RMCG

VNI West Community Reference Group

July 2026

Chairperson's summary and update

CRG BRIEF UPDATE

The VNI West Community Reference Group (CRG) met for its sixteenth meeting on 9 June 2026. That meeting interrupted by a protest inside the venue that began during the opening session. As the CRG meetings are closed and the protesters were not prepared to leave, the meeting was ended and postponed to July 8, an online meeting.

I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate that the VNI West CRG was set up to make sure that there is two-way communication between communities and the VNI West project, so that community members are well informed about the project and associated processes – such as the Environment Effects Statement (EES) – and so that the project can learn about and respond to the concerns, ideas and needs of communities. It is not a decision making forum.

My role as Chair is to run a process that is fair and effective. In practice, this means working within the scope of the CRG, working with members to set the meeting agenda and forward plan for meetings, making sure all members can contribute and feel safe to do so, making sure questions are pursued and answered, and keeping track of agreed actions. It also means asking all parties to come to the table in good faith.

It is important that these meetings are closed to allow all members to speak candidly, test ideas, ask difficult questions, and disagree openly without those views being taken out of context, used against them, or subjecting them to public pressure or intimidation. This confidentiality is what allows the CRG to function as a valuable forum for two-way communication between the project and communities.

At the online meeting held on 8 July, nine CRG community members were joined by VicGrid, Iberdrola Australia (the VNI West Development Partner) and other observers.

Key topics of discussion included:

- Update on the landholder benefit payment extension – the early access landholder benefit payment was due to expire on 30 June has been extended to 30 September 2026.
- The recent declaration of renewable energy zones across the Community Engagement and Social Value Guidelines.
- A series of information sessions were held in Kerang and Stawell to share information on participation in the EES, the renewable energy zones and the Community Engagement and Social Value Guidelines.
- An update on surveys being conducted to inform the EES including ecology, cultural and historic heritage, noise and vibration, traffic, landscape and visual amenity investigations.
- A discussion on the EES, key periods for community input and how else VicGrid can support community to engage with the EES

I thank all CRG members for taking the time to attend this additional meeting and for their willingess to come to the CRG and work in good faith.

The minutes for the April are now available on the CRG website, and the minutes for his meeting will be reviewed and endorsed by the CRG at its next meeting.

This report has been prepared by:

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