

Coolah Emergency Services Response Capabilities

Central West Orana *REZ*

Status Report 10/03/2024

Introduction

Author, Noel Gilbert Squad member and Secretary of the Coolah Volunteer Rescue squad and Director, Coolah District Development Group

For this report the term *AGENCY*. refers to *Emergency services teams and their parent bodies*.

Energy Co are the Project facilitators under the NSW Dept of Planning Housing, and Infrastructure

District Agencies within the Liverpool Plains Windfarm portion of the REZ

Coolah VRA, Rescue Squad 561 - Location Coolah (GLR)

Coolah Fire Rescue NSW 261 – Location Coolah (Fire & RCR)

Rural Fire Service Castlereagh Zone, Queensborough Brigade – Location Coolah (fire suppression)

Dunedoo *SES* NSW – Location Dunedoo 48km from Coolah (GLR)

Dunedoo Fire Rescue *NSW*- Location- Dunedoo 48km from Coolah (Fire & RCR)

Dunedoo Rural Fire Service Castlereagh Zone – 48km from Coolah (fire suppression)

Tambar Springs SES NSW – 41km from Coolah (GLR)

Mendooran VRA Rescue Squad – 74km from Coolah (GLR)

All towns NSW Police

A recent appraisal of the Liverpool Range Wind Farm Modification-1 - Amended application

(SSD-6696-Mod-1) has highlighted a serious lack of preparation in relation to Emergency services response capabilities within the projects' work zones. Much of the initial work to be done will involve the Construction of a worker's camp within 3.km of the Town of Coolah. The Proposed workers camp is to be of a size to accommodate 500 workers. Slated to commence construction in the latter half of 2024 there is nothing contained in the project report that addresses existing emergency services level of readiness to handle a heightened level of activity; as the district is effectively transformed from a rural setting.to an industrial Zone. From the completion of the workers camp, the construction of the Wind Farm and the Transmission Lines will commence and is expected to be completed to operational status in 2027.

At no stage have Energy Co or the Department of Planning & Environment engaged with the Local Emergency Services crews to explain their strategy for the changes or indeed if they even have one. With construction to begin within the current calendar year we simply aren't prepared for the expected ramp up of activity on an industrial scale.

The limitations of Small-Town Volunteer Organisations

Each of the crews are operated by Dedicated Volunteers and many of the members are volunteers for multiple agencies within their Town. We should not be having this communication in relation to the serious shortfall in planning for such an important construction project.

On average, considering all are volunteers it takes eight months to train a crew member to attain General Land Rescue Operator status. This may vary depending on the employment status of the recruit and available courses. Most training courses are

conducted in a central location outside the Zone, therefore significant sacrifice of time and commitment is required.

The Crews,

Having been in recent discussion with our comrades in the neighbouring squads and Brigades it is apparent that we are all faced with the same demographic. Small crews with diminishing numbers of fully trained and operational members.

Coolah VRA – 5 – with three trainees.

Dunedoo SES – 5

Tambar Springs SES – 6

Mendooran VRA -?

Both Coolah and Dunedoo Fire Rescue *NSW* brigades are crewed by on-call crew members and overall have younger fully trained members. It must be noted that the on-call Fire Rescue Brigades will respond to any agency deployment to any location whether it be in town or to joint agency responses out of town such as road crash rescue. If necessary, relief Brigades from other centres will be deployed to cover their absence from town. However, the relief brigade in some circumstances could be hours away.

It is hard to believe, isn't it? All are volunteers except for the on-call * firefighters. They have committed to the safety of their communities, to the training and on call status, while maintaining full time jobs and family commitments. So now knowing all of this, there is much to be organised in the brief time we have and must ensure that moving forward, we have the best possible response capability for our communities'

The Central - West Orana REZ Transmission Submissions Report

It is difficult to outline a range of potential solutions when the Submissions responses are ambiguous and generic in nature, never quite answering the question. Most responses outlined allude to a planning structure being in the development stage or the

Strategy being developed will be refined and adapted according to the Contractor responsible for construction; policy on the run. The Warrumbungle Shire Council and Mid-Western Regional Council have asked very pertinent questions in relation to the Work camp structure with specific highlighted sectors in the work camps requiring the planning detail be revealed, the response has been more of the same and lacking in the detail asked for. Nowhere has the issue of Local Emergency Services Response capability been placed in the EIS, or the responses to submissions. Below are extracts taken from the Submissions and the responses.

The Responses

5.25.6 Bushfire risk Mitigation measures Summary of issues Greater transparency regarding specific mitigation is needed given the increased bushfire risk of the project, and the contribution of this has to community anxiety. **Response** Ignition of bushfires as a result of the project's operation has the potential to occur during maintenance of project infrastructure and from the infrastructure itself. The potential sources of ignition resulting from the operation of the project have been identified in Technical paper 10 – Bushfire and EIS Chapter 16 (Hazard and risk). The project would be designed and managed in accordance with the Electricity Supply Act 1995 and Electricity Supply (Safety and Network Management) Regulation 2014 which requires a network operator to take all reasonable steps to ensure that all aspects of its network are safe. To manage the bushfire risks, project infrastructure would be regularly inspected and maintained to minimise risk of failure or incident. APZs would also be provided at the switching stations and energy hubs, which would be regularly maintained to manage the risk of fire spreading from these locations. The risk of a bushfire being ignited by high voltage transmission lines is low. High voltage (above 220 kV) transmission lines have lower risk than distribution lines, as they are suspended higher above the ground, significantly reducing the likelihood of physical contact with vegetation or arcing to ground (EnergyCo, 2023f). To ensure safe electrical clearances would be achieved during operation, vegetation within the transmission easements with growth heights of two metres and above (largely trees and shrubs) would be removed by the Network Operator prior to and during operation, whereas native vegetation with growth heights less than two metres would be retained. In addition, large trees in close proximity to the easement (deemed 'hazard trees') would also be removed where they pose a potential risk. This approach seeks to balance sufficient bushfire risk mitigation with protection of biodiversity, and has been applied in other recent transmission infrastructure projects in NSW. EnergyCo will work with landowners during the easement acquisition process to understand individual property constraints in relation to fire management. As a licensed transmission operator, the Network Operator will be required to implement an Electricity Network Safety Management System to Australian Standard 5577 – Electricity network safety management systems, undertake hazard identification associated with bushfire risk, implement and maintain appropriate fire protection measures. As part of this, the Network Operator will collaborate with RFS to determine any additional resources required to manage bushfire risk to an acceptable

Council commented that the workforce accommodation camps will be decommissioned at the end of the construction period. Mid-Western Regional Council requested that this is noted in the conditions of approval (if approved) and a completion date or time period is included in this. Conditions should also identify that the camp is for the workforce to support this project only and further utilisation for other projects will require a modification of consent. Further, Mid-Western Regional Council commented that the EIS states that a small number of construction workers would utilise existing local hotel, motel and rental accommodation. It was requested that further details are provided in relation to this number including what constitutes a 'small number'. Mid-Western Regional Council requested further information in regard to the accommodation for the workers who are constructing the workforce accommodation camps. Response

Construction of the workforce accommodation camps is planned to occur between November 2024 and April 2025 as part of the enabling works (refer to Figure 3-12 of the EIS), subject to obtaining planning approval. The layout of the workforce accommodation camps would be finalised during detailed construction planning and prior to the commencement of construction. The workforce accommodation camps are planned to be demobilised following the completion of construction. The workforce accommodation camps would include a range of features and services, including:

- demountable accommodation and office buildings
- workforce amenities, including food and catering, laundry, bathroom and first aid facilities
- sporting facilities, such as outdoor training sports fields, running tracks, gymnasium
- entertainments facilities, such as indoor recreation rooms, media rooms and cinema facilities
- utilities, including telecommunication services, electricity and water
- parking areas including designated pick up and drop off locations for workers traveling to site
- first aid facilities and medical practitioners

Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone Transmission project | Submissions Report 390

- fire fighting equipment
- security and surveillance measures such as boundary fencing, CCTV, locked gates, movement/ sensor lights, and alarms
- wastewater treatment plant.

As per mitigation measure LV2, lighting at construction compounds and workforce accommodation camps will be designed and operated in accordance with Australian and New Zealand Standard AS/NZS 4282:2019 Control of the obtrusive effects of outdoor lighting and the design guidelines contained in the Siding Springs Dark Sky Planning Guideline (DPE, 2023d). A project wide emergency plan will be established for the project with consideration of emergency services access to sites and if required safe evacuation of the workforce. Should alcohol be available at the workforce accommodation camps, that service will not be open to the public and would be subject to NSW legislated liquor service requirements. It is anticipated that during enabling works, prior to the establishment of the workforce accommodation camps, around 100 construction workers would be employed, primarily comprising the workforce to construct the camps, along with a number of project management personnel. The construction of workforce accommodation camps would take around four

level. **Comprehensive Bushfire Emergency Management and Evacuation Plans would be prepared for construction and operation, to outline the emergency response for the project and the fire management during construction and operation. The Bushfire Emergency Management and Evacuation Plans would be prepared in consultation with RFS and be provided to the relevant Local Emergency Management Committees prior to construction and when updated.** The plan would be prepared in accordance with the Guide to Developing a Bushfire Emergency Management Plan (RFS, 2014) and meet the requirements of Australian Standard AS3745-2010 Planning for emergencies in facilities and would include:

- protocols for the relocation of workers to nominated safe refuge zones during a bushfire emergency, either within or remote to the work zone
- protocols for the management of bushfire risk and fuel management during construction and operation. This would include the restriction and/or prevention of certain activities that present Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone Transmission project | Submissions Report 383 bushfire risks on days with a fire danger rating of equal to or greater than 'high', and as directed by relevant state authorities
- training to inform workers of bushfire risks and preventative actions, including risks associated with the operation (and maintenance) of vehicles, plant and equipment. Firefighting equipment will be installed at construction compounds and workforce accommodation camps. As outlined in mitigation measure BF5, firefighting equipment will be maintained and made available for use during the construction phase in accordance with Planning for Bushfire Protection 2019 (RFS, 2019) including the following:
- static water supply tanks with a minimum volume of 20,000 litres (each) will be provided at the construction compounds and workforce accommodation camps for firefighting purposes (final construction water storage volume would be confirmed during detailed design)
- 38 millimetre metal Storz outlets with a gate or ball valve will be provided as an outlet on each of the tanks
- non-combustible water tanks and fittings will be used
- firefighting equipment (inclusive of a slip on unit) will be maintained at and/or accessible to all active construction site personnel during the declared bushfire danger season and site personnel trained in its use. Switching stations and energy hubs would be designed and constructed in accordance with AS3959 – 2018 Construction of Buildings in Bushfire Prone Areas including installation of fire systems. The Network Operator would be liable for any directly attributable damage caused to land and property during the construction and operation of the transmission line, such as ignition of a fire. The Network Operator holds insurance policies with reputable insurers to cover any risks to workers, contractors and landowner property as a result of constructing and operating the transmission network.

6.1.2 Workforce accommodation camps Summary of issues Mid-Western Regional Council (as did Warrumbungle Shire Council in the Modification report) requested the following information on the workforce accommodation camps be provided:

- indicative construction program
- layout of camps, including type of recreational facilities included in the camp
- lighting levels
- whether the camp is dry/alcohol free or not
- safety measures including firefighting measures and medical facilities. Mid-Western Regional

11. Determine the feasibility of Establishing a dedicated unit of professionals, if deemed necessary, to be responsible for the protection of construction and REZ workers and the unique environment they will be working in.

By the Numbers

1. Plan and devise a REZ region 3 emergency services recruitment programme.

Finding the volunteers to operate and maintain our District Rescue Services has always been a battle out here in the bush. From a limited population base and the varied lifestyles and vocations of the constituents, suitable recruits are at a premium and always come with a *caveat*. Farmers and Farmworkers out of necessity work some distance from our Squad and Brigade Bases. Likewise, Business owners and Council Management are required and expected to give grace to the Volunteers who are their employees and where possible allow them leave to respond. therefore, their availability for response needs to be factored into response times and response availability. These factors mean the more trained members we have in each Squad/Brigade gives flexibility to its operation.

Starting with all forms of Media, an REZ region 3 (Emergency Services) recruitment campaign needs to be implemented in an urgent effort to attract new members to our Towns impacted by the *REZ Industrial level construction*.

2. Conduct a multi-agency appliance and equipment, fitness for purpose survey.

Each squad and brigade are equipped to carry out General Land Rescue in our region. Specialist Vertical Rescue services are located outside our immediate district and have travel times varying from one hour to several. With Transmission Lines and Wind Turbines being constructed and rough and remote terrain being traversed, specialist appliances with 4WD or all terrain capability will be required. Although not strictly necessary, the Appliances may need to be equipped with specialist heavy lifting equipment of the type kept with SES crews.

3. Devise a training programme focused on Coolah and its facilities that can be accessed by all agencies Locally.

Squad Training in-house or at local *Tafe* facilities. That can be accessed by neighbouring Agencies, negating the need for travel to other regional areas. The programmes to be made available across all Squads to foster interagency familiarity. For the term of the project's construction continue to ensure interagency cooperation.

to six months to construct, during which time the workforce would utilise existing local hotel, motel and rental accommodation.

Nowhere within either documents Reports, Submission's or Responses are Local Emergency Services other than RFS mentioned. Next, we must bring the agencies responsible and their representatives to the *Coolah Negotiation Table* and devise a workable solution for what surely is a very important and urgent issue.

The minimum requirements for a positive Solution

1. Plan and devise a *REZ* region 3 emergency services recruitment programme.
2. Conduct a multi-agency appliance and equipment fitness for purpose survey.
3. Devise a training programme focused on Coolah and its local facilities that can be accessed by all agencies
4. Engage with and employ Tafe accreditation courses in house or online.
5. Ensure that all areas are covered in rescue specialised areas, identified as being necessary yet known to be deficient as the response district is transitioning from rural residential to industrial.
6. If determined Supply the necessary infrastructure required for a specialist response unit to be housed and equipped with agency standard facilities.
7. Engage with the Coolah and District communities in promoting Emergency response awareness, including the heightened awareness that industrial level activity is happening within the district. A clear and concise list of commencement dates and local media campaigns to alert our public to a momentous change in our landscape.
8. Ensure communication networks have the capacity to perform in the more remote areas such as the Coolah Tops National Park and the Liverpool Range Wind Farm areas
9. Ensure Local Rescue Crews can collaborate with The Western Area Health Service through the Coolah MPS (Hospital) in providing back up services to hospital and Ambulance NSW Paramedics, having a broad understanding of operational and evacuation procedures.
10. Have the vision to plan and adapt accordingly, where changes and production outcomes may impact services.

4. Engage with and employ Tafe accreditation courses in house or online.

This Proposed initiative speaks for itself in terms of benefit to recruitment programmers and the attaining of the diverse skills required by Rescue operators.

5. Ensure that all areas are covered in rescue specialised areas, identified as being necessary yet known to be deficient as the response district is transitioning from rural residential to industrial.

Target and make available to Squad and Brigade members, the specialist training outside General Land Rescue operations such as Vertical Rescue, Confined Spaces or HAZMAT (Fire Rescue) EV cars etc that may be required in the REZ construction Zones.

6. Probably the best option for both short term and long term Capability Supply the necessary infrastructure required for a specialist response Unit to be housed and equipped with agency standard facilities.

The single most important infrastructure requirement, having a new specialist facility to service the Liverpool Range WF Construction Zone, is to be considered paramount. Also essential are changes to Squad and Brigade headquarters to facilitate RCR rescue techniques such as road crash vehicle access. An outside training area with Roof and training room aids such as smart Tv, and computer/ Wi Fi streaming services that are unrestricted for the training room.

Coolah Rescue Squad headquarters are relatively new and currently house a primary rescue Appliance, a Rapid response 4WD Land Cruiser and a 4WD Land Cruiser Personnel Carrier. The squad also is the district host to the Specialist Light Trailer.

Coolah RFS Queensborough Brigade has its Primary Appliance and intermittently a Cat 7 Landcruiser Pump. These are housed within the Castlereagh Zone Coolah headquarters with Administration and training rooms. The Administrative offices are shared with the Coolah VRA at the same Location.

Coolah Fire Rescue NSW 261 has its Station located on the Corner of Booyamurra and Cole Streets Coolah. The station house was built for purpose by the Coolah Shire Council and Locals during the Late 1950's Housing 1 aging appliance (average 18 yrs.). An upgrade proposal to make a home for a specialist equipped REZ Emergency response team would be to Build a fit for purpose multi-functional Coolah Fire Rescue Building designed to operate to current industry standards. Once the brigade was relocated to their new facility a new specialist equipped REZ Emergency response team could occupy the vacated old fire station for the duration of the construction phase of the project. The beneficiaries of such an infrastructure proposal would be the Project facilitators, The

Brigade Operators, and the Coolah Community with upgraded Emergency Services Facilities enhancing their functionality. Also, the old fire station could be returned to the community after the project's construction phase for the purpose of creating a rescue themed museum or other worthwhile community group.

- Where could you build it? Maybe a new Fire Station on the grounds of the Coolah MPS adjoining Hospital Street. What about Sherwood Park in Goddard Street? assuming the area doesn't have public land status, Perhaps Council Land opposite the Top Garage in Binnia Street? Or maybe "Lew Close" off Martin Street behind the Council Houses.

7. Engage with the Coolah and District communities in promoting Emergency Response awareness. Enable the local Groups, particularly the Senior Citizens who have a greater understanding of the needs of their members and the best way to communicate your project's upcoming requirements. Develop visitor Programs where Energy Co and LRWF representatives attend and explain the changes that are about to happen. Everyone needs to be aware of what's about to happen.

8. Ensure Communication Networks have the capacity to perform in the more remote areas with maximum connectivity. Presently there are known black spot areas where Radio Comms such as the RFS network, simply do not work. Those areas also have limited Mobile Phone Services sometimes rendering accident situations in those areas Isolated from real time situation reports. Turee Vale Road is one such area.

9. Ensure Local Rescue Crews can liase with The Western Area Health Service through the Coolah MPS (Hospital) Conduct multi agency training exercises designed to share evacuation protocols developed for the MPS and utilised by Coolah Paramedics. Worker Camp site and evacuation plans need to be shared with all emergency service agencies.

10. Have the vision to plan and adapt accordingly, where changes and production outcomes may impact services. Speaks for itself

11. Determin the feasibility of Establishing a dedicated unit of professionals. Make this determination a priority above all others as there are currently no plans or strategies.

To date, 10/03/2024 a discussion has been held between the Author and The VRA region 3 Coordinator/Manager in respect of Coolah's Emergency Services Response Capability and that of Coolah Rescue Squad. The issues contained in this report will be taken to the VRA Commissioner to advance the discussion and prepare for engagement with the *REZ through Energy Co.*



Coolah RFS Brigade Queensborough Appliance



Coolah Rescue Squad in Training with New Lighting Equipment



Coolah Fire Station 261
Fire Rescue *NSW*



Coolah RFS/VRA Training Room