RMCG

VNI West Community Reference Group

Meeting Minutes – Tuesday 25 February 2025 6:00 – 7:35pm
Online

ATTENDEES 6:00-6:30 CRG ONLY

CRG members

Barry Batters, Brett Hosking, Jon Whykes, Cr. Justine Hide, and Claire Flanagan-Smith (Chairperson) and Marg Sangalli (Secretariat).

ATTENDEES 6:30-7:35 CRG, TCV & OBSERVERS

CRG members

Barry Batters, Brett Hosking, Colin Coates, Jon Whykes, Cr. Justine Hide, and Claire Flanagan-Smith (Chairperson) and Marg Sangalli (Secretariat).

TCV

Claire Cass (General Manager Victorian Network Services and Delivery), Tom Everitt (Landholder Liaison), and Samantha Smith (Manager – Project Community & Stakeholder Engagement), Mark Gledhill (Senior Project Manager), Bonnie Bryson (Project Communications Advisor).

Observers

Cr. Alan Getley (Buloke Shire Council), Cr. Dan Bolitho (Gannawarra Shire Council)

APOLOGIES

CRG Member apologies

Andrew Borg, Claire Grant, Rachel Lloyd, Max Fehring, Stephen English, Bryan Pederson

Observer apologies

Geoff Caine (VicGrid).

1 CRG only session

This session was only attended by CRG members, the Chairperson and Secretariat.

1.1 DISCUSSION

While the particulars of this meeting are confidential, the issues discussed by the CRG include:

- Concern that the Minister is not hearing accurate information about the project and therefore does not know what is happening on the ground, that the community's stories are not being heard and they're not getting any answers fuelling the frustration
- Information provided to date on insurance has not provided sufficient clarity, answers must be concrete
- CRG members raised concern around mental health and wellbeing challenges within the community because of the project suggesting it should pause and reset given the impact on families and communities
- There is a perception within the group that they are not being heard or listened to; it was suggested this was a factor in the poor attendance at this meeting
- Energy project developers have already started approaching landholders on farms in the alignment, some were approached on a Sunday morning.

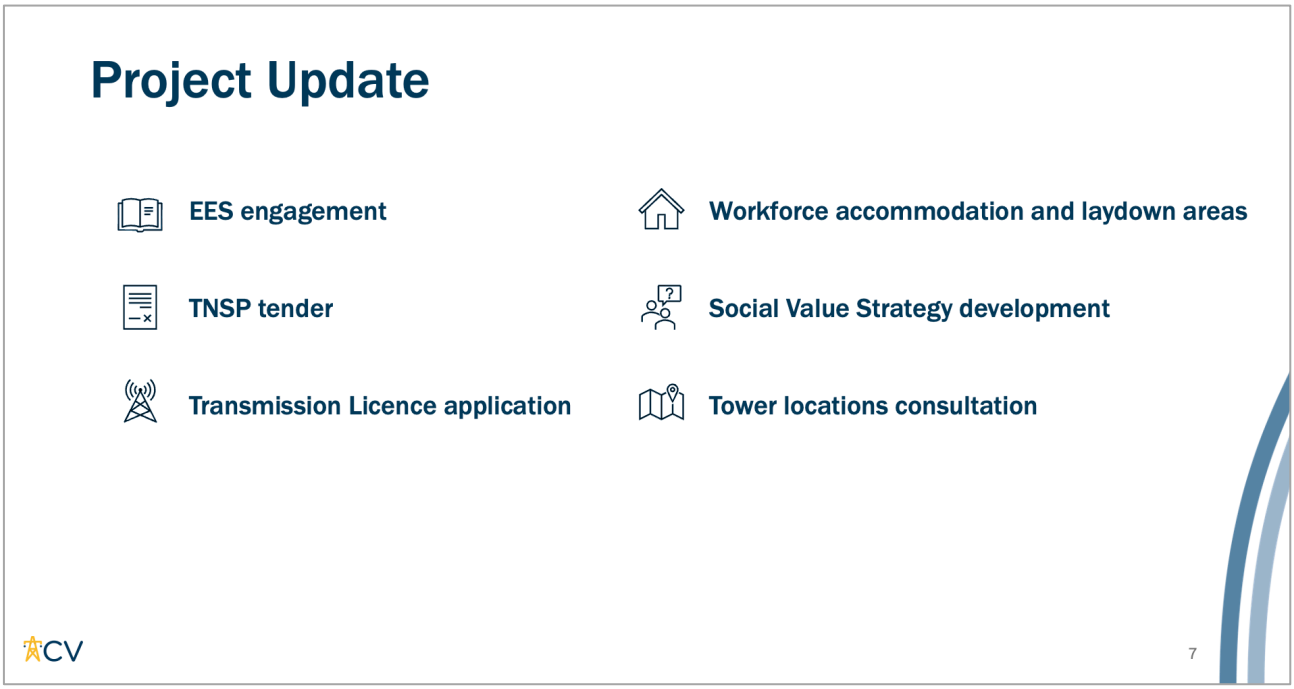
2 Whole group session

TCV and observers joined the meeting at this point and the meeting continued with all listed attendees.

2.1 WELCOME AND OPEN MEETING

- The Chair opened the meeting, welcomed attendees, acknowledged the Traditional Owners and provided an overview of the agenda.

2.2 AGENDA ITEM 1: PROJECT UPDATE

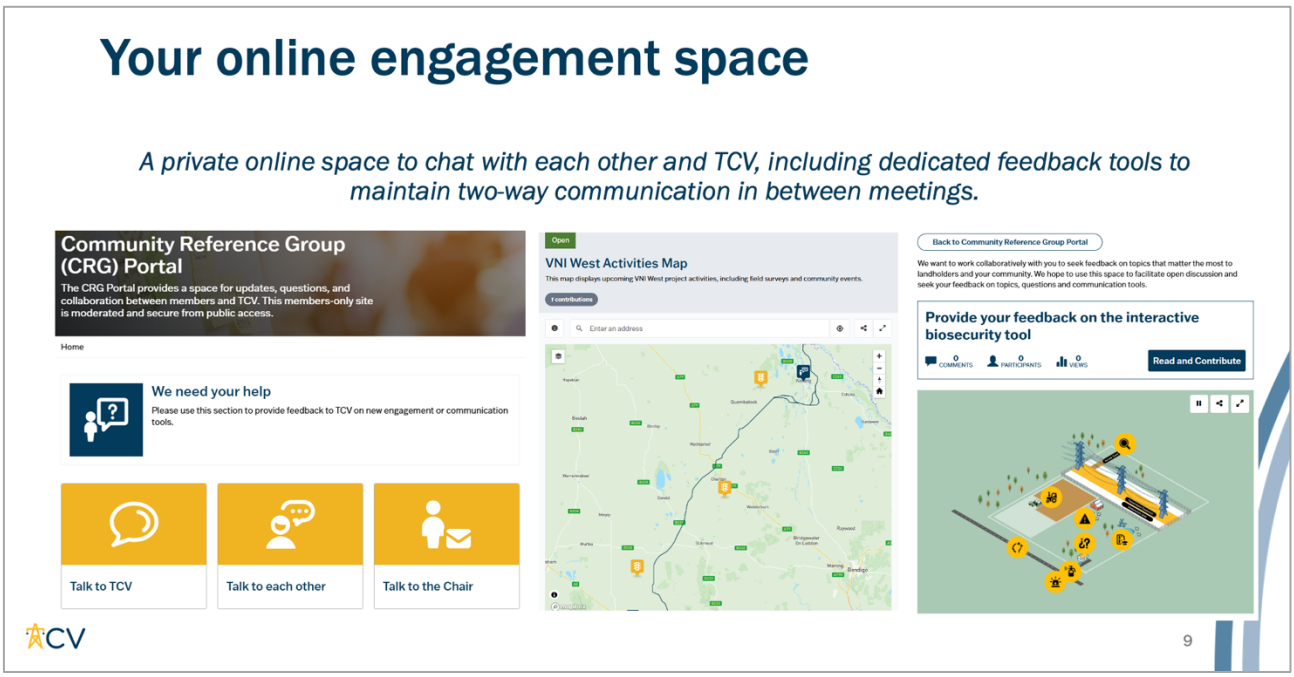


TCV presentation

Sam Smith (TCV) provided a project update. Key points presented included:

- EES engagement: Commenced engagement via regional popups and website expansion to include more interactive mapping. People can find studies being undertaken and what that might mean.
- TNSP tender: Progressing with tender response evaluation with community representatives to identify the best tenderer conducted recently. Thanks to those who have participated in that process.
- Transmission licence application: Licence has been granted – details have been shared previously via email.
- Workforce accommodation and laydown areas: Working hard to understand what workforce accommodation and laydown areas may mean for local communities. Working extensively with Councils on this as well as a recent newspaper advertisement for communities to tell us what they are thinking or discuss what hosting accommodation might look like for individuals
- Social Value Strategy development: The strategy is developing. The Second strategy co-design workshop will be held in Charlton on 27 February. CRG has a seat at the table in developing what that social strategy looks like
- Tower location consultation: Still undertaking tower locations consultation. Have received some really good feedback and working with them individually to understand how the project can best mitigate any potential impacts on their properties and operations and any opportunities to minimise these.

2.3 AGENDA ITEM 2: CRG ONLINE PORTAL



Presentation

Bonnie Bryson (TCV) presented a new online portal for CRG members to:

- Engage with TCV
- Engage with one another
- Contact the CRG Chair
- Provide feedback to TCV on meetings
- Access information on the project activities, including field surveys

The portal aims to facilitate ongoing engagement between meetings and gather input on specific topics. The portal currently showcases TCV's biosecurity policies and procedures in an interactive, clickable format. CRG members were asked to explore this tool and provide feedback on what TCV are currently considering in terms of biosecurity and what, if anything is missing.

CRG members were encouraged to have a look at the portal and provide any feedback or suggestions to TCV. Anyone that has trouble logging in or navigating the portal is welcome to contact the Chair or engage with Bonnie directly.

Key points of discussion

- **Statement by a CRG member:** This is a request for information for TCV to their benefit, to be used at our cost. A continuation of the expectation on people.

  Chair Answer – Noted the observation. In relation to biosecurity particularly, this group has asked to have input into, and this is the opportunity whereby you can make sure the tool makes sense. Is going to protection interest of your farm and the community's farms when people access properties.
- **CRG question**: What time frame can we expect to get answers to questions?

  TCV Answer: Acknowledgment of the question will be within 2 working days and included in that response will be an estimate of how long it might take to answer the question.

- **CRG question:** What is the protocol for biosecurity between intensive industry properties e.g. Piggery, or chicken farms?

  TCV Answer: All current biosecurity policy and procedures are on the project website – informed by industry practice (Department of Agriculture).

  Chair Answer: If you can't find the answers you are looking for, provide feedback on the portal.

  TCV Answer: Complies with Essential Services Commission Land Access Code, developed with Agriculture Victoria. There may be specifics, which is what we want to know.

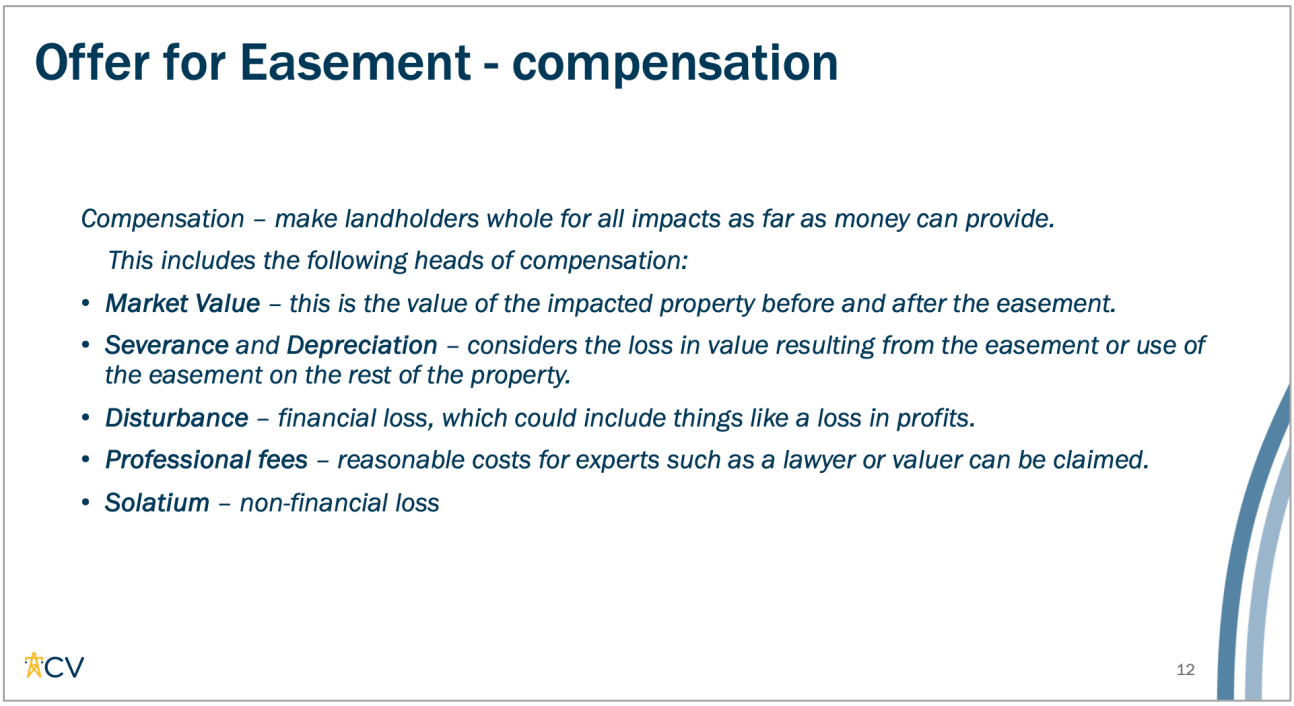
ACTION: TCV or Chair to provide contact details for individual support on the portal to CRG members.

Summary of agenda item 2

- TCV introduced an online portal for CRG members to engage with TCV, share feedback, and access project information, especially on biosecurity.
- The portal includes interactive biosecurity policies, and members were encouraged to provide feedback.
- In discussion, CRG raised concerns about the portal benefiting TCV at landholders' expense. TCV responded that the portal aims to protect farm interests.
- Questions would be acknowledged within 2 working days and that biosecurity protocols are based on industry standards, with members encouraged to provide further input if needed.

2.4 AGENDA ITEM 3: OFFER FOR EASEMENT

Claire Cass and Mark Gledhill hosted a discussion on compensation and benefits. TCV said that one of the key things they are contributing effort to at the moment is the offer for easement, methodology, process and rollout strategy, including timing. TCV hosted a discussion about compensation and benefits, but also principles around it – they told the CRG that they are asking for their views as representatives of landholders.



Summary of discussion

- **TCV question:** Regarding compensation, what does that mean to you, what are you passionate about, what are you concerned we are going to do or not do? What are the principles, concerns and expectations regarding compensation?

  CRG member response: Regarding ongoing obligations for the life of the project. How can you possibly know what all the future issues will be?

  TCV response: Our compensation framework must consider adequately all impacts known today and future impacts. We acknowledge that there will always be elements of uncertainty, but wherever possible we would like to work with landholders and the CRG to anticipate and quantify future impacts.

  Statement by a CRG member: Landowners need an income stream associated with the project for the life of the project. If regulations change, compensation must change too.

  TCV response: The Offer for Easement package for landholders will aim to provide adequate compensation which covers the impacts of the project now and into the future. Future impacts are not something we can value easily, but there needs to be triggers in the contract.

  Statement by a CRG member: There should not be any cost to the landowner for the life of the line, including decommissioning, restructure, lines fallen over. It should go to the energy company of the day. The impact of the project is still unknown, it needs to be defined, TCV need to provide the details of the impact.

  TCV response: This is a great principle. and this is something we will cover as part of Offer for Easement discussions.

  Statement by a CRG member: There is a power imbalance in asking this question. We don't know what you are asking to compensate for, we don't know what a tower looks like, we don't know what we can do under an easement, there's height restriction questions, we don't know what construction is going to look like, what the natural environments going to look like, how this will impact our day-to-day farming practices. We are being asked to comment on what we should be compensated for, we don't know the answer to that.

  TCV response: This is the conversation we wanted to have to identify what we need to tell you, providing the details of the impact i.e. infrastructure and associated operations – that's a good principle.

- **CRG Question:** If the towers fall over in a storm who pays for that?

  TCV response: Question taken on notice. Would say it's the insurance company of the TNSP, but it may be related to what caused it.

ACTION: TCV to provide a response to the question of who covers insurance if towers fall over in a storm.

- **TCV question:** What is it that we can help landholders with in order to engage with them?

  CRG member response: Make it attractive for people to be involved – an income stream and something that lasts the life of the project, $8k per kilometre for 25 years is not attractive to landholders. There needs to be a genuine attempt to relate to landholders. Community benefits must be in addition to what is paid to affected landholders. An ongoing income stream should be in addition to compensation.

  TCV response: $8k per kilometre for 25 years is in addition to compensation. What you are talking about relates to project benefits; our principle is that the community should benefit from this project.

  CRG member response: Two principles in relation to any ongoing community benefit and any contribution, should 1) not be at the expense of existing Victorian Government obligations, so shouldn't be a substitution for money that by rights government should be committing to a rural community and 2) compensation has to begin and be concentrated on the people who are being the most affected and have the most ongoing detrimental impact on their property.

  TCV response: Recognise that you are saying that landholders should benefit in addition to compensation.

- **TCV question:** Who else should this project benefit, in addition to landholders, near neighbours, communities and traditional owners? Should those paying for the project benefit?

CRG member response: CRG members agreed that landholders, the community, and those paying for the project should benefit but not at the expense of the landholders, which would be seen as an indirect tax on rural communities.

- **TCV question:** Do you think it's fair if we aim for a win-win, if we can deliver mutual benefits where possible, should we aim for that?

  CRG member response: Mutual benefit depends on who gets the benefit. What is the proportion of benefit to landholders who are hosting the lines? For example, why should First Nations be getting benefits as part of that scheme?

  TCV response: We take your point that it does ultimately come down to proportionate benefit. We agree that landholders should benefit, community should benefit and so should those paying for this - energy consumers. Our aim is deliver a win-win.

- **CRG member question**: I'm an energy consumer, will I be paying for this? Will I benefit from this? It still comes back to the same questions, I'm still paying, but not benefitting – it doesn't stack up.

  TCV response: You will pay through your power bills. You will benefit as a Victorian who will continue to receive power. The benefit that we allocate to landholders should perhaps be proportionate to or more than they will be paying in power – that's one lens. The project can offer benefits to farmers, but it relies on the ultimate benefit to the energy consumers. Other benefits must be justifiable and quantifiable.

- **TCV question:** We aim to fully compensate landholders for all project-related impacts, ensuring they are made whole. This is not about getting the lowest costs. How can we best engage landholders to test and refine our compensation assumptions?

  CRG member response:
  There are so many unknowns. If we lose access to our land for years, the financial impact is difficult to quantify. For example, if there is work happening on the line, there will be restrictions on me entering the paddock for spraying at the right time, which directly affects our farming operations.

  TCV response:
  These are exactly the individual conversations we need to have with landholders. We recognise the challenge of quantifying impacts during the asset operation phase and need to develop an equitable methodology and framework to address these concerns.

- **TCV question:** What services or help will farmers need?

  Statement by a CRG member: We need a neutral ombudsman for renewables – only for when issues arise

  TCV response: We can talk to the AEIC about an ombudsman.

  CRG member response: Members noted that TCV needs to answer outstanding questions to address unknowns so that they can be comfortable with what has been proposed. E.g. Will TCV pay the fire services levy? CRG members also raised concerns about the potential for the process to increase conflict within the community.

  TCV response: We are working through the outstanding questions from this CRG. We are checking about the fire service levy to see if we can compensate for. Relating to risk, we are intending to develop a succinctly written terms sheet that states the landholder rights and requirements and what might change and the TNSP rights and requirements. We are thinking a lawyer will be needed at some point for legal representation – turning our minds to how we can help farmers, we don't want to leave landholders in the lurch, how does it work in practice. Are there any other services you think you'll need?

  CRG member response: Valuation of land is concerning to some members, not just the VNI west line, it's all the ancillary infrastructure. Members are concerned that land in this zone won't be able to sell.

ACTION: TCV to progress action to talk to government and AEIC about establishing a neutral ombudsman.

ACTION: TCV to develop a methodology and framework for benefits and test with the CRG at a future meeting.

Summary of principles recommended by CRG:

- Compensation must account for ongoing and future impacts: A one-time upfront payment is insufficient because landholders will experience ongoing restrictions and potential regulatory changes over the life of the project. A compensation framework should include a trigger for future changes , i.e. if regulations or operational requirements shift (e.g., changes in restrictions for working under lines), there should be a mechanism to adjust compensation accordingly.
- Compensation should be fair and attractive: Offers perceived as inadequate will not encourage cooperation and may fuel resistance.
- Landholders should not bear any costs related to decommissioning or infrastructure issues: Any future costs related to decommissioning, maintenance, or infrastructure failures should be the responsibility of the project owner, not the landholder.
- Compensation discussions must be based on clear definitions of project impacts: Landholders need more details on how the project will impact their land, activities, and business before they can accurately discuss what compensation should cover.
- The power imbalance in compensation discussions must be acknowledged: Landholders are being asked to define compensation needs without having full information about the infrastructure's impact, making it difficult to negotiate fairly.

Summary of principles relating to benefits raised by CRG:

- Landholders should receive benefits in addition to compensation: Compensation addresses direct impacts, but there should also be an ongoing benefit for those hosting infrastructure.
- Benefits should include an ongoing income stream for affected landholders: A fair and sustained financial benefit should be provided to those with infrastructure on their land.
- Community benefits should not come at the expense of landholder compensation: Broader community benefits (e.g. local projects, infrastructure) should not be prioritised over fairly compensating those directly impacted.
- Community benefits should not replace existing government responsibilities: Any funding or support offered to communities should be additional, not a substitute for services the government is already obligated to provide.
- Those who benefit most should contribute the most: Energy companies, investors, and generators profiting from the project should be responsible for funding benefits, not just landholders and rural communities.
- The concept of ‘mutual benefit’ must be fair and justified: Any claim of a ‘win-win’ scenario must ensure landholders receive meaningful, proportionate benefits relative to their level of impact.
- Benefits should not be tokenistic: Simple gestures (such as covering power bills) are not seen as meaningful compensation and could further frustrate landholders rather than build goodwill.

2.5 PREVIOUS MINUTES

No objections to approving December meeting minutes. The Chair proposed that members who had not yet read the minutes should be given an additional 48 hours to raise any objections, this was agreed to by CRG.

2.6 OBSERVER COMMENTS

VicGrid update submitted in absentia by Geoff Caine through the Chair:

- Throughout March, VicGrid be having conversations with Councils likely to be in the Draft proposed REZs ahead of the Draft VTP being published in April.

- If there are any stakeholders that CRG members think would be important to speak to please let either the Chair or Geoff know. Likewise, if CRG members are aware of any community forums happening over the next month, VicGrid would be happy to attend and talk through what is being proposed.

The Chair called for other comments or questions:

- **Question from Cr Bolitho:** Previous to this meeting, my impression was that the responsibility for benefits at with VicGrid and compensation discussions sat with TCV – why has the TCV conversation opened up about benefits to landholders (including neighbours)?

  Response from TCV: We have been working closely with VicGrid and advocating for it for some time. VicGrid is now amenable to TCV determining the proposal for a benefits framework.

  Response from Cr Bolitho: Does the framework mean TCV is paying that or TSNP takes over?

  Response from TCV: TSNP will finance, noting that if we start talking benefits for landholders, it needs to have a mutual benefit to energy consumers.

2.7 NEXT MEETING

- The next meeting will be face-to-face on 1st April in Charlton
- A review of actions will be undertaken at the next face to face meeting.

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1.0	Draft	12.3.2024	M. Sangalli C. Flanagan-Smith	C. Flanagan-Smith	M. McIntosh	C. Flanagan-Smith	TCV