



TRANSCRIPT OF MEETING

RE: VALLEY OF THE WINDS WIND FARM (SSD-10461)

ENERGYCO & DPHI MEETING

PANEL: RICHARD PEARSON (CHAIR)
SARAH DINNING
SUELLEN FITZGERALD

OFFICE OF THE IPC: STEVE BARRY
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DEPARTMENT OF
PLANNING, HOUSING &
INFRASTRUCTURE: CLAY PRESHAW
NICOLE BREWER

ENERGYCO: AZARIA DOBSON

LOCATION: ZOOM VIDEOCONFERENCE

DATE: 3:00PM – 4:00PM
WEDNESDAY, 16th APRIL 2025

<THE MEETING COMMENCED

MR RICHARD PEARSON: I'll just begin with an opening – thank you – begin with an opening statement. So, before we begin, I would like to acknowledge I am speaking to you from Gadigal country and acknowledge the traditional owners of all the lands from which we virtually meet today and pay my respects to Elders past and present.

Welcome to the meeting today to discuss the Valley of the Winds Wind Farm (SSD-10461) currently before the Commission for determination. The Applicant, ACEN Australia, proposes to develop a 943-megawatt wind farm in the Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone within the Warrumbungle Shire local government area.

The project involves the development of up to 131 turbines, 320-megawatt/640-megawatt hour battery energy storage facility, connection to the proposed Renewable Energy Zone transmission line and other ancillary infrastructure.

My name is Richard Pearson. I am chairing this Commission and joined by fellow commissioners, Sarah Dinning and Suellen Fitzgerald. And we've also got Steve Barry, Kendall Clydsdale and Callum Firth from the Office of the Independent Planning Commission.

In the interest of openness and transparency and ensure full capture of information, today's meeting is being recorded, and a complete transcript will be produced and made available on the Commission's website.

This meeting is one part of our consideration of this matter and will form one of several sources that we rely upon in making our decision. It is important for the commissioners to ask questions and clarify issues whenever considered appropriate. If asked a question and not able to answer, please feel free to take it on notice and provide any additional information in writing, which we will also put up on our website.

If everyone can just introduce themselves before speaking for the first time. And just to be clear, the purpose of this meeting is just really to focus on some of the cumulative impact work that is being undertaken by the State Government, because that is an issue that has come up strongly at the public meeting that we held last week, and is also an issue that the Commission is interested in how these individual projects fit into the bigger picture going forward.

So, we can now begin the meeting. Maybe if the government representatives could introduce themselves and then we can turn to our agenda. Thank you.

MR CLAY PRESHAW: Thanks, Commissioner. My name is Clay Preshaw. I am currently the Executive Director of Planning System Reform but I previously, and probably the reason I'm sitting here, was the Executive Director of Energy Resources and Industry.

MR PEARSON: Yes. Thanks, Clay.

5 **MS NICOLE BREWER:** I'm name is Nicole Brewer. I'm the Director for Energy Assessments responsible for wind, transmission and pumped hydro.

MR PEARSON: Mm-hm.

10 **MS AZARIA DOBSON:** I'm Azaria Dobson. I'm the Executive Director of Project Interface and Strategic Coordination at EnergyCo.

MR PEARSON: Great. Thank you. And so we have our agenda, which is a pretty high-level agenda, but yes, we're just interested to find out a bit more about the status of the REZ-wide cumulative impact assessment that's being undertaken.
15 The Council did speak – the Warrumbungle Council did speak to it, but not in any great depth. So, we're interested in what you're doing, where it's up to, and when it might see the light of day. So, if I can hand it over to whoever would like to talk about that.

20 **MS BREWER:** It's probably best that I cover that. So, there is a whole-of-government implementation for the Electricity Infrastructure Roadmap, and the government has committed to undertaking those cumulative impact studies in the CWO and New England and South-West REZ's. And the intent is that these studies identify ways for whole-of-government to support the host communities to
25 identify specific actions and plans that can be implemented so that they might be able to alleviate those kinds of potential pressures for the cumulative impacts.

So, particularly for the CWO REZ, it's actually the Department, so DPHI, is responsible for the delivery of the workforce, population, housing and
30 accommodation study, and waste study for the Central-West REZ. So, they build off the work that EnergyCo completed in its studies in 2022 and 2023, and they're nearing completion, and to be submitted later in the year.

35 The idea is that they'll set kind of an agreed baseline and projections of cumulative impacts that then can be used by the relevant agencies and councils to develop those sorts of responses and solutions.

40 So, the other part of the work that DPHI is doing is also undertaking work on a CWO REZ housing and accommodation strategy. And that's to ensure that the REZ workforce can be accommodated to deliver the electricity infrastructure and associated projects. And to alleviate the kind of price shocks of displacement of vulnerable community members and impacts on economies and that sort of thing.

45 So, that work's also underway and nearing completion. I mean, I think for this project, they're proposing an accommodation camp, so that, you know, the delivery of that strategy perhaps is less specific or relevant to this particular project.

MR PEARSON: Mm-hm.

MS BREWER: I think maybe if I just pause there. I mean, because I think there are some – there is a concentration of projects around the Central-West and on sort of the southern end of that kind of Warrumbungle LGA. And I guess what we're seeing is that there'll be kind of a steep rise in the sort of the population as the construction and major projects ramp up, but that that might be a little bit different in the Warrumbungle area.

But some of these studies are still being finalised at the moment, but that's some of the – there's still research going on around the particular LGA and the broader REZ cumulative studies.

MR PEARSON: Mm-hm. So, could you – the studies that you are doing again were workforce, population and housing and waste. Is that what you said?

MS BREWER: Yes. So, housing and accommodation, yes. Workforce, population, housing and accommodation, and waste. That's right.

MR PEARSON: Okay, sorry, yes. And what about transport, roads – because the Golden Highway appears to be a bit of a – well, quite a big pinch-point potentially for this REZ but also the South-West REZ has been mentioned as using the Golden Highway to access that REZ. And even the Applicant's cumulative impact work suggested it was getting pretty close to capacity as a result of, I think, the Central-West REZ contribution to the highway. So, is that a piece of work that's also being done?

MS BREWER: So, there are – I mean, there's the Port to REZ works, and I think Azaria's probably best placed to talk to the Port to REZ works and that's around really facilitating those oversize elements getting to the region.

The cumulative impacts on the Golden Highway, I'd say, in terms of the traffic along that Golden Highway, separate to the issue of those Port to REZ, you know, the specific upgrades for oversize and larger bits of kit to get to the REZ. Then that is, that was part of the assessment for Valley of the Winds, so the cumulative impacts on the Golden Highway.

It did consider the cumulative impacts of common projects that would be using the relevant section of the Golden Highway, and included kind of Liverpool Range and Ungula. And it also included Dunedoo, Wollar and Stubbo that were submitted at that point. And it's worth noting, I think, that those – although that list of projects is what was included in the cumulative traffic numbers, Wollar and Stubbo and Ungula have actually already commenced construction.

MR PEARSON: Mm-hm. So, look, I'll come to timing in a minute. But will these ... So, I think ... I don't really understand what's going to be the products that will kind of land on this. Is it going to be funding commitments to do things about ...? We understand that this is going to be a bit cyclical, you know there's

going to be this big ramp-up where during the construction phase, maybe, you know, and they probably do need things like medical services, potentially a range of other social and human services as well as the hard infrastructure.

5 Will there be commitments to deliver the ... Because Coolah is a pretty small little town and currently I think there's one doctor who's pretty much part time, there's no police, there is a police station. Will it make commitments to deliver those things or, you know, can you kind of talk about what the products will look like? What are these studies going to deliver?

10 **MS BREWER:** So, I think – perhaps if I start and I don't know if Clay wants to jump in, or Azaria – but the intent is that the relevant government areas that are responsible for those elements consider that as kind of a baseline or a kind of dataset to inform what might happen. And that might be seeking funding to do
15 certain things to coordinate.

So, yes, I would imagine that that is part of the kind of response – you know, we don't have that dataset yet and it's yet to go back to those relevant areas. But I think that was the intent of collating this data, to provide it to the relevant areas to
20 what does need to be done here and what might be proposed.

I mean, to medical, you know, the accommodation camp in particular, ACEN's committed to having medical staff within the accommodation camp. And I think it was – I'd need to check the details, but things like having a nurse on site and telehealth so that they aren't having a draw on the local services in the way I think
25 that some of the communities might be concerned.

MR PEARSON: Mm-hm. And what about timing, yes, what are we looking at there?

30 **MS BREWER:** Timing in terms of when those responses will be? Because the datasets are being compiled –

MR PEARSON: Yes, yes, because everyone's aware that stuff's happening but
35 no one seems to know when it might see the light of day, I think.

MS BREWER: I don't know, Clay, if you've got an understanding of the timing for the whole-of-government sort of response? We still have the step obviously of that data being finalised later in the year.

40 **MR PEARSON:** Mm-hm.

MR PRESHAW: Yes. I'm not sure I can answer that directly, but I was going to jump in and sort of add maybe some context to how the decision making is
45 working. And I'm not sure how much we've explained this previously. But essentially, in the REZ's, but particularly in the CWO REZ, there is a, I guess, a set of steering committees that are working across government.

So, at the very top level there's a Roadmaps Steering Committee, which has all the relevant agencies at a very senior level that meets regularly to ensure that the roadmap is on track and all of the relevant issues that relate to the energy transition are considered across agencies.

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And then sitting below that top level committee are many other committees that sort of filter down by content. So, whether that's transport or other issues, there are different sub-committees of that.

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And then sort of cascading further down, some of the working groups beneath the steering committee are actually involved, the relevant councils. So, I sit on one of those committees that – one of those working groups, sorry, that has the councils involved.

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And so I guess to circle back to the question around what is the timing of the various inputs into the cumulative impact work, it probably depends on which aspect of that you are interested in. and I don't have that answer with me today – I'm not sure if Azaria or Nicole do – but there's a lot of moving parts and there's lots of inputs into the cumulative impact piece. But we could probably come back to you with whatever the working group has agreed on various parts of the cumulative impact work.

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So, we'd probably have to come back to you with specific inputs that are going to be done at particular dates. I don't know, Azaria, whether you sort of have anything further to add from your agency's perspective.

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MS DOBSON: Yes, probably just a little bit of flavour on the timing of some of those things. So, for example, the housing cumulative impact work is quite advanced, as is water, and that's currently being commented on by councils.

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So, to Clay's point, these studies are sort of in various stages of iterations and depending on how advanced DPHI is in completing them, or if it's water, say for example, EPA were looking at the waste one. And then it's just going back to councils and making sure that those things are right before feeding the answers into that very large government structure which is the "what's next".

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So, you know, we can probably provide you with a table of which studies are being completed by who and which dates, but then it's probably, you know, what happens after that in terms of the solutions that are coming out of each one of those committees. And they will be at various stages, depending on the data and depending on the impact.

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You're on mute.

45

MR PRESRAW: Sorry Commissioner, I think you're on mute, yes.

MR PEARSON: Thank you. Will there be eventually this thing called a "Central West Cumulative Impact Study" that – or is it just going to be this disparate set of

connected plans, agency plans? Just in terms of community legibility, what's the final product going to look like? If I'm living in Coolah and I want to see what's happening in the REZ and how it affects my part of the world and what additional resourcing of government's going to put into things, yes, how legible will all that be?

MS DOBSON: So, there is a working group that's run by Infrastructure New South Wales, so they have the Implementation Plan, so that is the physical document which traffics various tasks of what we were talking about – say, Port to REZ, for example, the high-level program is actually shown there. And they have a whole lot of other reporting, so they've got a whole lot of people who look after bringing all the data from the disparate spots together and putting it into one program.

So, Infrastructure have taken charge of doing that from an Implementation Plan perspective, and that's at a roadmap level. Probably the things that aren't so easy to track – that's really easy to track, infrastructure, but it's a bit harder to track some of those softer activities, and that's probably something that we'd have to come back to you about with what the plan is on the more softer side of things. Because those working groups are doing a range of different activities.

So, I mean, obviously we're talking about infrastructure and cumulative impacts now, but there's working groups around local content, Aboriginal participation, and all of that reporting is collected up and reported into that broader roadmap group that Clay was talking about before.

So, I guess the issue is the reporting exists, how accessible that is to the public is probably something that we'd have to come back to you about. That would be the intention when those things are finished, that a certain component of that data is made available. It's just it's not ready yet.

MR PEARSON: Yes. I suppose, what we are kind of hearing is that, you know, this will be a short, sharp kind of bang, if you like, that's going to be this perhaps doubling of the population in Warrumbungle. So, these things might be short to medium-term needs that will then subside when the construction period has completed.

So, I think what it implies though is any kind of augmentation of services or infrastructure also needs to be able to meet that timeframe so that we don't sort of finally deliver what's needed and the workers have all gone, you know. I think that would be quite – that would be incredibly frustrating.

Enough from me. Suellen or Sarah, do you have questions that you wanted to raise?

MS SUELLEN FITZGERALD: Just two, Richard, thank you. The first is to do with the point that you were just making there. Given that there are new projects coming online all the time, is the work of this Roadmap Steering Committee and

the datasets and so on going to be live projects? Because the situation will be changing, you know, on a quarterly basis, I imagine. You'll get the cumulative impact datasets now; in 12 months' time they might look different. So, what's the thinking there about the ongoing nature of this assessment work?

MS DOBSON: So, I can't talk to the assessment component, I might leave that to Clay or Nicole. But from a data perspective, this is something that we have been working on together with the other agencies and Infrastructure New South Wales because your point is very valid. In that we have a snapshot in time now and how do we actually maintain, not just from our candidate foundation generators, the EnergyCo, you know, we actually collect data as part of our agreements with them. But how do we get data from other places, you know, such as the planning portal?

So, I think what we have sort of found is that there's definitely a way to standardise that data and make sure that all of the agencies are actually using the latest datasets, because probably, to the Commissioner's point, we don't want to oversize assets and oversize effort, but we want to make sure it's at the right time as well.

So, that data is being coordinated through Infrastructure New South Wales and they're pulling from the different components. So, for example, with EnergyCo, we give them a dataset every month with all of the data from our particular generators. And so they're working on how to bring all of that together to maintain a picture.

And one of the things, probably to both of your points, there will be a component of data that we make publicly available, because there's lots of interested stakeholders that need to plan and understand what's happening. And then there's probably a richer dataset that we make available to the assessment team, for example.

MS FITZGERALD: Thank you, Azaria. And my final question was, you talked about "softer components" of the impact study, that infrastructure and so on is relatively simple to deal with. The key issues that we heard in the community, besides transport, were medical services including emergency services, and particularly funding of voluntary emergency services, was quite a big issue in the community we were talking to. Difficulty getting volunteers, you know, a lot of differences in the amount of funding that one organisation was getting, as opposed to what another organisation was getting. So, I thought that was a big area for coordination.

And medical, ambos and police were the key areas that I think the community was feeling very anxious about. So, are they part of this overall whole-of-government working group?

MS DOBSON: They definitely are, and I can't say too much because we're in a budget process at the moment. But all of those agencies have been at the table and

are being coordinated by this roadmap steer co. So, every agency has been asked what sort of services, what sort of budget would you need to be able to deliver on the roadmap, and that's the subject of internal budget processes at the moment.

5 **MS FITZGERALD:** Thank you. That's it from me, Richard.

MR PEARSON: Yes, thanks Suellen. Sarah, was there anything you wanted to ask?

10 **MS SARAH DINNING:** No, thank you. Thank you.

MR PEARSON: What about the EnergyCo access rights fees – where does that go? Because will that go into funding some of this stuff?

15 **MS DOBSON:** That's probably the very large amount, the million-dollar question. So, what we've been doing at a whole-of-government level is looking at the different buckets of money that are available. Obviously, there's – we've just made the announcement on Friday, EnergyCo has put, I think, over \$50 million into the region to address infrastructure needs. We funded a number of community
20 projects. So, we've had early access to some of those access fees to fund some of those projects.

Now, the community employment benefits fund has some very strict guidance around community benefit, as you would be aware. Then there's things like VPAs,
25 which also have very strict guidance. And so EnergyCo is currently working out, because the access fees are collected over a long period of time, so we're looking at how best to utilise those fees to, I guess, address the issues now rather than wait until later, and we're currently investigating those different options.

30 So, there's not a definitive answer at the point in time, but we understand that that's, you know ...

MR PEARSON: Because obviously when we're issuing consents for projects such as the Valley of the Winds that we're dealing with now, should we end up
35 issuing a consent, that's it, you know, there's no coming back to that developer for anything further. You know, they will contribute to a voluntary planning agreement with the Council, and they have that separate access rights fee.

40 But this is where, I guess, you know, not having the cumulative piece resolved makes it hard to plug these individual projects into a picture that's emerging, not that has emerged. So, once a consent's issued, if the consent is issued, that's, I guess, the end of an opportunity for that development to contribute towards what needs doing to manage the cumulative impacts.

45 **MS DOBSON:** Yes, and we're very aware of that, and so we're looking at access fees, we're looking at State Government funding, we're looking at Federal Government funding, we're looking at how to leverage any type of funding and to be clear which pictures neatly fit into which buckets.

MR PEARSON: Mm-hm. Okay. Kendall, Steve, Callum, did you have any issues you want to raise? It sounds like we might need to do a follow-up or perhaps get some additional information in relation to studies and dates, if we could.

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: No, nothing from the Office, thanks Richard.

MR PEARSON: Would we, Kendall or Steve, need to go back in writing to the Department or EnergyCo, or are we just going to allow them to follow up with what they've offered?

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: I think we can put together some quick dot-points and to just formalise the request and we can get through. Are you the best contact, Azaria, to send that through to?

MS DOBSON: It'll probably be best to send it to Planning, because Planning are leading the majority of the cumulative impact studies.

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: Sure.

MS DOBSON: But you can cc me in, and we can make sure the right people give Planning the other information if it's not their responsibility.

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: Sounds good.

MR PEARSON: Okay. Was there anything else that the Department or EnergyCo wanted to add on this matter?

MS BREWER: Nothing from me.

MR PRESCHAW: Not from me, no.

MR PEARSON: All right, well, thank you, I mean, it's – yes, I think we got some better idea than we had half-an-hour ago. But it's clearly a work in progress, so we have the difficult job of trying to fit our project scale determinations into this emerging picture. And something that needs to emerge quite quickly, just as we've discussed, given we don't want to oversize things, but we don't want to under-time things either. So, that's the task, I think. Sorry, Azaria.

MS DOBSON: Yes, sorry I couldn't work out on Zoom where to raise my hand; I'm so used to Teams. Probably just to give an indication of how seriously government is taking this issue. I mean, the establishment of the whole-of-government committee, the creation of all of those sub-committees, the sheer amount of time and effort that's being put in.

I guess I will just bring the Commission's attention to the fact that we definitely know that things need to be done and there's a whole team of people working in each issue. Whether it's transport under Port to REZ, whether it's water, you

know, whatever the issue is, this is something that there are a lot of people – and we have a lot of deputy secretaries sitting around the table and tracking this every six weeks to make sure that government is actually addressing it.

5 So, I think with the creation of that structure and the allocation of those roles and responsibilities, it's sort of the first time that I've ever seen cumulative impacts have so much attention for real things to be coming out of them. And the Port to REZ program is a really good example. That's actually come directly out of the
10 acknowledgement that cumulative impacts need to be assessed and that we need to do something at a whole-of-program level.

And so we're already doing it, and I think it's just going to be that those things will roll through when we've got the right data.

15 **MR PEARSON:** Okay. Thank you for that. If there's nothing further from anybody, I'll conclude the meeting and just thank the Department and EnergyCo for attending and giving us the advice you have today. So, thank you. And we'll come back in writing following the meeting. Thank you. Thank you all.

20 **MR PRESHAW:** Thank you.

MS BREWER: Thank you.

25 **MR PEARSON:** And maybe the IPC, the commissioners could stay on board, and the Office, and we'll just have a final chat. Thanks everyone.

>THE MEETING CONCLUDED