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Rothbury Battery Energy
Storage System

Community and Stakeholder Outcomes Report

March 2026

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Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands where the Ausgrid distribution network is located, and we pay our respects to the elders, past, present and emerging. Our network and operations span the traditional country of 17 languages, tribal and nation groups in Sydney, the Central Coast and Hunter regions of New South Wales.

We want to lead and foster a workforce, and approach to our operations, that embraces the learnings, voices, cultures and histories of these Traditional Owners into our own organisation. We acknowledge the profound and enduring contributions of Indigenous peoples to our shared communities and commit to working collaboratively towards reconciliation, justice, and respect for all First Nations peoples. We commit to planning and delivering engagement that is respectful of First Nations people and works toward reconciliation.

Acronyms

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AEMO	Australian Energy Market Operator
BESS	Battery Energy Storage System
CSEP	Community and Stakeholder Engagement Plan
DNSP	Distributed Network Service Provider
DPHI	Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
EP&A Act	Environmental Protection and Assessment (NSW) Act 1979
EWO	Energy and Water Ombudsman
IAP2	International Association of Public Participation
MWh	Megawatt-hour
NEM	National Energy Market
NECF	National Energy Customer Framework
SAL	Suburbs and Localities area for ABS Census data
SEAR	Secretary's Environmental Assessment Requirements
SEIA	Social and Economic Impact Assessment
SEM	Stakeholder Engagement Manager
SSDA	State Significant Development Application

1. Executive summary

Ausgrid is advancing its commitment to a more sustainable and resilient energy future by proposing the implementation of Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) connected to existing substations across its network. These storage systems are critical to supporting the growth of renewable energy, stabilising the electricity grid, and ensuring reliable power supply.

Ausgrid has led the planning, design, and approvals for these projects, though will transition construction, operation, and maintenance to a third-party provider.

Large scale energy storage connected to the distribution network will help manage electricity demand, maintain network stability and improve grid reliability. By better leveraging existing network assets, Ausgrid Group can improve network resilience during extreme weather and network events, helping defer expensive network investment while reducing the environmental and community impacts of the transition.

1.1. About this Report

This Engagement Outcomes Report provides an overview of the engagement activities undertaken for the Rothbury BESS between March 2025 and March 2026. It details the engagement methods, stakeholder priorities, and outcomes, highlighting Ausgrid's proactive engagement with communities and key stakeholders.

A robust engagement approach was adopted, incorporating diverse engagement methods such as stakeholder briefings, neighbour meetings, site visits, pop-up information sessions, surveys, phone calls, and email correspondence.

While feedback highlighted a good level of understanding of energy storage and its purpose, engagement showed mixed community sentiment towards the Project. There was also early opposition from residents near the site, who expressed particular concern about fire risk, visual impact and noise.

In response to this feedback, Ausgrid has implemented specific management and mitigation measures, as detailed in the EIS, demonstrating its commitment to transparency, responsive decision-making, and meaningful community engagement.

1.2. Snapshot of engagement statistics

Engagement activities from March 2025 to March 2026:



30 meetings held, both in-person and online



2,150 unique webpage visitors



60+ people attended four pop-up information sessions in the local community



351 newsletters distributed to households and businesses



12 people completed an online survey



37 phone calls or emails received



4,467 webpage views



33 letters sent to key stakeholders

**Numbers as at 2 March 2026*

2. Background

2.1. Purpose of this report

This report presents a comprehensive overview of the engagement approach and activities undertaken for Rothbury BESS to date. The report has been prepared in line with the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure's (DPHI) *Undertaking Engagement Guidelines for State Significant Projects*, and in accordance with the Project's Secretary's Environmental Assessment Requirements (SEARs).

This report provides a detailed account of the following:

- **Engagement program:** outline of the activities and methods used to engage with stakeholders.
- **Communication channels and feedback mechanisms:** details on how information was shared and how feedback was collected.
- **Promotion of engagement opportunities:** strategies employed to inform the public and encourage participation.
- **Audience and stakeholder identification:** identification of key audiences involved in the engagement process.
- **Response statistics and analysis:** compilation and analysis of the feedback received.
- **Next steps:** outline of the future actions based on the engagement outcomes.

Proactive, accessible and targeted communications and engagement are essential to delivering a successful project outcome. Engaging with the appropriate stakeholders as early as possible has informed project planning and enabled the development of the Project's relationship with the community and stakeholders.

2.2. SEARs requirements and response

This report aims to address the SEARs for SSD-85939708. Table 1 identifies the relevant SEARs requirement/s and corresponding reference/s within this report.

Table 1 Response to SEARs

Reference	Secretary's Environmental Assessment Requirements	Where addressed in this report
Key issues	The EIS must include:	
	Social – including: an assessment of the social impacts or benefits of the project for the region and the State as a whole in accordance with the Social Impact Assessment Guideline (DPE, 2023), including consideration of any increase in demand for community infrastructure services, and consideration of construction workforce accommodation.	EIS Appendix O: Social and Economic Impact Assessment
	Economic and Benefit-Sharing – including: an assessment of the economic impacts or benefits of the project for the region and the State as a whole and provide details of any proposed voluntary benefit sharing, having regard for the Benefit-Sharing Guideline 2024 and Private Agreement Guideline 2024.	EIS Appendix O: Social and Economic Impact Assessment

Engagement	During the preparation of the EIS, you should consult with the relevant local, State or Commonwealth Government authorities, infrastructure and service providers, community groups, affected landowners and any exploration licence and/or mineral title holders. In particular, you must undertake detailed consultation with affected landowners surrounding the development, the owners of all exploration licences across the proposed development, the operator of any pipelines on or adjacent to the site, and all relevant government agencies, including the relevant local Council. The EIS must: • detail how engagement undertaken was consistent with the Undertaking Engagement Guidelines for State Significant Projects (DPHI, 2024); and	Section 4: Community and Stakeholder Engagement Strategy (CSEP)
	• describe the consultation process and the issues raised, and identify where the design of the development has been amended in response to these issues. Where amendments have not been made to address an issue, an explanation should be provided.	Section 7: Community sentiment and insights Section 8: Feedback raised and response

3. Project description

Ausgrid is seeking development consent for a BESS with a capacity of 135MW at Rothbury, NSW. The Project is being assessed as a State Significant Development Application (SSDA) by DPHI.

The proposed location of the BESS is at 1309 Wine Country Drive, Rothbury, as shown in Figure 1.

The site is located within the Cessnock local government area, approximately 47 km north-west of the Newcastle CBD, and about 14 km north of the town of Cessnock.

The proposed location of the BESS is on property owned by Ausgrid, adjacent to an existing Ausgrid substation.

The site has two street frontages: Old North Road and Wine Country Drive, and is surrounded by rural lots. The closest building is about 190 m south and is a residential property. There is also a housing estate under development 1.5 km to the north of the site. Nearby properties are mostly vineyards, holiday properties and residential rural lots.

The Project comprises a BESS facility that would store electricity from the grid and release electricity during periods of high demand.

Features of the Project would include but not be limited to:

- Construction and operation of a BESS with a capacity of approximately 135MW (construction of the Project may be carried out in stages)
- Connection of the BESS to the existing Rothbury substation via an underground connection
- Other ancillary infrastructure and services required such as internal access roads, laydown areas, control and operational buildings.

The Project is expected to result in significant benefits to the state and local community, including:

- Improved network security and diversified energy supply and storage within NSW
- Support for increased renewable power generation during daytime peak periods, placing downward pressure on wholesale electricity prices in accordance with the NSW Integrated System Plan
- Support economic development within NSW through the creation of new jobs during the construction and operation phase.



Figure 1: Proposed site location

4. Community and Stakeholder Engagement Plan (CSEP)

This section outlines the engagement activities delivered between March 2025 and March 2026 to raise community and stakeholder awareness of, and invite feedback on, the Project.

The CSEP was prepared to support engagement over the Project lifecycle, including phased consultation to inform the Scoping Report and EIS. The CSEP will continue to be reviewed as the Project moves through to construction, continuing to guide the engagement undertaken by Ausgrid and its representatives or contractors.

The engagement methodology outlined in the CSEP has been informed by, and is consistent with, DPHI's *Undertaking Engagement Guidelines for State Significant Projects*.

Specifically, the engagement activities outlined in the CSEP support the following Project phases:

- Preparation of the Scoping Report (request for SEARs)
- Preparation of the EIS
- All project milestones, including throughout construction and operation.

The CSEP is based on:

- Ausgrid's Engagement Principles
- Ausgrid's Community Engagement Framework
- Ausgrid's Engagement Framework 2024–2029 Regulatory Proposal

- International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) standards (Table 2).

4.1. Engagement approach

Ausgrid sought to establish and maintain authentic relationships with the community and interested stakeholders through early consultation and clear, effective communication.

The engagement approach focused on stakeholders identified as being most interested in, or potentially affected by, the Project, with supporting communications provided to the broader community.

This approach was informed by a stakeholder sentiment analysis and early engagement, which showed:

- residents within 1.5 km of the Project site demonstrated a high level of interest in the Project; and
- residents beyond 1.5 km of the Project site, across the broader Cessnock area, showed comparatively low levels of interest.

In response, Ausgrid prioritised direct engagement with nearby residents, while keeping the wider community informed through ongoing updates on the project webpage, newsletter distributions, and via established channels such as Cessnock City Council's email newsletter.

4.1.1. Engagement principles and objectives

Ausgrid's engagement approach was guided by clear principles designed to support meaningful, effective, and proportionate engagement with landholders, stakeholders, and the broader community.

Based on the community profile (refer to the CSEP for detailed analysis), engagement for the Project was undertaken in line with the following principles and processes:

- Information was provided in a clear, accessible and plain-English format, supported by visuals to assist understanding of complex and technical content.
- Engagement was inclusive and transparent, with a broad range of stakeholders involved, including traditionally hard-to-reach groups and communities.
- A multi-channel, community-focused approach was used, combining digital and in-person methods to maximise reach and enable face-to-face participation through community information sessions.
- Adjoining landholders, stakeholders and local communities were provided with timely and relevant project information and given opportunities to provide feedback.
- Communication with landholders and community stakeholders was appropriately documented.
- All interested stakeholders were provided with a responsive and accessible point of contact for enquiries, complaints and suggestions.
- Stakeholders with a potential interest in the Project were identified early and provided with consistent messaging and opportunities to be heard.
- Engagement activities were planned and delivered to minimise disruption to landholders, affected stakeholders and the wider community.
- Engagement supported the broader Program to meet planning approval requirements and assist in securing approvals from regulators and decision-makers in a timely manner.

4.2. Engagement methodology

Engagement activities to inform the SSDA were undertaken through a staged approach:

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- **Engagement to inform Scoping Report:** March – June 2025
- **Engagement to inform EIS:** July 2025 – March 2026.

Activities were designed to communicate information about the Project to nearby landowners, local council, Members of Parliament and the local community.

The engagement approach was adapted from the IAP2 spectrum. The engagement objectives during scoping and EIS phases aligned with the goals of **informing** and **consulting** with stakeholders and the community to obtain feedback to inform each stage.

Table 2 IAP2 Spectrum

	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Public participation goal	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/ or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
Promise to the public	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.

5. Stakeholders

As outlined in *Undertaking Engagement Guidelines for State Significant Projects*, DPHI defines stakeholders as individuals, special interest groups, councils and government agencies with an interest in or that are likely to be affected by the project.

In line with these *Guidelines*, Table 3 outlines the stakeholders that have been consulted about the Project.

Table 3 Stakeholder groups

Government authority	Government agency or service provider	Community	First Nations
Local Cessnock City Council	Transport for NSW	Adjoining landowners	Mindaribba Local Aboriginal Land Council
State - DPHI (Planning Assessment team) - Clayton Barr MP (Member for Cessnock)	Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water – Conservation Programs, Heritage & Regulation Group	- Surrounding residents and businesses (refer to Table 4 below) - Hunter Valley Wine & Tourism Association	Traditional Owners of the area (Awabakal, Wonnarua and Darkinjung peoples)
Federal Dan Repacholi MP (Member for Hunter)	- NBN - Telstra - Transgrid - Ausgrid		Registered Aboriginal Parties

5.1. First Nations engagement

As an infrastructure planner, Ausgrid has a responsibility to involve First Nations communities in project planning and delivery. Ausgrid is doing this by forming ongoing and meaningful relationships with the Indigenous communities whose Country the Rothbury BESS is located on.

First Nations engagement for this Project has been guided by:

- Advice and best practice informed by First Nations community consultation
- Aboriginal Heritage consultant (in line with Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Assessment requirements)

5.2. Community consultation area

The community that was consulted is shown in the catchment area below. A total of three project newsletters were distributed in this area, with a further newsletter published online and emailed directly to those who had participated in previous engagement. This area was strategically defined with the intention that all community members interested in, or potentially affected by, the Project were included.

The area captures nearby residential and business properties in Rothbury, North Rothbury and Lovedale that are in close proximity to the site. It is defined by a 2 km radius around the site, and includes 117 properties.

Because of the semi-rural nature of the area, copies of each newsletter were also delivered to Cessnock Library to increase accessibility and Project visibility.

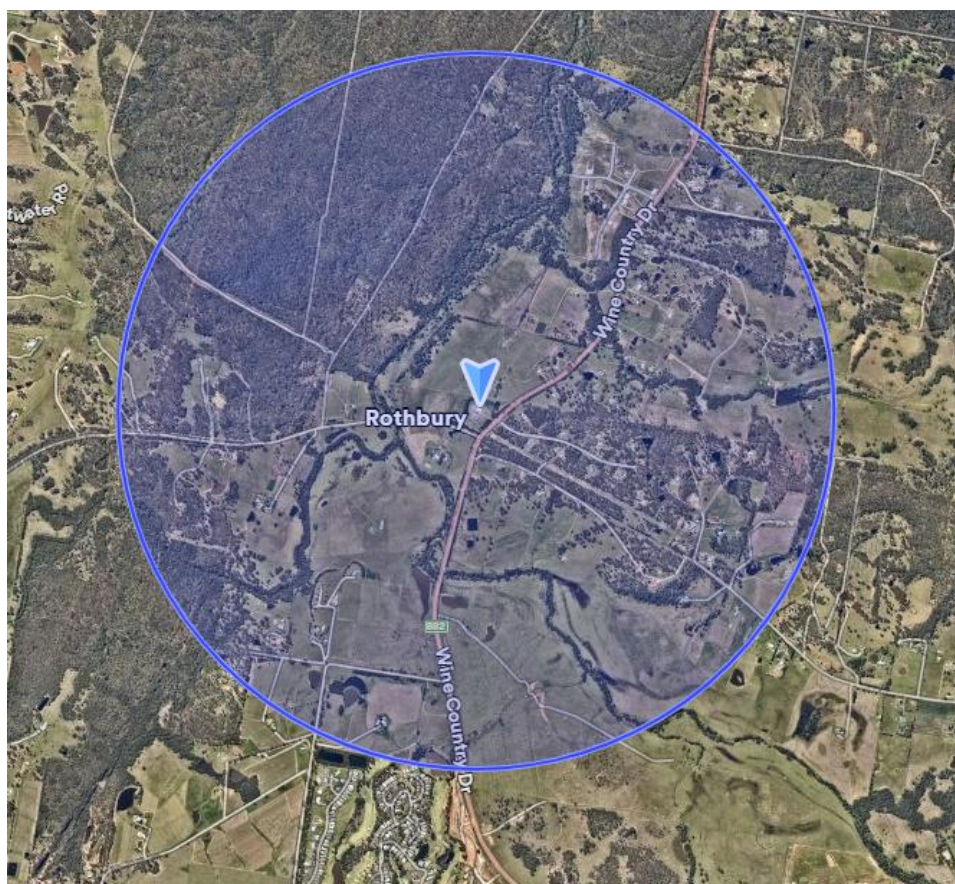


Figure 3 Community consultation catchment area

5.3. Stakeholder register

Table 4 outlines the stakeholders consulted as part of the Project engagement program, including the methods used and the timing of engagement activities. Outcomes from all engagement interactions are summarised in Section 8 of this report.

Table 4 Stakeholder interactions

Stakeholder	Date	Details
Government and elected representatives		
<i>Local</i>		
Cessnock City Council Staff	Scoping 24 February 2025 (letter) 13 March 2025 (meeting) 29 May, 18 June 2025 (email)	- Project introduced via letter February 2025 - Project introduction meeting March 2025 - Project update email following publication of project update newsletter and first round of community engagement - Project updates also shared via email for distribution to councillors

Stakeholder	Date	Details
	EIS 1 September, 4 November 2025, 26 February 2026(email) 26 February 2026 (meeting)	- Project update emails throughout 2025 and into 2026 - Project update meeting February 2026 to discuss results of technical assessments and future project benefit sharing
Elected councillors - Mayor Daniel Watton - Ward C councillors: - Cr Sophie Palmowski - Cr Mitchell Lea - Cr Mark Mason - Cr Mitchell Hill (Ward D)	Scoping 29 March 2025 (pop-up information session) 10 June 2025 (email)	- Cr Hill attended March 2025 pop-up information session and spoke with the project team - Project update email circulated to councillors via Council staff in June 2025
	EIS 17 and 29 September, 17 December 2025, 27 February 2026 (email) 27 September 2025 (pop-up information session)	- Cr Lea and Cr Hill attended September 2025 pop-up information session and spoke with the project team - Project update emails sent to Cr Lea and Cr Hill
State		
Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure	February 2025 – March 2026	Ongoing engagement, including via regular meetings, emails and phone calls
Transport for NSW	EIS Direct engagement via Amber Organisation Pty Ltd	Engagement during preparation of Traffic Impact Assessment
Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water – Conservation Programs, Heritage & Regulation Group	EIS Direct engagement via Niche Environment and Heritage Pty Ltd	Engagement during preparation of Biodiversity Development Assessment Report
Clayton Barr MP (Member for Cessnock)	Scoping 24 February 2025 (letter) 13 March 2025 (meeting) 29 May 2025 (email)	- Project introduced via letter February 2025 - Project introduction meeting March 2025 - Project update email following publication of project update newsletter and first round of community engagement
	EIS 1 September 2025 and 25 February 2026 (email)	- Project update emails and offers of meeting - Shared community newsletters
Federal		
Dan Repacholi MP (Member for Hunter)	Scoping 24 February 2025 (letter) 13 March 2025 (meeting) 29 May 2025 (email) 6 June 2025 (meeting)	- Project introduced via letter February 2025 - Project introduction meeting March 2025 - Project update email following publication of project update

Stakeholder	Date	Details
		newsletter and first round of community engagement Update provided during meeting about different project June 2025
	EIS 1 September 2025 and 25 February 2026 (email)	- Project update emails and offers of meeting - Shared community newsletters
Service providers		
Transgrid	February 2024 – February 2026	Ausgrid and Transgrid meet monthly. Ausgrid first raised its intention to pursue BESS connections with Transgrid in February 2024.
NBN	January 2025	Before You Dig notification submitted
Telstra	January 2025	Before You Dig notification submitted
Community		
Near neighbours (within 1.5 km)	Scoping March – April 2025: - Letters - Meetings - Phone calls and emails - Newsletter May 2025: - Newsletter - Phone calls and emails	- Project introduced via letter March 2025 - Project introduction meetings March – April 2025 with interested neighbours - Project introduction newsletter March 2025 - Invitation to attend pop-up information sessions - Feedback survey - Project update newsletter May 2025 to reflect what was heard during early engagement
	EIS July 2025 – March 2026: - Phone calls and emails - Meetings - Site visits - Newsletters (September 2025, February 2026)	- Regular update emails during EIS preparation - Project update meetings with interested neighbours - Site visits as part of visual impact assessment - Project update newsletter September 2025 (outline of planning process and timeline) - Invitation to attend pop-up information sessions - Project update newsletter February 2026 (results of technical assessments)

Stakeholder	Date	Details
		Feedback survey
Rothbury, North Rothbury, Lovedale and Huntlee communities (within 2km of Project)	Scoping 20 March 2025 (newsletter distribution) 29 March, 5 April 2025 (pop-up information session) 29 May 2025 (update newsletter)	- Project introduction newsletter distributed via mail to inform broader community and promote pop-up information sessions - Pop-up information sessions: - Cessnock Village Shopping Centre – 18 people engaged - Coles Huntlee – 22 people engaged - Update newsletter published on webpage May 2025, reflecting outcomes of early engagement
	EIS 1 September 2025 (newsletter distribution) 18 and 27 September 2025 (pop-up information session) 25 February 2026 (newsletter distribution) - Emails	- Project newsletters distributed via mail to inform broader community and promote pop-up information sessions - Pop-up information sessions: - Coles Huntlee – 16 people engaged - Rusty Jack's Pies & Coffee, Rothbury – 3 people engaged - Project update emails to those who signed up for mailing list at pop-up information sessions - Access to 1800 number and email for ongoing project communications
Hunter Valley Wine & Tourism Association	Scoping 18 March 2025 (letter) 25 March 2025 (email) 28 March 2025 (meeting) 29 May 2025 (update newsletter)	- Project introduced via letter March 2025 and meeting offered - Project introduction meeting March 2025 - Project update email following publication of project update newsletter and first round of community engagement May 2025
	EIS 8 September, 17 December 2025 (email) 1 September 2025 (newsletter distribution) 25 February 2026 (newsletter distribution)	- Ongoing project update emails throughout 2025 and into 2026 - Community newsletter shared via email - Project update meeting offered February 2026 and feedback survey promoted
ARIA Hunter Valley	Scoping	Project introduced via letter March 2025 and meeting offered

Stakeholder	Date	Details
Residential development	18 March 2025 (letter) 24 and 25 March 2025 (email) 28 March 2025 (meeting) 29 May 2025 (update newsletter)	- Project introduction meeting March 2025 - Project update email following publication of project update newsletter and first round of community engagement May 2025
	EIS 7 July, 8 September, 14 October, 17 December 2025, 27 February 2026 (email) 1 September 2025 (newsletter distribution) 25 February 2026 (newsletter distribution)	- Ongoing project update emails throughout 2025 and into 2026 - Community newsletters shared via email
First Nations		
<i>First Nations stakeholders</i>		
Mindaribba Local Aboriginal Land Council	Scoping 17 March 2025 (letter) 19 March 2025 (show face/office visit)	- Project introduced via letter March 2025 and meeting offered - In-person visit to build relationship and follow up on offer of meeting
	EIS 3 and 4 July, 3 December 2025, 25 February 2026 (email) 9 October 2025 (meeting) 1 September 2025 (newsletter distribution) 25 February 2026 (newsletter distribution)	- Ongoing project update emails throughout 2025 - Project introduction meeting October 2025 - Community newsletters shared via email

6. Engagement activities

This section includes further details of engagement activities undertaken during the development of the Scoping Report and EIS.

6.1.1. Scoping engagement

Table 5 Engagement activities during Scoping

Activities	Description
Stakeholder letters, emails and meetings	In March 2025, Ausgrid issued letters via email to:

Activities	Description
	- Government stakeholders, including Cessnock City Council, Clayton Barr MP (State Member for Cessnock) and Dan Repacholi MP (Federal Member for Hunter). - Hunter Valley Wine & Tourism Association - ARIA Hunter Valley, a nearby residential development. Letters introduced the Project and invited stakeholders to a meeting. Meetings were held with these stakeholders between March and June 2025.
Near neighbour letters, phone calls, emails and meetings	In March 2025, Ausgrid hand-delivered letters to properties within a 1.5 km radius of the Project. In total, 28 letters were distributed. This included follow-up letters to some properties. Letters introduced the Project and invited neighbours to attend a one-on-one project briefing with Ausgrid. Where contact details were available, follow-up phone calls and emails were sent to arrange the project briefing. Ausgrid held 11 project introduction meetings with neighbours at Cessnock Library. All neighbours that attended a meeting subsequently received a copy of the May 2025 project update newsletter via email, which outlined feedback from early engagement and next steps.
Community newsletter #1	On Thursday 20 March 2025, a community newsletter was distributed to 117 properties within a 2 km radius of the site. Figure 3 (above) shows the distribution area for the community newsletter. Due to the semi-rural nature of Rothbury, copies of the newsletter were also delivered to Cessnock Library to increase the accessibility of the information. The newsletter shared project details, including a location map, planning and approvals process, contact information (phone, email, website), and details of the pop-up information sessions held from 10am to 12pm at Cessnock Village Shopping Centre (Saturday 29 March 2025) and Coles Huntlee (Saturday 5 April 2025).
Project webpage	A dedicated webpage was established, outlining the purpose and location of the Project. The webpage also included a copy of the community newsletters, Project FAQs, a 'What is a BESS?' fact sheet and contact details (dedicated phone number and email). The webpage has been regularly updated.
Online community survey #1	An online survey was live between 28 March and 30 April 2025 to capture feedback about community concerns and values related to the Project. The survey was promoted at the pop-up information sessions and on the webpage. A total of 12 survey responses were received.
Pop-up information session #1 and #2	On Saturday 29 March and 5 April 2025, pop-up information sessions were held at Cessnock Village Shopping Mall and Coles Huntlee to introduce the Project to the community and capture feedback.

Activities	Description
	A total of 40 people stopped to speak to the Project team across the two sessions. 
1800 number and email address	A dedicated 1800 number and engagement email address were established at project inception. These details were included in all newsletters and other written communication with the community.
Project update newsletter #1	Due to the high interest and mixed sentiment shown during early engagement, Ausgrid published a project update newsletter in May 2025 on the Project webpage. This update was also emailed directly to those Ausgrid met with during March and April 2025. The newsletter summarised feedback received to date, outlined how Ausgrid will consider and respond to feedback, and set out the next steps for the Project.

6.1.2. EIS engagement

Table 6 Engagement activities during EIS

Activities	Description
Stakeholder emails and phone calls	Between July 2025 and March 2026, 48 emails were sent to stakeholders, including the Rothbury community and neighbouring landowners. This included emails to key stakeholders at Project milestones, such as when SEARs were received, and to promote pop-up information sessions. In addition, 10 outgoing phone calls were made to update stakeholders on the Project.
Stakeholder meetings	During preparation of the EIS, 7 meetings were held with stakeholders including Mindaribba LALC, local MPs, Cessnock City Council, neighbouring landowners and proponents of nearby projects.
Community newsletter #2	On 1 September 2025, a community newsletter was distributed to 117 properties within a 2 km radius of the site as per Figure 3 above. Copies of the newsletter were also delivered to Cessnock Library to increase the accessibility of the information.

Activities	Description
	The newsletter shared a project update and information on issues that the community highlighted as important, such as noise, safety and hazards, traffic and transport, and visual amenity. It outlined how these issues would be addressed through the planning process and encouraged community members to share their feedback. The newsletter also promoted the pop-up information sessions held from 3pm to 6pm at Coles Huntlee (Thursday 18 September 2025) and 9am to 12pm at Rusty Jack's Pies and Coffee (Saturday 27 September 2025).
Project webpage	The dedicated webpage was updated at key project milestones, including when SEARs were received. All community newsletters were published on the webpage, as well as the details of pop-up information sessions and the feedback survey.
Pop-up information session #3 and #4	On Thursday 18 September and Saturday 27 September 2025, pop-up information sessions were held at Coles Huntlee and Rusty Jack's Pies and Coffee to provide an update on the Project and capture feedback. About 20 people spoke to the team across the two sessions. Overall, interest and attendance were lower than the sessions held in March and April 2025.  
Community newsletter #3	On 25 February 2026, a community newsletter was distributed to 117 properties within a 2 km radius of the site. Copies of the newsletter were also delivered to Cessnock Library to increase the accessibility of the information. The newsletter shared a project update and a summary of the results of technical assessments for noise, visual amenity, hazards, bush fire and cultural heritage. The newsletter also outlined some of the currently proposed mitigations, such as noise walls. The newsletter encouraged community members to provide feedback and suggestions for potential benefit sharing via an online survey (see below).
Online community survey #2	An online survey was opened between 12 February and 18 March 2026 to capture feedback about the Project's potential impacts and ways the community would like these to be mitigated, as well as suggestions for community benefit sharing arrangements. The survey was promoted via the community newsletter and direct email to the project mailing list. Zero survey responses were received, reflecting the lower levels of community interest seen throughout EIS engagement.

Activities	Description
1800 number and email address	A dedicated 1800 number and engagement email address were established at project inception. At the time of writing the EIS, 31 emails and 6 phone calls had been received via the engagement contact details.

7. Community sentiment and insights

This section summarises the feedback received as part of the above engagement activities.

7.1. General sentiment

- **Broader community:** The sentiment and interest levels of the broader community have changed during consultation. Early sentiment was mixed and interest high, with particular concern around safety and visual impact. As consultation continued throughout 2025, the level of community interest reduced, as evidenced by relatively low engagement during the September pop-up information sessions. The number of community members expressing support for the Project during face-to-face engagement also increased slightly.
- **Close neighbours:** Among close neighbours, interest remained relatively high. Sentiment was varied according to perceived impact from the Project, ranging from negative to neutral. Most close neighbours expressed mixed or neutral sentiment.
- Of those who chose to participate in the consultation activities, common issues raised included:
 - Safety and hazards, particularly fire risk.
 - Visual impact. The local community told us they value the scenic landscape of the area and want to see it preserved.
 - Noise. Concern about potential Project noise was largely related to the operational phase. Both nearby residents and business owners (including vineyards and accommodation providers) shared this concern.
 - Traffic and transport, particularly related to road safety on Wine Country Drive.
 - Aboriginal cultural heritage. First Nations stakeholders noted Black Creek, to the west of the Project, is an area of high cultural value.
 - Flooding. Some close neighbours noted Black Creek occasionally floods and questioned the impact of this on the BESS.
 - Economic impact. There was some concern about the BESS negatively affecting tourism in the broader Hunter wine region, as well as directly affecting local businesses by deterring potential customers.

7.2. Safety and hazards

- Community members raised concerns about the potential fire risk associated with a BESS, referencing incidents at sites in Australia and internationally.

- Community members raised concerns that a BESS fire could spark a wider bushfire, given the Project's location on bushfire prone land.
- Air quality and health impacts were raised during early consultation in relation to a BESS fire, with close neighbours expressing concern that a fire would have negative health impacts.
- Residents on Blackburn Close, to the east of the Project, expressed concern about emergency egress in the event of a fire. As Wine Country Drive is the only entry and exit point for Blackburn Close, these residents noted a fire at the Project site could affect emergency evacuation routes.
- Some community members expressed concern that BESS chemistry in general was unstable and could lead to significant safety incidents.

7.3. Visual impact

- Community members indicated that they value the scenic landscape of the Hunter wine region, including the area around the Project. During consultation, the potential visual impact of the BESS was a key concern.
- Some close neighbours provided feedback that a BESS would not fit with the character of its surroundings and would have a significant visual impact.
- It was noted by some of those consulted that the existing Ausgrid substation is well-screened by vegetation from both Wine Country Drive and Old North Road, and many community members expressed a strong preference for the BESS to also be screened from view.

7.4. Noise

- During consultation, people indicated that noise impacts were a main concern. This concern was largely focused on operational noise impacts, including questions about noise tonality and pitch.
- Community members indicated that they value the peace and quiet of the Rothbury area and do not want noise generated by a BESS to affect this.
- Some feedback was also received about construction noise impacts, including requests to limit construction on weekends so that nearby businesses are not affected.

7.5. Traffic and transport

- Close neighbours raised safety issues when turning right from Wine Country Drive into Old North Road and expressed preference for a slip lane to increase safety.
- Questions were raised about the volume of truck movements along Wine Country Drive, which is a key road within the Hunter wine region used by residents and visitors.
- Some mentioned that construction traffic should not restrict access to residences or businesses.
- Several community members asked whether Old North Road could be upgraded as part of the Project, including the causeway across Black Creek.

7.6. Aboriginal cultural heritage

- Some communicated that the area along Black Creek contains a significant number of cultural artefacts and is an important place for local communities.
- It was also mentioned that Aboriginal cultural heritage is more than artefacts; it encompasses the whole environment and needs to be viewed holistically during project planning.

- Community members emphasised that the Project should not negatively impact Aboriginal cultural heritage.

7.7. Flooding

- During consultation, some mentioned that Black Creek floods occasionally, and that the extent of this flooding can be significant.
- Close neighbours who are long-term residents of the area provided information about historic flood levels and noted the BESS project would need to account for this.
- Some community members questioned whether flooding would affect the safety of the BESS.

7.8. Economic impact

- Community members emphasised the importance of the Hunter wine region to the local and NSW economy and expressed concern that the Project would reduce the number of visitors to the area.
- Nearby vineyards and accommodation providers highlighted that increased noise, visual impact and perceived safety risks could negatively impact local businesses, which would have flow-on effects for the area.

8. Feedback raised and response

The following table outlines the issues raised by all stakeholders including government authorities, relevant agencies and the community, and the Project response.

Table 7 Engagement summary

Stakeholder	Feedback received	Response and relevant EIS chapter
Cessnock City Council Staff	Technical studies - Council noted the site may be ecologically sensitive and asked whether ecological studies would be completed. - Council outlined their requirements regarding upgrades to Old North Road and provided information on potential road safety concerns and nearby developments that could impact traffic volumes. - Discussion of waste expected to be generated by the Project.	- Detailed technical studies have been completed as part of the EIS, including a Biodiversity Development Assessment Report. See Chapter 6. - Old North Road will be upgraded in line with Council's requirements. Ausgrid will work with Transport for NSW regarding upgrades on Wine Country Drive, which is a State road. See Chapter 6. - Further details about the waste expected to be generated can be found in Chapter 6. Consultation will continue with Council during the Project's detailed design phase.
	Community and stakeholder engagement - Recommendation to meet with Hunter Valley Wine and Tourism Association (HVWTA) to discuss Project. - Recommendation to ensure coordination with Ausgrid's Hunter Central Coast Renewable Energy Zone (HCC REZ) team to reduce engagement fatigue in the area. - Questions around how the Project will consult with Fire and Rescue NSW (FRNSW).	- Ausgrid met with HVWTA in March 2025. HVWTA received regular project updates via email. - Engagement activities in the area were coordinated with HCC REZ. A member of the BESS Project team was also present at REZ events to answer community questions. - Consultation will take place with FRNSW during the exhibition of the EIS, via DPHI. FRNSW will also be consulted during preparation of the Fire Safety Study for the Project.

Stakeholder	Feedback received	Response and relevant EIS chapter
	Project specific - Questions about the lifespan of the Project and what happens at its end of life. - Questions about maintenance during operation of the Project and expected workforce. - Questions about the purpose of the BESS and whether it assists the local grid. - Discussion of benefit sharing requirement for the Project	- The lifespan of the Project is around 50 years and the site would be rehabilitated after decommissioning, as outlined in Chapter 3. - Expected workforce is around 3 FTEs during operation, with staff from the battery manufacturer conducting maintenance as required. - The Project will store energy when it's plentiful and release it back into the grid when demand is high. This will support grid stability and support the integration of more renewable energy. - Benefit sharing for the Project will be undertaken in line with the <i>NSW Benefit-Sharing Guideline</i> and in further consultation with Council.
Cessnock City Council - Cr Mitchell Lea (Ward C) - Cr Mitchell Hill (Ward D)	- Questions about expected traffic volumes and interaction with other projects in the area. - Feedback that the community is concerned about safety and hazards related to the BESS.	- Detailed technical studies were completed as part of the EIS, including a Traffic Impact Assessment. See Chapter 6. This also assessed cumulative impacts. - A Preliminary Hazard Analysis (PHA) has been completed. See Chapter 6 for a detailed summary of potential hazards relating to the Project.
Elected representatives - Clayton Barr MP (Member for Cessnock) - Dan Repacholi MP (Member for Hunter)	- Questions about the interaction of the Project with nearby developments and the assessment of cumulative impacts. - Feedback that the community is concerned about safety and hazards related to the BESS, as well as visual impact.	- The cumulative impact of the Project with other developments has been assessed. See Chapter 6. - A Preliminary Hazard Analysis (PHA) has been completed. See Chapter 6 for a detailed summary of potential hazards relating to the Project.
First Nations stakeholders Mindaribba Local Aboriginal Land Council	- Feedback that Black Creek is an important cultural site and should not be impacted. - Feedback that Aboriginal cultural heritage encompasses more than just artefacts.	- The Project will not impact Black Creek and will avoid the western portion of the site, which was found to be of high archeological value. See Chapter 6. - The Project team acknowledges that cultural heritage and connection to Country is much broader than archaeological artefacts. Information on the potential impacts and opportunities of Rothbury BESS has been shared with First Nations stakeholders and feedback has been sought at all stages of Project planning.

Stakeholder	Feedback received	Response and relevant EIS chapter
Near neighbours Residences and businesses within 2 km	- Concerns about safety and hazards, including fire risk, thermal runaway and potential unsafe emissions in case of a fire. - Some concern about the impact of flooding from Black Creek on the Project. - Questions about health impacts, including from electromagnetic fields (EMF). - The scenic landscape of the area is highly valued. Some near neighbours expressed concern about the visual impact of the Project. - Some near neighbours also expressed concern about construction and operational noise impacts on their families and businesses. - Feedback from some near neighbours that the Project location was unsuitable due to potential impacts on residents and visitors to the Hunter wine region.	- Detailed technical studies were completed as part of the EIS, including a Preliminary Hazard Assessment, Water Impact Assessment, Visual Impact Assessment and Noise and Vibration Impact Assessment. See Chapter 6. - The risk of a fire is very low. If a fire were to occur, there will be measures in place to prevent it from spreading and enable adequate space for firefighting access. To support this, a Fire Safety Study will be developed in consultation with FRNSW, and asset protection zones will be implemented in line with Rural Fire Service (RFS) requirements. - The impact of different flood scenarios on the BESS has been considered. The site will be designed to protect both the surrounding environment and the electricity infrastructure. - EMF levels from the Project will be similar to household appliances, and negligible outside the site boundary. The levels are well below limits set by international health guidelines. - The site is largely screened by existing vegetation from Wine Country Drive. Additional screening vegetation will be planted where possible to reduce the Project's visual impact. - Noise barriers will be installed around the battery units to reduce sound at the source, ensuring noise stays within accepted levels set out by the NSW Environment Protection Authority. - Ausgrid completed a detailed site selection review, which considered environmental, social and technical issues. The Project will be located on an existing electrical infrastructure site, hence reducing the potential impact to tourism.
Local area Residences and businesses within 2 km – 5 km	Members of the local community expressed concern about safety and hazards, particularly fire risk and the capacity of local firefighters to manage a potential fire.	- Detailed technical studies were completed as part of the EIS, including a Preliminary Hazard Assessment and Traffic Impact Assessment. See Chapter 6. - The Project will work with FRNSW and RFS to develop an emergency response plan and ensure local firefighters are aware of its contents.

Stakeholder	Feedback received	Response and relevant EIS chapter
	• Questions about traffic volumes on Wine Country Drive and how safety would be managed at the intersection with Old North Road. • Questions about the need for the Project, whether it would support the local electricity network and how it would impact electricity prices. • Some support for renewable energy projects in general.	• A Traffic Management Plan will be prepared before construction to ensure traffic on Wine Country Drive is managed safely. • The Project will support grid stability and the transition to renewable energy. The integration of more renewable energy in the electricity grid will help to put downward pressure on wholesale electricity prices.
Broader community • Residences and businesses in the Cessnock LGA • Visitors to the LGA	• Questions about the need for the Project and the benefits of renewable energy in general. • Some concern that the Project would impact businesses in the Hunter wine region, or affect visitor numbers. • Some support for the Project and its location on Ausgrid-owned land. • Some support for renewable energy projects in general.	• The Project will support grid stability and the transition to renewable energy. It aligns with government strategies and policies, including Australia's Long-Term Emissions Reduction Plan and the NSW Electricity Strategy. • Detailed technical studies were completed as part of the EIS, including a Social and Economic Impact Assessment. See Chapter 6.

