



Voice for Walcha

22nd July 2025

Attn: The Review Team

NSW Transmission Planning Review – Interim Report

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Voice for Walcha present this submission to the NSW Transmission Planning Review.

Voice for Walcha are a grassroots community group with 350 local members. This group was established in response to a lack of information provided by renewable energy project developers. There has been a failure for all government agencies to engage meaningfully with communities – the stakeholders burdened with hosting the infrastructure. Without genuine engagement and the ability to have meaningful input, communities will continue to resist the development of transmission and generation infrastructure in their regions.

Missing in this review is any context from the communities who are hosting the transmission and generation infrastructure. Decisions are being made from a state and federal level with no meaningful consultation or collaboration with the host communities.

The reality for communities is that decisions are being made remotely, by organisations that have no understanding or respect for the communities they are imposing this infrastructure on. This has been the story since the declaration of the renewable energy zones. This has and will continue to result in resistance to development and mistrust of government and industry agencies.

In the New England, we have had the New England REZ Transmission Infrastructure Project presented as a finished product by EnergyCo with no evidence of any strategic planning and no community input. It was designed based on a “point in time” snapshot of “generator partner” interest. EnergyCo has never considered the community as a partner or a significant stakeholder.

Despite continued attempts at engagement with EnergyCo, the requests of grassroots community groups have never been taken into consideration by the Renewable Energy Zone planner. Nor have EnergyCo ever shown an appetite to address the impacts that are resulting within these communities as a result of the rushed and poorly planned rollout of the REZs.

Recommendations to accelerate the planning and delivery of the New England REZ without addressing the failure of EnergyCo to date will only exacerbate the community resistance to these projects.

Communities are the party most impacted by renewable energy transition but have no seat at the table. There is no engagement, no justification of decisions and no transparency.

1. This review is unacceptable in its complete failure to include impacted communities in its consultation.

Assessment Criteria 3 is to *“Improve outcomes for NSW electricity consumers, local communities and taxpayers”*

Review objective 2 is *“Public Interest alignment – allocation of roles and responsibilities that are in the best interests of NSW energy consumers and communities hosting transmission infrastructure.”*

However, the review consultation paper states the review will consider the following issues: *“• Consultation outcomes from all interested stakeholders of NSW electricity network planning, including Roadmap entities, market bodies and regulators, distribution networks and planners, project developer representatives and industry groups, and consumer representatives.”*

WHERE IS COMMUNITY? It is not surprising the consultation with community and grassroots groups is missing from this conversation. The stakeholders that are most impacted by this transmission planning have not been consulted in this review.

We request immediate meaningful engagement with communities before the finalisation of this review.

2. “Immediate actions to accelerate planning and delivery of the New England REZ and other upcoming projects” is very concerning to community groups within the New England REZ.

Recommendations by this review to streamline authorisations and remove barriers are going to result in further frustrations for the impacted communities hosting these projects. There is already a lack of accountability and transparency in the delivery of REZs within NSW. EnergyCo have demonstrated an inability to deliver responsible planning and co-ordination within the Central-West Orana REZ. Impacts resulting from EnergyCo’s poor performance have been highlighted in the recent inquiry into the impact of Renewable Energy Zone (REZ) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales. The hearings at this inquiry should be considered in this review. Giving EnergyCo increased power and less over-sight will only exacerbate the impacts to communities in the delivery of the NE REZ.

If our community and other regions had seen competency, good planning, genuine consultation and good outcomes, there would be a likelihood of support for the development of the New England REZ. However, with the evidence of poor performance from Energy Co across all key performance criteria, the recommendation to accelerate the planning and delivery of the New England REZ sends alarm bells to all corners of the region.

The lack of planning and co-ordination by EnergyCo in its rollout of the Central-West Orana REZ has left communities reeling from the impacts of thousands of temporary workers and large-scale projects. Promises of funds and resources from EnergyCo have not materialised. There is no co-ordination for roads, accommodation, water or waste. Communities and councils are being forced to manage this on their own on a project-by-project basis.

We request accountability and transparency from EnergyCo and proven ability to deliver projects without major community upheaval before expanding EnergyCo’s functions or funding.

3. Enhancing engagement, transparency and governance of transmission planning decisions

This review has identified the inadequacy of current engagement, transparency and governance and funding arrangements of EnergyCo. Unfortunately, the engagement held by this review was with consumer groups only, not community groups. Consumers and impacted communities are impacted in different ways and have different objectives. They should not be combined in the consultation and review process.

Recommendation C1: Implement best-practice engagement obligations to enhance engagement with consumers and local communities and transparency of decision making

It is hard to see how recommendation C1 will result in any improvement in engagement by EnergyCo. As identified by the authors of this review, EnergyCo are already required to consult with local communities as part of the environmental planning process. This engagement is nothing more than a box-ticking exercise. There is no meaningful engagement with communities, no transparency and no outcomes for communities. How will the recommendations in this review result in meaningful consultation or any change at all?

Communities need to be given the same right as consumers in the establishment of an EnergyCo funded Community Panel. It is hard to understand why the recommendation

changed from a Consumer and Community Panel in the options report to exclude communities and have a consumer only panel in the interim report.

As a community group, we request a Community Panel be established under the same model as that proposed by this review for the Consumer Panel. If this is not recommended, we would like to know the reasons for the exclusion of community.

4. Recommendation C.2: Ensure EnergyCo's governance and funding arrangements are appropriate for its current and expanded functions and enable it to attract and retain suitable staff

The review has stated that recommendations on governance reforms are outside the scope of the review. We reject the review's recommendations to increase EnergyCo's role and funding until these reforms are undertaken.

The Central-West Orana REZ has been an abject failure on the part of EnergyCo. Communities will not support an increase in its role until the governance, structure and performance of EnergyCo are addressed.

Communities are looking for an organisation with technical expertise, decision makers and problem-solving abilities. Instead, we are seeing a high rotation of inexperienced consultants who are empathetic but have no accountability or commitment to resolve issues. There is no evidence of adequate expertise in the design of transmission infrastructure and no accountability for the final design.

We request a redesign of the organisation and governance, not more power.

5. Failure of this review to address assessment criteria 3. Improve outcomes for NSW electricity consumers, local communities and taxpayers: Do the NSW transmission planning arrangements: a. support improved outcomes for NSW electricity customers in relation to the affordability, reliability, security and sustainability of electricity supply b. foster local community support for investment in transmission network projects and a sustainable energy transition c. facilitate effective consultation and engagement with affected stakeholders, including NSW electricity customers, local communities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people d. allocate risks efficiently between investors, electricity customers and government e. support the other objects of the EII Act?

Recommendations by this review will result in worse outcomes for local communities and further resistance to transmission infrastructure projects. Increased power with less oversight for EnergyCo cannot benefit communities. Failure to include a recommendation for a community panel with increased accountability and transparency from EnergyCo will result in a continued tokenistic approach to consultation with communities.

We have listened to the Transmission Planning Review Interim Report Webinar held on 22nd July 2025 and posted a question. We noted that you mentioned that you are keen to meet with community groups, and we would be pleased to be able to have the opportunity to present a community perspective or our experience with the New England REZ announcement, updates, transmission planning and engagement process.

We thank you for the opportunity to provide this submission and request inclusion in ongoing consultation.

Kind regards
Voice for Walcha