

Notice of decision – Central-West Orana REZ Transmission

Section 2.22 and clause 20 of Schedule 1 of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*

Application type	Critical State significant infrastructure
Application number and project name	Central-West Orana REZ Transmission (SSI-48323210)
Applicant	Energy Corporation of New South Wales
Consent Authority	Minister for Planning and Public Spaces

Decision

Under section 5.19 of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* (the Act), the Minister for Planning and Public Spaces has approved the critical State significant infrastructure (CSSI) application to develop Central-West Orana REZ Transmission, subject to conditions.

The key components of the development involve:

- constructing and operating:
 - a 90km 500 kV transmission lines (primary infrastructure) from Wollar to Elong Elong via Merotherie;
 - a total of 150km of 330 kV transmission lines (secondary infrastructure) between the proposed energy hubs and the nearby renewable energy generation projects;
 - energy hubs at Merotherie and Elong Elong, which would comprise 330 kV and 500 kV switchyards with power transformers, synchronous condensers, and supporting equipment;
 - a new 500 kV switching station at Wollar, connecting the project to the existing 500 kV network via Transgrid's Wollar Substation and 14 separate 330 kV switching stations along the secondary infrastructure network, and
- associated infrastructure and construction facilities, including microwave repeater sites, construction compounds, accommodation camps, and concrete batching plants.

Construction of the development would take 28 months, and once operational would provide a network capacity of 6 gigawatts (GW) and a connection between renewable energy generation projects in the Central-West Orana Region to the National Electricity Market.

A copy of the Department's assessment report and Minister's infrastructure approval are available [here](#).

Date of decision

26 June 2024

Reasons for decision

The following matters were taken into consideration in making this decision:

- the relevant matters required under the Act, including the objects of the Act;
- relevant Commonwealth and NSW legislation, policies and guidelines;
- all information submitted to the Department during the assessment of the application;
- the findings and recommendations in the Department's assessment report; and
- the views of the community about the development (see **Attachment 1**).

The findings and recommendations set out in the Department's Assessment Report were accepted and adopted as the reasons for making this decision.

The key reasons for approving the application are as follows:

- the development would provide a range of benefits for the State and the National Electricity Market (NEM) as a whole, including an intended network capacity of six gigawatts (GW), enabling additional renewable energy projects to connect to the electricity network;
- the Project is consistent with relevant NSW Government policies and guidelines, including the *Transmission Infrastructure Strategy* (2018), the *Electricity Strategy* (2019), and more broadly the *Climate Change Policy Framework* (2019) and *Net Zero Stage 1: 2020 – 2030* (2021) and *Implementation update* (2022);
- the impacts on the community and the environment can be appropriately minimised, managed or offset to an acceptable level, in accordance with applicable NSW Government policies and standards;
- the issues raised by the community and Councils during consultation and in submissions have been considered and adequately addressed through changes to the development and the recommended conditions of approval; and
- weighing all relevant considerations, the development is in the public interest, subject to strict conditions of approval.

Attachment 1 – Consideration of Community Views

The Department exhibited the application from 29 September 2023 until 8 November 2023 (42 days) and received 366 unique public submissions (351 objecting, 13 comments and 2 in support) and 21 submissions from special interest groups (12 objecting, 8 comments and 1 in support).

The Department also visited the site.

A summary of how the key issues raised by the community were taken into consideration is provided in the below table.

Issue	Consideration
<p><i>Landscape and Visual</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interruption of views from existing residents • Impacts to existing landscape character • Potential additional impacts of future renewable energy projects that may be located near the development 	<p><i>Assessment</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Department considers impacts to non-easement affected dwellings and public viewpoints surrounding the project. • The Department acknowledges that seven dwellings were expected to experience a moderate visual impact and two dwellings were expected to experience a high visual impact. • EnergyCo has committed to managing the predicted visual impacts of the project by implementing appropriate mitigation measures in consultation with the landowners of potentially impacted dwellings. Accordingly, the Department has recommended conditions requiring EnergyCo to implement appropriate mitigation measures (such as landscaping and vegetation screening) in consultation with the owners of dwellings 198, 207, 350, 354, 357, 373, 399, 539, 672, 717, 719, 730, 741 and 1195. • The Department considers that while there would be views of the project from the public domain, these would largely be from local roads and would be short in duration and between existing vegetation. The Department considers that there would be limited traffic utilising these roads and would largely be restricted to local traffic accessing dwellings in the vicinity of the project. As such, the Department considers that visual impacts at public viewpoints would not be significant. • The Department considers that the project would have a very low to moderate impact to the landscape character in the projects surrounds and considers that the project would not fundamentally change the broader landscape characteristics of the area. <p><i>Conditions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement appropriate visual impact mitigation measures, such as landscaping and/or vegetation screening at receivers 198, 207, 350, 354, 357, 373, 399, 539, 672, 717, 719, 730, 741 and 1195 residences upon receiving a written request from the owners of these residences. • Provide additional measures visual impact measures at receivers 198, 399, 730 and 741 during detailed design. • Ensure that external lighting is minimised and complies with the relevant Australian Standards. • Prohibit any signage or advertising on the site, unless it is for safety purposes. • Ensure ancillary facilities, accommodation camps and earthwork material sites are rehabilitated.
<p><i>Agricultural Land</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of agricultural land • Interruption of ongoing agricultural operations • Potential additional impacts of future renewable energy projects that may be located near the development 	<p><i>Assessment</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The project area is predominantly used for agricultural purposes, including livestock grazing and cropping. • During the three year construction period, up to 3,755 ha of agricultural land would be unavailable for agricultural activities, resulting in a total productivity loss of around \$3.95 million. This loss is equivalent to around 0.2% of the total gross value of agricultural production across the four impacted local government areas over the same period. During operation, the project would have a permanent direct impact on around 795 ha of agricultural land. The loss of agricultural productivity associated with this loss is estimated to be around \$285,900 per year. • Impacts to agricultural land and disruptions to landholders would be mitigated through ongoing consultation with landholders, the development of individual Property Management Plans and Biosecurity Management Plan, limiting new access tracks and ongoing weed management. <p><i>Conditions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No specific conditions have been recommended
<p><i>Social and economic benefits</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability of accommodation and housing • Impacts to local services such as health and emergency services 	<p><i>Assessment</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The project is consistent with a range of national and state policies, which identify the need for additional transmission capacity within the CWO REZ to connect proposed renewable energy generation projects within the REZ to the NEM, and to support energy security and reliability. • The Department recognises that using underground transmission lines may be feasible in some locations and may further reduce environmental impacts, such

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceived negative behaviours associated with worker accommodation camps • Undergrounding of transmission lines to reduce project impacts 	<p>as disruptions to aerial firefighting or result in lower visual impacts. However, the Department considers this option is significantly constrained in meeting other project objectives and would not allow the timely connection of renewable energy projects in the CWO REZ to energy consumers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Merotherie and Neeley's Lane workforce accommodation camps would provide accommodation for up to 1,800 construction workers and ease pressure on availability of local housing and accommodation and is proposed to be staged as the workforce size changes with construction works. • The workforce accommodation camp would be managed in accordance with an Accommodation Camp Management Plan, which would include a code of conduct for workers and cultural awareness training for the workforce. • EnergyCo has committed to preparing a pre-construction and construction Communication and Engagement Plan to ensure landowners, businesses and local residents with the potential to be affected by construction activities are promptly notified about upcoming activities and potential impacts. This plan will also include consultation with local health and emergency services to establish processes for managing potential increased demands due to non-resident workforce. • The project would deliver significant economic benefits to NSW, including a capital investment of \$3.2 billion and the creation of up to 1,800 jobs during construction. <p><i>Conditions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare an Accommodation Camp Management Plan and a Local Business Employment Strategy for the project in consultation with relevant Councils, with consideration to prioritising the employment of local workers. • Prepare and implement a Social Impact Management Plan in consultation with Councils and affected stakeholders, with the intent of enhancing positive social impacts from the development. • Prepare and implement a Local Business and Employment Strategy in consultation with the relevant Council.
<p><i>Biodiversity</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impacts on native vegetation • Impacts on flora and fauna species and habitat 	<p><i>Assessment</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Department acknowledges that the construction of 240 km of transmission line would inevitably result in impacts to biodiversity, and notes that the development would disturb up to 1,290 ha of native vegetation within the 4,000 ha indicative construction area footprint. • The Department considers that the development has been designed to avoid and minimise impacts on high quality vegetation and habitat, as far as practicable, particularly co-locating sections of the transmission line with existing infrastructure and relocating other sections to avoid key biodiversity features. • In addition, the project involves various other mitigation measures to reduce biodiversity impacts, including partial vegetation clearing beneath the transmission lines. Importantly, the final detailed design of the transmission line alignment would also be based on further reductions in impacts, wherever practicable. • The Department considers that subject to the recommended conditions, the development would not significantly impact the biodiversity values of the locality. <p><i>Conditions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimise the clearing of native vegetation and key fauna habitat, including hollow bearing trees and habitat for threatened bird and bat populations, within the project footprint and protect native vegetation and key fauna habitat outside the approved disturbance area. • Prepare and implement a Biodiversity Management Plan, including details of measures to avoid and minimise impacts, and a program to monitor and report on the effectiveness of biodiversity mitigation and management measures monitor. • Prepare and implement a Biodiversity Offset Package and provide a bank guarantee for \$280 million as security to ensure offsets are implemented.