RMCG

VNI West Community Reference Group

Meeting Minutes – Tuesday 21 April 2026, 5:30pm–8:00 pm

Donal Recreation Reserve, Donald

ATTENDEES 5:30PM–6:15PM CRG ONLY

In person: Steven English, Cr Jenny Greenberger, Cr Justine Hide, Carly Noble, Colin Coates, Barry Batters, John Whykes, Colin Fenton, Max Fehring, Claire Grant, Paul Haw, Claire Flanagan-Smith (Chair) and Melissa Ludeman (Secretariat).

Online: New CRG member Jacquie Kelly (Landcare Facilitator Murray Mallee), Brett Hosking, Dan Bolitho

ATTENDEES 6:30PM–8:30PM CRG, TCV, GUESTS AND OBSERVERS

CRG members

In person: Steven English, Cr. Jenny Greenberger, Cr. Justine Hide, Carly Noble, Colin Coates, Barry Batters, John Whykes, Colin Fenton, Max Fehring, Claire Grant, Paul Haw, Dan McLoughlan, Claire Flanagan-Smith (Chair) and Melissa Ludeman (Secretariat).

Online: New CRG member Jacquie Kelly (Landcare Facilitator Murray Mallee), Brett Hosking, Cr. Dan Bolitho

VicGrid

Mick Douge (VNI West Program Director), Mark Gledhill (VNI West Senior Project Manager), Amy Pepper (VNI West Lead, Communications, Engagement and Social Performance), Ali Driscoll (VNI West Senior Advisor Engagement).

Iberdrola

Peter Campbell (Executive General Manager Strategy and Stakeholders), Doug Galbraith (General Manager Engagement and Social Impact VNI West), Tom Dockray (Executive Manager VNI West Project).

Certified B Corporation

University of Canberra

Associate Professor Jonathan Pickering (in-person), Dr Wendy Conway-Lamb (online)

Observers

Cr Alan Getley, Geoff Caine (Regional Director North West, VicGrid), Chris Sourness.

APOLOGIES RECEIVED

CRG member apologies: Bryan Pedersen, Rachel Lloyd

CRG members absent: Glenda Watts

1 Members only pre-meeting session

This session is only open to Community Reference Group (CRG) members, the Chair and Secretariat. The group focussed on understanding the upcoming agenda and preparing a list of items for general business in the full meeting, among other matters. The particulars of discussions during this session are confidential.

2 CRG meeting

2.1 WELCOME AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

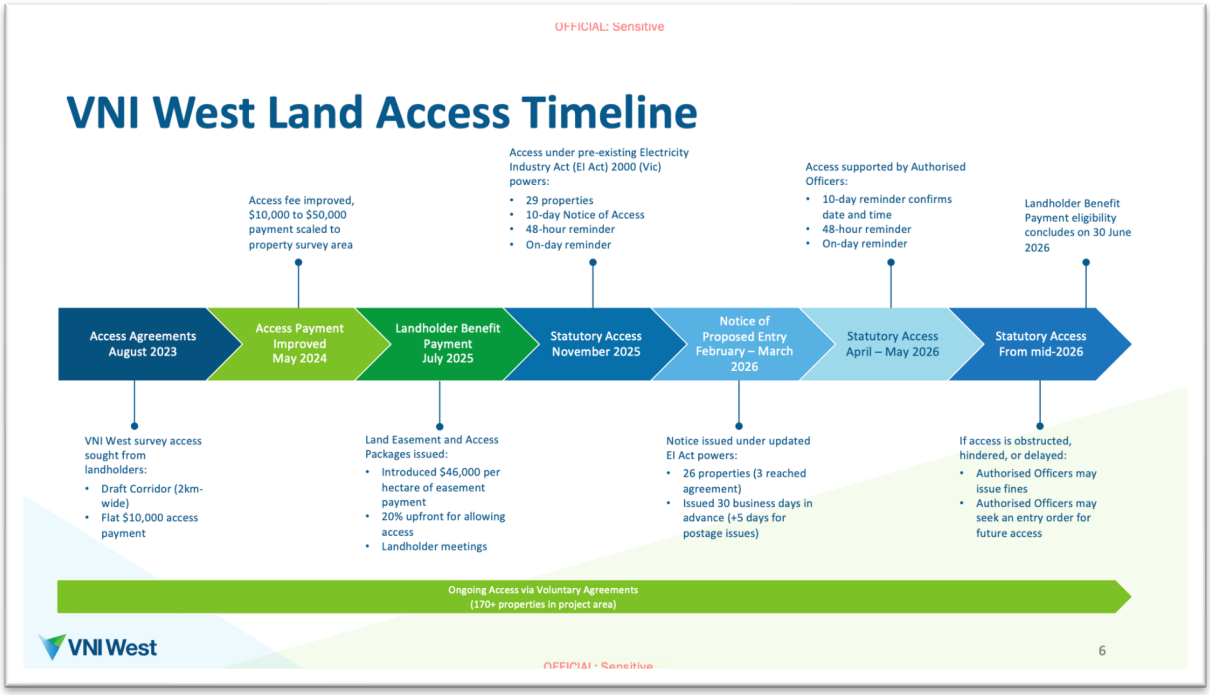
Cr Alan Getley opened the meeting, welcomed attendees and made an Acknowledgement of Country. VNI West CRG Chair Claire Flanagan-Smith provided an overview of the meeting agenda, listed apologies and introduced new CRG Member Jacquie Kelly. The Chair also noted other online attendees.

The Chair acknowledged that there a lot of questions for Iberdrola than allowed for in the agenda so those will be held over until general business.

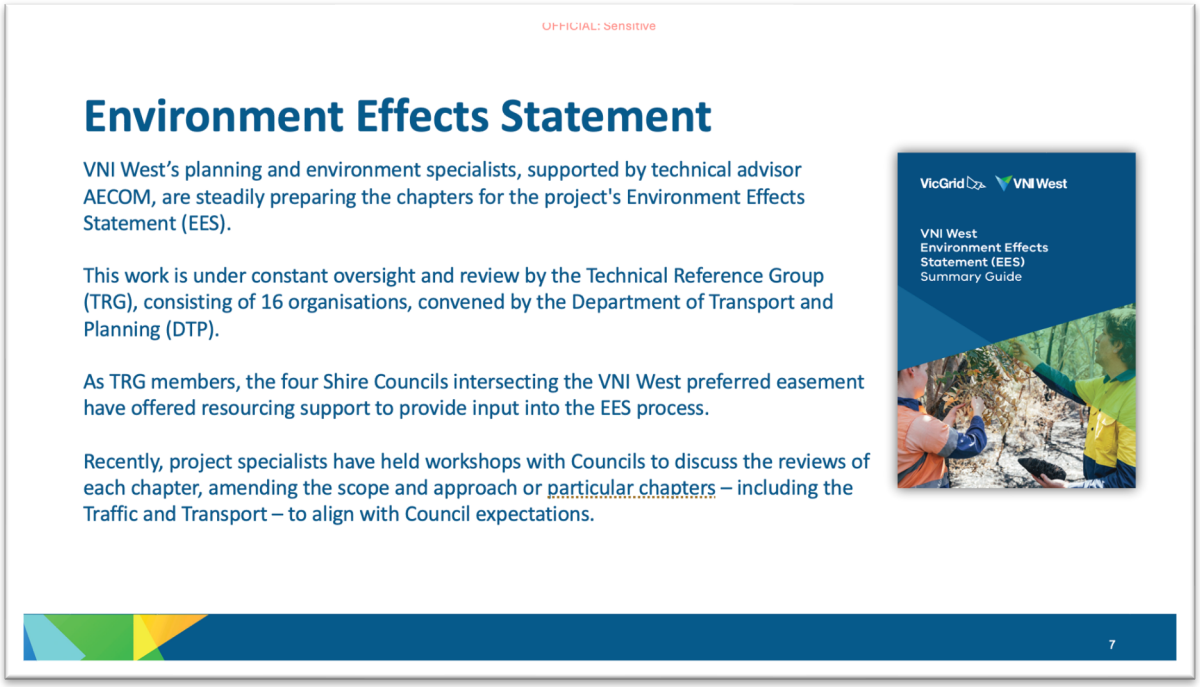
2.2 PROJECT UPDATE

Mick Douge, VNI West Program Director provided a project update:

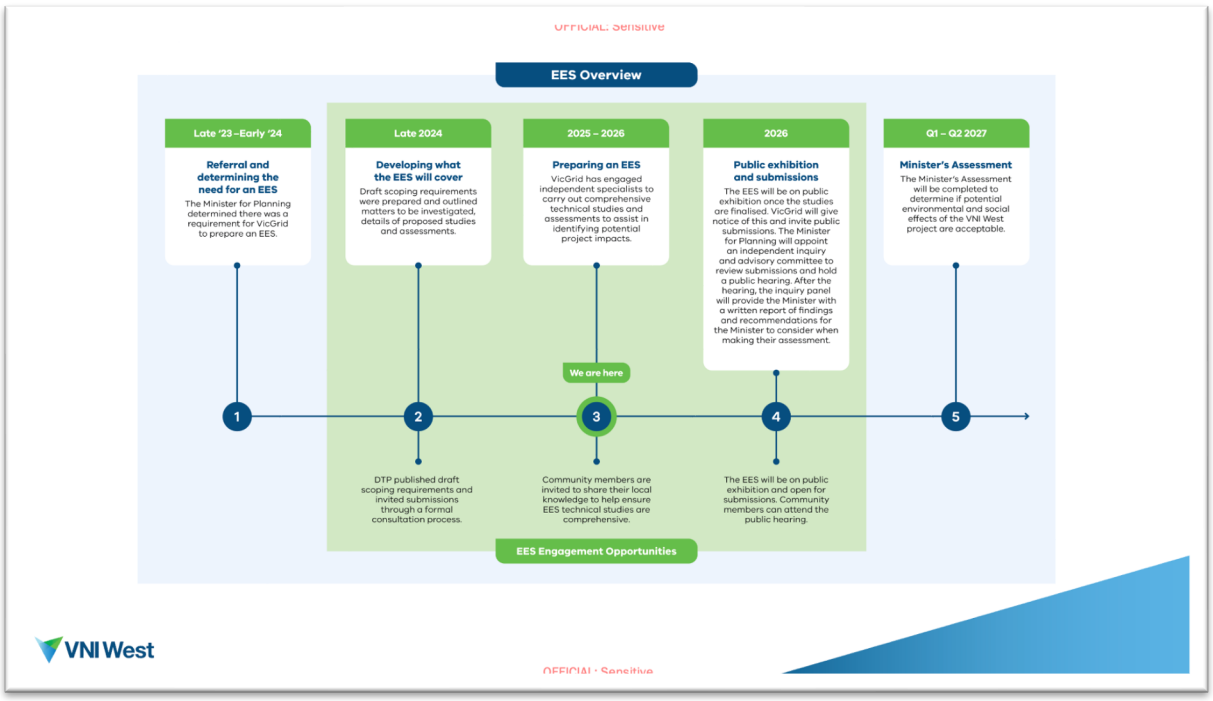
- Overview of timeline with the main activities listed (see slide below).
- Since the last meeting, there has been an upgrade to the legislation, so it now includes Section 93bd. This means there are now Authorised Officers in attendance when accessing properties using Section 93bd. VicGrid intends to continue to access properties to get the information required for the Environmental Effects Statement (EES).
- Since this change, VicGrid has attempted to access to six properties. Those attempts were unsuccessful.



- Iberdrola Australia are progressing with the design of the project and looking to engage suitable Design and Construction teams to build the project. They went out to market last week with an Expression of Interest (EOI). The purpose of the EOI is to understand potential contractor interest and then move into a tendering phase which will take place in quarter four.
- Next year (2027), Iberdrola will present the design and delivery phase, followed by the proposal for the ongoing operation of the facilities for the next four years.
- All the information from surveys is being collated and included into the EES documentation. VicGrid are aiming to meet the target due date for public exhibition at the middle of this year (2026), which will be followed by hearings. This is on track to be completed by quarter two next year (2027).



- After the public exhibition and hearings process, a report will be written outlining findings and recommendations and delivered to the Minister, who will assess it. Once the Minister's assessment is completed, it will be approved by Government.



- The VNI West Team has attended several field days to speak to people about transmission and the Renewable Energy Zones. For the VNI West project, there was about 120–130 people who engaged in conversations. The VizAR tool is now available to people to see what the proposed infrastructure will look like in situ.



- At tower site locations, VicGrid completed geotechnical surveys which involved 150mm bore holes. All the material that is removed is replaced into the bore hole after the survey is complete.



CRG member question: Why is the EES happening now, it seems very late in the piece given the appointment of Iberdrola? And what involvement do you expect landholders to have?

VicGrid response: The EES has commenced as planned. VicGrid, as project proponent, is responsible for preparing and submitting the EES – this is separate from the role of Iberdrola, who have been appointed as the delivery partner for the construction phase. More recently we have progressed that appointment in preparation for the delivery phase.

These processes run in parallel. They are all on track for the project to be completed by 2030. The EES requires data gathering up front so as part of the EES project, there were surveys that involved community and landholders to obtain input into the EES. All community members will have an opportunity to put in a public submission when the EES goes on public exhibition later this year.

CRG Chair: There are two CRG meetings planned for this year that will take people through the EES process in detail. The August CRG meeting will coincide with the public exhibition period.

CRG member question: In regard to the six access attempts, was that 100% of the attempts?

VicGrid response: In regard to access attempts – it was 100% of the attempts. All were unsuccessful.

CRG member question: What happened to the feedback we provided on the VizAR tool?

VicGrid response: We have sought technical information from the tool creator about how the feedback has been incorporated.

CRG member question: I spoke to an ex-Land Access Liaison about impacts on irrigation land from the transmission line. In the event VicGrid proceeds with compulsory acquisition, then it is anticipated that the land would be fenced and we would lose it. Who is going to pay the water delivery share fixed to that land? Would I require new access points and arrangements?

VicGrid response: Transmission easements are mostly not fenced and are still available for landholder use. In relation to water delivery share, the compensation will be relevant to the total impact on that land. If there are changes to the infrastructure that would minimise that impact, then we are open to having a conversation about the required compensation.

CRG member question: Have there been any changes to the number of (~226) landowners along the alignment and the number who have agreed to access?

VicGrid response: There were three options for the route that were being assessed. For one option, land access was granted, and it was determined that the route option was not suitable, so it was ruled out. The total number of affected landholders has dropped as a result. Broadly we are sitting about the same percentage of landholders who have agreed to access. VicGrid can take that request on notice and provide updated numbers.

Action: VicGrid to provide updated number of affected landholders along the alignment and number who have agreed to access.

CRG member: Ongoing frustration regarding a lack of clarity on insurance arrangements.

VicGrid response: The VNI West project position is clear and remains unchanged, as presented in the Land Easement and Access Package (LEAP). This is the fullest extent of information available.

CRG Chair: As noted at our last meeting, the VNI West position has already been clearly declared and presented to this group and clearly places liability away from landholders. This is as far as the project can go, with the details will be worked out by insurers. Acknowledge that the this may remain frustrating to some landholders.

VicGrid added that the Insurance Council has not identified any premium increases for farmland with transmission lines and reaffirmed that, per LEAP, liability does not sit with the landholder.

2.3 IBERDROLA AUSTRALIA INTRODUCTION

Each of the Iberdrola team members in attendance introduced themselves:

- Peter Campbell, Executive General Manager Strategy and Stakeholders. Peter noted that Iberdrola is the largest and fastest growing utility. It has a lot of experience working with communities. Listening carefully, being compassionate, and being open are the best ways to build trust. Peter's role reports to CEO and Chairman.
- Doug Galbraith, General Manager Engagement and Social Impact VNI West. Doug has recently joined Iberdrola but has a lot of experience and looking to be a regular observer.
- Tom Dockray – Executive Manager for delivery of the VNI West Project.

The Iberdrola team presented an overview of their organisation, what it means to be a development partner and their commitment to communities. A summary of the presentation is below:

- Iberdrola Australia has been in Australia for 20 years. Since 2020, the organisation has accelerated. It has a portfolio of wind farms, solar farms, batteries, gas peakers and is now expanding into transmission projects like VNI West.
- Iberdrola corporate strategy is focussed on delivering affordable and reliable clean power. It wants the best form of power for customers. In Victoria, we have 22GW of coal fire generation retiring, so unless we do something to replace that, the system will get worse. Iberdrola is open minded about how we address that problem.

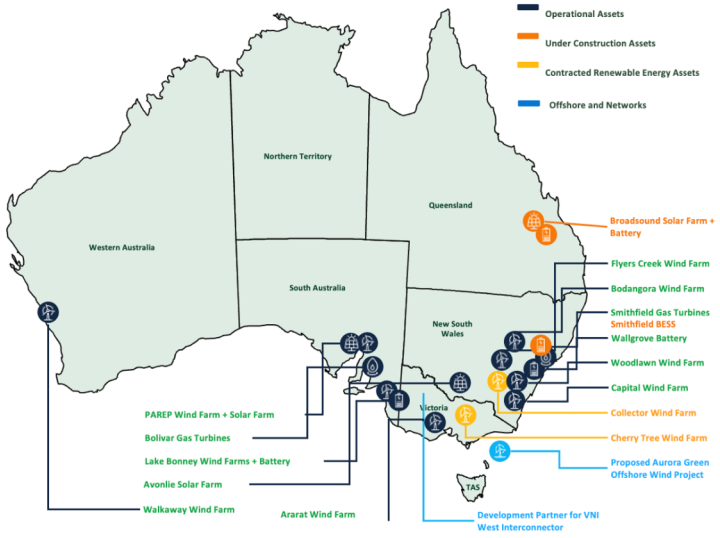
Who is Iberdrola Australia?

Iberdrola

We are one of Australia's largest, fastest growing and most diversified electric utilities

- 10 wind farms
- 3 solar farms
- 5 batteries
- 2 gas peakers
- 400 commercial and industrial cusotmers
- Expanding into transmission in Australia with VNI West.

Twenty-year history of serving Australia's customers and communities.



*Iberdrola Australia contracts 60% of the output of the 227 MW Collector Wind Farm
*Long-term lease

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- Iberdrola SA is a global leader and is one of the largest electric utilities in the world (A$200bn)
- It serves 100M customers worldwide
- When Iberdrola spoke to VicGrid, its pitch was that Iberdrola provides the best combination of local expertise, global knowledge, and has a track record in Australia
- It operates over 1.4 million kilometres of line across the world.

Who is Iberdrola SA?

Iberdrola

- **One of largest electric utilities in world by market capitalisation (~A$200bn)**
- **100% free-float, governed by independent Board of Directors**
- **Global leader in networks, renewables, offshore wind and pumped-hydro**
- **Serves over 100m customers across world**
- **Major market positions in Spain, UK, USA and Brazil**
- **Recent transmission projects include:**
  - Connecting Canada and USA
  - Connecting Scotland and England
  - Connecting north and south Brazil
- **Operate over 1.4 million kilometres of line across the world**

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- What is a development partner?
  - Over the coming period 12–15 months, Iberdrola is doing a body of work to increase the definition and positioning this project for the delivery phase.



- Commitment to communities
  - Listen, and work with you in partnership
  - Pick up this project and run with it.



Questions:

CRG member question: These are reassuring words – what information do you have on how the community views the proposed route?

Iberdrola response: For the tender phase in 2025 – We were provided with sufficient information for us to understand that this project has community representatives who oppose this project.

CRG member statement: The turnaround for those people deeply opposed will need to be dramatic.

CRG member question: What involvement does Iberdrola have in the EES?

VicGrid response: VicGrid is responsible for delivering the EES. Iberdrola may be able to assist with addressing some technical enquiries, but VicGrid will be responsible for seeing it through. VicGrid will maintain and have the lead on engaging with landholders. Iberdrola will assist where needed.

CRG member question: You mentioned other transmission projects? Have you had other Australian projects with compulsory easement action?

Iberdrola response: This is the first one in Australia.

CRG member question: Are either VicGrid or Iberdrola going to ground truth where these lines are going? For example, to avoid the alignment going through farms on an angle at odds to with how the farm works.

Iberdrola response: It is collaborative across the project. VicGrid will maintain the lead. More information about project sites will come in time as we engage more deeply.

CRG member comment: Other consultants have advised CRG members to ask whether they (VicGrid) have considered how the farm works. There should be some appeal options for the alignment across a farm.

CRG member question: To Iberdrola – would you consider developing a community cohesion plan and a map of sentiment?

Iberdrola response: We would like to explore that further through future conversations.

CRG member advice: In the community I hear from, there is a whole lot of education needed. You need to use less jargon as there is concern that once the [transmission] line is in place, other projects will want to set up on farms. What's the relationship with other projects? You need to bring them along for the journey.

Iberdrola response: Acknowledged the adice. Stated that the reason we need to connect Victoria to NSW is to build resilience in the system.

2.4 DISCUSSION: WHAT IS FAIR FOR COMMUNITIES AFFECTED BY INFRASTRUCTURE

2.4.1 UPDATE ON THE SOCIAL VALUES REFERENCE GROUP

Amy Peppers provided an update on the Social Values Reference Group:

- VicGrid has an important opportunity to work with Iberdrola to inform social values work going forward
- There is a lot of value in learning from Iberdrola and their other projects
- We are looking at reconvening the Social Values Reference Group and bringing in our VicGrid and Iberdrola colleagues.

2.4.2 UNIVERSITY OF CANBERRA PROJECT – *JUST TRANSMISSION*

Associate Professor Jonathan Pickering and Dr Wendy Conway-Lamb from the University of Canberra introduce their project *Just Transmission:*

- The three-year research project has recently been established to look at electricity transmission, what works well and what could be done better. As part of the project, the team will look at how transmission is regulated and use the VNI West and Hunter transmission projects as case studies.

- The project is funded by Australia Research Council.
- At this stage, the team is doing its first visit to the area to understand the context of the project. The plan is to recruit a community fellow who will be based in the area to do interviews and community workshops.
- The project hopes to gain some lessons learned for future transmission projects and guides for policy makers. The team has an open mind and keen to talk to anyone about the project.

CRG member question: Will the research look at underground options?

Jonathan's response: No, but we will look at some of the concerns raised in relation to undergrounding. Before this project we looked at renewable energy zoning in NSW.

2.5 QUESTIONS FOR THE CRG ON FAIRNESS

The Chair facilitated discussion about the three questions CRG members identified for discussion at the las CRG meeting:

Question 1: What are we talking about when we talk about community?

CRG members ideas:

- Communities of geography
- Communities of interest (e.g. sporting groups, multicultural groups, school groups, arts)
- People who share the same sentiment (e.g., support or opposition to the project)
- Impacted landholders
- Neighbours
- Urban people in rural towns.

Other discussion points from the CRG members:

- There are many definitions of what communities are.
- Support for the idea of creating a map along the alignment to show a bell curve ranging from sentiments such as strongly against the project, to strongly support the project. This would show how communities feel. Researchers should be involved.

Question 2: What do you think fair distribution of benefits and impacts looks like?

CRG members ideas:

- Some said that most of the benefit should go to people who are directly impacted by physical infrastructure, on their farm, or on visually on a neighbouring farm, and a much smaller proportion to others in the town.
- Another said that a conversation within a geographical community might agree with the perspective about directly impacted landholders receiving the most benefit, but we do not know until we ask.
- It should not reduce funding from other State Government core business / allocations. For example, reduced funding for the hospital because it is assumed this project will fund it.
- Community infrastructure should not be worse off as a result of renewable energy infrastructure, for example roads.

Other discussion points from the CRG members:

- Respectful, transparent, and consistent engagement across agencies and organisations is required
- Fair distribution means stakeholders feel satisfied that they were listened to and fairly compensated

- Pull in information from other VicGrid consultation, for example from the Community Benefits Plan
- It needs to address impacted community infrastructure as it will increase a lot of jobs
- [We think about] how it is affecting our community and how it is tearing our community apart. People feel that there are other ways to do it. The community does not feel we are getting enough benefits based on the impact.

Question 3: Things that could happen to help communities to heal and strengthen?

CRG members ideas:

- Map sentiment along the alignment
- Create a Community Cohesion Plan with CRG involvement
- Being positive or negative is contagious. We need to listen to more positive people.
- Information shared early
- Being transparent about how the decisions being made
- Agencies and the project speak with one voice and aligned messaging
- Engagement is local regular and accessible and at community friendly times
- Plain language
- Engage with communities without using compulsory acquisition powers
- Give landholders better input into the LEAP
- Give community better input into Government policy.

Other discussion points from the CRG members:

- This is an imposed changed and it hasn't been explained well enough. We need to put thought into the language that we use. People are reluctant to talk about this project in communities because we got off on the wrong foot.
- We were concerned it was dangerous and some of the behaviour was aggressive. Some of the more recent conversation we've seen at the gate between farmers and authorised officers has been respectful. We've moved past that the aggression, we hope.
- Relationships are built with continuity and respect
- Some feel isolated from government policy. Policy should be road tested with communities to create a level of ownership. Building the line does not mean this is finished. There will be issues when renewable energy)projects are proposed that want to connect to the line.

CRG member question: Can a Community Cohesion Plan be developed and can the CRG members be a part of it?

VicGrid response: VicGrid will take this on notice with Iberdrola.

ACTION: VicGrid to come back to the CRG about whether they will proceed with a Community Cohesion Plan.

GENERAL BUSINESS

Minutes from the last meeting

CRG members accepted the minutes from the last meeting and that they were true and correct.

Other general business items

It was at this point Cr Jenny and Cr Justine left the meeting so they could make it home in reasonable time.

CRG member question: A lot of farmers have had legal advice not to sign contracts because they are not in favour of the landholder. I advise that Iberdrola and VicGrid should change the contracts to get them right.

CRG member question: 70% of Agricultural is going to be affected by renewable energy projects and 8% of area. Is VicGrid happy with landholders to request reasons for objecting to entry? Is there a good answer to the that question?

VicGrid response: VicGrid will take those statistics and question on notice and will come back to the CRG at the next meeting with a response. Authorised Officers are not VicGrid staff. They have the authority to independently assess what is a reasonable and non-reasonable response from a landholder.

Action: VicGrid to clarify the impact (% of agricultural production and agricultural land affected) of renewable energy projects on agriculture.

CRG member question: Are these transmission lines accommodating data centres? The AEMO model indicates demand increase, and they have a model that considers data centres.

VicGrid response: The transmission infrastructure being planned is sized to accommodate future demand growth, not just current needs. So yes, data centre demand is considered in the modelling that underpins the need for transmission infrastructure.

CRG member question: Agriculture was not mentioned in prelude from Iberdrola.

Iberdrola response: We operate wind farms with voluntary agreements with positive feedback elsewhere. It becomes a logistics project and there will be very active consultation with landholders about how we move and traverse through properties.

VicGrid response: The Land Access Code of Practice sets out how access to private property must be undertaken. All access will be conducted in accordance with this.

2.6 NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is planned for the week starting Tuesday 9 June 2026 at Charlton.

3 Action register

Table 3-1: Action register

ACTION #	DATE RAISED	ACTION ITEM	OWNER	DUE	STATUS	NOTES
CRG 42	14/05/2025	TCV to investigate the need for neighbouring agreements to ensure clear liability and insurance protocol for damage to property that may influence adjacent landholders.	VicGrid	Aug-25	In progress	VicGrid will investigate further and provide a response as soon as the information is available.
CRG 52	19/08/2025	VNI West Team to investigate options for supporting landholders to commission independent experts (e.g. ecologists) for site-specific input to the EES.	VNI West Team	Dec-25	In Progress	VNI West agrees that landholders may engage independent specialists of their choosing to undertake project-specific survey works. This includes ecologists. VicGrid will reimburse reasonable costs incurred in engaging a preferred ecologist (consultant) and obtaining a report. The works undertaken, and the resulting report, must align with the survey methodology required by the Department of Transport and Planning. Reimbursement of costs will occur after the report has been provided to VicGrid. Additional information on the conditions can be provided.
CRG 53	19/08/2025	VNI West Team to reach out to landholders mid 2026 to establish a working group or feedback mechanism for CRG members to provide input into the operational requirements of the permit system.	VNI West Team	Dec-26	In progress	Referred to development partner for a response at a later date.
CRG 56	19/08/2025	VNI West Team to investigate what support can be provided to CRG to assess the EES material.	VNI West Team	Dec-26	Complete	Propose an EES workshop for the CRG to work though reports with SMEs in June – refer to 2026 plan.
CRG 57	16/12/2025	Review the advice provided to landholders to make the implication for loans if land is de-valued due to the project is clear.	VNI West Team	April-26	In progress	*The impact of easements on property value is compensated to landholders on a case-by-case and assessed by a qualified independent valuer in line with the requirements of the Land Acquisition*

ACTION #	DATE RAISED	ACTION ITEM	OWNER	DUE	STATUS	NOTES
						and Compensation Act (LACA) 1986 and the Valuation of Land Act 1960 (Vic). *As we all know, mortgages can be impacted by a multitude of factors. We are not legally able to provide any advice on any impacts of registered easements on mortgages and recommend landholders seek their own financial advice. Any financial advice reasonably incurred by the landowner will be reimbursed by VicGrid.*
CRG 59	17/02/2026	Provide CRG members with information on what the Authorised Officers will be carrying, wearing and their roles and responsibilities.	VNI West Team	April-26	In progress	
CRG 60	17/02/2026	VicGrid to follow up with Barapa Barapa to make sure the community's communication preferences are being met	VNI West Team	April-26	Complete	
CRG 61	17/02/2026	CRG Independent Chair to propose a plan for CRG meetings for 2026.	CRG Chair	April-26	Complete	
CRG 62	21/04/2026	VicGrid to provide updated number of affected landholders along the alignment and number who have agreed to access.	VNI West Team	June-26	New	
CRG 63	21/04/2026	VicGrid to come back to the CRG about whether they will proceed with a Community Cohesion Plan.	VNI West Team	June-26	New	
CRG 64	21/04/2026	VicGrid to clarify the impact (% of agricultural production and agricultural land affected) of renewable energy projects on agriculture.	VNI West Team	June-26	New	

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Document review and authorisation

Project Number: #1871

Doc Version	Draft	Date	Author	PD Review	BST Review	Release approved by	Issued to
1.0	Draft	28/04/2026	M. Ludeman	C. Flanagan-Smith	-	C. Flanagan-Smith	VNIW
1.1	Draft	08/05/2026	C. Flanagan-Smith	C. Flanagan-Smith	B. Gravenor	C. Flanagan-Smith	CRG

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