
Appendix C

Community Engagement Plan

EnergyCo

Community Engagement Plan

Hunter Transmission Project

May 2024



1 Introduction

Overview

Feedback from the Hunter community has helped shape the Hunter Transmission Project (HTP), one of the State's most critical energy projects. This community engagement plan will guide how the community is involved in refining the HTP during the project's environmental approvals process.

The plan:

- identifies key stakeholders
- highlights issues of importance to these stakeholders and the broader Hunter community
- outlines the engagement objectives
- describes how the community will be involved in the assessment of the project's impacts.

The HTP is urgently needed

The project involves building a new overhead 500 kilovolt (kV) transmission line that will connect the existing 500 kV transmission line at Bayswater to the existing 500 kV transmission line in the Olney State Forest near Eraring. It is urgently needed as coal-fired power stations close and the State transitions to renewable energy.

Both the NSW Government and the Australian Government recognise the strategic importance of the HTP and want it built by 2028 to ensure energy security. The HTP requires the approval of both the NSW Minister of Planning and Public Spaces under the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 (EP&A Act) and the Australian Minister for Water and the Environment under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act).

Both ministers will make their final decision on the HTP after a single, integrated approval process with extensive community consultation. The environmental impact statement (EIS) for the HTP will be placed on public exhibition in late 2024.

Building on previous engagement

This plan builds on early engagement undertaken for the project.

Engagement with key stakeholders has been underway since 2022 and early community engagement started in October 2023. The lessons from this engagement have been used to shape the HTP—and inform the engagement to be carried out during the preparation of the EIS in 2024.

We know from early engagement that the community is interested in both regional and local issues.

To ensure our engagement during the environmental approvals process is targeted and relevant, we have divided the project into 3 zones: HTP North, HTP Central and HTP South. This will allow engagement to focus on the local issues that are specific to each zone while regional issues are dealt with at a whole-of-project level.

2 Strategic engagement

2.1 Engagement principles

Engagement involves informing and consulting with people and groups who are interested in, or affected by, proposed changes to an area, and obtaining expert advice from relevant councils and government agencies.

This plan reflects the principles of engagement outlined in the NSW Government's Undertaking Engagement Guidelines for State Significant Projects. It conforms with the engagement requirements under the EP&A Act, EPBC Act and Electricity Infrastructure Investment Act 2020.

The HTP engagement will be:

- open and inclusive
- easy to access
- relevant
- timely
- meaningful.

Feedback we receive during engagement will continue to inform the design of the HTP. This includes how to minimise the project's impacts on people and the environment, while identifying opportunities for benefit sharing and local employment, procurement and training.

Importantly, the approach outlined in this plan will be refined as the EIS progresses, for example in response to community feedback, changes to the HTP's design, or findings in technical studies. Engagement activities will also be regularly reviewed and adjusted to ensure continuous improvement.

2.2 Engagement objectives

The HTP guiding principles govern the way we will interact with stakeholders during the environmental approvals process:

- **Critical for energy security** – clearly explain why the project is critical for energy security in the Hunter, Sydney and Illawarra.
- **Work closely with the community** – talk to affected individuals and groups, value their opinions, try to address their concerns and strike a reasonable balance between competing interests.
- **Hunter-first** – harness and build on the region's diverse economic skill base and provide opportunities for the community to share in the benefits of the project.
- **Tread lightly** – minimise the impacts of the project on the people and the environment.
- **Act with integrity** – be open, inclusive, fair, respectful and do what we say we will do.

Our EIS engagement objectives are firmly grounded in these guiding principles. They are to:

- provide regular information about the HTP to affected landowners, communities in the vicinity of the HTP, the local Aboriginal community, environment and recreation groups, the broader Hunter community and other stakeholders so people have timely and accurate information
- give interested people and groups the opportunity to share feedback through different platforms or tools so they can have their say on the HTP
- clearly communicate what can and cannot be influenced about the HTP so people can provide meaningful feedback
- continue to work closely with the community to refine the design of the HTP and assess the project's impacts.

2.3 Regional Reference Group

We have established a Regional Reference Group for the HTP. The group will provide a forum for strategic discussions between EnergyCo and the broader Hunter community about the HTP including:

- the project design
- community views
- actions to avoid and minimise impacts on people and the environment
- actions to maximise the benefits for the Hunter community
- actions to reduce the cumulative impacts of the HTP with other projects in the region.

The group has an independent chair and comprises 9 members who include 3 local government representatives (the mayors of Singleton, Cessnock and Lake Macquarie); 3 local community representatives from HTP North, HTP Central and HTP South; and 3 regional community representatives.

It will meet regularly, invite community members to attend meetings, and share information about the project with the broader community.

2.4 Key stakeholders

Early engagement has helped identify key stakeholders for the HTP and this will continue during the environmental approvals process.

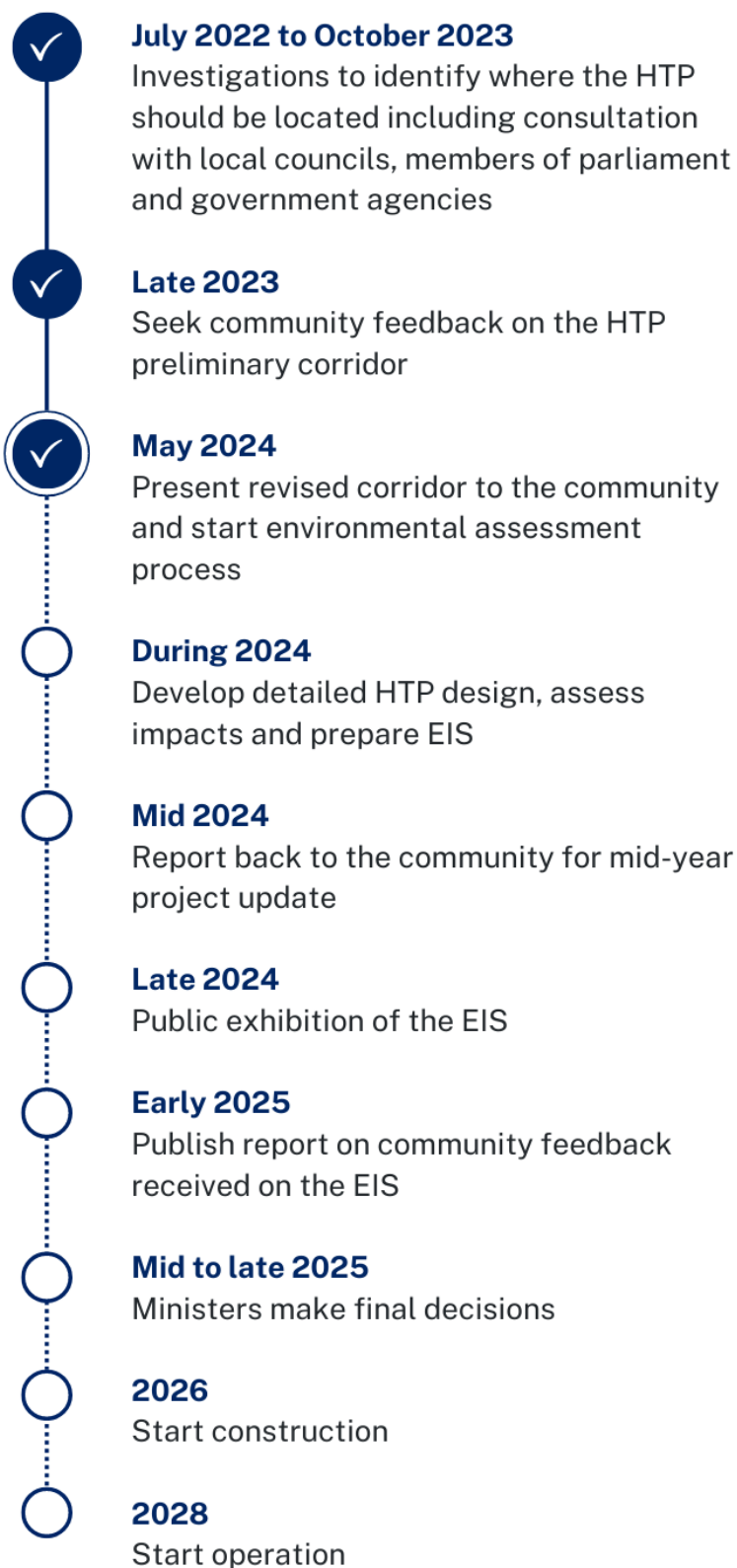
Table 1 summarises key stakeholders and a detailed list is included in Appendix A.

Table 1: Key stakeholders

Group	Stakeholders
Members of the Australian Parliament	Hunter, Paterson, Newcastle, Dobell and Shortland electorates
Members of NSW Parliament	Upper Hunter, Cessnock, Lake Macquarie, Maitland, Newcastle, Wallsend, Swansea and Wyong electorates
Local government – elected representatives and officers	Singleton, Cessnock, Lake Macquarie, Central Coast, Muswellbrook, Maitland and Newcastle councils
Australian Government agencies	Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water; Department of Defence; Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner; Australian Energy Market Operator; Australian Energy Regulator; Civil Aviation Safety Authority; Airservices Australia
NSW Government agencies	Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure; Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water; National Parks and Wildlife Service; NSW Forestry Corporation; Transport for NSW; Regional NSW; Rural Fire Service; Fire and Rescue NSW; Environment Protection Authority; Safework NSW; NSW Consumer Trustee; NSW Renewable Energy Sector Board; Electricity Infrastructure Jobs Advocate
Affected landowners	Landowners in HTP North, HTP Central and HTP South who are affected by the project. Includes both private and organisational landowners as well as owners, occupiers, leaseholders and other interest holders
Community members	Local communities in HTP North, HTP Central and HTP South; the Hunter community and NSW community
Traditional owners and Aboriginal groups	Local Aboriginal Land Councils (Wanaruah, Mindaribba, Awabakal, Biraban and Darkinjung), traditional owners and knowledge holders, registered Aboriginal parties
Interest groups	Peak environmental, recreational, business, industry groups and interest groups

Network service providers	Transgrid, Ausgrid, Endeavour Energy, Essential Energy
Education and training	Includes the University of Newcastle, TAFEs, Hunter Valley Training Company
Unions and jobs advocates	Relevant unions and jobs advocates, including Hunter Jobs Alliance

2.5 Project timeline and milestones



The EIS will be publicly exhibited for at least 28 days in late 2024. This process will be managed by the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure but will be supported by HTP engagement activities.

3 Refining the HTP

3.1 Engagement approach and activities

Our approach is based on what the community told us in our early engagement. This is described in our report [Shaping the HTP](#). Community engagement will be meaningful, proportionate and tailored to the needs of all stakeholders.

Throughout the EIS process, some activities will focus on regional stakeholders. We will also continue to develop bespoke engagement and communications for stakeholders in each zone (HTP North, HTP Central and HTP South). This will allow us to continue capturing and addressing local feedback about the issues of greatest concern and interest, noting these are likely to change as the project progresses.

To facilitate meaningful and targeted engagement, we will:

- provide clear and concise information about the project and its impacts
- use various tools (see Table 2) to encourage community participation and feedback to help use refine the HTP and assess the project's impacts
- report back to the community on what was heard, what has or hasn't changed, and why.

Table 2: Engagement and communications tools

Engagement method	Purpose
Regional Reference Group	To provide a forum for strategic discussion with the community on the HTP in accordance with the group's Terms of Reference (see Appendix B).
Meeting	To engage in detail with stakeholders on key issues. Face to face or online.
Briefing	To provide an overview of the project or updates on issues. Stakeholders may ask questions, but briefings are less interactive than meetings. Face to face or online.
Workshop	To explore specific, complex issues in a structured way. Stakeholders may be asked to work in small groups.
Community drop-in session	To provide information to stakeholders, but also answer questions and hear immediate thoughts and concerns from stakeholders. They will be targeted to HTP North, HTP Central, and HTP South.
Site walk	To allow stakeholders to show, rather than tell. For Aboriginal groups, this can be an important tool for engagement.
E-newsletter	To keep the community informed about the project. It is also a way to connect regularly and provide feedback on how the community is helping to refine the HTP. The newsletter may also invite people to participate in upcoming workshops, briefings and drop-in sessions.
Promotional stall	To give stakeholders the opportunity to ask questions, as well as raise awareness of opportunities presented by the HTP for the broader Hunter community.
Podcast	To provide detailed information to the community about specific issues such as the findings of technical studies or the design of the project. The topics discussed in the podcast will be guided by community feedback.
Videos	To provide information on key issues to the broader community in a format that is easy to understand.
Media and advertising	To inform and invite feedback from the community.

Engagement method	Purpose
Toll free community Infoline (1800 645 972)	To receive and respond to enquiries from the community.
Email address (htp@energyco.nsw.gov.au)	To receive and respond to enquiries from the community.
HTP website (energyco.nsw.gov.au/htp)	To provide information to the community.
Online interactive map	To allow the community to understand where the project is located and how it interacts with other EnergyCo projects.
Fact sheets	To give stakeholders more information on key issues.
Feedback form/online survey	To allow stakeholders to make suggestions and provide feedback.

4 Regional engagement

4.1 Overview

The communications and engagement approach regionally reflects the importance of the project and the opportunities it presents for the Hunter community. It will focus on information sharing and broad project awareness, with targeted engagement on project-wide issues.

Early community engagement identified the project's impacts on biodiversity, Aboriginal cultural heritage and recreation in the State forests as key issues for the Hunter region. It also identified potential opportunities for Hunter businesses, training organisations and the community to benefit from the project.

4.2 Regional engagement issues and opportunities

Hunter-first benefit sharing

The HTP is a multi-million dollar investment that will generate hundreds of jobs.

We are committed to harnessing and building on the region's diverse economic skills base and maximising opportunities for the Hunter community to benefit from the project.

During the preparation of the EIS, we will develop a benefit sharing program for the HTP in consultation with local councils, affected landowners, local communities and other key stakeholders such as the local Aboriginal community. This program will include:

- funding for strategic initiatives to directly benefit local communities affected by the HTP
- strategic benefit payments (\$200,000 per kilometre) for private landowners hosting transmission infrastructure on top of regular compensation for easements or land
- at least 1.5% of the design and build contract value to go towards increased income and job opportunities for local Aboriginal communities under the First Nations Guidelines
- maximising the employment of locals and the purchase of local goods and services under the NSW Renewable Energy Sector Boards Plan.
- creating education and training opportunities for the community to participate in the transition to renewable energy, including the HTP.

Under the Hunter-first guiding principle for the HTP, we will work closely with local Aboriginal groups and Hunter-based peak businesses to ensure they are in the best possible position to take advantage of the opportunities provided by the HTP.

We will also work closely with local registered training organisations, ensuring that people in the Hunter have the necessary skills to take advantage of employment opportunities provided by the HTP and other renewable energy projects in the region. This will allow training organisations to understand the project's workforce needs and plan their programs accordingly.

Biodiversity

Protection of the region's biodiversity was one of the most common issues raised during early engagement.

During the selection of the HTP corridor, we have sought to avoid and minimise the project's impacts on biodiversity. This includes:

- avoiding areas of high conservation values such as Watagans National Park, Werakata National Park, Jilliby State Conservation Area, Warrawolong Flora Reserve and biodiversity offset areas
- avoiding and minimising impacts to threatened ecological communities, particularly scarce valley floor vegetation such as the critically endangered Warkworth sands woodland

- avoiding and minimising the removal of habitat for threatened plants and animals such as the critically endangered regent honeyeater and swift parrot
- revising the corridor in the Pokolbin and Corrabare State forests to avoid and minimise impacts on key threatened species such as the sooty owl, brush-tailed rock wallaby and scrub turpentine.

There is scope to further reduce these impacts during the project's detailed design – particularly in the State forests by locating transmission towers on hilltops, spanning the transmission line across valleys to avoid vegetation clearing, and only partially clearing the rest of the transmission easement.

We are also committed to providing strategic biodiversity offsets for the HTP that significantly enhance the region's biodiversity values.

We'll work closely with environmental groups during the environmental approvals process to minimise the project's biodiversity impacts as much as possible and deliver strategic offsets. These groups will be involved in regular meetings to share knowledge and seek feedback on the results of the biodiversity surveys and investigations and the project's biodiversity offsets package.

Aboriginal cultural heritage

The protection of Aboriginal cultural heritage across the HTP corridor was another common issue raised during early engagement. Scenic landscapes are also very important to the local Aboriginal community and traditional owners whose feedback was to make sure the HTP doesn't interrupt ridgelines and sightlines because these are an important part of cultural heritage.

During the preparation of the EIS, we will assess the project's impacts on Aboriginal cultural heritage value in accordance with relevant guidelines and involve Aboriginal groups in this assessment to determine the cultural significance of any impacts. The assessment will include:

- actions to further avoid and minimise the project's direct and indirect impacts
- detailed field surveys with Aboriginal groups of the project's disturbance footprint
- test excavations in targeted areas, including the sandsheets around the Hunter River and Wollombi Brook and rock-shelters with potential cultural deposits in HTP Central and HTP North
- cultural values mapping by an anthropologist with key Aboriginal Elders and knowledge-holders
- an analysis of the cultural significance of any impacts, including the potential cumulative impacts with other relevant projects in HTP North.

In conjunction with this work, we will continue to engage with Aboriginal community and traditional owners to deliver on the Hunter-first benefit sharing package linking to key [Closing the Gap](#) priorities in the region as well as maximising income and job opportunities.

Recreational impacts

Most of the corridor in HTP Central and HTP South runs through State forests. It avoids popular recreation areas and minimises impacts on NSW Forestry Corporation's hardwood plantations. It also maximises the use of existing forestry management zones and infrastructure such as access tracks to reduce the project's vegetation clearing and disturbance.

Early engagement with recreational user groups indicated that access to the forests is an important issue and clear communication about potential temporary closures will be key. The project will continue to hold regular meetings and briefings with these groups to ensure recreational impacts are fully considered. There will also be opportunities for recreational users to provide feedback about potential upgrades to recreation facilities in the State forests via workshops.

4.3 Key regional stakeholders

Table 3: Key regional stakeholders

Key stakeholder	Engagement method	Indicative timing	Outcome
Regional Reference Group	Meetings and briefings	Quarterly with additional meetings as needed	Group is kept up to date with the project and can speak to it confidently with community or media, as well as providing input into project issues
			Group understands benefit sharing program and shares information with network
Singleton, Cessnock, Lake Macquarie, Muswellbrook, Maitland and Central Coast councils	Meetings and briefings	Ongoing as needed	Councils are kept up to date and can provide feedback
Local Aboriginal Land Councils Traditional owners and Aboriginal community	Meetings and briefings Phone and email communication Site walks	Regular and ongoing – dedicated local Aboriginal engagement officer	Stakeholders are kept up to date, understand impacts and can provide feedback
Recreational user groups	Meetings and briefings	Ongoing as needed	Groups understand project impacts and timeline
	Workshop	Ongoing as needed	Groups can provide input into upgrades and enhancements they would like to see
Environmental groups	Meetings and briefings	Ongoing as needed	Groups are kept up to date, understand impacts and can provide feedback
	Workshop	Ongoing as needed	Groups can provide input and be involved in development of offset strategy
Peak business groups	Phone and email communication Meetings and briefings Workshop	Ongoing as needed	Businesses understand how to take advantage of project employment and procurement opportunities
	Stalls and booths	Attendance at industry conferences as appropriate	Businesses are aware of the HTP and what it involves
	Project newsletter	Monthly	Businesses are kept up to date with project news
Training and education providers	Meetings and briefings	Ongoing as needed	Providers understand future skills needs related to project and how to tailor training accordingly
Hunter community	Stalls and booths	Attendance at regional events as appropriate	People are aware of the project and its importance to the region

Key stakeholder	Engagement method	Indicative timing	Outcome
	Project newsletter	Monthly	People are kept up to date with project news

5 Our approach in HTP North

5.1 Overview

In HTP North (Bayswater to Broke), the transmission line will be largely on power station, industrial, mining and government owned land. There will be some impact on private landowners. Engagement with these landowners will continue throughout the EIS process.

Early community engagement allowed us to understand issues of importance in HTP North. These are summarised below in 5.3 and discussed in more detail in the [Shaping the HTP](#) report.

5.2 Key stakeholders

Both Singleton Council and Muswellbrook Council are key stakeholders for communications and engagement activities in HTP North, although the project is mostly located in the Singleton local government area (LGA). We will work closely with both councils during the environmental approvals process. The Mayor of Singleton Council and a community representative from the Singleton LGA sit on the HTP Regional Reference Group.

We will also involve the relevant Local Aboriginal Land Council –Wanaruah LALC –and traditional owners in the developing income and employment opportunities for the local Aboriginal community and minimising impacts on Aboriginal cultural heritage.

The Hunter Valley Gliding Club operates from Warkworth Airfield in HTP North. The safe operation of this airfield and the club's activities have been considered in the development of the HTP corridor. The club is an important stakeholder and will be kept updated.

Timely, relevant information will be shared with residents and businesses via a monthly email newsletter.

Table 4: Key HTP North stakeholders

Key stakeholder	Engagement method	Indicative timing	Outcome
Singleton Council Muswellbrook Council	Meetings at staff level	Ongoing and regular	Council understands project impacts and can provide feedback
	Briefings – Mayor and councillors		Mayor and councillors are kept informed
Wanaruah LALC Traditional owners Aboriginal community	Meetings and briefings Phone and email communication	Regular and ongoing – dedicated local Aboriginal engagement officer	Stakeholders are kept up to date, understand impacts in HTP North and can provide feedback
	Site walk	As needed	
Private landowners and mining, power station and government landowners	Meetings Phone and email communication	Ongoing – dedicated local team	Landowners are kept up to date, can ask questions and provide feedback
	Project newsletter	Monthly	
	Drop-in sessions	As needed from May 2024	

Key stakeholder	Engagement method	Indicative timing	Outcome
Environmental groups	Briefings	Ongoing as needed	Groups are informed and can ask questions about impacts in HTP North
Local residents and businesses	Project newsletter	Monthly	People are kept up to date and informed
	Drop-in sessions	As needed from May 2024	People are informed about the project, can ask questions and provide feedback
	Website and fact sheets	Ongoing	People are kept up to date and informed
Transport for NSW	Meetings at staff level	As needed	Stakeholder understands potential interaction of HTP with State roads and can provide feedback

5.3 Key engagement issues and activities

These issues have been identified as important to the community during early engagement on the HTP.

Impacts on people

The HTP North corridor includes less than 10 private properties. This includes industrial properties as well as some residential and farming land. We'll work with landowners to reduce this further and negotiate to secure easements and land as quickly and sensitively as possible. We'll also keep working to minimise any impacts on the Hunter Valley Gliding Club. We'll also involve the local community in the assessment of the HTP's impacts during construction and operation, including potential social impacts.

Biodiversity

Despite HTP North's mining and industrial landscape, it contains areas with high conservation value. This includes scarce valley floor vegetation such as the critically endangered Warkworth sands woodland and critical habitat for threatened species such as the regent honeyeater and swift parrot. The location of the HTP North corridor avoids the impacts on these areas as much as possible. During the environmental approvals process, we'll seek to reduce these impacts further and deliver strategic offsets in consultation with key environmental groups such as BirdLife Australia and the National Parks Association.

Construction impacts

During construction, the project is expected to have minimal impact on infrastructure and services in the Singleton LGA as we will provide accommodation for the project's workers in HTP North's construction support facilities. We'll work with Singleton Council and the local community to identify and manage any construction impacts on residents and businesses in the area.

Traffic and transport

Road infrastructure is of a high standard in HTP North, so traffic impacts during construction are likely to be relatively minor. There may be some interaction with Singleton Bypass, which will be under construction until late 2026.

The HTP will work with Transport for NSW to understand and manage any traffic impacts arising from the project during the construction of Singleton Bypass. It will also work with Singleton Council to minimise traffic impacts on local roads.

Benefit sharing

We're engaging with both Singleton Council and Muswellbrook Council as well as Aboriginal groups and service providers, peak regional business groups, education and training providers to identify benefit sharing opportunities. These opportunities will be captured in the project's benefit sharing program.

6 Our approach in HTP Central

6.1 Overview

HTP Central (Pokolbin to Corrabare) runs through State forest and some privately owned land. The communications and engagement approach for HTP Central reflects the relatively high levels of impact expected to the local community.

These issues are summarised below in 6.3. and discussed in more detail in the [Shaping the HTP report](#).

6.2 Key stakeholders

The NSW Forestry Corporation and National Parks and Wildlife Service NSW are key stakeholders in this area. The HTP team is also working closely with the owners of the affected private properties and those that are expected to be impacted by site access during construction.

Cessnock City Council is a key stakeholder for communication and engagement activities in HTP Central, particularly as traffic and transport impacts are expected to be key issues in the area. The Mayor of Cessnock Council and a community representative from the Cessnock LGA sit on the Regional Reference Group.

We will also involve the relevant Local Aboriginal Land Councils –Mindaribba LALC and Awabakal LALC –and traditional owners in the developing income and employment opportunities for the local Aboriginal community and minimising impacts on Aboriginal cultural heritage.

Table 5: Key HTP Central stakeholders

Key stakeholder	Engagement method	Indicative timing	Outcome
Cessnock City Council	Meetings at staff level	Ongoing and regular	Council understands project impacts and can provide feedback
	Briefings – Mayor and councillors		Mayor and councillors are kept informed
Mindaribba LALC Awabakal LALC Traditional owners Aboriginal community	Meetings and briefings Phone and email communication	Regular and ongoing – dedicated local Aboriginal engagement officer	Stakeholders are kept up to date, understand impacts in HTP Central and can provide feedback
	Site walk	As needed	
Local residents and businesses	Workshop	Workshops on specific issues as needed	People are kept up to date and involved in finding solutions that work for their community
	Website and fact sheets	Ongoing	People are kept up to date and informed
	Drop-in sessions	As needed from May 2024	People are informed about the project, can ask questions and provide feedback
	Project newsletter	Monthly	People are kept up to date and informed
Environmental groups	Briefing	Ongoing as needed	Groups are informed and can ask questions about impacts in HTP Central
Recreational user groups	Briefing	Ongoing as needed	Groups are informed and can ask questions about impacts in HTP Central

Key stakeholder	Engagement method	Indicative timing	Outcome
Private landowners	Meetings Phone and email communication	Ongoing – dedicated local team	Landowners are kept up to date, can ask questions and provide feedback
	Project newsletter	Monthly	
	Drop-in sessions	As needed from May 2024	
	Workshop	Workshops on specific issues as needed	

6.3 Key engagement issues and activities

Impacts on people

We've tried to avoid private land as much as possible, however some land will be impacted. Working with landowners to understand land use and ways to minimise potential impacts will be ongoing.

Private landowners will be engaged face to face and using digital methods. Landowners will also receive broad project communications via an email newsletter monthly, as well as targeted updates about fieldwork and surveys happening in their area.

In HTP Central, regular drop-in sessions and subject-specific workshops will be key methods of engagement and will allow affected landowners the opportunity to work closely with the project team.

Traffic and transport

There are likely to be several road and traffic impacts in HTP Central during the construction period as material and equipment including transmission towers are transported into the Pokolbin and Corrabare State forests. Road access will be mostly via local roads and access tracks, which will require upgrades. This includes roads on private land and those maintained by NSW Forestry Corporation in State forests.

We'll engage with the the NSW Forestry Corporation, Cessnock Council and the local community around Millfield, Cedar Creek and Pokolbin to minimise these impacts. Engagement with the local community will occur on an individual basis with affected landowners and at the neighbourhood level via drop-in sessions and workshops.

Visual amenity

The project's impact on the scenic landscape in HTP Central is a key engagement issue for the area. Residents in the Congewai area are particularly concerned about the visual impact of transmission towers.

Results from visual impact assessments during the EIS process will be shared with the community, including photomontages of the project from key viewpoints.

Biodiversity

Biodiversity impacts are an issue of concern for the local community, environmental groups and the wider region. Potential impacts to old growth forest, koala habitat and endangered or threatened species, including the regent honeyeater and the glossy black cockatoo, are of particular interest in HTP Central.

Engagement on biodiversity will occur via regular meetings and briefings with environmental groups during the EIS process to share knowledge and seek feedback on biodiversity survey results and the project's offset strategy.

Cultural heritage

Protection of Aboriginal cultural heritage sites is an issue of high interest. Compared to HTP North, where significant cultural heritage investigations have taken place to enable mining approvals, relatively few cultural heritage surveys have been completed in HTP Central. These surveys will be carried out during the EIS process, supported by ongoing engagement with traditional owners, knowledge holders and Local Aboriginal Land Councils to identify areas of importance and ways to minimise impacts.

The project's impact on the cultural landscape and view lines is also an issue of interest. The results of visual impact assessments will be shared with Aboriginal stakeholders and feedback taken on board.

We have a dedicated Aboriginal engagement officer and Aboriginal stakeholders will be engaged via regular meetings and briefings, cultural mapping exercises, site walks and surveys.

Benefit sharing

We're engaging with Cessnock City Council as well as Aboriginal groups and service providers, peak regional business groups, education and training providers to identify benefit sharing opportunities. These opportunities will be captured in the project's benefit sharing program.

7 Our approach in HTP South

7.1 Overview

HTP South runs through the Olney State Forest. The revised corridor avoids all private land in HTP South.

The communications and engagement approach for HTP South reflects the moderate level of impact expected to the local community.

Early community engagement in HTP South reflected an interest in environment and biodiversity impacts and Aboriginal cultural heritage impacts. Issues such as roads and traffic, construction impacts and impacts on recreational users of the Olney and Watagan State forests will also be key areas of engagement.

These issues are summarised below in 7.3. and discussed in more detail in the [Shaping the HTP report](#).

7.2 Key stakeholders

The NSW Forestry Corporation and National Parks and Wildlife Service NSW are key stakeholders in HTP South. We'll continue to work closely with these agencies to minimise the project's impacts on forestry operations, the environment, recreation activities and Aboriginal cultural heritage sites.

Lake Macquarie City Council is a key stakeholder for communication and engagement activities. The Mayor and a community representative from the Lake Macquarie LGA sit on the Regional Reference Group.

Relevant Local Aboriginal Land Councils – Biraban LALC and Darkinjung LALC – will continue to be closely engaged, along with traditional owners and the local Aboriginal community.

Table 6: Key HTP South stakeholders

Key stakeholder	Engagement method	Indicative timing	Outcome
Lake Macquarie City Council	Meetings at staff level	Ongoing and regular	Council understands project impacts and can provide feedback
Central Coast Council	Briefings – Mayor and councillors		Mayor and councillors are kept informed
Biraban LALC Darkinjung LALC Traditional owners	Meetings and briefings Phone and email communication	Regular and ongoing – dedicated local Aboriginal engagement officer	Stakeholders are kept up to date, understand impacts in HTP South and can provide feedback
Aboriginal community	Site walk	As needed	
Environmental groups	Briefing	Ongoing as needed	Groups are informed and can ask questions about impacts in HTP South
Recreational user groups	Briefing	Ongoing as needed	Groups are informed and can ask questions about impacts in HTP South
Local residents and businesses	Project newsletter	Monthly	Stakeholders are informed about potential project impacts in HTP South

	Drop-in sessions	As needed from May 2024	People are informed about the project, can ask questions and provide feedback
	Website and fact sheets	Ongoing	People are kept up to date and informed

7.3 Key engagement issues and activities

Biodiversity

Biodiversity impacts are an issue of concern for the local community, environmental groups and the wider Hunter community. Construction of a substation in the Olney State Forest, including a bushfire protection zone around the substation, will have biodiversity impacts.

Engagement on biodiversity will occur via regular meetings and briefings with environmental groups during the EIS process to share knowledge and seek feedback on biodiversity survey results and the project's offset strategy.

Cultural heritage

Protection of Aboriginal cultural heritage sites is an important issue. Relatively few cultural heritage surveys have been completed in HTP South. These surveys will be carried out during the EIS process, supported by ongoing engagement with traditional owners, knowledge holders and Local Aboriginal Land Councils to identify areas of importance and ways to minimise impacts.

We have a dedicated Aboriginal engagement officer and Aboriginal stakeholders will be engaged via regular meetings and briefings, cultural mapping exercises, site walks and surveys.

Traffic and transport

Construction traffic in HTP South will be concentrated on Freemans Drive and Martinsville Road as materials for the new substation and transmission towers are transported into the Olney and Watagan State forests. We will work closely with the NSW Forestry Corporation, Lake Macquarie City Council and the local community in Cooranbong and Martinsville to minimise the project's traffic impacts.

Benefit sharing

We're engaging with Lake Macquarie City Council as well as Aboriginal groups and service providers, peak regional business groups, education and training providers to identify benefit sharing opportunities. These opportunities will be captured in the project's benefit sharing program.

8 Measuring success and reporting back

8.1 Evaluation of engagement

The engagement activities described in this plan will be monitored and evaluated to ensure continuous improvement. This will occur formally, via feedback forms and surveys at events, as well as informally.

Engagement activities will also be evaluated against the outcomes set out for each activity in the sections above. Where a particular activity or method is not producing the desired outcome, it will be refined.

8.2 Reporting back

During the environmental approvals process, we will report back to the community regularly on:

- what we have heard during engagement
- how this has helped to refine the design of the HTP and minimise the project's impacts on people and the environment
- how the community can be involved in the project's next steps.

This will be done mainly via the e-newsletter and website updates.

In mid-2024 we will publish a report that explains how community feedback has continued to help refine the HTP, and the preliminary findings of some of the technical studies for the EIS.

When the EIS is placed on public exhibition in late 2024, we will publish another report that explains how community feedback has informed the project's design and provides a simple summary of the EIS.

Appendix A: Key stakeholders

GROUP	NAME/GROUP	INTEREST/ROLE
Affected landowners	People who live in or own land in the corridor	Impact of HTP on private property, including traffic access Participating in briefing sessions, workshops, meetings
Ministers	Federal Minister for Climate Change and Energy, Chris Bowen MP Federal Minister for the Environment and Water, Tanya Plibersek MP Federal Minister for Defence, Richard Marles MP State Minister for Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Heritage, Penny Sharpe MLC State Minister for Planning and Public Spaces, Paul Scully MP State Minister for Agriculture, Tara Moriarty MLC State Minister for Education and Early Learning, Prue Car MP	Approvals for HTP Portfolios interact with HTP
Elected representatives (affected communities)	Federal Member for Hunter – Dan Repacholi MP Senator Ross Cadell State Member for Upper Hunter – Dave Layzell MP State Member for Cessnock – Clayton Barr MP State Member for Lake Macquarie – Greg Piper MP	Distributing information to constituents Interest in local impacts
Elected representatives (broader community)	State Member for Swansea – Yasmin Catley MP State Member for Wallsend – Sonia Hornery MP Federal Member for Paterson – Meryl Swanson MP Federal Member for Newcastle – Sharon Claydon MP State Member for Newcastle – Tim Crakanthorp MP Federal Member for Shortland – Pat Conroy MP Federal Member for Dobell – Emma McBride MP	Distributing information to constituents
Local government	Cessnock City Council – Mayor Jay Suvaal, Councillors in Ward A – Councillor Paul Dunn (LIB), Councillor James Hawkins (ALP), Councillor Jessica Jurd (IND) Lake Macquarie City Council – Mayor Kay Fraser, Councillors in West Ward – Councillor David Belcher (ALP), Councillor Jason Pauling (LIB), Deputy Mayor Councillor Madeline Bishop (ALP) Singleton Shire Council – Mayor Sue Moore, Councillors Maitland City Council – Mayor Philip Penfold, Councillors Muswellbrook Shire Council – Mayor Steve Reynolds, Councillors Central Coast Council – Administrator Mr Rik Hart	Distributing information to residents Interest in local impacts
Government agencies	NSW Government Department of Climate Change, Energy, Environment and Water– NSW and Australian agencies Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure National Parks and Wildlife Service NSW Forestry Corporation Transport for NSW Regional NSW NSW Rural Fire Service Fire and Rescue NSW Environment Protection Authority SafeWork NSW Department of Primary Industries – Agriculture NSW Environment and Heritage NSW Consumer Trustee NSW Renewable Energy Sector Board Electricity Infrastructure Jobs Advocate Australian Government Department of Defence Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner	Approvers Policy

	Australian Energy Market Operator Australian Energy Regulator Civil Aviation Safety Authority Airservices Australia ASL – Consumer Trustee	
Industry and advocacy groups	Business Hunter Business Singleton Hunter Joint Organisation of Councils Hunter Jobs Alliance Hunter Valley Wine Country Committee for the Hunter HunterNet Dantia Cessnock Business Chamber Lake Macquarie Business Limited Lovedale Chamber of Commerce	Project employment and procurement opportunities Distributing information to members
Education groups	Hunter Valley Training Company The Connectivity Centre University of Newcastle Hunter TAFE Foundation Hunter TAFE University of Newcastle	Project skills needs and education opportunities
Mining and energy sector	Yancoal Glencore Centennial AGL Origin Transgrid Port of Newcastle	Transmission infrastructure using mining land Economic benefits to energy sector companies
Environmental groups	Australian Conservation Foundation Nature Conservation Council of NSW National Parks Association Hunter Bird Observers Club Birdlife Australia Hunter Community Environment Centre Hunter Environment Lobby Landcare Groups Community Environment Network EcoNetwork Port Stephens Local wildlife groups Sydney Basin Koala Network	Environmental impact and opportunities of HTP Distributing information to members Participating in briefing sessions and workshops
Recreational groups	Hunter Mountain Bike Association Lake Macquarie Bike Riding Club Newcastle Orienteering Club Newcastle Bushwalking Club Newcastle Ramblers Bushwalking Club Hunter Area Walkabout Club Lake Macquarie Bushwalkers Watagan Wanderers Bushwalking Club Brisbane Waters Outdoors Club Port Hunter 4x4 Club Maitland Districts 4WD Club Hunter Region 4WD Council Gold Eagle 4WD Club Newcastle and Districts 4WD Club Morpeth Horse Riders Club Hunter Valley Horse Riders Club Lake Macquarie Pack and Trail Horse Riders Australian Climbing Association Newcastle and Central Coast	Impact of HTP on State forest – permanent and construction access issues, visual impact Distributing information to members Participating in briefing sessions and workshops

Community and special interest groups	Wollombi Progress Association Wollombi Valley Chamber of Commerce (known as Wollombi Valley Tourism) Cooranbong Community Services Centre Hunter Valley Protection Alliance Bulga Milbrodale Progress Association Cooranbong Community and Business Alliance	Impact of HTP on local community Opportunities of HTP for local community Distributing information to members
Rural Fire Service	Bulga – Singleton Rural Fire Brigade Laguna Volunteer Bush Fire Brigade Wollombi Volunteer Bush Fire Brigade Martinsville Rural Fire Service Cooranbong Rural Fire Service Pokolbin Rural Fire Service	Bushfire risk, access issues Opportunities for new or upgraded access routes into State forests Participating in briefing sessions
General public	People who live, work in or visit the Hunter region	Environmental and community impact of HTP Opportunities presented by HTP

HUNTER TRANSMISSION PROJECT REGIONAL REFERENCE GROUP

Purpose

The Regional Reference Group (RRG) for the Hunter Transmission Project will perform an advisory and consultative role.

The purpose of the RRG is to:

- facilitate genuine engagement between EnergyCo and the broader Hunter community on the HTP
- allow EnergyCo to seek feedback from the community on project-related matters
- give the community a forum to ask for information or give feedback on the project.

Terms of Reference

The RRG will provide a forum for strategic discussions between EnergyCo and the broader Hunter community about the Hunter Transmission Project, including.

- the design of the project
- community views on the project
- actions to avoid and minimise impacts on people and the environment
- actions to maximise the benefits for the Hunter community
- actions to reduce the cumulative impacts of the HTP with other projects in the region.

Members

The RRG will comprise:

- an independent chairperson
- three Council representatives, one from each of the relevant councils (Singleton, Cessnock and Lake Macquarie)
- three regional representatives from peak Business, Aboriginal and Environment groups
- three local community representative, one from each of the relevant Local Government Areas (Singleton, Cessnock and Lake Macquarie)

EnergyCo will appoint the representatives for the RRG following consultation with key stakeholders in the region, including local Councils.

Independent Chairperson

The RRG will be chaired by an independent chairperson. The chairperson is expected to:

- provide leadership
- be independent and impartial
- act as the key contact between the RRG and EnergyCo
- be responsible for overseeing the management and administration of the RRG with the support of the Secretariat, including arranging the time and location of meetings, setting the agenda for meetings and approving the minutes of meetings following consultation with EnergyCo and the members
- facilitate constructive discussion between members on the project
- give all members an opportunity to share their views
- help resolve any differences of opinion between members fairly and transparently.

Secretariat

The HTP Community Team will act as the Secretariat of the RRG.

Meetings

The RRG will meet at least four times a year, but more frequently if necessary.

Attendance of Meetings by non-RRG Members

The independent chairperson may invite non-RRG members to attend RRG meetings as observers or to give advice. This may include:

- representatives from EnergyCo or other State agencies
- representatives from other Councils in the Hunter, including Newcastle, Maitland, Muswellbrook and Central Coast
- technical experts or consultants
- members of the public.

Remuneration

The independent chairperson will be paid a daily sitting fee by EnergyCo for arranging and chairing meetings.

While the other members of the RRG will not be paid for their services, they will be able to recover any reasonable costs associated with attending meetings (petrol, meals, etc.) from EnergyCo.

External Communications

Members of the RRG will be encouraged to share information about the HTP with the broader community. However, any information provided to the RRG on a confidential basis must not be discussed or shared outside the RRG.

The RRG may decide to release statements or other information on the project to the media or adopt other approaches to publicise information.

However, only the independent chairperson may speak publicly to the media on behalf of the RRG. Individual members may make comments to the media or in public forums on behalf of themselves or their stakeholder groups, but not on behalf of the RRG.

Publication of Information

The following information must be published on the HTP project web page on EnergyCo's website:

- the members of the RRG
- meeting agendas and minutes
- any other information agreed to by the RRG and/or EnergyCo.

Changes to the Purpose, Terms of Reference & Membership of the RRG

Over time, EnergyCo may:

- expand the remit of the RRG to include other EnergyCo projects such as the Hunter Central Coast Renewable Energy Zone
- vary the Terms of Reference of the RRG
- expand the membership of the RRG
- replace the members of the RRG
- provide further guidance on the operation of the RRG.

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EnergyCo is the NSW Government statutory authority responsible for delivering the Hunter Transmission Project (HTP) as a critical part of transitioning to a cleaner future under the NSW Electricity Infrastructure Roadmap.

You can read more about EnergyCo on our website: energyco.nsw.gov.au

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