

Neoen CRP



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# THUNDERBOLT ENERGY HUB COMMUNITY RELATIONS PLAN

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## PURPOSE

This Community Relations Plan (CRP) was first developed during the feasibility phase by Joanna Murphy with oversight from Lisa Stiebel and published together with the Scoping Report in October 2020. The CRP was developed further throughout the detailed assessment phase throughout 2021 by Joanna Murphy together with Neoen's local Community Liaison representative Anne-Marie Ward.

This document identifies the community relations approach and objectives for the Thunderbolt Energy Hub and surrounding communities. It outlines the overall framework across the phases of the project lifecycle (from development through construction to operations) and proposed plans. It also provides a summary of the key stakeholders including landholders, neighbours, local community and local government.

Neoen understands that the success of the Thunderbolt Energy Hub is dependent to a large extent on the development of genuine, open and ongoing relationships with key stakeholders and members of the local community. We recognise the importance of ensuring a "no surprises" dynamic with the local community and are committed to developing and nurturing long-term relationships between our team and the various project stakeholders.

Neoen also engaged Umwelt Pty Ltd (Umwelt) to undertake a Social Impact Assessment (SIA) for the Project. Although the SEARs do not require a SIA to be submitted, Neoen engaged Umwelt to complete the assessment to provide an independent review of the community consultation activities undertaken by Neoen to date and to provide an independent risk assessment of the likely social impacts (both positive and negative) that the Project may have on the community.

This template was developed in accordance with the best practice guidelines from the ACT and VRET auction schemes.

The CRP is a key element of the Community Relations Toolkit depicted in Table 1. It is one of the tools, along with the stakeholder register and the project website, that will accompany the project from early feasibility stage to decommissioning.

This is an external CRP for public access.

# Safety First

Neoen have a policy of safety first across all our projects and activities. Staff and community safety is a baseline essential to ensure engagement can proceed. Wherever there is a conflict between the approach and guidelines outlined in this Community Relations Plan and the safety of our staff or the general public then appropriate safe practices will take priority.



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# **1** COMMUNITY RELATIONS APPROACH

#### 1.1 Our approach

Stakeholder and community relations are led by Neoen's project managers with support from local community relations specialists. We consider it important that trusting relationships are developed between the people on the ground who know the project the best, and the stakeholders that are part of and connected to their region and local community. Due to the rural nature of the community, our overall approach to consultation for the Thunderbolt Energy Hub will be open, relaxed, flexible and responsive.

Neoen have a vertically integrated business model, meaning that we 'develop to own' our projects. This model is unusual in the industry, affording us a clear advantage over our competitors in respect to community relations – our starting point is the clear understanding that we will be long term neighbours and participants in the local community for the lifetime of the project. As such we are able to establish and nurture relationships, embrace partnerships and innovation, confident that we will be there to see projects and benefits to fruition.

#### 1.2 Our values

As a company Neoen has a clear set of values that underpin and guide our work. How these internal values translate into our external approach to building relationships with communities is described in Table 2.



Integrity We operate with integrity, whatever we do, whenever and wherever we do it. We work with partners who abide by the same rules.



**Commitment** We uphold all our commitments, internal and external. We believe in hard work and take pleasure in seeing a good job well done.



Audacity We believe we can become a world leader in renewable energy. We have the audacity to operate globally, imagining, designing and implementing competitive, effective energy solutions.



Esprit de corps We are loyal to each other and form a closeknit team. We are proud of our company, our goals and our accomplishments.

Value & Principle	In practice
Integrity Mutual Respect	- We provide a space for genuine dialogue where people can participate in respectful discussions.
Integrity Transparency	<ul> <li>We demystify the development process for local stakeholders and clearly communicate which points, when and to what extent they are able to influence decisions.</li> <li>We are transparent about how and why decisions are made.</li> </ul>
Integrity Inclusiveness	<ul> <li>We reach out to involve key stakeholders and the local community so they can play a part in decisions that affect them.</li> <li>We provide a range of opportunities and avenues for ongoing and meaningful dialogue, allowing for detailed and timely discussions.</li> </ul>
Commitment Responsiveness	<ul> <li>We communicate well and are responsive to emerging issues, concerns and ideas.</li> <li>We provide timely information and ensure people have time to digest information, understand the project and make informed decisions.</li> </ul>

#### Table 1: Principles and practice

Value & Principle	In practice
Commitment Mutual Benefit	- We seek shared outcomes of mutual benefit for the local host community over the long term.
Audacity Innovation	<ul> <li>We deliver engagement beyond regulatory conditions and compliance</li> <li>We are open to and pursue bold and creative ideas and solutions tailored to and driven by the local context of the project.</li> </ul>
Esprit de corps Relationship building	<ul> <li>We build and nurture long term local relationships and make meaningful links with local leaders and organisations.</li> <li>We provide many avenues for interaction across the project lifecycle.</li> </ul>
Esprit de corps Celebration	<ul> <li>We value and celebrate community; our own and those of the communities we work with.</li> <li>We enjoy celebrating our successes together.</li> </ul>

#### 1.3 Industry Best Practice

Our approach to engaging stakeholders is informed by the Public Participation Spectrum developed by the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) and widely adopted as a framework for structuring consultation by the renewables industry<sup>1</sup>. The approaches and spectrum are represented in the Table 3.

Spectrum	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Community engagement objective	- Provide balanced and objective information - Assist the community in understanding all aspects of the project, including possible problems/ issues	- Obtain feedback from the community on plans, options and/or decisions	- Work directly with the community throughout all stages of the project - Ensure community concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered	<ul> <li>Partner with the community in each aspect of planning, development and decision- making</li> <li>Include the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution</li> </ul>	- Community leads the development of the renewable energy project - Place decision- making in the hands of the community
Promise to community	- Keep the community informed through all stages of development, including issues and delays	<ul> <li>Keep the community informed</li> <li>Listen and acknowledge suggestions and concerns</li> <li>Provide feedback on how</li> </ul>	- Work with the community to ensure concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed - Provide feedback on how	<ul> <li>Look to the community for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions</li> <li>Incorporate advice and recommendatio ns into decisions</li> </ul>	- Implement what the community decides

Table 2: Spectrums of engagement

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Lane, T. and J. Hicks (2017) Community Engagement and Benefit Sharing in Renewable Energy Development: A Guide for Applicants to the Victorian Renewable Energy Target Auction. Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, Victorian Government, Melbourne.

Spectrum	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
		input influenced the decision	input influenced the decision	to the maximum extent possible	
Community engagement outcomes	- Securing a good site to install the renewable energy facility - Gaining planning permission - Meeting compliance regulations	- Minimising objections - Effectively managing complain - Good stakeholder relations - A level of community awareness and trust in the project	- Long-term broad local social acceptance and knowledge of the project - Strengthened local relationships and trust - Local advocates for renewable energy	- Broad community participation, support and awareness - Some sense of local ownership - Greater community benefit and strong local relationships and trust - Timely development and easier planning approval - Some sharing of benefits beyond investors	- Benefit sharing program tailored to the local context - Harness the skills and capital of the community - Upskill community members to manage the project - Largely community owned and controlled

This CRP aims to move our engagement activities and benefit sharing approach along the spectrum listed above so that across our project portfolio we are:

 Involving the community in the development, construction and operation of the wind farm, solar farm and battery farm

- **Collaborating** with the community to ensure that local advice and insights are shaping our approach to engagement and benefit sharing

 Empowering the community to shape key elements of the project, such as co-designing the longterm framework of the shared benefits program

The first five sections of this Thunderbolt Energy Hub Community Relations Plan (CRP) describe our progress so far, involving, collaborating with, and empowering the community around our project. Section 6 outlines community engagement going forward, mapped against this industry-best-practice framework.



#### 1.4 Emerging trends

Table 3 in the prior section shows that differing levels of participation are legitimate, depending on the goals, timeframes, resources and levels of interest/concern in the decision to be made. At all levels of engagement, it is fundamental to define the promise and ensure it is clearly understood by both the decision makers and the stakeholders to be engaged. The following figure<sup>2</sup> shows the emergent key elements of best practice as at 2018.





Stakeholders groups are likely to have differing communication and engagement needs. A level of engagement is therefore necessarily assigned to each stakeholder identified. It is possible for the level of engagement to alter at different milestones of the project; as a consequence, some stakeholders will be assigned more than one level of engagement. Each level of engagement is a valid one, provided it is delivered in a meaningful way and to a group that expects to be engaged with at that level.

The project team will engage broadly but understands there are stakeholders seeking different levels of engagement in the project. Stakeholder level of interest will evolve over the duration of the project and this analysis will be updated regularly to reflect changes and emerging issues or opportunities. A detailed Stakeholder Register incorporating the stakeholders and communities affected and/or interested in the project is maintained by the manager responsible for the CRP.

#### 1.5 Objectives

- 1. Foster a transparent and open approach to the development of Thunderbolt Energy Hub and ensure 'no surprises' for the local community.
- 2. Keep the community and stakeholders informed about Thunderbolt Energy Hub through the provision of accurate, timely and factual project information.
- 3. Identify and address community and stakeholder concerns and maintain transparency in the project design, implementation and ongoing operations

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Lane, T., Wood, E. Hall, N., Webb, A. and Mey, F. Enhancing Social Outcomes from Wind Development in Australia: Evaluating Community Engagement and Benefit Sharing. Clean Energy Council, Melbourne.

- 4. Involve stakeholders and community regarding key decisions.
- 5. Identify opportunities to maximise local business involvement and local employment in the construction and operations of Thunderbolt Energy Hub.
- 6. If relevant, identify opportunities for Indigenous Participation and employment in the construction and operations of Thunderbolt Energy Hub and where appropriate co-develop and implement an Indigenous Participation Plan.
- 7. Co-design, develop and deliver a benefit sharing program in collaboration with the community, and in partnership with local stakeholders where possible.
- 8. Develop long-term relationships and partnerships with community and stakeholders.

#### 1.6 Community Relations Framework

An eight-phased approach will guide the implementation of community relations strategy in alignment with each of the project stages.

Key project activities and milestones are outlined on the page below, with the associated community relations activities on the following page.

Section 3 provides detailed project-specific information on the community relations approach and strategy for Thunderbolt Energy Hub.

		•	Decommissioning	K Ba	Explore business case for site	renewal	Cease or extend	landowner	contracts	Removal of	infrastructure	Site rehabilitation						
	OPERATION	0	Operation		Ongoing asset maintenance and	management	Generation and	revenue tracking &	optimisation									
r Stage		9	Construction		Mobilise on site	Civil, mechanical & electrical	installation		Commissioning	Generation	commences	Construction	Manager hands over to Asset	Manager				
and Milestones by	CONSTRUCTION	9	Pre-Construction		DA approval	Finalise procurement and	appoint EPC and	O&M contractor	Finalise connection	agreement		agreement	Secure project	finance leading to 'financial close'	Development	Manager hands over to	Construction Manager	0
Project Activities		9	Post DA Lodgement		Begin procurement process	Finalise detailed	design		Commence PPA negotiations	1	Commence grid	application process						
1.7		•	Planning & Approvals	$\begin{pmatrix} \circ & \\ \uparrow / & \times \\ \circ & \times & \circ \end{pmatrix}$	Completion of studies and surveys	Preparation of DA		Investigate power	purchase agreement (PPA)	options		inquiries	Refining detailed	project design				
		2	Feasibility		Meet and discuss with neighbours	Manning of site	constraints		Commence development	application (DA)	studies	Preliminary project	design	Internal approval to proceed				
	DEVELOPMENT	-	Site Selection		Desktop survey	ldentify potential landowners		Fatal flaw	assessment	Meet and	negotiate with	ומוומסאוופוא	Enter options to lease					

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# 1.8 Community Relations Activities by Stage



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# 2 PROJECT CONTEXT

#### 2.1 Context narrative

Thunderbolt Energy Hub is a hybrid renewable energy project with the ability to provide affordable, reliable power to New South Wales consumers. During the Scoping phase, the project was proposed in one stage consisting of 380MW wind, 120MW of solar generation combined with 400MW battery storage. This is shown on Figure 2.





The project location was chosen as it meets several criteria that will allow it to become a competitively priced project for NSW consumers. Some of the criteria taken into account include:

- Strong wind & solar resource;
- Suitable site topography;
- Low population and thus distances to involved and neighbouring dwellings; and
- Located within a strong part of the electricity network (ability to connect to one or both of the existing 330kV transmission lines crossing the project).

In July 2021, Neoen decided to makes some changes to the project based on feedback received from neighbours, the community, Councils and local MPs, which will be further described in Section 4.4.

Based on the feedback received, Neoen is now proposing to deliver the Thunderbolt Energy Hub in two stages as illustrated by Figure 3 below.

Figure 3: Thunderbolt Energy Hub Stage 1 and 2



Stage 1 include properties to the north-west of the New England Hwy. The size of Stage 1 is proposed to be 192 MW of wind energy, equivalent to 32 wind turbines. Each wind turbine is proposed to have a capacity of 5-8 MW with a maximum tip height of 260m. Stage 1 is the subject of this Development Application (DA).

Stage 2 is proposed to include properties to the southern of the New England Hwy. The preliminary size of Stage 2 is proposed to be 150 MW of wind energy, equivalent to 25 wind turbines. The wind turbines are proposed to be of a similar size to the wind turbines proposed in Stage 1. Stage 2 may also include a 120 MW solar farm. The capacity of Stage 2 is preliminary and will be further refined during the detailed assessment phase for this stage. Separate DAs will be submitted to NSW DPIE for the Stage 2 wind farm and solar farm respectively.

Neoen would like to prove its professionalism, gain the community's trust and prove our contribution socially & economically through the development of Stage 1. Stage 2 will be based on the success of Stage 1.

#### 2.2 Background and development summary to date

The project site was first identified in mid-2018 and engagement with landholders commencing soon thereafter. Early feasibility works were completed in 2020 with the submission of two Scoping Reports (one for the wind farm<sup>3</sup> and one for the solar farm<sup>4</sup>) to the NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (DPIE) in November 2020. NSW DPIE issued the Secretary's Environmental Assessment Requirements (SEARs) for the wind farm and solar farm in December 2020, outlining the requirements for the detailed assessment phase and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) reporting. Throughout early 2020 a number of feasibility studies were undertaken, including:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Thunderbolt Energy Hub – Wind Farm Scoping Report: <u>https://www.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/major-projects/project/40551</u>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Thunderbolt Energy Hub – Solar Farm Scoping Report: https://www.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/major-projects/project/40601

- September 2018: Installation of a SODAR machine to monitor the wind resource
- February 2020: Installation of an 80m wind monitoring mast
- February 2020: Development of a preliminary wind turbine layout based on SODAR wind data
- March/April 2020: A fatal flaw assessment

Neoen commenced community consultation activities in 2019, which is described in detail in Section 4.0 of this report. A summary of the engagement activities undertaken since 2019 are outlined in Table 3 below.

Umwelt was also engaged in 2021 to complete a Social Impact Assessment (SIA) for the project, which involved consultation with community members individually, community groups and agencies. Refer to the Social Impact Assessment report for further details.

#### Table 3: Engagement Activity Summary

Date	Engagement Activity
2019	Early engagement with a neighbouring landholder group on the southern side of the New England Hwy about the project. This landholder group became a host landholder group for the area now known as Stage 2 of the Thunderbolt Energy Hub.
February 2020	A concerned neighbour group meeting was held in Kentucky Hall. Commencement of one-on-one neighbour engagement
Throughout 2020 - 2021	One-on-one neighbour and community engagement
September 2020	Advertising for the first community drop-in session to be held on 16 September 2020 Community drop-in session held in Uralla on 16 September. Neoen engaged a local community liaison officer, who is based in Kentucky.
October 2020	Neoen gave a project presentation to Uralla Shire Council. Neoen published a video about what is involved in ecological surveys for renewable energy project.
December 2020	A newsletter was distributed to the community via email and hard-copy via Australia Post to residents in Kentucky.
March 2021	Local advertising of the project through posters displayed in local cafes and an advertisement in the Uralla Wordsworth.
April 2021	Neoen advertised for nominations for community members for the project's Community Consultative Committee (CCC).
May 2021	Consultation with Aboriginal stakeholders participating in the Aboriginal Heritage on-site assessment.
June 2021	Neoen gave a project presentation to Adam Marshall MP, member for the Northern Tablelands state electorate.
	Neoen gave a project presentation to a representative of Kevin Anderson MP's office, member for the Tamworth state electorate.
July 2021	Neoen gave a project presentation to Adam Marshall MP, member for the Northern Tablelands state electorate.
	Neoen gave a project presentation to Uralla Shire Council.

Date	Engagement Activity				
	A Project Bulletin was sent to all community members on Neoen's email mailing list and uploaded to the project website's documents page.				
August 2021	The first Community Consultative Committee (CCC) meeting was held on 3 August. Advertising for the second drop-in session via email and local media				
September 2021	The second CCC meeting was held on 15 September online due to the Covid-19 travel restrictions.				
	Revised advertising for the community information sessions via email, advertising in local media, posters in cafes and businesses.				
	Distribution of an updated project information booklet through Australia Post (Walcha) distribution system prior to the community information sessions.				
	A Project Bulletin was sent to all community members on Neoen's email mailing list and uploaded to the project website's documents page.				
	A number of in-person and online community information sessions were hosted between 15 – 18 September. Refer to Appendix B.				
October 2021	Neoen gave a project presentation to Tamworth Regional Council.				
	Neoen gave project presentations to various community group and organisations as part of the Social Impact Assessment together with Umwelt. Groups/organisations presented to include: New England Visions 2030, Job Link Plus, Regional Development Australia (Northern Inland NSW) and Z-NET Uralla				
	A Project Bulletin was sent to all community members on Neoen's email mailing list and uploaded to the project website's documents page.				
November 2021	Neoen gave a project presentation to Transport for NSW.				
	Neoen and Umwelt gave a project presentation to NSW Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Science (BCS).				

#### 2.2.1 Summary of one-on-one engagement

In September 2020 a local community engagement officer was engaged to support the community engagement effort, including meeting with community members one-on-one and supporting community events. To date, contact has been made with around 195 community members in the areas surrounding stages 1 and 2 of the Thunderbolt Energy Hub. Of the 195 community members contacted:

- 88 meetings were held;
  - o 72 one-on-one face-to-face meetings
  - o 14 were met in a group setting
  - o 2 were communicated with online or on the phone/via email
- 11 people stated they would like to meet, but a suitable time has not been arranged to date
- 6 people did not want to meet or have information sent to them
- 44 people were happy to receive a booklet and did not want to meet
- Approximately 46 booklets were left in mailboxes, emailed or posted where direct contact could not be made. The booklets included contact information for the local community engagement officer attached with a note stating that contact could not be made and that they were welcome to reach out if they would like to discuss the project. This resulted in a few more meetings, phone calls and community feedback forms being completed.

The outcomes of the community engagement and feedback received is discussed in further detail in Section 4.5.

#### 2.3 Site location

Thunderbolt Energy Hub is located near Kentucky, NSW. The project is located approximately 47km northeast of Tamworth. Stage 1 is proposed on two freehold properties as shown on Figure 3.

The project (both stages 1 and 2) is located within the New England Renewable Energy Zone (REZ), announced by the New South Wales Government in July 2020 as shown on Figure 4 below.





A number of other State Significant Developments (SSD) are proposed near the Thunderbolt Energy Hub. These projects are various stages of development, as detailed in Table 4 below. Neoen has included a number of projects which have not yet submitted a Scoping Report to NSW DPIE and have not received SEARs. The future of these projects is uncertain and they have not been included in detailed assessments for Stage 1 of the Thunderbolt Energy Hub.

The location of some of these projects in relation to the Thunderbolt Energy Hub project are shown on

*Figure 5* where location information and the extent of the project boundary are known.

SSD Name	Technology	Proposed Size	Project Stage	Proponent	Distance to Thunderbolt Energy Hub
Oxley Solar Farm	Solar Battery	225 MW solar; 50 MW battery	Development; Response to Submissions	Solar Megawatt Holdings Pty Ltd	Approximately 42km north-east of Thunderbolt Energy Hub
New England Solar Farm	Solar Farm Battery	720 MW solar; 50 MW battery	In Construction	UPC Renewables A ustralia Pty Ltd	Approximately 25km north-north-east of Thunderbolt Energy Hub
Salisbury Solar Farm	Solar Farm	700 MW	Development; Prepare EIS	Walcha Energy Pty Ltd	Approximately 9km north-east of Thunderbolt Energy Hub
Winterbour ne Wind Farm	Wind Farm	700 MW	Development; Prepare EIS	Winterbourne Wind Pty Ltd	Approximately 20km east of Thunderbolt Energy Hub
Tara Springs Wind Farm	Wind Farm	400 MW	Pre-Scoping; No Scoping Report submitted	Renewable Energy Systems (RES)	Adjacent to Thunderbolt Energy Hub
Bendemeer Renewable Energy Hub	Wind Farm Solar Farm	380 MW wind 300 MW solar	Pre-Scoping; No Scoping Report submitted	Athena Energy Holdings Pte Ltd	South of Thunderbolt Energy Hub (exact distance unknown, ~3- 5km)

Table 4: SSD Projects planned near Thunderbolt Energy Hub

5km -Oxley Solar Farm Uralla Shire Council Local Government Area New England Solar Farm URALLA THUNDERBOLT Salisburv **ENERGY HUB** Solar Farm STAGE Tamworth Regional Council Local Government Area KENTUCKY 5 STAGE 2 BENDEMEER WOLLUN ď Tara Springs Wind Farm Winterbourne Wind Farm Walcha Council Local Government Area WOOLBROOK WALCHA

Figure 5 Location of Thunderbolt Energy Hub (stages 1 and 2) and other SSD projects within the New England REZ

#### 2.4 Community Overview

The community around the proposed Thunderbolt Energy Hub is centred in the towns of Kentucky and Bendemeer. The Australian Bureau of Statistics<sup>5</sup> 2016 Census population statistics are summarised below.

Table 5: Total Population Study Map – Kentucky and Kentucky South

Demographics	Kentucky	Kentucky South	
Estimated Population	158	125	
Median Age	49	46	
Median Weekly household Income	\$1,187	\$1,274	
Total Dwellings	80	58	
Education	Kentucky	Kentucky South	
Bachelor Degree level and above	26	16	
Advanced Diploma and Diploma level	11	17	
Certificate level III	18	14	
Year 12	19	6	
Occupation	Kentucky	Kentucky South	
Managers	24	15	
Professionals	11	10	
Labourers	13	11	
Technicians and Trades Workers	8	5	
Industry	Kentucky	Kentucky South	
Sheep-Beef Cattle Farming	8	3	
Shearing Services	5	0	
Sheep Farming (Specialised)	3	5	
Beef Cattle Farming (Specialised)	3	4	
Other Grocery Wholesaling	0	4	
Veterinary Services	0	3	
Meat Processing	3	0	
Home Ownership	Kentucky	Kentucky South	
Owned outright	23	22	
Owned with a mortgage	24	15	
Rented	13	10	

<sup>5</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics Quick Stats: <u>https://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/D3310114.nsf/Home/2016%20QuickStats</u>

Table 6: Total Population Study Map – Wollun and Bendemeer

Demographics	Wollun	Bendemeer
Estimated Population	67	492
Median Age	37	49
Median Weekly household Income	\$1,291	\$905
Total Dwellings	27	230
Education	Wollun	Bendemeer
Bachelor Degree level and above	-	46
Advanced Diploma and Diploma level	-	22
Certificate level III	-	62
Year 12	-	35
Occupation	Wollun	Bendemeer
Managers	-	47
Professionals	-	29
Labourers	-	44
Technicians and Trades Workers	-	28
Industry	Wollun	Bendemeer
Beef Cattle Farming (Specialised)	-	16
Hospitals (except Psychiatric Hospitals)	-	14
Sheep Farming (Specialised)	-	12
Sheep-Beef Cattle Farming	-	11
Pubs, Taverns and Bars	-	7
Home Ownership	Wollun	Bendemeer
Owned outright	-	84
Owned with a mortgage	-	57
Rented	-	38

## **3** COMMUNITY RELATIONS STRATEGY

#### 3.1 Needs-based approach

Each key stakeholder has a different need across each phase of the Thunderbolt Energy Hub lifecycle. To address this nuance, a needs-based approach is described for each of the key stakeholders to this project in Table 5.

Stakeholder Group	Overview	Objectives – Needs based approach	Activities – per development phase
Host Landowners	Residents who are hosting wind turbines or part of the solar farm on their land.	Ongoing communication and discussions as project progresses. Contribution to the project's progress, ability to provide local knowledge, advice and input. Involvement in development and delivery of Community Benefit-sharing Scheme	One-on-one meetings Landowner updates & dinners Letterbox drops (or email) with updates Invitations & involvement in community events
Wind near neighbours up to 3.5km	Residents owning land adjacent to the project site have the potential to be affected by the visual impact of the wind farm and/or battery and the noise from heavy vehicle traffic associated with the construction phase.	To create and maintain a close connection with direct adjacent neighbours of the Thunderbolt Energy Hub. To keep neighbours informed about the project from early in the project planning process and provide opportunities to raise issues and provide feedback. To ensure that neighbours share in the benefits of the project.	Benefit-sharing based on proximity of wind turbine generators to the respective neighbours' dwellings. One-on-one engagement Invitation to be provided a private photomontage depending on the distance and aspect of their dwelling Letterbox drop (or email) with updates Community Information Sessions Invitation to community events
Wind near neighbours: 3.5 – 8km	Residents owning land adjacent to the project site have the potential to be affected to some extent by the visual impact of the wind farm and potentially some noise from heavy vehicle traffic associated with the construction phase.	To keep neighbours informed about the project from early in the project planning phase To provide opportunities to raise issues and provide feedback	One-on-one engagement Letterbox drop (or email) with updates Community Information Sessions Invitation to community events
Neighbourhood (Kentucky, Kentucky South,	The local people living within the Kentucky, Kentucky South, Wollun	To keep the local community informed about	Benefit-sharing

Table 7: Key stakeholders



Stakeholder Group	Overview	Objectives – Needs based approach	Activities – per development phase
Wollun and Bendemeer)	and Bendemeer townships adjacent to the project.	the project from early in the project planning phase To provide opportunities to raise issues and provide feedback To involve in development and delivery of benefit- sharing strategy that will support the local neighbourhood	Newspaper advertisements Community Information Sessions Invitation to community events
Councils	Tamworth Regional Council, Uralla Shire Council and Walcha Council	To ensure a positive and collaborative relationship with the LGA that can support the long-term goals of the community.	One-on-one engagement Project briefings & updates Community Information Sessions Pre-DA meeting
State MPs	The Hon. Kevin Anderson MP (Tamworth) The Hon. Adam Marshall MP (Northern Tablelands)	To ensure the local member is kept updated about the project and its progress	Project briefing in person by Head of Development Invitation to community events
Federal MP	The Hon. Barnaby Joyce, MP (New England)	To ensure the local member is kept updated about the project and its progress	Project update in person by head of Development Invitation to community events
Traditional Owners – Indigenous community	We will seek to engage and understand what elements of the project are culturally relevant and/or sensitive.	Engaging with local Aboriginal groups beyond planning requirements, such as Cultural Heritage Management Plans.	Invitation to co-design Indigenous Participation Plan Site Visit Invitation to community events
Rural Fire Service (RFS)	Representatives from the New England RFS district	To ensure project activities abide by safety and regulatory requirements	Provide indicative design plans and updates on the project to prepare for any local fire and emergency safety requirements
Schools, TAFEs and Universities	Kentucky Public School Bendemeer Public School Woolbrook Public School Rocky River Public School Uralla Central School St. Joseph's Primary School, Uralla Walcha Central School St. Patrick's School Walcha TAFE NSW Tamworth TAFE NSW Armidale University of New England (Armidale)	To ensure organisations are updated on education and vocational opportunities associated with the project. To use the opportunity of a local renewable project to dovetail relevant & practical educational content into the syllabus.	Information and project updates provided and invitation to future networking engagement Opportunities for site visits for local schools.



Stakeholder Group	Overview	Objectives – Needs based approach	Activities – per development phase
Business groups / industry stakeholders	We will seek to engage and collaborate with local businesses and business networks around what opportunities may be available such as sourcing for the wind farm, solar farm and/or battery development.	To ensure Neoen is creating of local renewable energy projects.	To ensure project activities abide by safety and regulatory requirements
Wind farm and/or solar farm opponents	FOKAG Red4NE	To be accessible, help to address concerns proactively, and to have a best practice complaints system in place. To keep people informed about the project from early in the project planning phase. To provide opportunities to raise issues and provide feedback.	Complaints process implementation Letterbox drop (or email) with updates One-on-one face-to-face engagement with key group members Invitation to community events Offer to be involved in the Social Impact Assessment
Advocacy groups	Z-Net Uralla New England Visions 2030	Discussion on community energy and zero emissions targets Potential for partnerships	Update / presentation on project Invitations to community events
Community organisations	The Rotary Club of Uralla Walcha Rotary Club Uralla Lions Club Walcha Lions Club Uralla Shire Business Chamber Armidale Business Chamber Tamworth Business Chamber Kentucky Progress Association Kentucky Memorial Hall Committee	To understand a project and be able to update their members To participate in / benefit from Community Benefit- sharing Scheme	Update/presentation on project E-newsletter updates Invitations to community events
Community Consultative Committee (CCC)	1 independent chairperson Secretary 5 community members 1 Council representative from each Council (Uralla Shire Council, Tamworth Regional Council and Walcha Council)	To provide a forum for open discussion between the proponent and representatives of the community, stakeholder groups and local councils on issues directly relating to the project.	Advertising in local media to invite community members to apply for a community member role on the CCC. Regular meetings to be held (frequency dependent on project phase)

#### 3.2 Facilitating opportunities for involvement

#### 3.2.1 Local Participation

One of our key areas of focus for the broader local community is facilitating the involvement of local jobseekers and businesses in the construction and operation of the wind farm, solar farm and battery to ensure a strong regional economic benefit.

During feasibility & planning/approvals phases expressions of Interest for work are invited and received through adverts, information days and the project website. A job interest register for internal use has been created to ensure reference during construction and operation phases can be made to list of interested workers.

Neoen has started to develop a Local Participation Plan for the Thunderbolt Energy Hub project. This includes a register of local contractors and businesses that have submitted an expression of interest to date in either becoming a contractor or supplier during the construction and/or operation phases of the project. To date approximately 48 contractors and suppliers have submitted an EOI.

Neoen has also commenced consultation with businesses and industry groups such as JobLink Plus, TAFE Tamworth and Regional Development Australia (Northern Inland NSW) to discuss the project and share some preliminary information of the types of contractors and suppliers that are required for the construction and operations phases of a wind farm project. Neoen has also presented to the Uralla Shire Business Chamber to introduce the project and discuss how interested community members may submit an expression of interest to be involved in construction and/or operations phases of the project. An email was also sent to the Tamworth and Armidale Business Chambers to inform them of the project.

As part of the detailed assessments undertaken for Stage 1 of the project, a Social Impact Assessment (SIA) was completed by Umwelt. The SIA included sending an email to 122 local contractors, suppliers, accommodation providers, training/recruitment/employment providers. The SIA aims to understand community views, interests and concerns to be able to analyse and respond to potential social impacts of a proposed development, with a view to minimise negative impacts and enhance the opportunities.

As part of the SIA, contractors and service providers were invited to provide their feedback the project by completing an online business and service provider survey. The questions relate to:

- Their organisation / business or service and the types of goods or services you provide
- Their business/service's current servicing capacity (including occupancy rates) and existing supply and demand, considering seasonal trends and other industry sectors
- The town and region's current servicing capacity and/or workforce availability and capability
- Their views on the project
- Their business/service's interest to provide goods or services to the Project in the future.

Alternatively, Umwelt's SIA team could be contacted via phone or email if this was a preferred way to share feedback. All information provided in the survey was de-identified for the purposes of Umwelt's reporting. A total of 15 responses were received from this survey.

Contractors and service providers will be kept informed of the project progress through email updates. In the pre-construction phase a Local Employment & Supplier Networking Session will be held locally, with invitations going out to those on the job interest register and local employment agencies, ensuring they have the opportunity to meet with the appointed construction contractors.

#### 3.2.2 Indigenous Participation

During the development stage we engage with traditional owners and, depending on local context and requirements, we co-develop a Cultural Heritage Management Plan or a Cultural Heritage Arrangement.

Neoen has engaged with representatives of the Gomeroi and Anaiwan peoples, who participated in the Aboriginal Heritage survey for the project. The contact details of these representatives have been added to Neoen's contact register such that they can stay informed of project updates.

An Indigenous Participation Plan will be co-developed with Aboriginal stakeholders if they are interested. Workforce participation and benefit-sharing will be further developed as the project progresses.

#### 3.2.3 Education

We explore opportunities to work with local schools and colleges, both at primary and secondary, to support education in renewable energy generation, the electricity grid and electricity market.

In 2022 Neoen will be launching a Learning Hub with curriculum-linked materials for Year 6 and Year 8.

During operations we offer opportunities for site visits from local schools, and will be developing more specific educational content, materials and visitor packs in 2022.

## **4** COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITY

#### 4.1 Project Website

The project website (<u>https://thunderboltenergyhub.com.au/</u>) was set up during feasibility stage to provide clear and accessible information about the project and suggest a number of ways for people to get involved.

These include but are not limited to:

- Email us <u>contact@thunderboltenergyhub.com.au</u> or call 1800 966 207
- Complete a feedback survey: <u>https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/neoenthunderbolt</u>
- 'Work with us' register job or supplier interest: <u>https://thunderboltenergyhub.com.au/work-with-us/</u>
- Community events and updates published on the news page:

https://thunderboltenergyhub.com.au/news/

- View project documents: <u>https://thunderboltenergyhub.com.au/documents/</u>
- View information about the planning process: <u>https://thunderboltenergyhub.com.au/planning-process/</u>

• Learn about the Community Consultative Committee (CCC), including meeting minutes: https://thunderboltenergyhub.com.au/community-consultative-committee-2/

#### 4.2 1800 Number

The project's 1800 number is 1800 966 207. This was set up during Planning & Approvals stage, prior to the first Community Information Day. The number remains with the project for its lifetime.

Calls to this number is forwarded to mobile of the person responsible for the Community Relations Plan. They are forwarded during office hours Monday-Friday 9am-5.30pm, with a project specific recorded answering message at other times. Messages are sent to the project email address.

#### 4.3 Host landholder group consultation

The Thunderbolt Energy Hub project presents a unique approach to the engagement of host- and nearneighbour landholders. Following the engagement of Kyabra Station as host landholder to the north of the New England Highway, Neoen has been working together with a landholder group to the north and south

of the New England Highway. The aim of working with a group of landholders in the Kentucky and Bendemeer region rather than individually was to:

- Enable transparent discussions;
- Provide all landholders with fair financial compensation;
- Provide an avenue to ask questions and share early feedback in a group setting, including concerns, preferences and questions; and
- Be inclusive of all landholders within the group, including those that would not be able to host infrastructure on their properties.

#### 4.3.1 Background

Prior to Neoen's first engagement with the landholders in the Kentucky and Bendemeer regions, a group of landholders on the southern-side of the New England Highway had formed as a result of discussions with another renewable energy developer. This group consisted of landholders that the previous developer considered to host wind turbines on their properties and smaller landholders with adjacent landholdings that were not considered as suitable hosts by this developer.

In the preliminary stages of the Thunderbolt Energy Hub development (late 2018 and early 2019), the project involved only Kyabra Station as a host landholder. When Neoen engaged with the southern-side landholder group in early 2019 this was to inform and consult with them early as immediate project neighbours. The group showed a keen interest in the project and later expressed their wish to also participate as host landholder group participation, thus increasing the size of the proposed project. In the invitation extended to this landholder group, Neoen provided all landholders in the group an opportunity to participate in hosting the project regardless of the size of their land holdings.

#### 4.3.2 Working with the landholder group

Neoen views working with a landholder group, including those that will not be able to host infrastructure, as advantageous as:

- The group feels a sense of ownership towards the project;
- All landholders receive the same information at the same time;
- Open and transparent discussions can be held within the group and with Neoen;
- Group workshops could be conducted, considering everyone's preferences within the group;
- Smaller, non-host landholders, are also included in early discussion and are able to provide their feedback, which feeds into the early wind farm and solar farm design; and
- Smaller, non-host landholders do not feel as though they are "missing out" as they will also receive financial compensation throughout the operational phase of the project.

The original landholder group boundary is shown on Figure 6 below.

Figure 6: Original host landholder group boundary



A number of landholders to the south of the New England Highway, which were not part of the initial landholder group, either did not wish to join the group or had already signed contracts with other renewable energy developers and thus could not join the group.

Neoen hosted a number of landholder group workshops in 2019 and 2020 to explain the development process of a wind and solar farm, including the specialist studies that would be undertaken, community consultation, approvals required as well as estimated timeframes for each phase up until the operations phase. Preliminary wind resource maps, wind turbine layout and solar farm layouts were shown to the group and feedback was sought regarding the early designs. This allowed Neoen to understand and address landholder preferences early regarding potential access track routes, distances from wind turbines to houses and sheds as well as exclusion zones on properties.

To ensure effective and clear communication could be maintained within the large landholder group, Neoen created a landholder only webpage as a separate section within the main project website. This page is only accessible by Neoen and host landholders and allows Neoen to easily share documents, maps, answers to commonly asked questions, meeting minutes, a summary of next steps in the development phase, and updates and news with the group. Uploading this information to the landholder only section of the website ensures that all host landholders have access to the latest information at the same time and to ensure that information can be easily accessed and referred to if and when required. The private website was used when the landholder group was very large and during the early lockdown periods during 2020 and early 2021. This ensured that, even though not all landholder group members could attend meetings in person, information could be shared with all group members at the same time.

Following several months of discussions and negotiations between the landholder group and Neoen, a final landholder group was formed in 2020. This final landholder group is highlighted in blue on Figure 7 below.

The areas shown in white outline are Kyabra Station and another landholder, who are not part of the landholder group, but are the host landholders for Thunderbolt Energy Hub Stage 1 (project staging is outlined in Section 4.4).

The properties shown on Figure 7 were included in the Scoping Report submitted to NSW DPIE in November 2020.

Landholders, who were primarily to the southern side of the Oxley Highway, chose not to progress with Neoen's landholder group and instead commenced discussions with a different renewable energy developer.





#### 4.4 Project Staging

Neoen originally planned to develop the Thunderbolt Energy Hub as one stage, consisting of a 380MW wind farm, 120MW solar farm and a 400MW battery as described in Section 2.1 and shown on Figure 2. In July 2021, Neoen publicly announced that it would make some changes to the project and deliver it in two stages as illustrated in Figure 3.

Stage 1 includes two freehold rural properties to the north of the New England Hwy. The size of Stage 1 is proposed to be 192 MW of wind energy, equivalent to 32 wind turbines. Each wind turbine is proposed to have maximum tip height of 260m. Stage 1 is the subject of this DA. Stage 2 will form part of a separate DA.

Neoen decided to make this change based on feedback received from neighbours, the community, Councils and MPs. Concerns were raised about the proximity of the project on the southern side of the New England Hwy to Kentucky village and residents living in this area. Some community members were concerned about the potential impacts that this may have, including visual impact, noise impact, construction disruption,

impact on property values and impact to biodiversity. Fewer concerns were raised by neighbours and community members about the Stage 1 area on the northern side of the New England Hwy.

Neoen would like to prove its professionalism, gain the community's trust and prove its contribution both socially and economically through the development of Stage 1.

Neoen is committed to early, ongoing, participatory and responsive community engagement. Neoen will continue further in-depth community consultation throughout 2022 to further address questions and concerns raised by neighbours and community members.

#### 4.5 One-on-One Community consultation

#### 4.5.1 Consultation with near neighbours along the New England Highway

There are six neighbouring properties along the New England Highway that are located in the centre of the proposed wind farm development between stages 1 and 2 (dwellings 6, 26, 27, 28, 29 and 41). These properties are relatively small and due to this some of them are not suitable to host wind turbine infrastructure.

Neoen has engaged with these six near neighbours from early 2020 by inviting them along to landholder group workshops and facilitating a separate group meeting at which these neighbours (and other residents within the Kentucky community) could discuss their concerns about the proposed wind and solar farm (February 2020). One of these neighbours was originally part of the host landholder group and interested in hosting wind turbines on their property, but have since left the group. They are no longer interested in hosting infrastructure on their property.

Necen recognises the importance of engaging with these particular neighbours very early on in the development process due to the proximity of their dwellings to the proposed wind farm and possible higher visual impact. One-on-one meetings were also offered to these neighbours to discuss their feedback and concerns. Three of the six neighbours have taken up the offer for a one-on-one meeting to date. One further neighbour wanted to meet with Necen, but a suitable time to meet could not be arranged to date. One of the three neighbours that was met expressed during the one-on-one meeting that he was very supportive of the project and would enjoy the view onto the proposed wind turbines. The other five neighbours on the other hand are concerned about the development, with the primary concerns being visual impact, potential noise impact, potential impact to biodiversity, bushfire risk and potential loss of property value. One of the development.

#### 4.5.1.1 Addressing Concerns of near neighbours along the New England Highway

While some concern was raised regarding Stage 1, the concerns raised by these neighbours related predominantly to the Stage 2 wind farm. This is because impacts such as visual impact may be higher to these neighbours for Stage 2 compared to Stage 1. The feedback and concerns received from these neighbours as well as other community members contributed to Neoen's decision to deliver the project in two stages. This provides Neoen with the opportunity to prove its professionalism in the delivery of an area of lower concern (Stage 1) and spend more time on further engagement ahead of progressing the development of Stage 2.

The main concerns raised by these neighbours as well as the wider community (visual impact, noise impact, biodiversity impact, bushfire impact and aerial firefighting capability) were furthermore addressed by Neoen by organising for the respective subject matter experts to present on the assessment process and outcomes during the September 2021 presentation and Q&A sessions. This gave these neighbours and the community the opportunity to learn about the respective assessment processes and results, and to ask questions directly to the respective subject matter experts. Please refer to Appendix B for further detail on the presentation and Q&A.

Neoen has been inclusive of these neighbours during the visual impact assessment and noise impact assessment to address their concerns where possible. Two neighbouring dwellings (6 and 29) were included in the noise assessment, which involved installing noise monitoring equipment near their dwellings for a number of weeks to measure background noise. Neoen also offered to provide the neighbours with the noise monitoring data collected by the noise monitor on their respective properties.

All six neighbours were contacted and offered to be included in the visual impact assessment for Stage 1. This included a representative from Moir Landscape Architecture (Moir), the visual impact specialist, visiting their property and taking photos from a location close to the respective neighbour's dwelling. Five of six neighbours agreed and allowed Moir to visit their property. The photos were then used by Moir to determine the likely visual impact for each neighbour. Where it was likely that a wind turbine would be visible from the neighbour's dwelling, a photomontage was prepared to provide the neighbour with an understanding of what the wind turbines may look like from their dwelling. Where wind turbines would not be visible, Moir prepared a wireframe diagram to illustrate where wind turbines would be located relative to the neighbour's dwelling. Please refer to the visual assessment report for further detail. A wireframe was prepared for the neighbour who did not wish for Moir to visit their property. The visual impact assessment for Stage 1 shows that the visual impact rating for this dwelling would be "negligible".

Neoen publicly announced its neighbour benefit sharing program in September 2021, which is applicable to neighbours who own a dwelling within 3.5km of proposed wind turbines. Agreements were sent to neighbours, which also includes five of the neighbours along the New England Hwy (the sixth neighbour is a little over 3.5km from the wind turbines). The neighbour benefit sharing program is described in further detail in Section 5.2.

#### 4.5.2 Consultation with the community surrounding the project

Detailed assessments have now been completed for Stage 1 of the Thunderbolt Energy Hub, which are included in this DA. Neighbour consultation commenced in early 2020, supported by a local community liaison officer since September 2020. When the Scoping Reports for the wind farm and solar farm were submitted in November 2020, 57 neighbours within an 8km distance to the wind farm (stages 1 and 2) had been contacted to inform them of the project and offer one-on-one in-person meetings. This number does not include the neighbours who were originally part of the landholder group, but chose not to proceed with Neoen's project. Of the 57 neighbours contacted, 27 were met in person throughout late July to early October 2020.

By October 2021 a total of 195 community members, including those originally part of the landholder group, were contacted, of which 88 were met. Of the community members met,

- 72 were one-on-one face-to-face meetings
- 14 were met in a group setting; and
- 2 could not be in met in-person due to Covid, but have met online or communicated over the phone and/or via email

Contact has been made with community members through community information sessions, phone calls, face-to-face meetings, mailbox drops (where contact details were unknown), email bulletins and newsletters distributed through Australia Post, posters around the communities of Kentucky, Bendemeer, Walcha and Uralla. Refer also to Section Appendix B for further details on community events, and newsletter and bulletins.

The majority of the in-person meetings were held in private homes, while some were held in public locations such as cafes or in a local park. Neighbours that have not been met in person to date either could not schedule a meeting yet, did not want to meet as they did not feel the project would affect them, or felt that their questions could be captured through a phone conversation and by Neoen sending an information in the mail or via email. Project information booklets were mailed to those neighbours that could not meet and requested further information. The figures for each are as per Table 8 below.

Table 8 Number of neighbours and community members contacted and met

Description	Number as at November 2020	Number as at November 2021
No. of neighbours and community members contacted	57	195
No. of neighbours and community members who could not be contacted and no booklet could be left in the mailbox	-	9
No. of neighbours and community members who could not be contacted and received an information booklet in the mail	-	46
No. of neighbours and community members met in person (one-on-one meeting)	27	72
No. of neighbours who could not be met face-to-face due to Covid, but have met online or communicated over the phone and/or via email	-	2
No. of neighbours and community who were met in a group setting	-	14
No. of neighbours and community members that did not want to meet or receive information via mail or email	5	7
No. of neighbours and community members that did not want to meet, but wished to receive information by mail or email	11	44
No. of neighbours that would like to meet, but could not schedule a meeting to date	14	11

The main questions and concerns that were raised during the one-on-one and group meetings and how these were addressed by Neoen are summarised in Table 10. A number of these questions are also outlined in the FAQ section of Neoen's community information booklet and on the project website which was provided during neighbour meetings and at the community information sessions in September 2020 and September 2021. The main concerns raised by neighbours and community members who were met in a one-on-one meeting, both in person and online (74) are summarised in Table 9.

 Table 9 One-on-one neighbour meeting outcomes - key concerns about the proposed wind farm

Description of concern	No. of responses (November 2021)	Percentage of responses (as at November 2021)
Visual impact – general	7	4.5 %
Visual impact – from their house	14	8.9 %
Noise	18	11.4 %
Construction disruption (dust, noise, traffic, etc)	10	6.3%
Land value impact	18	11.4 %
Land Use Impact	10	6.3 %
Health Impacts	6	3.8 %
Biodiversity Impacts	10	6.3 %
Decommissioning	7	4.4 %
Other	24	15.8 %
Glare (solar farm)	1	0.6 %

Description of concern	No. of responses (November 2021)	Percentage of responses (as at November 2021)
No concerns	32	20.3 %

The 'other' concerns that were raised about the wind farm included:

- Not all (renewable energy) projects will be able to connect to the existing transmission lines, meaning not all projects may go ahead 1 person
- That wind turbines cannot be recycled 1 person
- Foreign ownership of the host landholder property, meaning that project benefits are not reinvested into the community – 2 people
- Impact on phone and internet reception 2 people
- Construction vehicles bringing weeds into the area 1 person
- Impact on local water sources 1 person
- Fire risk of wind turbines (if they were struck by lightning) and inability for aerial firefighting to occur near wind turbines 6 people
- Impact to community relationships/cohesion and misinformation being spread 3 people
- Impact on personal solar generation into the grid 2 people
- What happens if the proponent goes bust? 1 person
- Big businesses making money off locals 1 person
- Ability to use a small aircraft to spread fertiliser on their property 1 person
- Many companies choosing to develop large projects in the area, such that they will become surrounded by wind turbines 1 person
- Unfair benefit sharing 1 person

Two community members are concerned that the solar farm could increase radiation, adding to the greenhouse effect. Another community member expressed concern about the solar farm being too close to the ground, such that farmers won't be able to plant crops.

Table 10 and the latest version of the project information booklet<sup>6</sup> shared with the community also includes a section titled "Response to Concerns", in which a number of key concerns raised above are addressed. These concerns include negative impact on property values, bushfire risk and aerial firefighting, health impacts such as infrasound, impact to the natural environment including birds, decommissioning and a perceived conflict of interest of companies engaged by Neoen to undertake impact assessments.

Neoen has responded to the above concerns through public consultation, one-on-one consultation, newsletters, bulletins and through updating the project booklet FAQ section.

#### 4.5.3 NSW Visual Impact Assessment Bulletin

As part of the one-on-one conversations held from early October 2020 onwards, specific questions regarding potential visual impact were asked in line with the NSW Visual Assessment Bulletin. These included:

- What are some of the key landscape features, areas of scenic quality and key public viewpoints valued by you?
- Are there any landscape features in the area that you particularly value and why?
- Are there any specific viewing locations or landscape features in the area surrounding the Project that you value highly or believe may require conservation or protection?
- Are you concerned about a particular view from your property or visual impacts to the area in general?

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Thunderbolt Energy Hub Project Information booklet – September 2021: <u>https://thunderboltenergyhub.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/20210915-Neoen TEH booklet v3.pdf</u>

The responses received to date indicate that there are no key landscape features, areas of scenic quality or key public viewpoints in the local region surrounding the proposed Thunderbolt Energy Hub project. Some neighbours living in Kentucky and Kentucky South mentioned that they very much enjoyed the views onto the hill to the north-east of Kentucky called Harnham Hill; however as the Thunderbolt Energy Hub is proposed to the west of Kentucky, this would not present an issue in their views. The neighbours and community members that are concerned about visual impact of the wind farm are mainly concerned about the visual impact from their homes. The concern relates to how the wind turbines may impact the view from their homes over the hills and fields generally, rather than disrupting their view of a particular landscape feature or key viewpoint. A few neighbours and community members suggested that they would like to see photomontages from either their homes or particular public locations such as a particular street intersection, near Kentucky South train station and from a point in Kentucky village.

As visual impact was raised as one of the key concerns by neighbours and community members, Neoen invited its visual impact specialist, Moir, to participate in the September 2021 presentation and Q&A sessions to provide further information on the visual assessment process and results for Stage 1. This gave community members an opportunity to ask any questions directly to the noise specialist to help address their concerns.

Moir also created 360-degree panoramas from six public locations surrounding the project area to illustrate what the Stage 1 wind farm may look like from the different vantage points. This included creating panoramas from Kentucky village and Kentucky South as requested by community members. The panoramas are published on the Thunderbolt Energy Hub website<sup>7</sup> for community members to view.

As part of the visual impact assessment, Moir created a number of photomontages and wireframes for neighbours of the Stage 1 project area where appropriate. These were shared with the respective neighbours to provide further information on what the wind turbines may look like from their dwelling. Please refer to the visual impact assessment for further details.

#### 4.5.4 Noise Impact Assessment

A number of neighbouring dwellings of stages 1 and 2 wind farms were included in the noise assessment, which involved installing noise monitoring equipment near their dwellings for a number of weeks to measure background noise. Further noise monitoring may be required for Stage 2 at a later stage. Neoen offered to provide the neighbours with the noise monitoring data collected by the noise monitor on their respective properties.

As noise impact was raised as one of the key concerns by neighbours and community members, Neoen invited its noise specialist, Sonus Pty Ltd, to participate in the September 2021 presentation and Q&A sessions to provide further information on the noise assessment process and results for Stage 1. This gave community members an opportunity to ask any questions directly to the noise specialist to help address their concerns.

#### 4.5.5 Ecology Video

Neoen produced a video together with ecologists from Umwelt, who are undertaking seasonal ecology surveys for the project. The video is narrated by the project's lead ecologist and outlines what is involved in ecological surveys for renewable energy projects. The video link was shared in a news<sup>8</sup> update on the Thunderbolt Energy Hub website on 1 October 2020 and is available on Neoen's YouTube channel.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Thunderbolt Energy Hub Stage 1 panoramas: <u>https://thunderboltenergyhub.com.au/</u>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> What is involved in ecological surveys?: <u>https://thunderboltenergyhub.com.au/what-is-involved-in-ecological-surveys/</u>

#### 4.5.6 Consultation with Friends of Kentucky Action Group (FOKAG)

Consultation commenced with the community in early 2020. Throughout 2020, the FOKAG group formed, which consists of concerned neighbours and community members from Kentucky and areas surrounding the project. Neoen is not aware of how many community members are part of the FOKAG group, however the group has created a public Facebook page in mid-2020. The Facebook group has 236 members as at 1 December 2021.

Neoen consulted with 16 FOKAG members from early 2020 and throughout 2021 as a group and individually. One-on-one meetings were held with seven individuals/families from the FOKAG group who were willing to meet with Neoen to discuss their concerns and feedback. Six other FOKAG members were met and consulted at in a group setting, at information sessions in February 2020, September 2020 and/or September 2021. Neoen communicated with three FOKAG members via phone and/or SMS, either because this was their preferred method or because a one-on-one meeting face-to-face could not yet be scheduled.

One-on-one meetings were held with FOKAG members to provide them with an opportunity to discuss all concerns/ issues and how these would be addressed during the detailed assessments phase. Common concerns raised by FOKAG members included visual impact, noise impact, property valuation, ability for aircrafts to undertake aerial firefighting, health impacts, shadow flicker and rates increases. These topics were addressed by sharing information in the form of information booklets (which includes a FAQ section), referring to the project website's FAQ page, and requesting the specialist consultants for visual, noise, biodiversity, aviation and social impact to participate in the presentation and Q&A session held in September 2021. Refer to Appendix B for further details about this event.

FOKAG, as a group, have additionally sent a number of emails to Neoen's project manager, asking questions about the project, which were answered:

**14 July 2021:** Neoen answered a number of questions regarding the Community Consultative Committee (CCC), community liaison officer, Development Application (DA) submission date and agreement status.

29 July 2021: Neoen responded to FOKAG's questions about photomontages.

**29 July 2021:** Neoen responded to FOKAG's questions about noise monitoring, including feedback from our noise assessment specialist Sonus.

9 September 2021: Neoen answered questions about the project information sessions.

**16 September:** Neoen notified FOKAG of the photomontages that are available on the project website.

**20 September:** Neoen invited FOKAG to take part in the Social Impact Assessment, which will be included in the DA submission. A number of FOKAG members spoke to the Social Impact Assessment team from Umwelt, who conducted this assessment.

**1 October:** FOKAG emailed Neoen to share feedback about the recent online presentation and Q&A session. They shared with Neoen that they did not appreciate being muted during the presentation and Q&A and that they had to instead type their questions and feedback comments. They also informed Neoen that a recording of the Q&A segment should be provided in their view, not only a written version of all the questions and answers discussed throughout both webinars.

Neoen responded to this email on 25 November thanking the group for their feedback and that this feedback would be taken into account in the design of future sessions.

The FOKAG email address as well as the email address of some of its members is furthermore included on Neoen's email register, so group members receive bulletins and updates via email.

Neoen held two online presentation and Q&A sessions as part of the community information sessions held between 15-18 September 2021. The presentation and Q&A sessions were held on Thursday 16 September and Saturday 18 September (refer to Appendix B for further details). Two FOKAG members participated in the webinar on Thursday and one FOKAG member participated on Saturday.
FOKAG was also invited to participate in the Social Impact Assessment by speaking to Umwelt's team directly to share their feedback and participate in the survey for this assessment. A total of eight FOKAG members spoke to Umwelt's SIA team directly on the phone to share their feedback and participate in the assessment.

Three FOKAG members were also included in the noise assessment for the project (including monitoring for stage 2). This involved noise monitors being placed near their respective dwellings for a number of weeks to measure background noise levels. This was utilised in the noise assessment. Neoen informed these FOKAG members that they can be provided with this data for their respective noise monitor if they wish.

#### 4.5.7 Priority concerns identified by the community

Table 10 Ke	ey neighbour	concerns	and Neoen'	s response
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Description of concern	Neoen's response to concern
Decreasing or increasing land values of neighbouring properties	Neoen is not aware of any reliable, impartial research or evidence which establishes a correlation between real estate values and proximity to renewable infrastructure, either negative or positive.
	The most recent and relevant study carried out in Australia was commissioned by the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage and published by planning consultancy Urbis <sup>9</sup> in July 2016. This report comprised both an analysis of available sales data and a 'literature review' of Australian and international studies (including a 2009 report prepared for the NSW Valuer- General's office). The findings in this study came to the following conclusion: <i>"In our professional opinion,</i> <i>appropriately located wind farms within rural areas, removed</i> <i>from higher density residential areas, are unlikely to have a</i> <i>measurable negative impact on surrounding land values."</i>
	operator of large-scale renewable energy plants, anecdotally some landholders around our operating wind farms have said that property value increased. They have suggested contributors to this increase may include the economic improvement of the nearby town during construction, and host landholders looking to re-invest their additional income by purchasing additional property in the region.
	Property values are influenced by a range of factors and it is therefore difficult to determine if wind or solar farms (or other similar infrastructure) can cause land values on neighbouring agriculture properties to increase or decrease. It is not expected that the Thunderbolt Energy Hub would have a measurable effect on the productivity or value of neighbouring properties.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Review of the Impact of Wind Farms on Property Values (Urbis, 2016)

https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/resources/communities/wind-farm-value-impacts-report.pdf

Description of concern	Neoen's response to concern	
Visual Impact	Neoen responded by noting that the visual impact from the nearest receivers (and others with a particular concern) is studied during the development phase through a visual impact assessment in line with the NSW Visual Impact Assessment Bulletin.	
	Photomontages or wireframes could be provided to near neighbours and those that are particularly concerned about visual impact to receive an impression of how the wind turbines may look from their dwellings. Mitigation measures, such as vegetation screening, can be offered to neighbours where a moderate or high visual impact is identified.	
	Additionally, Neoen asked neighbours and community members specific questions regarding potential visual impact in line with the NSW Visual Assessment Bulletin during the one-on-one meetings to identify if there are any key landscape features, scenic quality and/or key public viewpoints that are valued by the individuals. This is outlined in Section 4.2.2.1.	
Proximity to houses	Appropriate distances to neighbouring houses will be determined based on both the visual impact assessment as well as the noise assessment. These studies assess the visual and noise impacts to near neighbours and allow Neoen to modify the wind turbine layout to prevent adverse impacts to neighbours. Further consultation then occurred with neighbours throughout these studies to establish appropriate turbine free buffers zones around houses. Even with the implementation of appropriate buffers, there will still be some residual impact, mostly visual, on some project neighbours. In recognition of this residual impact, our neighbour benefits sharing scheme is specifically designed to share the most benefits with the most impacted neighbours.	
Construction disruption (dust, noise, traffic, etc)	Neoen responded by noting that, where possible, existing roads would be utilised as much as possible. Roads will need to be upgraded and maintained by Neoen throughout the project's lifecycle, which may be of benefit to neighbours where current roads are in poorer condition. Neoen would additionally determine the impacts of construction activities on near neighbours as part of its traffic and transport specialist assessment to determine the most efficient transport routes to site, while minimising disruption to neighbours. For Stage 1 of the project, there is one entry point into the project site off the New England Hwy. The majority of roads required for Stage 1 will be on the host landholders'	

Description of concern	Neoen's response to concern	
	properties; therefore the impact to neighbours is limited to vehicles entering and existing the project area.	
Noise impact / Infrasound/low frequency emissions	Specialist noise studies, including undertaking background noise monitoring, were undertaken for Stage 1 to determine the noise impacts of turbines at neighbouring dwellings. Outcomes of this study are detailed in the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), submitted to NSW Government as part of the Development Application. Before it can operate, a wind farm has to demonstrate that noise levels at neighbouring residences will meet strict noise limits. These limits are designed to ensure that noise from a wind farm is not intrusive for the average person.	
Impact on the local environment	<ul> <li>Neoen engages specialist consultants for detailed flora and fauna surveys to determine the ecological attributes of the land. For the Thunderbolt Energy Hub project, specialists from the company Umwelt are undertaking the ecological assessment, which has involved six seasonal on-site surveys since early 2020. Umwelt are very experienced in this field and have worked on several renewable energy projects.</li> <li>Neoen aims to minimise the impact on flora and fauna for all of its projects by designing projects outside areas of high conservation significance, and through adopting control measures during construction.</li> <li>During the detailed design, wind turbines will be micro-sited to minimise the potential impact on fauna habitat. Turbine heights will be selected to minimise the overlap between rotor swept area and bird flight heights. Other mitigation measures include: <ul> <li>preparing environmental management plans</li> <li>identifying 'no-go zones' within the project site</li> <li>conducting pre-clearance surveys</li> </ul> </li> <li>Neoen also consults with government departments of environment and biodiversity throughout development, construction and operation of projects, as well as local nongovernment organisations. This will include the consideration of Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (1999) and consultation with the federal agency Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment.</li> <li>A response to this concern is also provided below from Umwelt's ecologist, who has been leading the ecological surveys for the Project:</li> </ul>	

Description of concern	Neoen's response to concern	
	"The Project requires approval under Part 4 of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 (EP&A Act). As a State Significant Development (SSD), the development application for the Project will be subject to the requirements of Division 4.7 of the EP&A Act. As part of the approval application, Umwelt (Australia) Pty Limited (Umwelt) are preparing a biodiversity assessment using the Biodiversity Assessment Method (BAM) under the Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016 (BC Act).	
	The detailed surveys completed as part of the assessment so	
	far include:	
	BAM Vegetation Integrity Plots	
	<ul> <li>Targeted surveys for threatened flora and fauna species, including:</li> </ul>	
	o walked transects,	
	<ul> <li>diurnal and nocturnal bird surveys,</li> <li>call playback</li> </ul>	
	<ul> <li>spotlighting surveys,</li> </ul>	
	<ul> <li>reptile surveys,</li> </ul>	
	<ul> <li>remote survey cameras, and</li> <li>Bird and Batt Utilization Survey</li> </ul>	
	o Bira and Bat Othisation Surveys.	
	Additional ecological surveys will be undertaken as part of the Project as it progresses. There will also be extensive mapping and analysis, technical reporting, assessment of significance, etc.	
	The risk the proposed wind farm will potentially pose on avifauna species (birds and bats) will be assessed specifically through the Prescribed Impact Assessment for Turbine Strike, as part of the Biodiversity Development Assessment Report (BDAR) that will be prepared through the BAM assessment.	
	A key framework underlying the BAM is for a Project to demonstrate how it avoids, minimises and/or mitigate impacts on biodiversity values. Umwelt is working closely with Neoen to facilitate the avoidance and minimisation of impacts on biodiversity values.	
	The Project will offset any residual significant impacts to biodiversity values in accordance with government requirements.	
Unfair sharing of financial benefits	Neoen have assessed the impact of the wind farm Stage 1 on near neighbours, both from a visual impact, noise impact and from a construction disruption point of view.	
	Neoen has announced its neighbour benefits program in September 2021. This program is transparent, easy-to-	

Description of concern	Neoen's response to concern
	understand and equitable and will provide neighbours up to 3.5km from wind turbines with annual payments throughout the operations phase of the project. Payments are made on a sliding-scale based on the distance of their dwelling to wind turbines. The total amounts paid to neighbours are meaningful and will allow them to diversify their income. It was described as a best-practice neighbour program. <sup>10</sup> Neoen has announced a community benefits fund of \$100,000 per annum for Stage 1 of the Thunderbolt Energy Hub. This fund will be administered throughout the operations phase of the project and is designed to benefit the communities surrounding the project. Additionally, Neoen aims to further support the wider community by involving as many local contractors and suppliers from the local community throughout the construction phase. A construction job register is established and a local contractor and supplier information session will be held prior to construction commencing.
Potential health impacts	operations.
	many of them in more densely populated areas close to houses. Some 17 reviews of research literature from these leading health and research organisations concluded there is no published evidence linking wind turbines with adverse health effects:
	World Health Organisation
	Australia's National Health and Medical Research
	Centre
	UK Health Protection Agency
	US National Research Council
	Solar panels are placed on more than 25% of Australian homes and have been on homes across the world for the past 15 years. No health issues have been associated with solar panels.
	The Office of the Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner (AEIC) furthermore concluded in its 2019 report:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> RE-Alliance; 'Thunderbolt Energy Hub announces best-practice neighbour payment scheme': <u>https://www.re-alliance.org.au/thunderbolt\_energy\_hub\_announces\_new\_neighbour\_payment\_scheme</u>

Description of concern	Neoen's response to concern
	" for the last two years, the Office has not received any complaints regarding allegations of vibration sensations being caused by a wind turbine's operationOf material concern is the potential situation whereby a resident may fail to seek and obtain appropriate medical advice and treatment for a treatable health condition
	In November 2019, the South Australia Supreme Court handed down its decision in relation to the proposed Palmer Wind Farm. The Court concluded that claims that the turbines would cause sickness and health issues for residents were unsubstantiated." <sup>11</sup>
Decommissioning, lack of clear Government regulation around clean- up of sites	At the end of the wind farm's life cycle (typically 25-30 years) the wind farm is either re-energised or decommissioned. If the wind farm is decommissioned, Neoen is responsible for the removal of the wind turbines and all above ground structures and for the rehabilitation of the site. Decommissioning is a condition of the wind farm's development approval from the State government and forms a part of the Lease agreement between Neoen and host landowners. The cost of decommissioning is considered in all of Neoen's projects. During decommissioning most of the materials the wind farm is made from can be reclaimed or recycled. This is because the steel, copper, aluminium and other materials they are made of retain significant value.
Bushfire risk and the impacts of the wind farm on aerial firefighting	There are no special aviation risks associated with turbines. Authorities also do not consider that turbines pose unique issues in aerial firefighting. Pilots view turbines as no different to other tall structures and hazards such as power lines, transmission towers, radio masts, mountains and valleys; turbines are simply another piece of infrastructure in the environment that needs to be managed on a risk basis when fighting fires.
	Pilots fly by sight and will not fly into smoke. Wind turbines, if not covered by smoke, are easily visible in the environment. Regarding the hazard posed by moving blades to pilots, turbines will generally be turned off and locked as soon as requested by firefighters. Neoen maintains a 24-hour control room in Canberra which is able to turn off turbines remotely, in addition to local maintenance staff and technicians.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner's 2019 Annual Report : <u>https://www.aeic.gov.au/publications/2019-annual-report</u>

Description of concern	Neoen's response to concern
	The Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council's (AFAC) position paper on Wind Farms and Bushfire Operations also concluded that:
	"Wind farms are not expected to adversely affect fire behaviour in their vicinity. Local wind speeds and direction are already highly variable across landscapes affected by turbulence from ridge lines, tall trees and buildings. Any potential for wake turbulence from wind turbines influencing fire behaviour is expected to be controlled through the shutting down of wind turbines in a bushfire event." <sup>12</sup>
	Neoen is additionally undertaking an aviation safety assessment as part of the detailed assessment phase. Results of this assessment will be published in the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) report, submitted as part of the Development Application to NSW DPIE.
Not all renewable energy projects will be able to connect to the existing transmission network	There is a limit to how much additional renewable energy generation can be injected into the existing transmission lines. There are two transmission lines crossing Stage 1 and Stage 2 of Thunderbolt Energy Hub respectively. Neoen is confident that there is sufficient capacity to connect Stage 1 into the transmission lines with limited constraints. Neoen will be engaging a grid specialist to determine the best way to connect the project. Depending on how much capacity is proposed in the near-bye area, it may be that the existing network needs to be augmented to allow further renewable energy projects to connect.
Wind turbines cannot be recycled	After the assets are removed, most of the materials are reclaimed or recycled. This is because the steel, copper, aluminium and other materials they are made of retain significant value. Wind farm manufacturers are furthermore in the process of investigating recycling of wind turbine blades.
Foreign ownership of the host landholder property, meaning that the income is not re-invested in the community	Neoen typically leases the land on which its projects are proposed. The lease payments are typically re-invested into the property/farm by the landholder to improve their business. This may also include hiring more local workers for their farm. How the money is spent is up to each individual landholder.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> AFAC Wind Farms and Bushfire Operations : <u>https://www.afac.com.au/insight/doctrine/article/current/wind-farms-and-bushfire-operations-doctrine</u>

Description of concern	Neoen's response to concern
	The wider community receives benefits as well however through the community benefits fund, neighbour benefits program, and job opportunities during construction/operations. There are also flow-on effects on local businesses throughout construction and operations, which brings significant investment to the region.
Impact on phone and internet reception	This is studied as part of the Environmental Impact Statement and is detailed in the EMI/EMF report.
Construction vehicles brining weeds into the area	Construction vehicles are typically checked and washed down as required prior to entering the Project Area to minimise this issue.
Impact on local water resources	Water sources are studied prior to construction and assessed as part of the Construction Environmental Management Plan. Neoen will determine the most appropriate sources of water and seek licenses/permits for the use of local water sources (if available) or bring water to site via water trucks.
Impact on community relationships / cohesion and spread of misinformation	Neoen aims to provide project information to the community at the same time. Project information has been shared with the community through newsletters, bulletins, project information booklets, newspaper ads, one-on-one meetings and public community events.
The proponent going bust before the project is decommissioned	The largest cost in a wind farm is the CAPEX. This means that should Neoen "go bust" before the end of the wind farm lifecycle, there is value for another company to take over the project and continue its operation in generating renewable electricity. Neoen furthermore has provisions in its contracts with host landholders to ensure that the wind farm is not abandoned in the case that Neoen as a company no longer exists.
Ability to use a small aircraft to spread fertiliser on the property	For neighbours that are located within close proximity of the wind farm, the ability to fly small aircraft near the wind farm was included in the aviation impact assessment. Letters of advice were provided to these neighbours by the aviation assessment specialist.
Cumulative impacts, being "surrounded" by wind turbines	Neoen is required to include a cumulative impact assessment in its detailed studies that are included in the Environmental Impact Statement. Other proponents are required to undertake a similar assessment.

Description of concern	Neoen's response to concern
Impact on the local economy	Neoen considers the Project to have a positive impact on the local economy through the creation of approximately 190 jobs throughout the 18-24 month construction phase and between 5-10 jobs throughout the 25-30 year operation phase.
	Additionally, Neoen considers there to be many positive downstream economic impacts as a result of the construction and operations phase as other businesses such as accommodation and other service providers may also benefit from increased activity. The community benefits fund and neighbour benefit sharing program will provide community members with further funding, thereby supporting the local economy. An economic impact assessment has been undertaken as part of the detailed assessments, which is submitted as part of the Development Application.
Impacts of waste on local landfill	Neoen will develop a waste management plan to determine the best ways to dispose of waste during the construction phase.
Impacts on mental health	Neoen acknowledges that there are multiple stress factors impacting the community, including drought, bushfires and the Covid-19 pandemic. Neoen believes it is very important to gain an understanding of the social impacts that already exist, also including as a result of the New England Renewable Energy Zone and other proposed renewable energy projects in the area. Neoen's community engagement, together with the Social Impact Assessment, aim to deepen our understanding of these impacts. Neoen's community engagement for the Thunderbolt Energy Hub has been and continues to be in-depth, responsive and participatory.
Accessibility of rescue helicopters for highway accidents	There are no special aviation risks associated with turbines. Pilots view turbines as no different to other tall structures and hazards such as power lines, transmission towers, radio masts, mountains and valleys; turbines are simply another piece of infrastructure in the environment that needs to be managed on a risk basis.
Shadow flicker	This has been studied as part of the detailed assessments. Neighbours who may be impacted by shadow flicker will be informed of this impact and appropriate mitigation strategies can be implemented.

Description of concern	Neoen's response to concern
Wind turbine components being imported – overall impact on environment (carbon footprint)	Neoen Australia has been continuously improving local content for our projects here in Australia. Some of the main wind turbine components can be sourced in Australia, such as steel tower sections. The environmental pay-back period (including the carbon footprint) for a wind turbine is typically "repaid" within months of operation. Over its 30 year operating life a wind turbine will contribute to millions of tonnes of CO <sub>2</sub> reduction.
Wind turbine blades need to be replaced frequently as they cannot be repaired	This concern does not align with Neoen's experience owning and operating wind farms around the world. Wind turbine blades are designed to last the lifetime of a wind turbine (typically 30 years) and are frequently inspected during operations to ensure ongoing safety. If damaged, wind turbine blades can often be repaired on site.

Some neighbours felt that after the in-person discussion with Neoen and learning about the project in further detail, they were less concerned than prior to the meeting. Some neighbours remained concerned and are not in favour of the project.

#### 4.5.8 Community feedback survey results

Concerns raised and responses provided by Neoen during one-on-one meetings and when speaking to community members at community events are outlined in Table 10. An additional mechanism for community members to provide Neoen with their feedback on the Thunderbolt Energy Hub project was through a community feedback survey, available on the project website. Hard copies of the survey were also provided to community members at community consultation events and during one-on-one meetings.

By the end of November 2020, 41 feedback survey responses had been received. By November 2021, a total of 70 feedback surveys have been received. Of these, 64 were unique responses (i.e. six respondents completed the survey twice). The views of neighbours and members of the public expressed in the feedback survey are summarised below.

Of the 70 responses received, 47 people answered the question: *"What is your level of interest in the project?"* with 0 meaning no interest and 10 meaning very high interest. The average level of interest based on these responses is **8.1/10**, meaning the level of interest in generally high.

Of the 70 responses received, 65 people answered the question: *"How would you rate your attitude towards Thunderbolt Energy Hub?"* with 0 meaning they are opposed to the project and 10 meaning they are very supportive of the project. The average support for the project based on these responses is **7.3/10**, meaning that the majority of people are supportive of the project. Of these 65 respondents, there were 60 unique respondents. The majority of respondents live in Kentucky or Kentucky South (59%) and the majority indicated that they are supportive of the Project with an average rating of 7.2/10. The results are further detailed in Table 11.

Location of Respondents	No of unique respondents	Average level of support for the Project
Kentucky and Kentucky South	34	7.2/10
Wollun	2	2.7/10
Bendemeer	8	6.3/10

#### Table 11 Level of support for the Project based on location

Location of Respondents	No of unique respondents	Average level of support for the Project
Uralla	6	8.7/10
Walcha	2	10/10
Salisbury Plains	1	3/10
Armidale	5	9.6/10
Tamworth	1	10/10
Other NSW	1	10/10

Below is a summary of the main benefits identified by the survey. The question: *"Which of the following benefits of wind farms do you consider important?"* received 67 responses and is summarised in Table 12. Respondents could select multiple answers.

Table 12 Survey Responses: Which of the following benefits of wind farms do you consider important?

Description of perceived benefit	Percentage of responses (as at end November 2020)	Percentage of responses (as at end November 2021)
They generate renewable energy	92.68 %	88.06 %
They reduce greenhouse gas emissions & help to combat climate change	65.85 %	55.22 %
They bring investment to regional	70.73 %	65.67 %
areas		
They deliver local economic opportunities – jobs/tourism	63.41 %	61.19 %
They help farmers to diversify their on-farm income	73.17 %	67.16 %
They deliver community benefits including funds for community projects	73.17 %	70.15 %
Other/comments	7.32 %	11.94 %

Respondents who selected 'other/comments' in the response to this question, raised the following other main benefits of the wind farm proposal:

- *"Hopefully cheaper power, improved communications and better community infrastructure"*
- "Improved biodiversity"

Other respondents used the comment section to raise concerns. These concerns are also addressed in Table 10.

Table 13 summarises the main concerns identified by the survey. The question: *"What, if any, concerns do you have about wind farms?"* received 68 responses. Respondents could select multiple answers.

Table 13 Survey Response: What are the main concerns about the wind farm?

Description of concern	Percentage of responses (as at end November 2020)	Percentage of responses (as at November 2021)
Visual Impact	34.15 %	35.29 %
Noise	12.20 %	22.06 %
Disturbances (such as traffic) during construction	39.02 %	38.24 %
Effects on land use or land values	48.78 %	47.06 %
Effects on natural areas and habitats	43.90 %	44.12 %

Description of concern	Percentage of responses (as at end November 2020)	Percentage of responses (as at November 2021)
No concerns	29.27 %	25 %
Other	17.07 %	19.12 %

The concerns raised by respondents who selected 'other' in response to this question have been addressed in Table 10.

Only one response raised concerns about the solar farm proposed as part of Stage 2. The concern was whether the solar panels have any effect on air temperature and weather and whether they can be recycled at the end of their life.

Neoen has responded to the above concerns through public consultation, one-on-one consultation, newsletters, bulletins and through updating the project booklet FAQ section as described in Section 4.5.2 and Section 4.5.7.

### 4.6 Social Impact Assessment (SIA)

Neoen engaged Umwelt Pty Ltd (Umwelt) from September to October 2021 to undertake a Social Impact Assessment (SIA) for the Project. Although the SEARs do not require a SIA to be submitted, Neoen engaged Umwelt to complete the assessment to provide an independent review of the community consultation activities undertaken by Neoen to date and to provide an independent risk assessment of the likely impacts (both positive and negative) that the Project may have on the community.

The SIA specialists undertook a targeted consultation program in collaboration with Neoen, including consultation with project neighbours, community members, community groups, local businesses and services providers, Aboriginal stakeholders and government agencies. Consultation was undertaken in the form of phone interviews with Umwelt SIA specialists, online surveys, participation in Neoen's online presentation and Q&A sessions (September 2021) and online meetings.

Umwelt's assessment identified a number of key project concerns and benefits, summarised in Figure 8 below. Project benefits are shown in italics and the darker shading indicates concerns/benefits are of higher significance to stakeholders. The concerns and benefits identified by Umwelt's SIA assessment match those identified by Neoen throughout its community consultation program undertaken to date with no different concerns or benefits identified.

Figure 8 – Key concerns and benefits perceived by the community – source: Umwelt



The SIA furthermore acknowledged that a number of design changes had been made by Neoen in direct response to feedback received by the community to minimise negative impacts and enhance social benefits, including:

- Staging the project and progressing with Stage 1 first, which has lower impacts
- Refining the wind turbine layout to avoid and minimise environmental impacts and neighbours where possible based on specialist assessments and community consultation
- Sharing benefits with closest neighbours through the Neighbour Benefits Sharing Program
- Community Benefits Sharing Program
- Development of the Community Relations Plan
- Development of a Local Participation Plan

#### Umwelt's assessment found the following:

The separation of the Project in two separate stages with only Stage 1 being progressed as part of the current development application is a tangible response by Neoen to some of the stakeholder engagement feedback which identified some issues requiring further consideration regarding the Stage 2 area but identified less concern regarding the Stage 1 area. Neoen's plan to only progress Stage 1 (the Project) in this current development application represents an approximate 50% reduction in the scale of the Project originally planned to be progressed, in response to stakeholder feedback. – Umwelt (2021)

The SIA assessed the overall social risk of the project in line with the NSW Government's Social Impact Assessment Guideline for State Significant Projects (July 2021) and with reference to relevant technical assessment reports provided as part of the Development Application. This risk assessment provided by Umwelt's SIA specialists is included in Appendix C. The risk assessment showed that the Project has a low impact rating. A small number of impacts have a risk rating of medium, however following the implementation of mitigation measures, the residual risk rating is low.

The SIA identified the following key positive social benefits:

- Renewable energy provision for the region, reducing effects of climate change
- Employment opportunities and skills development
- Income diversification for host landholders and neighbours
- Improved social/community outcomes through the provision of the Community Benefit Sharing Program
- Consistency with State, regional and local strategies and plans that support the development of renewable energy

The community's perceived negative impacts of the project identified in the SIA align with the concerns identified through Neoen's extensive community consultation effort between 2019 and 2021. Neoen have addressed these concerns in a number of ways, as outlined in Table 10.

Overall, the concerns and positive impacts identified by the SIA align with those identified and responded to throughout Neoen's community engagement activities. The SIA confirms that, with the implementation of mitigation measures, Stage 1 of the Thunderbolt Energy Hub is a project that can be delivered with low negative social impacts and that has the potential to provide significant benefits to the community.

### 4.7 Community Consultative Committee (CCC)

A CCC was established in accordance with the SEARs issued for the project by NSW DPIE. An independent chairperson was nominated by NSW DPIE and advertisements were published in April 2021, requesting community members to nominate community representatives to form the CCC committee. Applications were due on 5 May 2021 and evaluated by the independent chairperson. The CCC community representatives were chosen in July 2021.

Two CCC meetings have been held to date, in August and September 2021. Meeting minutes and a copy of the presentation slides are available on the Thunderbolt Energy Hub project website<sup>13</sup>.

#### 4.8 Agency consultation

#### 4.8.1 NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (DPIE)

Neoen and Umwelt met with representatives of NSW DPIE on 18 August 2020 to discuss the proposal.

DPIE raised the following main concerns:

- <u>Visual Impact</u>: DPIE is concerned about the visual impact of the wind farm on adjacent neighbours due to the large number of near neighbours within a 4km radius of the proposal. Visual impact studies must clearly assess the visual impact from receivers within a 4km and a 8km radius of the wind turbines in line with requirements of the Visual Bulletin.
- <u>Cumulative Impact</u>: DPIE is concerned of the cumulative impact of the Thunderbolt Energy Hub and other renewable energy projects that are proposed in the region. Impacts include visual, noise, traffic and construction disruption. A detailed map was requested showing the distances of Thunderbolt Energy Hub relative to the other renewable energy projects.

On 13 October 2021 Neoen provided DPIE with a letter outlining the following project updates:

- Staging the project with Stage 1 to the north of the New England Hwy being the subject of the first Development Application
- Providing an update on the Community Benefits Fund
- Providing information about the Neighbour Benefit Sharing Program
- Providing an update on the Community Consultative Committee (CCC)
- Providing an update on the community information sessions held throughout 2020 and 2021.

Neoen met with representatives of NSW DPIE on 4 November 2021 to discuss the project staging and road route assessment.

#### 4.8.2 NSW Biodiversity, Conservation and Science (BCS)

Neoen and Umwelt had discussions with members of both the North West NSW BCS Office and the North East NSW BCS Office on 24 July 2020 to discuss the project and request further information about particular requirements that BCD may have in regards to the seasonal ecological studies. Due to the project covering two BCS regions, BCS informed us that Neoen's point of contact for future correspondence would be the North West Office, who would then share this information with the North East Office.

BCS also provided advice in regards to the installation of anabats on wind monitoring masts to record bat calls during ecological surveying. The preference is for three anabats to be installed on an 80m wind monitoring mast: one at ground level and two at height. This will allow sufficient information to be gathered about the heights at which bats typically fly in the project region and therefore to determine if and to what extent the proposed wind farm may impact bats.

Neoen and Umwelt met with representatives of NSW BCS again on 4 November 2021. The meeting was to discuss the changes in the delivery of the project from one stage to two stages and that the upcoming DA application would only include Stage 1. A separate DA will be submitted for Stage 2. Neoen, Umwelt and BCS also discussed that the project was considered to be a Controlled Action, as determined by the Federal Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment (DAWE) at the end of October.

The road route was furthermore discussed. BCS confirmed that it would like to see credits for the road route reported separately to those in the project area. As no biodiversity surveys have been undertaken for the road route, BCS confirmed it would be best to use a conservative assumption for credit calculations.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> CCC Meeting Minutes: <u>https://thunderboltenergyhub.com.au/community-consultative-committee-2/</u>

BCS furthermore noted that the access point to site should be confirmed as appropriate by Transport for New South Wales.

BCS expressed some concern about potential impact to wedge-tailed eagles. Umwelt outlined the survey methodology undertaken and discussed possible impacts. BCS indicated that it had read about a study undertaken in Norway to address bird fatality by painting one wind turbine blade black. No similar study is available in Australia, but BCS encouraged Neoen and Umwelt to look into this further.

#### 4.8.3 Transport for New South Wales (TfNSW)

Neoen informed TfNSW northern region of the proposed development. A preliminary information booklet was shared as well as information about the Community Information Day in September 2020.

A letter was sent to TfNSW in October 2021 informing them of the staged delivery of the project. A meeting was held with representatives of TfNSW, Umwelt and Access Traffic on 15 November 2021 to provide a project update, including the staged delivery of the project, benefits sharing programs proposed, and estimated job numbers throughout construction and operations. The proposed road route from Newcastle port to the project site was discussed and it was confirmed by Access Traffic/Neoen that a two-part blade is being proposed in the DA. This means that the traffic disruption would be contained within the road reserve and not cross any privately-owned land. Access Traffic furthermore provided TfNSW with an overview of the proposed site access location, configuration and details of available sight distances. TfNSW requested a more detailed sketch of the access point to be provided after the meeting for their review. Neoen provided this to TfNSW on 25 November 2021.

Proposed traffic volumes were discussed and TfNSW provided the feedback that they believe that 2019 traffic data would be more representative of likely traffic volume compared to 2020 and 2021 data due to the reduced traffic volumes during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Other feedback provided by TfNSW to be considered prior to construction includes:

- Consideration of ancillary services such as water and where and how it will be delivered to site
- Understanding of where materials would be sourced from, for example locations of local quarries
- Consultation with other road authorities such as local Councils
- Consideration of where staff may travel from during construction and whether a bus service from Tamworth and Armidale could be implemented to reduce excess traffic volumes. Consult with local Councils for pick-up and drop-off locations.
- When developing Stage 2, consideration should be given to how transmission lines would cross the highway

#### 4.8.4 TransGrid - Lumea

Neoen commenced discussions with TransGrid in late 2019 through the submission of a connection enquiry. In September 2020 a follow-up meeting was conducted to further discuss the preliminary project connection proposed by Neoen; i.e. to connect the Thunderbolt Energy Hub to both existing 330kV transmission lines.

Neeen met with representatives of Lumea on 6 October 2021 to provide a project presentation outlining the changes proposed to the Thunderbolt Energy Hub since the Scoping stage. This included providing an update on the project staging and also discussing a detailed grid study that was undertaken in early 2021. The grid study was completed by a grid specialist consultant engaged by Neoen to determine the best connection configuration options to the transmission network. Two 330kV transmission lines cross the project area, one on the norther side of the New England Hwy (Stage 1) and one on the southern side of the highway (Stage 2). The consultant assessed whether it would be a better option to connect the whole project to the northern transmission line only, the southern transmission line only or connecting to both transmission lines. The study concluded that it would be best for the whole project (stages 1 and 2) to connect to the northern line due to constraints present in the network. Lumea was interested in learning about and discussing the study.

Neoen asked Lumea whether a new connection enquiry would be required for Stage 1 of the project given the changes made to the proposed project since the last connection enquiry (late 2019). Lumea confirmed that a new connection enquiry would be required.

#### 4.8.5 State and Federal Ministers

The Thunderbolt Energy Hub is located within the State electorates of Tamworth and Northern Tablelands and within the Federal electorate of New England. Letters were sent to the respective MPs for each electorate, informing them of the proposed Thunderbolt Energy Hub proposal along with a preliminary project information booklet. Ministers were also informed about the first Community Information Day held in September 2020 in Uralla.

Letters providing the respective MPs with project updates were also sent in April, July and October 2021. The letters provided information on community consultation updates, establishment of the CCC, EIS assessment updates, project staging, neighbour benefits sharing program, community benefits fund, the community information sessions in September 2021, response to community members' concerns, and the social impact assessment undertaken as part of the EIS.

Neoen met with a representative of Kevin Anderson MP's office, member for the state electorate of Tamworth, in June 2021 to provide a presentation about the project. Neoen also met with Adam Marshall MP, member for the state electorate of Northern Tablelands in June and July 2021 to provide a presentation about the project and discuss project updates.

#### 4.8.6 Local Councils

Stage 1 of the Thunderbolt Energy Hub is located within the Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Tamworth Regional Council and Uralla Shire Council. The proposed Stage 2 project area is within the Tamworth Regional Council, Uralla Shire Council and Walcha Council.

Consultation with the Councils has been as follows:

- Email sent to all three Councils in July 2020, providing an introduction to Neoen and the Thunderbolt Energy Hub project.
- Email sent to all three Councils in September 2020 informing them of the upcoming community drop-in session. Neoen also informed Councils that the Scoping Reports for the wind and solar farm would be finalised after the community event.
- Neoen provided a project presentation to Uralla Shire Council in October 2020.
- Email sent to all three Councils in December 2020, notifying them of the submission of the Scoping Reports, including a link to the planning portal. The first community newsletter was attached to the email.
- Neoen provided a project presentation to Uralla Shire Council in July 2021.
- Neoen provided a project presentation to Tamworth Council in October 2021.

Neoen also emailed the project bulletins to all three Councils in July 2021, September 2021 and October 2021.

#### 4.8.7 Muswellbrook Council

Neoen also consulted with Muswellbrook Council, providing a project presentation on 25 August 2021. As the proposed traffic route for Thunderbolt Energy Hub passes through the Muswellbrook Council LGA, Neoen was interested to understand the Council's concern and feedback. Neoen agreed to keep Muswellbrook Council informed as the project progresses towards construction.

#### 4.8.8 Uralla Shire Business Chamber (USBC)

Neoen became a member of the USBC in 2020. In July 2021, Neoen gave a project presentation to USBC at their monthly meeting. Neoen encouraged that any business or contractor that may be interested in working on the project during construction and/or operations could submit an Expression of Interest on the

Thunderbolt Energy Hub project website. A list of the types of jobs and suppliers required during construction can also be found on the website.

### 4.9 Community Groups Consultation

Neoen consulted with a number of community groups throughout 2020 and 2021, both at community drop-in sessions and through individual meetings with representatives of the respective groups. During the one-on-one meetings with group representatives, Neoen provided an introduction to the company as well as an overview of the proposed project and community benefits sharing. Some of the meetings also included participation in the Social Impact Assessment (SIA), included in the EIS for Stage 1. The groups that Neoen has met with to date are:

- Z-NET Uralla
- New England Visions 2030
- Landcare NSW
- Kentucky Hall committee
- National Seniors Australia Armidale branch

### **5 BENEFIT SHARING**

#### 5.1 Community Benefit Sharing

#### 5.1.1 Overview

To ensure both short and long-term benefits flow through to the community as a result of the establishment and operation of the Thunderbolt Energy Hub, we establish a Community Benefit Sharing Program (CBSP).

The CBSP will be designed to deliver benefits to key stakeholders in the community in a way that aims to meet their needs and aspirations. Specifically, our objectives are to:

deliver significant and meaningful improvements to the community surrounding Thunderbolt
 Energy Hub;

- ensure a wide range of different stakeholder groups benefit from Thunderbolt Energy Hub;
- empower the community to shape the design and implementation of the different initiatives;
- build support for renewable energy in the Kentucky, Bendemeer and Uralla area.

The majority of initiatives will be delivered during the construction and operations phase.

In alignment with Neoen's organisational vision, it is important that the benefit be a true benefit and be tailored to meet each distinct communities' need.

From an industry best practice standpoint, several principles are seen as being helpful guides in developing or assessing a benefit sharing strategy, as outlined in Table 14 below<sup>14</sup>:

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Principle	Description
Appropriate	<ul> <li>Benefit sharing is tailored to local circumstances, culture and need, helping to address (not create or reinforce) patterns of conflict or inequality. It makes sense and is appropriate in the local context.</li> <li>The local community provides guidance on how benefit sharing can create a positive, lasting and meaningful impact for their local community. We work with the</li> </ul>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Lane, T & Hicks, J, (forthcoming) Benefit Sharing Options for Renewable Energy, 2019, Clean Energy Council

Principle	Description
	local community to develop specific benefit sharing strategies that respond to their unique local context and need.
Flexible	<ul> <li>Benefit sharing is an aspect of project development that will greatly benefit from being open to community involvement, influence and negotiation. Having the flexibility to respond to local context will ensure benefit sharing has the best and biggest local impact.</li> <li>The lifecycle of renewable energy developments is significant (25 years or more), a lot can change in a community during that period of time. Therefore, it is important to build in flexibility so that benefit sharing can evolve as the community needs do.</li> </ul>
Transparent	<ul> <li>The benefit sharing strategy is transparently available to the community and provides a clear and understandable rationale for the various programs and who is eligible to participate.</li> <li>Benefits are freely given for the sake of sharing the proceeds of the project and building relationships. Benefit sharing must not come with conditions of silence or consent.</li> </ul>
Integrated	<ul> <li>Benefit sharing seeks to integrate the project owner/operators as valuable community members by building links and relationships into the community.</li> <li>The benefit sharing approach is integrated with Neoen's broader approach to community engagement and project development.</li> </ul>
Mutually Beneficial	<ul> <li>The approach is designed to bring mutual benefit to local communities and the project.</li> </ul>
Proportionate	<ul> <li>The benefits are perceived as being proportionate to the scale of the project and the level of change or disturbance experienced by local people. Given community members living closest to projects experience greater impacts, they should receive a proportionate benefit.</li> </ul>
Strategic	<ul> <li>Create a positive legacy in the local community. Look to bring ongoing and lasting value to the local area. Integrate benefit sharing opportunities with broader strategies by building local partnerships.</li> </ul>
Accountable	<ul> <li>Systems and processes are deployed to ensure the credibility and reputation of the benefit sharing program.</li> <li>Benefit sharing is managed in a transparent and accountable way that involves local stakeholders.</li> </ul>

#### 5.1.2 Scope of the CBSP

This CBSP does not include:

- required activities under our permit conditions such as for visual screening
- annual council rates payments or fire levies (where applicable)
- host landowner payments;
- the value of local jobs and investment.

However, it is worth noting that these activities will all deliver significant value to the community. \$100,000 is the total amount for Thunderbolt Energy Hub CBSP annually based on the current size of Stage 1 of the project.

Neoen have a number of mechanisms to enable benefits to be shared in a meaningful and equitable way. Community input was sought into these options (and any other local ideas) at the community information sessions held in the lead up to planning permit submission and via the community feedback survey. As

there are a number of other renewable energy projects being developed in the region, Neoen plans to coordinate with these projects to identify common opportunities for the community benefit funds and ensure that funding is provided to a range of initiatives within the local communities.

The final program is likely be a mix of 3-4 benefit-sharing mechanisms from the following list:

- Community Benefit Fund
- Lower energy bills through solar and/or storage subsidies
- Lower energy bills through partnership with an energy retailer
- Community co-investment
- Investment to address specific local issue e.g. poor mobile coverage, electricity blackouts

#### 5.2 Community Benefits Fund

Neoen has committed a Community Benefits Sharing Fund of \$100,000 per annum throughout the operations phase of the project for Stage 1. The amount is based on the current size of the project (192 MW) and may change if the size of the project changes. A further \$100,000 per annum is proposed for Stage 2; however the final figure will depend on the size of this project stage.

Neoen has asked the community to share their ideas and feedback for community projects and initiatives that they would like to see receive funding from the Community Benefits Fund. Feedback was received during one-on-one meetings, at community information sessions and through the feedback survey. In the feedback survey the following question was asked: *"We will establish a Community Benefit Sharing Program to deliver benefits to the local community and we're interested in your thoughts on this. Here are some initial ideas – tick your favourites and/or add your own suggestion."* 

A total of 64 responses were received for this question, with answers summarised in Table 15.

Description of Benefit	Number of responses (as at November 2021)	Percentage of responses (as at November 2021)
Community Benefit Fund providing	43	67.19%
grants for local community groups		
Discounted electricity bills for local	34	53.13%
households		
Solar and/or battery storage	32	50%
subsidies for local households		
An opportunity for community	21	32.81%
members to invest directly in the		
project		
Biodiversity funding &	24	37.5%
opportunities		
Explore ways to support local eco-	15	23.44%
tourism		
Suggestion (please specify)	22	34.38%

Table 15: Community Benefits Sharing Feedback Survey responses

Some of the responses received from people who selected 'Suggestion (please specify)' include:

- Community Future Fund
- Ambulance station for improved outcomes for the community
- Sponsorship of the local show
- Profit sharing in wind turbines that impact neighbours
- Telecommunications improvement, including improved mobile phone signal and internet coverage
- Funding for Kentucky Hall, School and fire brigade
- RFS training on roads within wind farm
- Educational scholarships, traineeships, cadetships, trade skills

- Making the wind farm partially community-owned
- Indoor sports centre
- Energy efficiency program and support for low income households
- Help local shires to prosper

During the one-on-one meetings, the most common idea that community members had in relation to the Community Benefit Fund was that they would like to see improved telecommunications in the area (mobile and internet reception) as they perceived it to be poor at present. Other ideas suggested include:

- providing cheaper power
- a viewing platform for the wind farm
- funding for local community groups such as the Kentucky Hall, School, RFS and Progress Association to make Kentucky more appealing
- create more recreational areas such as camping grounds
- a community centre where programs are held all the time, such as pottery and crafts
- a community sports centre
- a swimming pool/tennis court/cricket pitch
- tree corridors near turbine roads and next to the solar farm to prevent erosion and screen view of the solar farm
- potable water trucks for times of drought
- lights at railway crossing in Kentucky village
- wildlife conservation

Neoen will continue to seek feedback from neighbours and community members about their ideas for the Community Benefits Fund throughout the approvals process. As described in Section 5.1.2, the final program is likely be a mix of 3-4 benefit-sharing mechanisms. This will be developed further as the project progresses towards the operations phase.

#### 5.3 Neighbour Benefit Sharing Program

Neoen publicly announced its neighbour benefits program in September 2021. Neoen is committed to an equitable, transparent and easy-to-understand neighbour benefits program. The program applies to neighbours who own a residential dwelling within 3.5km of a wind turbine. Payments are made on a sliding-scale based on the distance of their dwelling to wind turbines, as described in Figure 9. An example neighbour payment is shown in Figure 10. The payments are annual and are proposed to commence at the beginning of the operations phase of the project, which is typically 25-30 years. The final amount received by neighbours will depend on the wind turbine layout, which will be determined following the approval of the Development Application and during the construction period.

Neoen's neighbour benefits program does not include any "gagging" clauses. If a neighbour wishes to accept a proposed neighbour payment, this does not prevent them from expressing their views for or against the project, both privately or publicly.

The neighbour benefits program is proposed in addition to the CBSP outlined in Section 5.1. The total amounts paid to neighbours are meaningful and will allow them to diversify their income. It was described as a best-practice neighbour program<sup>15</sup>.

Figure 9: Proposed Neighbour Benefits Sharing Payments

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> RE-Alliance; 'Thunderbolt Energy Hub announces best-practice neighbour payment scheme': <u>https://www.re-alliance.org.au/thunderbolt\_energy\_hub\_announces\_new\_neighbour\_payment\_scheme</u>



Figure 10: Example Neighbour Benefits Payment



In this example, there are two wind turbines proposed within 2-2.5km from a neighbour's dwelling, four turbines between 2.5-3km and 1 turbine within 3-3.5km.

Their annual neighbour benefits payment would be: \$15,000 each year ( $\$3,000 \times 2$ ) + ( $\$2,000 \times 4$ ) + ( $\$1,000 \times 1$ )

### 5.4 Environmental Benefits

The per annum energy generation for Stage 1 (192 MW) has been estimated as being 588,670 MWh per year. This estimated energy generation by the wind farm is estimated to have an environmental offset equivalent to:

- 476,820 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> avoided per year
- 159,750 cars taken off the road
- 114,600 household electricity usage
- 4.8 million trees being planted

The estimated environmental offset data has been sourced from Neoen's bespoke Environmental Calculator (state-specific, recent & sourced).

#### 5.5 Economic Benefits

Neoen engaged Muller Partnership Quantity Surveyors to create a Capital Investment Value (CIV) report for Stage 1 of the Project. Please refer to this report, submitted as part of the Stage 1 Development Application, for further detail. The total estimated capital investment estimate for Stage 1 is \$405,600,000 excluding GST.

Using project specific estimates and the local economic boost sourced from Neoen's bespoke Economic Calculator, it has been estimated that Stage 1 will create approximately 190 jobs throughout construction phase and approximately 5 - 10 jobs throughout the operations phase (25+ years).

### 6 Community Engagement Going Forward

### 6.1 Next Steps

Neoen is committed to early, ongoing, participatory and responsive community engagement. Neoen will continue further in-depth community consultation throughout 2022 to further address questions and concerns raised by neighbours and community members.

When the Stage 1 Development Application is on public exhibition, Neoen will notify the community such that they may make public submissions.

Neoen will continue to offer one-on-one meetings to neighbours and community members throughout 2022 and beyond, update the project website with relevant news items, documents and FAQ updates as required, and distribute newsletters and bulletins to community members. Neoen plans to host further community drop-in sessions and other community events.

### 6.2 Implementation Plan

The implementation plan will be supported by a comprehensive communications plan. Each approach of the IAP2 Spectrum is explored in Table 16: **Inform, Consult, Involve, Collaborate and Empower**.

		Planned Activities	
Tools	Feasibility - planning 2019 - 2024	Pre-construction - construction 2024 - 2026	Operations From 2026
Stakeholder identification and mapping	Key stakeholder groups identified and relationships established.	Further stakeholders and interest groups harvested for Stakeholder Register.	Further stakeholders and interest groups harvested for Stakeholder Register.
<u>(Inform)</u>	Stakeholder register and Contractor/Supplier register developed Email and mailing list created.		
One on one briefings <u>(Inform)</u>	One-on-one meetings held in the 6-8 km neighbourhood zone as well as in local towns of Kentucky, Kentucky South, Wollun, Bendemeer, Woolbrook, Uralla, Armidale and Tamworth with neighbours, community members, community groups,	Quarterly meetings held in neighbourhood zone in local towns with interest groups and key stakeholders.	Briefings held in neighbourhood zone annually.

 Table 16: Community Relations & Communications Implementation Plan

	interest groups and key stakeholders.		
Newsletters: neighbourhood and public (Inform)	Neighbourhood contact database has been established for neighbourhood area. Post distributed through the local post office to send out to the neighbourhood area. Public enews subscription available on the website or by contacting Neoen directly.	Neighbourhood newsletter sent out bimonthly throughout construction period - digital and hard copy for those without email. Public enews sent out quarterly.	Public enews sent out quarterly.
Project website	Project website implemented with	Project website maintained and updated	Project website maintained and updated 6
<u>(Inform)</u>	transparent logging of key documents such as planning permit application, project booklets, newsletters, bulletins, etc.	monthly with construction updates.	monthly.
Media releases and local print media ads <u>(Inform)</u>	Notification for community information sessions as well as community survey	Regular media releases and local ads for key project milestones.	Media releases for key events and project achievements such as Community Development Fund announcements and outcomes.
Fact sheets <u>(Inform)</u>	Fact sheets and relevant FAQs for website to proactively address potential issues.	Fact sheets and website FAQs developed proactively.	Fact sheets and website FAQs developed proactively.
Information sessions / Project presentations / wind farm, solar farm and/or battery farm tours / stalls at community events (Inform)	Community events held ahead of project milestones, for example submission of Scoping Report, Development Application, and following the start of the public exhibition.	Community event schedule	Open days, wind farm and/or solar farm tours and educational opportunities offered to the public via the website.
Community survey ( <i>Consult)</i>	Community feedback survey developed. It is available online and as	Future surveys to be implemented as part of the	Future surveys to be implemented as part of the

	hard copies. Hard copies are distributed at community events and during one-on-one meetings.	monitoring and evaluation program.	monitoring and evaluation program.
Contact community members (Consult)	Residents in the local areas surrounding the project are to contacted throughout this period to ensure they are aware of the project, receive up-to- date information about the project and are on the Stakeholder Register. Contact made through phone calls. Where contact information could not be found, a project information booklet was left in their mailbox together with contact information.	Any new residents (i.e. new builds) to be recorded and contacted throughout this period to ensure they are on the Stakeholder Register.	Any new residents (i.e. new builds) to be recorded and contacted throughout this period to ensure they are on the Stakeholder Register.
One on one meetings with key stakeholders ( <i>Consult)</i>	Community members have been offered the opportunity for a one-on- one meeting to share project information and discuss their feedback and any potential concerns.	Community members can contact Neoen if they would like a one-on-one meeting.	Community members can contact Neoen if they would like a one-on-one meeting.
1800# Telephone line <u>(Consult)</u>	Direct line set up to record inquiries.	Telephone line maintained and number available on website.	Telephone line maintained and number available on website.
Events (Involve)	Public drop-in sessions and community information sessions were hosted by Neoen in February 2020, September 2020 and September 2021.	Landowner dinner	Community celebration
Benefit Sharing Program Co-design process and delivery of program ( <i>Empower</i> )	Community is invited to share their ideas for the community benefits fund by speaking with Neoen directly or including them in the community feedback survey.	Implementation of the annual program.	Delivery of the annual program including a strong acquittal process.



	Ideas will be recorded in the Stakeholder communications register.		
Local business procurement opportunities	An Expression of Interest form is available on the project website on the page 'Work with Us'.	Contractor and supplier information sessions	
(Empower)	Interested suppliers and contractors are added to the contractor/supplier register and sent public enews.		

#### 6.2.1 Decommissioning phase engagement

The focus of the CRP is for the estimated lifecycle of the wind farm. Further we understand that the decommissioning phase will need to be well resourced in regards to community engagement and will ensure this is embedded in our future strategy.

### 7 Complaints Management Process

The following process has been developed in accordance with the Australian / New Zealand Standard Guidelines for complaint management in organisations and in consideration of recommendations from publications by the National Wind Farm Commissioner:

The process for managing complaints and concerns raised by community members involves several key steps including receiving, registering, investigating, responding to and addressing complaints stakeholders.

Contact details for complaints made via telephone or in written form are contained in Table 17.

Project website	https://thunderboltenergyhub.com.au/
Telephone number (toll-free)	1800 966 207
E-mail	<u>contact@thunderboltenergyhub.com.au</u>
Mail	Sydney or Canberra Neoen office

Table 17: Complaint lodging contact details

The contact details in Table 17 are published on the project's public website, alongside an outline of the complaints and investigation process. This information will also be made available in community consultations that occur in the lead up to construction commencement, and at any community consultation that is held during the construction period.

#### Step 1: Receive and register a complaint

Contact is received from community members may be received through the following methods: verbally either in person or via telephone or in written form via electronic mail and/or via the website.

It may be an inquiry, a concern or a complaint. If it is an inquiry or a concern we will respond directly to this and simply record this interaction in the stakeholder relationship management (SRM) database.

If it is a complaint then the following procedure is followed:

Upon the receipt of a complaint, a set of standardised information will be collected, recorded and filed to ensure an efficient and standardised process.

The following information will be collected from community members:

- The complainant's name and address;
- A unique reference number is to be communicated to the complainant.
- Any applicable turbine or monitoring mast reference number;
- The complainant's concerns including date, time, prevailing conditions and description of the complaint

This information must then be recorded in the relevant project's SRM.

#### Step 2: Acknowledging complaints

A non-urgent complaint will be acknowledged by the responsible Project Manager (see Table 1) within 3 business days of the complaint being submitted. If it's an urgent complaint then a response will be within 24 hours. This acknowledgement will be made via phone or email with any written correspondence dated and kept on file.

The acknowledgement will include:

- A summary of the complaint; with a reference number provided
- The opportunity to clarify issues relating to the complaint or a request for further information if required.
- The proposed investigation approach; and
- An estimated timeframe in which the stakeholder can expect to receive a response.

Where a complaint can be easily resolved or is better categorised as a request by stakeholder for additional information, it may be appropriate for the Project Manager to immediately respond to the stakeholder.

#### Step 3: Investigating complaints

The Project Manager is responsible for ensuring all complaints are investigated and that all reasonable attempts to seek a resolution are made. The investigation may be delegated to an appropriate Neoen staff member. Accurate records of the investigation must be maintained including records of meetings, discussions and activities.

The investigation may involve:

- Site visits, particularly in the instance of reported property damage;
- Consultation with Neoen staff or contractors, including senior management when required;
- Acquiring monitoring data and evidence (e.g. for noise or dust complaints); and
- Contacting external stakeholders.

#### Step 4: Responding to stakeholder/complainant

Following the investigation, the results, including details of the findings and proposed resolution, will be clearly explained to the complainant. In most circumstances, it will be at this stage that the complainant will determine if the resolution is satisfactory.

#### Step 5: Closing the complaint

If the process has been concluded appropriately then the Project Manager will close the complaint and make a file-note to this effect in the SRM. Formal written correspondence must also be issued to the complainant confirming that the complaint has been closed.

If the complainant is not satisfied with the investigation and resolution then the complainant has a right of review. This will be undertaken by the Senior Manager, Community Relations to ensure that the complaint process has been properly followed.

If the complainant is not satisfied with Neoen's investigation and proposed resolution, the complainant will be advised by Neoen that they have the ability to contact a number of other bodies:

• NSW Government: https://www.energy.nsw.gov.au/contact-us; or

• the Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner. Neoen will provide complainants with the relevant contact details, as seen in Table 18.

Table 18: Alternative complaint contact	Table	18:	Alternative	complaint	contacts
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State body (as identified in DA)	Email / Address / Phone number
Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner	<u>aeic@aeic.gov.au</u> PO Box 24434 Melbourne VIC 3001
Tamworth Regional Council	<u>trc@tamworth.nsw.gov.au</u> (02) 6767 5555 PO Box 555 Tamworth NSW 2340
Uralla Shire Council	<u>council@uralla.nsw.gov.au</u> (02) 6778 6300 PO Box 106 Uralla NSW 2358

#### Step 6: Recording and registering the complaint

Upon the closing of a complaint, the following information will be updated in the CRM with the additional following details:

- The process of investigation that was undertaken to resolve the complaint;
- What the proposed resolution was:
- Whether this was accepted and how it was implemented;
- Whether or not the complaint has been resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant.
- The reason why the complaint was closed;

### 8 Reporting, Evaluation and Continuous Improvement

This plan will be continuously monitored and updated to reflect the themes and issues emerging from engagement. Ongoing market research and media monitoring will be undertaken to better understand the underlying narrative in the community regarding the project and to assess the key messaging and effectiveness of the communication and engagement activities.

Neoen is committed to continually improving the approach to and identifying opportunities for the community to shape future plans and initiatives. Where possible, monitoring and evaluation activities will be designed to complement other engagement activities. A detailed monitoring and evaluation plan would be developed if the project is successful in obtaining its planning permit.

Evaluation is not a stand-alone or isolated process rather; evaluation is an integral and on-going component of every communication and engagement activity or process. Consequently, evaluation at the beginning of the consultation planning process is as important as it is during and following implementation.

Evaluation is a vital element for forward planning and can provide a strategic basis for decisions about issues, including the allocation of resources.

The evaluation process consists of two components (as seen in Table 13):

- 1. Outcomes increased satisfaction, awareness or attitudinal change
- 2. Outputs measuring and monitoring what is actually produced, released or implemented

Table 13: Evaluation Process - Outcomes and Outputs to be achieved

Evaluation	What will be achieved?
Outcomes	<ul> <li>General community awareness and understanding of the project.</li> <li>Long term broad local social acceptance of the wind farm</li> <li>Widespread understanding among project team, employees, residents, stakeholders and broader community of Neoen's commitment to engaging with the community</li> <li>General satisfaction among stakeholders that they have been given the opportunity to express their views and that they have been heard</li> <li>Expectations and issues managed effectively through communications and meaningful engagement</li> <li>Strong local relationships and trust</li> </ul>
Outputs	<ul> <li>Data collected from Feedback Survey throughout the Project</li> <li>Issue timely and relevant media releases, project bulletins, email broadcasts, direct mail letters and FAQs</li> <li>Update website with timely and relevant information</li> <li>Organise Community Information Days, Information Sessions, and other face-to-face engagement events and briefings</li> <li>Schedule regular briefings with key stakeholders i.e. Council.</li> <li>Ensure Stakeholder Database is regularly updated, so that relevant stakeholders receive project updates</li> <li>Complaints register</li> <li>Benefits sharing model tailored to the local context</li> </ul>

### 8.1 Objectives of evaluation

The objectives of monitoring and evaluating the delivery of the activities outlined in this CRP are to:

- identify opportunities to improve the approach;
- ensure key stakeholders including the community, partners, and contractors have a clear understanding of the progress and performance of key initiatives;
- identify opportunities for the community to shape future plans and initiatives;
- ensure a current understanding of community concerns and to track any complaints;
- report back to key stakeholders about the performance of Thunderbolt Energy Hub and associated programs



Appendix A - Newsletters and Bulletins

i

### THUNDERBOLT ENERGY HUB

### NEOEN

## NEWSLETTER

### December 2020



### **Overview**

Thunderbolt Energy Hub is a hybrid renewable energy project with the ability to provide affordable, reliable power to New South Wales consumers.

The project will combine around 380MW of wind, 120MW of solar generation and a 400MW battery.

The project is proposed near Kentucky, approximately 40km north-east of Tamworth. The project is proposed within the New England Renewable Energy Zone (REZ).

### **Project benefits**

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The project is predicted to produce enough renewable energy to power approximately **276,800 New South Wales homes.** 



The project represents approximately **\$1.01 billion investment in infrastructure**.



During construction the project would create over **600 jobs**, with **20-30 jobs during operations** (25-30 years).

Anyone interested in working on the project can **register their interest on the Thunderbolt Energy Hub project website.** 

In the pre-construction period, we will hold a Local Employment and Supplier Networking session.

### About Neoen

Neoen is an independent power producer headquartered in Paris. With over 200 employees, the company operates in 14 countries on four continents.

In Australia we currently have 4 operating wind farms and 6 solar farms including Coleambally, Dubbo, Griffith and Parkes. Our South Australian Big Battery has been keeping the lights on in SA since 2017, and has saved consumers over \$150 million.

Neoen owns and operates all of the projects we build (rather than developing them to be sold) and as longterm neighbours we are committed to sharing the benefits with surrounding communities.



# Wind and Solar Farm Design

Figure 1 shows the preliminary layout for the wind farm, designed to be located in areas identified as having higher wind resources.

This figure also shows the area under consideration for the solar farm (pink area). The solar farm is designed to avoid highly vegetated areas.

The layouts of the wind and solar farm will be refined once specialist studies have been undertaken to minimise impacts.

# Environmental assessments

Thunderbolt Energy Hub is classified as a State Significant Development (SSD) and a Scoping Report has been submitted to the NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (DPIE).

The NSW DPIE will issue a list of all the requirements that Neoen and specialist consultants must address to inform the next stage – the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the proposed wind and solar farm.

The Scoping Reports are available here:

#### Wind Farm Scoping Report: www.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/majorprojects/project/40551

Solar Farm & Battery Scoping Report: www.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/majorprojects/project/40601



This video, from Neoen's Thunderbolt Energy Hub project, provides an idea of what's involved in ecology surveys for a renewable project: www.youtube.com/ watch?v=0yUZIKBJ1jk or search Thunderbolt Ecology on YouTube.



Figure 1

### **Community Open Days**

A Covid-safe Community Information Session was held at the Alternate Root Café in Uralla in September. Neoen would like to thank all those who attended and provided their initial feedback which helped to inform the project's Scoping Report.

Another Community Information Session will be held in 2021 prior to the submission of the EIS to show the final proposed layout. Further details about this event will be made available via the project website and the next project bulletin.

### **Community Engagement**

Anne-Marie Ward has recently joined the Neoen team as Community Engagement Officer for Thunderbolt Energy Hub. Anne-Marie is based in Kentucky and will continue discussions with members of the local community. Feel free to contact Anne-Marie if you have any questions or would like further information.

Anne-Marie Ward Ph: 0407 345 908 E: annemarie.ward.ext@neoen.com

### Have your say

Community feedback forms can be completed via: www.surveymonkey.com/r/neoenthunderbolt

Or you can email: **contact@thunderboltenergyhub.com.au** to comment or request further information about the Thunderbolt Energy Hub project.



### **Project Bulletin**

July 2021

Thunderbolt Energy Hub is a hybrid renewable energy project with the ability to provide affordable, reliable power to New South Wales consumers. The project is proposed near Kentucky, approximately 40km north-east of Tamworth.

#### **Project Update**

Neeen has decided to make some changes in the delivery of the Thunderbolt Energy Hub. Neeen is planning to deliver the project in **two stages** as illustrated by Figure 1 below.

Stage 1 will include:

- Properties north-west of the New England Hwy only
- 198 MW of wind energy, equivalent to 33 wind turbines
- Each turbine is proposed to have a capacity of 6 MW with a maximum tip height (the distance between the ground and the tip of the blade) of 260m.

Neoen is planning to submit the Development Application (DA) for stage 1 to NSW Government in September 2021.

Stage 2 will include:

- · Properties south-east of the New England Hwy
- 150 MW of wind energy, equivalent to 25 wind turbines
- 120 MW solar energy

A separate DA will be submitted to NSW Government for stage 2 in 2022.

Neoen has decided to make these changes based on feedback received from the Kentucky community, Councils, and local MPs. Neoen would like to prove its professionalism, gain the community's trust and prove our contribution socially & economically through the development of stage 1. Stage 2 will be based on the success of stage 1.





#### **Community Drop-In Session**

A Covid-safe Community Drop-In Session will be held in Kentucky at the end of August/early September.

Come along to view revised maps and photomontages to get an impression of what the wind farm may look like from various locations. We welcome your feedback on our project.

A date for the event will be announced soon.

#### **Neighbour Benefits Sharing**

Neoen is developing a revised neighbour benefit-sharing approach. This approach will:

- considers the distance of neighbouring dwellings to the proposed wind turbines
- Be fair and equitable
- Easy to understand and transparent
- Allow neighbours to express their views freely for or against the project, both privately and publicly.

The new approach will be detailed on the Thunderbolt Energy Hub website once finalised.



The neighbour benefits are proposed **in addition** to the Community Benefits Program, which is proposed to be \$200,000 p.a. throughout operations based on the current project size for stage 1 and 2.



#### Community Consultative Committee (CCC)

The CCC committee has been established in line with NSW DPIE's requirements. The first meeting is planned for late July/early August. Meeting minutes will be published on the Thunderbolt Energy Hub website.

#### Thunderbolt Energy CCC

### Feedback & Registering Your Interest

If you would like to provide your feedback about the proposed Thunderbolt Energy Hub, you may do so by completing the community feedback forms via:

www.surveymonkey.com/r/neoenthunderbolt

If you are interested in learning what types of jobs and suppliers are typically required throughout construction and operations, or you wish to register your interest, please visit the below link.

#### Work With Us

For more information, please contact: Joanna Murphy joanna.murphy@neoen.com 1800 966 207 https://thunderboltenergyhub.com.au/



THUNDERBOLT

### **Project Bulletin**

#### 14 September 2021

Thunderbolt Energy Hub is a hybrid renewable energy project with the ability to provide affordable, reliable power to New South Wales consumers. The project is proposed near Kentucky, approximately 40km north-east of Tamworth.

Community Information Sessions, 15 – 18 September 2021

Join us this week for Covid-safe Community Information Sessions to be held both in-person in the Kentucky Hall (Noalimba Ave, Kentucky, NSW) and online (https://thunderboltenergyhub.com.au/) from Wednesday to Saturday this week (15 – 18 September).

#### **IN PERSON:**

Project posters will be displayed at Kentucky Hall (Noalimba Ave, Kentucky):

15 September: 9am – 11am

16 September: 2pm – 6pm

17 September: 4pm – 6pm

18 September: 10am – 12pm

Neoen team members will be available online during these times to answer questions.

#### ONLINE:

Project posters and information will also be made available on our website from 15-18 September for anyone who cannot attend in person.

#### PROJECT PRESENTATION AND Q&A:

To hear the latest project updates and ask questions, join us online:

16 September: 6:30pm

18 September: 2pm

Registration is essential

#### Register

View revised maps and photomontages to get an impression of what the stage 1 wind farm may look like from various locations. We welcome your feedback on our project.



#### Neighbour Benefit Sharing Program

Neoen is committed to a fair, transparent and easy-to-understand neighbour benefits sharing scheme. Our new neighbour benefits scheme considers the distance of neighbouring dwellings to the proposed wind turbines for both stages 1 and 2 of the project. The neighbour benefit sharing applies to neighbours with a residential dwelling within 3.5km of a wind turbine. The benefits are proposed to be shared with neighbours as per the attached booklet, which is also available on our project website:

#### **Benefit Sharing Program**

The payments are annual and are proposed to commence at the beginning of the operations phase of the project, which is typically 25-30 years.

Neoen's neighbour benefits scheme does not include any "gagging" clauses. If a neighbour wishes to accept proposed neighbour benefits, this does not prevent them from expressing their views for or against the project, both privately and publicly.

The neighbour benefits are proposed **in addition** to the Community Benefits Fund, proposed to be
\$200,000 per annum throughout the operations phase based on the current size for stages 1 and 2.

### Feedback & Registering Your Interest

If you would like to provide your feedback about the proposed Thunderbolt Energy Hub, you may do so by completing the community feedback forms via:

#### www.surveymonkey.com/r/neoenthu nderbolt

If you are interested in learning what types of jobs and suppliers are typically required throughout construction and operations, or you wish to register your interest, please visit the below link.

#### Work With Us

For more information, please contact: Joanna Murphy joanna.murphy@neoen.com 1800 966 207 https://thunderboltenergyhub.com.au/



THUNDERBOLT

### **Project Bulletin**

1 October 2021

Thunderbolt Energy Hub is a hybrid renewable energy project with the ability to provide affordable, reliable power to New South Wales consumers. The project is proposed near Kentucky, approximately 47km north-east of Tamworth.

#### Community Information Sessions, 15 – 18 September 2021

Thank you to the community members who attended our in person and/or online events recently. We were pleased to share these project updates with you and are on track to submitting the Development Application for Stage 1 at the end of October.

Project posters and information are still available online for anyone who missed the event: <u>https://thunderboltenergyhub.com.au/virtual-community-event/</u>

Thank you to community members who attended the project presentation and Q&A on Thursday and Saturday (16 and 18 September). A video recording of the presentation is available on our website together with questions and answers from both webinars for anyone who could not attend or would like to view the presentation again.

A hard copy of the presentation slides can be provided upon request.

Presentation and Q&A

https://thunderboltenergyhub.com.au/project-presentation-and-ga-september-2021/

#### **Photomontages**

Neoen's visual consultant from Moir Landscape Architecture, have prepared six photomontages from public locations surrounding stage 1 of the project. These photomontages are 360-degree images with the proposed wind turbines superimposed into the image. This provides you with an indication of what the wind farm may look like from different distances and points surrounding the project.



#### Photomontages Stage 1

https://thunderboltenergyhub.com.au



https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/ne oenthunderbolt

Share your feedback with us

We would encourage community members to complete a feedback survey so we can best understand the views and key concerns of the community. If you would like to share your feedback, please fill in the feedback survey in the link below. Alternatively, please do not hesitate to reach out to myself if you wish to discuss any aspects of the project directly.

Feedback Survey

#### **Registering Your Interest**

If you are interested in learning what types of jobs and suppliers are typically required throughout construction and operations, or you wish to register your interest, please visit the below link.



https://thunderboltenergyhub.com.au /work-with-us/

### Work With Us

For more information, please contact: Joanna Murphy joanna.murphy@neoen.com 1800 966 207 https://thunderboltenergyhub.com.au/

### Appendix BCommunity Events, Newsletters and Bulletins

### **B.1 Community Events**

### B.1.1 Concerned Neighbour Meeting – February 2020

In February 2020, prior to one-on-one neighbour meetings commencing, a meeting was held with a concerned group within the community to discuss some of the key concerns by these residents. The group consisted mainly of adjacent neighbours and some community members who live a few kilometres from the project. The key concerns were sent to Neoen prior to the meeting, such that Neoen could present as much information as possible in response. Some questions and responses included:

- Grid connection how will it work and is there sufficient capacity?
- Does Neoen receive Government subsidies?
- Can aerial firefighting occur around wind turbines?
- Will Neoen decommission the wind and solar farm at its own cost?
- Will roads be improved?
- Do wind farms cause property values to decrease?
- Can wind be accurately measured throughout a drought with different weather patterns than usual?

The concerns were addressed in detail at the meeting and further information shared about the development process. Key issues, as per Table 10, were also discussed. The outcome was that some attendees felt less concerned following the meeting, while others preferred to discuss particular items further during one-on-one meetings.

### B.1.2 Community Drop-In Session – September 2020

A community drop-in session was hosted on 16 September 2020. The wider community was invited to attend this meeting through advertising in local newspapers and the Thunderbolt Energy Hub project website. Community members that Neoen had previously spoken to and who had expressed an interest in being kept informed of the project were informed directly about the Community Information Day through sending a flyer by email or mail.

Neoen displayed project information posters in a local café in Uralla for members of the public to learn more about the proposal and provided feedback verbally and/or through a feedback survey. This allowed Neoen to collect further information about the main concerns of the community regarding the project as well as to seek feedback on which local community projects and initiatives could be sponsored by the project's Community Benefit Fund. Approximately 36 people attended the event.

Neoen had initially planned to host the event in Kentucky as the proposed project is located in Kentucky. At this time the Kentucky Hall was undertaking renovations and was not available for Neoen to host the dropin sessions. Other venues in Kentucky were also not available at this time. Neoen felt that as Uralla is the closest town to Kentucky, this was an appropriate venue for the event.

### B.1.3 Community Information Sessions – September 2021

Another community drop-in session was planned for 16 September 2021 in the Kentucky Hall. Advertising for the event commenced in late August 2021. Neoen received requests from the community to host the event on a weekend or during different hours of the day instead when more people may be able to attend. Neoen took this feedback on board and decided to extend the event over four days (Wednesday 15 September to Saturday 18 September 2021) and ensured that information sessions would be held during various hours of the day to meet the community's availability. Due to the Covid-19 restrictions, a number of in-person and online information sessions were hosted by Neoen. These included:

- Information posters were displayed in the Kentucky Hall between Wednesday 15th September and Saturday 18th September, allowing the community to browse posters in their own time, take an information booklet and submit a feedback survey. Neoen's local community liaison officer was present to answer questions. She also had her laptop available on a table in the hall if any community member wished to speak with Neoen's project manager directly via a Teams call. The hall was open during the following hours:
  - o 15 September: 9am 11am
  - o 16 September: 2pm 6pm
  - o 17 September: 4pm 6pm
  - o 18 September: 10am 12pm
- A virtual community day was also added to our website (which is still live) for those who could not attend in person. The virtual website includes maps, the latest information booklet, FAQs, video links, a link to the panoramas and a link to the feedback survey.
- Two presentation and Q&A sessions were held online, where Neoen and five specialists presented information on the visual, noise, aviation, biodiversity and social impact assessments. Community members were able to ask Neoen and the respective specialists questions through Zoom's Q&A function, which were answered live. A video recording of the presentation is available on the project website together with a copy of the presentation slides and a written copy of the Q&A.

A total of 17 people attended the Kentucky Hall in-person over the four days. Of the in-person attendees 53% were community members from Kentucky, 23% were proposed Stage 2 landholders and 23% were from the nearby towns of Walcha or Uralla. Most attendees provided very positive feedback about the proposed Stage 1 project.

The project presentations and Q&A sessions were attended by eight people on Thursday evening 16 September and six people on Saturday 18 September. When attendees registered for the event, they were asked to select where they live. Of all attendees, 1 was from Armidale, 1 from Walcha Rd/Woolbrook, 1 from Uralla, 6 from Kentucky, 3 from 'other NSW' and 2 from 'other Australia'.

### **B.2 Newsletters and Bulletins**

### B.2.1 December 2020

A community newsletter was developed and distributed via email (16 December) and via Australia Post in the local area surrounding the project. It was also uploaded to the project website<sup>16</sup> and are included in Appendix A. A news<sup>17</sup> item was also uploaded to the Thunderbolt Energy Hub.

The newsletter contained a project overview, a list of project benefits, information about Neoen, a preliminary wind farm layout map, information that the Wind Farm and Solar Farm Scoping Reports had been submitted to NSW DPIE, a link to Neoen's ecology video, a note about the recent community drop-in session and notice that a local community liaison officer had been engaged.

The engagement of the community liaison officer, based in Kentucky, was also added to the project website as a news<sup>18</sup> item.

### B.2.2 July 2021

A Project Bulletin was emailed to all community members on Neoen's email mailing list and uploaded to the project website's documents page. The bulletin included:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Thunderbolt Energy Hub Newsletters: <u>https://thunderboltenergyhub.com.au/documents/</u>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Environmental Assessments and Scoping Reports: <u>https://thunderboltenergyhub.com.au/environmental-assessments-and-scoping-reports/</u>

reports/ <sup>18</sup> Community Engagement: <u>https://thunderboltenergyhub.com.au/community-engagement/</u>

- Neoen's decision to change the delivery of the project to two stages, starting with the development of a wind farm to the north of the New England Hwy as Stage 1.
- Information that a community drop-in session would be planned at the end of August/early September and that a date would be announced.
- Information that Neoen was developing a revised neighbour benefit-sharing approach, which would be in addition to the Community Benefits Program.
- An update that the CCC committee was established and that the first meeting was planned for late July/early August. The meeting minutes would be published on the project website.
- A link to the community feedback survey and Work with Us page for anyone interested in registering their interest in future jobs and supplier roles throughout construction and operation.

### B.2.3 September 2021

A Project Bulletin was emailed to all community members on Neoen's email mailing list and uploaded to the project website's documents page. The bulletin included:

- Details about the community information sessions to be held from 15 18 September, including a link to register for one of the two project presentation and Q&A sessions
- An announcement of the revised neighbour benefit sharing program, including a link to an information booklet about the program. The program information was also added to the project website.<sup>19</sup>
- A link to the community feedback survey and Work with Us page for anyone interested in registering their interest in future jobs and supplier roles throughout construction and operation.

### B.2.4 October 2021

A Project Bulletin was emailed to all community members on Neoen's email mailing list and uploaded to the project website's documents page. The bulletin included:

- A link to the virtual community event, which remains on the website, for anyone who could not attend the community information sessions
- A link to a video recording of the project presentation together with a copy of the presentation slides and written Q&A.
- A link to the public 360-degree panoramas on the project website
- A link to the community feedback survey
- A link to the community feedback survey and Work with Us page for anyone interested in registering their interest in future jobs and supplier roles throughout construction and operation.

A hard-copy of the bulletin was also sent to community members on Neoen's mailing list together with a project information booklet and a community feedback survey.

### **B.3 Advertising**

### B.3.1 September 2020

Neoen advertised for the first community drop-in session to be held on 16 September 2020 as follows:

- ¼ page advertisement in the Uralla Wordsworth on 7 September 2021
- ¼ page advertisement and editorial in the Apsley Advocate on 9 September 2020
- Editorial in the Northern Daily Leader on 10 September 2020
- Advertisement emailed to Neoen's email mailing list on 10 September 2020

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Neighbour Benefits Program: <u>https://thunderboltenergyhub.com.au/local-benefits/</u>

### B.3.2 March 2021

Neoen wanted to ensure that community members were aware of the Thunderbolt Energy Hub project. While Neoen tried to reach out to as many neighbours and community members as possible through direct phone contact and by dropping a booklet in the letterbox, it was not feasible to reach all community members in this way.

For this reason, Neoen decided to approach local cafes and businesses to request for a general project information posters to be displayed in their windows. Cafes and businesses were approached in the local towns surrounding the project, including Kentucky, Uralla, Benedemeer and Walcha. The posters were titled *"Learn more about renewable energy coming to Kentucky"* and included a brief project information snapshot and Neoen's contact details, allowing community members to make contact with Neoen to learn more about the project. An advertisement containing this information was also included in the Uralla Wordsworth on 22 March 2021.

### B.3.3 April 2021

Neoen advertised for nominations for community members for the project's Community Consultative Committee (CCC) in the following ways:

- Uploaded to the project website news page, 1 April 2021<sup>20</sup>
- Sent via email to Neoen's contact database, 7 April 2021
- Included as a one-page advertisement in the Apsley Advocate, 14 April 2021
- Included as a one-page advertisement in the Uralla Wordsworth, 19 April 2021
- Digital advertisement in the Northern Daily Leader, 17 28 April 2021

Posters advertising the event were also displayed in local cafes and businesses.

#### B.3.4 August – September 2021

An advertisement for the second drop-in session, planned on 16 September 2021, was emailed to all community members on Neoen's email list on 23 August. An advertisement was included in the Uralla Wordsworth on 23 August and in the Apsley Advocate on 25 August. The advertisement was also uploaded to the Thunderbolt Energy Hub website on 23 August.

Based on feedback received from the community, the community drop-in session was changed to include several community information sessions from 15 – 18 September. A new advertisement was included on the project website on 27 August. Revised advertising for the community information sessions was emailed to all community members on Neoen's email list on 1 September. An advertisement was included in the Uralla Wordsworth on 6 September, in the Apsley Advocate on 8 September, and in the Northern Daily Leader on 11 September. An online advertisement was also included in the Northern Daily Leader from 12 – 18 September. Posters advertising the event were also displayed in local cafes and businesses in Kentucky, Bendemeer, Uralla and Walcha in the weeks leading up to the event.

A new project information booklet was produced for the event, containing the latest project information. The advertisement for the community information sessions was included on the front cover of the booklet. Neoen distributed a hard-copy of the booklet to residents in Kentucky using the Australia Post distribution system before the event.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> CCC advertising on Neoen's project website: <u>https://thunderboltenergyhub.com.au/ccc-nominations/</u>



### B.3.5 October 2021

A project bulletin was emailed to all community members on Neoen's email list on 1 October, including the latest information booklet as a pdf attachment. The bulletin included a link to the video recording of the project presentation, a copy of the presentation slides and a written copy of the Q&A. The video recording and pdf documents were included on the project website.<sup>21</sup> Neoen's community liaison officer mailed a hard-copy of the bulletin, project information booklet and feedback survey to over 80 people who are on Neoen's mailing list.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Project Presentation and Q&A: <u>https://thunderboltenergyhub.com.au/project-presentation-and-ga-september-2021/</u>

### Appendix C – Social Impact Assessment Risk Rating

#### Table 19 Social Impact Risk Rating (source: Umwelt)

Social impact	Project aspect	Social impact	Duration 22	Extent/affected parties	Stakeholder Perceived significance <sup>23</sup>	Signi	ficance ra	ting <sup>24</sup>	Social mitigations/	Residual
theme		description				L	М	S	enhancement measures	significance
Community/ Accessibility/ Way of Life	Project construction	Population influx caused by the construction workforce resulting in temporary change in community composition and township service capacity in select towns	С	Broader community Local government Local service providers	L	D	2	L	Prepare accommodation, employment, and procurement strategy prior to construction (as part of the Local Participation Plan)	L
Surroundings Project Livelihoods operations	Project construction and	Altered landscape affecting people's	C & O	Some neighbouring landholders	Н	С	3	Μ	implement visual mitigation measures to	L
	sense of place, rural character, visual amenity, and community values		Local community (Kentucky, Kentucky South, Wollun) Community and environmental groups	Н	D	2	L	address landholder concerns where possible, Communicate outcomes of the Stage 1 LVIA to	L	
				Broader community	Μ	D	2	L	interested stakeholders Avoid ecological sites where possible	L
	Project	Impacts on	C & O	Host landholders	L	D	2	L	Decommissioning plan	L
	decommissioning	surroundings and future land uses		Neighbouring landholders	Н	D	2	L	to be develop pre- closure of the wind farm	L

 $<sup>^{22}</sup>$  C = Construction Phase; O = Operations Phase  $^{23}$  Level of concern or interest from the perspective of the affected party

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> L = Likelihood (A: Almost Certain, B: Likely, C: Possible, D: Unlikely, E: Very Unlikely); M = Magnitude (1: Minimal, 2: Minor, 3: Moderate, 4: Major, 5: Transformational); S = Significance rating (L: Low, M: Medium, H: High, VH: Very High)

Social impact	Project aspect	Social impact	Duration	uration Extent/affected Stakeholder Perceived Significance rating <sup>2</sup>		ting <sup>24</sup>	Social mitigations/	Residual		
theme		description	22	parties	significance <sup>23</sup>	L	M S enhancement measures	significance		
		post decommissioning		Community and environmental groups	Н	D	2	L	in consultation with relevant stakeholders	L
				Broader community	L	D	2	L		L
	Project operation	Perceived public safety and health risk due to reduced access for bushfire management	C & O	Host and neighbouring landholders Emergency services Community and environmental groups Broader community	Н	D	2	L	Development of a Bush Fire Emergency Management Plan in consultation with the RFS Ongoing engagement with local community regarding concerns	L
	Project construction and operations	Social amenity and way of life impacts due to noise, vibration, lighting due to changes in how people experience their	С	Some neighbouring landholders	Н	С	2	М	Construction management planning to consider proximity of activities to residential properties, including active engagement during construction	L
		surrounds		Residents along the transport route	Μ	С	2	М	Construction management planning to consider activities affecting local community, including active engagement during construction	L
			0	Neighbouring landholders	Н	С	2	М	Feedback mechanisms for community to submit questions/	L
				Local community (Kentucky, Kentucky South, Wollun)	М	D	2	L	complaints	L

Social impact	Project aspect	Social impact	Duration	Extent/affected	Stakeholder Perceived	Significance rating <sup>24</sup>			Social mitigations/	Residual
theme		description	22	parties	significance <sup>23</sup>	L M S enhancement measures	significance			
	Project construction and operations	Social amenity and way of life impacts due to air quality / dust	С	Neighbouring landholders Local community (Kentucky, Kentucky South, Wollun)	L	D	2	L	Construction management planning to consider proximity of activities to residential properties, including active engagement during construction	L
			0	Neighbouring landholders Local community (Kentucky, Kentucky South, Wollun)	L	D	1	L	Feedback mechanisms for community to submit questions / complaints	L
Accessibility / Surroundings	Project operation	Renewable energy provision reducing effects of climate change	0	Broader community NSW community Australia	H (+)	A	4	VH (+)	Consideration of local energy provision projects through Community Benefit sharing program	
Livelihood	Project construction and operations	Decline in property values due to proximity of the Project	C & O	Neighbouring landholders	Н	D	2	L	Community benefits sharing program Neighbour Benefits Sharing Program	L
	Project construction	Provision of employment, training and upskilling of local people. Commercial benefit through procurement opportunities for local business and service providers	С	Local and regional businesses, contractors and suppliers Local and regional service providers Job seekers Local Government Broader community	M	В	4	н (+)	Prepare Accommodation, Employment and Procurement Strategy prior to construction in consultation with local stakeholders Indigenous Participation Plan co-developed with Aboriginal stakeholders	

Social impact	Project aspect	Social impact	Duration	Extent/affected	Stakeholder Perceived	Signi	ficance ra	ting <sup>24</sup>	Social mitigations/	Residual
theme		description	22	parties	significance <sup>23</sup>	L	М	S	enhancement measures	significance
Project   construction and   operations   Presence of the   Project   construction and   operations	Project construction and operations	Loss of agricultural land and impacts to land use	C & O	Host landholders/ farmers	L	D	2	L	Long-term lease agreement with the associated landholders includes provision for Neoen's decommissioning obligations Provision of information to landholders regarding	L
		Disruption to farming practices and land use	C & O             	Neighbouring landholders/farmers Broader community Local Government Community and	М	D	2	L		L
				environmental groups					key research outcomes Ongoing engagement with neighbouring landholders	
	Presence of the Project	Increased tourism activity	0	Tourism providers Broader community	L	С	2	M (+)	Engagement with tourism providers	L
	Project construction and operations	Distributive equity issues between host and neighbouring landholders	C & O	Host and neighbouring landholders	Μ	С	1	L	Proactively consult with Project neighbours to collaboratively develop Community Benefit Strategy and associated programs targeted to nearby residents	L
	Project construction and	Income diversification for property owners through host and neighbour payments	C & O	Host landholders	M (+)	A	2	M (+)	Ensure Project benefits are equitably	
	operations			Near neighbours	M (+)	В	2	M (+)	distributed, including community grant program funding and neighbour benefit scheme	

Social impact	Project aspect	ct Social impact Duration Extent/affected Stakeholder Perceived Significance rating <sup>24</sup> Social mi		Social mitigations/	Residual					
theme		description	22	parties	significance <sup>23</sup>	L	м	S	enhancement measures	significance
	Project construction	Strain on accommodation and housing market due to construction workforce demand, affecting accessibility and availability for other users	С	Accommodation service providers Visitors and tourists Local Government Broader community	L	С	3	Μ	Develop Accommodation, Employment and Procurement Strategy (as part of the Local Participation Plan) in consultation with local stakeholders ahead of construction	L
	Project construction	Impacts relating to road access and way of life as a result of increased traffic movements during construction	С	Broader community Road users	L	С	2	Μ	Construction Management Plan to include traffic management measures and local road changes	L
Community	Project construction and operations	Increased social investment at the local level through provision of Community Benefits Fund	C & O	Local community (Kentucky, Kentucky South, Wollun) Broader community	M (+)	В	2	M (+)	Ensure targeting of Community Benefit Strategy to local needs, priorities, and aspirations Ensure neighbouring landholders and other sensitive or vulnerable groups are considered as a discreet recipient	
Decision- Making Systems/ Community	Presence of the Project	Impacts on sense of community, community cohesion and sense of place		Host and neighbour landholders Local community (Kentucky, Kentucky South, Wollun)	M	С	2	М	Proactive, thorough, and transparent consultation process through Project planning, assessment, and development phases Community benefit sharing program Neighbour Benefits Sharing Program	L

Social impact	Project aspect	Social impact	Duration	Extent/affected	Stakeholder Perceived	Significance rating <sup>24</sup>			Social mitigations/	Residual
theme		description	22	parties	significance <sup>23</sup>	L	М	S	enhancement measures	significance
Surroundings	Presence of the Project	Impacts on community ecological values (including access to water)	C & O	Host and neighbour landholders Local community (Kentucky, Kentucky South, Wollun) Community and environmental groups Broader community	н	С	1	L	Communication of key management measures and outcomes to key stakeholders	L
Accessibility	Project construction and operations	Impacts to access to services and facilities including waste services and telecommunications	C & O	Local community (Kentucky, Kentucky South, Wollun) Local Government Broader community	Μ	С	1	L	Engagement with local council and service providers	L
	Project construction	Cumulative impacts on community services as a result of construction workforce in the region	С	Local community (Kentucky, Kentucky South, Wollun) Local Government Service providers and local businesses Broader community	M	С	3	Μ	Develop Accommodation, Employment and Procurement Strategy (as part of the Local Participation Plan) in consultation with local stakeholders ahead of construction	L
Health and wellbeing Project	Presence of the Project	Perceived effects of the Project development causing stress, anxiety, and health effects on local residents.	C & O	Neighbour landholders Local community (Kentucky, Kentucky South, Wollun)	Н	С	2	М	Ongoing engagement with local community	L
		Impacts to physical health as the result of Project impacts (i.e. EMF)	0	Neighbour landholders Local community (Kentucky, Kentucky South, Wollun)	М	D	1	L		L
Culture	Project construction and operations	Impacts on Aboriginal cultural heritage	C&O	Aboriginal community	M	D	2	L	Ongoing engagement with Aboriginal Stakeholders	L