

Ag Energy Taskforce Record of meeting

31 July 2025

10.00 am – 12.30 pm (*virtual meeting*)

Item	Topic
Item 1	<p>Chair welcome: Joy Thomas</p> <p><u>Present:</u> Stephanie McKechnie (QFF), Jennifer Brown (Cotton Australia), Michael Allpass (AgForce Qld), Greg McCarron (Central Irrigation Trust, SA), Caleb Connor (Farmers for Climate Action), Karin Stark (Farm Renewables Consulting), Warwick Ragg (NFF), Simon Maddocks (Primary Producers SA), Steven Ford (Pioneer Valley Water), Chris Souness (Wimmera Southern Mallee Development), Glen Hepburn (VFF), Sabiene Heindl (The Energy Charter), Joy Thomas (Ag Energy Taskforce/Ag Energy Social Licence R/table</p> <p><u>Apologies:</u> Dale Holliss (Bundaberg Regional Irrigators' Group), Chris Gillett (Qld Canegrowers), Nick Savage (NSW Farmers), Nathan Calman (Tas Farmers),</p>
Item 2	<p>Joy Thomas: Recap from 27 March 2025 Taskforce meeting</p> <p>Actions 27 March meeting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft outline of Regional Energy Accord circulated to Taskforce members on 10 June. • Sabiene connected with RELA General Counsel. <p>Upcoming activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Warwick Squire of Coexistence Qld to join Taskforce members on Thursday 14 August – for an hour's briefing on the work of Coexistence Qld. • A briefing by the Australian Energy Regulator (AER) has been requested on issues around retail pricing and the Default Market Offer which came into effect on 1 July, and on Network Tariff Reform <p>National policy and investment issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In February 2025, \$2.0 billion to recapitalise the Clean Energy Finance Corporation to invest in renewable energy, energy efficiency and low emissions technologies. • 2024 federal budget, \$19.7 bn over ten years (from 2024–25) towards investment in Future Made in Australia priority industries: incl renewable hydrogen, green metals, low carbon liquid fuels, refining and processing of critical minerals and manufacturing of clean energy technologies including in solar and battery supply chains. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Transparency from Govt is needed in terms of the return, or reapplication, of funds invested in those projects that are now not progressing. • This year's federal budget, \$2.3 bn towards the Cheaper Home Batteries Program – intended to provide an upfront discount on the cost of installing a small-scale battery – installed typically installed at home or at a commercial premises to provide back-up power and shift electricity generated from rooftop solar PV systems during the day - to supply evening peak electricity demand. Not intended for other types of batteries such as those contained within an electric vehicle. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Eligible batteries will include small battery storage systems (up to 100 kilowatt-hours in capacity) installed with new or existing solar PV systems (up to 100 kilowatts). As currently applies under the SRES, support would be provided in the form of STCs that are created when eligible systems are installed. <p>Attended the Renewables in Agriculture Conference in Bendigo 23 July. Focus of issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Renewable technologies applied on farm; and focus on farmers of the future with electrification and batteries, solar irrigation in the dairy industry and insights into other farming industries and how they are adopting technology on farm. • Large scale energy transition – incorporating tax law, insurance and hosting transmission. • Family farm transition issues and decision making around investing now in technology for the next generation.
Item 3	<p>Sabiene Heindl, CEO, The Energy Charter</p>

	<p><u>Developer Rating Scheme</u></p> <p>The Scheme was a recommendation from the former Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner's Community Engagement Review in 2023. The objective of the Scheme is to improve the way developers engage with communities when developing energy infrastructure including renewable energy developments, energy storage and major transmission lines. It also aims to provide landholders and communities with greater transparency and confidence about companies that propose new energy infrastructure in their region.</p> <p>Following an open tender process, the organisation to be appointed to design, develop, implement and operate the Scheme to be announced shortly.</p> <p><u>Regional Energy Accord</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A series of roundtables to be held in Gippsland, the Wimmera Southern Mallee and North-East Victoria, regions with lived experience and practical insights and a desire to lead. • Each roundtable, with input from local knowledge, underpinned by each region's realities and built to reflect the hard-won lessons and shared aspirations.
Item 4	<p>National, jurisdictional and industry updates on key issues</p> <p><u>National Farmers' Federation: Warwick Ragg</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awaiting to see what the Climate Change Authority offers in relation to agriculture and land. • The importance of getting community engagement right and the need for regionally nuanced approaches to social licence; social licence cannot be bought. • Criteria for community engagement is important. • Significant delay to the VNI West project; the issues that remain must be resolved. • Comments on the Developer Rating Scheme • Net zero plan for agriculture & land; continue to press for farm and land methodology draft. <p><u>Queensland Queensland Farmers' Federation (QFF): Stephanie McKechnie</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The PISPOLA {Planning (Social impact and Community Benefit) and Other Legislation Amendment Act} commenced 18 July 2025, introducing a new community benefit system which applies to wind farms and large-scale solar farms. This is in recognition that wind farm and solar developments can have significant social, economic and environmental impacts on local regional communities similar to resource projects. • The new community benefit system requires proponents to undertake a social impact assessment and enter into community benefit agreements prior to applying for a development approval. This new approach ensures that wind and solar installations contribute positively to communities and align with host community expectations as well as land-use planning objectives. • Qld Govt has announced the development of a five-year Energy Roadmap. • Qld Govt has announced the \$180.6 million Sovereign Industry Development Fund (the Fund) focusing on priority industries like defence, biomedical and biofuels, the latter of interest to QFF. • QFF's Landholder Toolkit to be updated to reflect legislative changes. <p><u>New South Wales: Cotton Australia (CA) – Jenny Brown</u></p> <p>Cotton Australia has provided a submission to the NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into the impact of REZs on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales; the inquiry has received mixed reactions with some communities constructive and others hostile: CA highlighted in its submission the importance of broadening horizons and considering agricultural opportunities from infrastructure development.</p> <p>Further Cotton Australia submissions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submission to Australian Energy Market Commission on Integrated Distribution System Planning (IDSP) rule change • Submission to the Queensland Competition Authority (QCA) on regulated electricity prices for regional Queensland 2025-26 <p>Jenny noted the Re-Alliance toolkit; providing factual information to help landholders, communities and local councils understand what happens when projects reach retirement age, with three possible paths forward: refurbishment; repowering; and decommissioning.</p>

	<p><u>South Australia: Primary Producers SA Chair, Simon Maddocks</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost of energy for industrial loads. <p><u>South Australia: Central Irrigation Trust (CIT), Greg McCarron</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CIT is joining South Australian Chamber of Mines and Energy Inc and others in seeking authorisation to establish a joint electricity buying group, jointly tender and negotiate electricity supply agreements, and to make and give effect to electricity supply agreements with the preferred electricity supplier/s. • Each participating member of the group must meet the definition of a large electricity customer in SA under the National Energy Retail Law. • The application has been lodged with the ACCC; authorisation is sought for a 12-year period. <p><u>Victoria: Wimmera Southern Mallee Development, Chris Souness</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key issues are insurance, liability and biosecurity; Issues relating to fire fighting remain a concern. • Energy costs for consumers.
<p>Item 5</p>	<p>Tony Mahar, Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner (AEIC)</p> <p>Tony highlighted rising community concerns about energy projects while some communities are working constructively and need to build on that; continued bad practice will be unhelpful.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The importance of transparency and consistent communication in community engagement efforts and more to be done on building trust with landholders and communities; and focus on practical issues like biodiversity offsets, insurance concerns, asset depreciation, and decommissioning. • The need to better understand social license criteria as part of the Developer Rating Scheme. • Acknowledged the complexity of compensation and benefits frameworks, noting early project mistakes will need ongoing efforts to rebuild trust with landholders and communities. • Focus on individualized responses to community needs • Catching up regularly with the energy companies and the Clean Energy Council; more awareness needed to get things right and at the state government level. • Recognise the importance of the Energy Charter and Wimmera Southern Mallee Development work • Need a focus on practical issues like biodiversity concerns and to ensure updated information on taxation and decommissioning is available. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tony to attend the upcoming Commonwealth and State Energy Ministers' meeting and will press for a coordinated national approach. • A series of fact sheets / information updates to be developed to address a range of issues and designed to improve community understanding. <p>Discussion on Net Zero and Community Perceptions and public understanding of net zero and its implications; Tony emphasised the need to explain the energy system and the transition better rather than debating net zero.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other discussion highlighted the disconnect between different community expectations and the portrayal of opposing views. • In response to an observation that rural communities feel abandoned and seek better government and corporate accountability, Tony stressed the importance of continued community engagement. <p>Joy observed whether there will be a change in community attitudes against the backdrop of compensation issues and particularly community benefit funds.</p> <p>Karin noted the Victorian legislation (<i>New laws are granting VicGrid the state's energy infrastructure body greater powers to access private land for transmission line construction, even without landholder consent</i>). Tony acknowledged the legislation is unfortunate.</p>
<p>Item 6</p>	<p>Energy Charter businesses: social licence accountability updates (*attached presentations)</p> <p>AusNet: Mark Hogan</p> <p>AusNet is contracted to build the Western Renewables Link, a 190km long high-voltage electricity transmission line. Proposed route: from Bulgana Terminal Station to Sydenham Terminal Station.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenges involved in assessing the effectiveness of the safety campaign and strengthening the landholder database for direct and target communications.

- Seeking to work with landholders on property-specific solutions to minimize operational interruptions.

AusNet's Community Engagement and Benefits

- AusNet's transmission safety awareness campaign and increased support for landholder benefits.
- Doubled land access payments to \$20,000 upfront and increased the options fee to \$50,000.
- Introduced a voluntary hosting benefit for landholders who sign an option for easement.
- Worked with AEMO on the \$15 million for development phase benefits, including investments in solar panels and battery upgrades for community sites.
- Announced a near neighbour benefit program to recognize impact on neighbours. Neighbours along the Western Renewables Link (WRL) will be able to share in a new benefits program, aligned with the draft VicGrid Benefit Sharing Framework. If project approved, neighbours within one kilometre of the proposed easement may be eligible for a one-off payment of \$20,000 or \$40,000, depending on proximity to the line.
- \$500,000 each to two councils to deliver power upgrades.

Challenges and Future Focus Areas

- AusNet working with landholders on property-specific solutions to minimize operational interruptions.
- Warwick inquired regarding establishing social license and the criteria for community engagement.

Warwick observed issues around establishing social licence and how information asymmetry is resolved when there are a number of guidelines. Need to ensure farmers are sufficiently empowered; funding is needed for legal advice.

[Marinus Link Project: Mark Lindsay](#)

- The [Marinus Link](#) project is preparing for project delivery and focus on stage one from 2026 to 2030
- The site is east of Burnie and will connect with Tas Networks project; a politically significant project in Tasmania with recent state election and impacts on decision making.
- Focus on gateway approvals and the EPBC Act.
- Community engagement efforts include a community grants and sponsorship program, quarterly updates, and informal community meetings.

Community Benefit Sharing Framework will inform programs throughout construction and beyond.

- The framework aims to address local needs and synergies between Tasmania and Victoria.
- The land team is working with landholders, with positive feedback on improved practices.
- The project has completed valuation periods and signed over 30% of easement and lease option deeds.

[Powerlink Queensland: Kiara Bowles](#)

Powerlink Queensland is involved in several key projects focused on strengthening the transmission network to support the state's energy transition. These projects aim to increase capacity, improve reliability, and facilitate the integration of renewable energy sources into the grid.

- Finalised Powerlink's Community and Social Performance Strategy to drive lasting benefits for communities. Implemented a procurement process and contract framework that facilitates and aligns with the requirements of the strategy.
- Appointed a Local Economic Participation Specialist to help support local business involvement in Powerlink projects.
- Commenced work on Powerlink's first Social Impact Assessment (SIA), examining the impacts and opportunities from project development in Central Qld. The first round of in-field social research was completed to seek insights from a range of local stakeholders. Feedback will inform development of Social Impact Management Plans to deliver tailored local mitigation measures and maximise positive outcomes for communities.
- Developing a biosecurity declaration app to enhance digital efficiency and mobile access of biosecurity information. Completed forms can be downloaded and shared with landholders as a record of compliance with biosecurity requirements.
- Exploring underground project development near Cairns, working with QFF on policy representation.

Future focus: A range of strategic partnership and R&D initiatives are being pursued with NRM Regions Qld to deliver community, stakeholder and environmental outcomes e.g. maximising strategic land use for vegetation offsets to minimise impacts from infrastructure; exploring coordinated biosecurity management efforts; and progressing a soil monitoring program in association with the CSIRO.

Kiara emphasised the importance of local procurement.

TasNetworks: Chris Warr

The North-West Transmission Developments (NWTD) project is an upgrade to the electricity transmission network. The NWTD, together with [Marinus Link](#), will support Australia's energy transition with the upgrade providing capacity to support new and existing renewable energy developments in the region, enabling Tasmania to use its energy system more efficiently.

- Prior to construction of a major project like NWTD, various studies are conducted to understand the existing environment. This information helps to identify ways to avoid, reduce, and manage impacts.
 - As part of the environment, planning and heritage approvals process, TasNetworks has lodged a Permit Application with the Tasmanian Planning Commission (TPC), the responsible planning authority under the Major Infrastructure Development Approvals Act 1999 (MIDAA). This will allow NWTD to be formally assessed before TasNetworks can proceed to the construction phase.
- TasNetworks is establishing direct relationships with landowners and finalizing easement option agreements and preparing for project construction.
- Currently 55% of landowners have signed a Licence and Easement Option Agreement and negotiations are ongoing with remaining landholders.
- Regional biosecurity washdown sites completed; property specific washdown sites are being documented during the drafting of property management plans.
- Community Benefit Sharing Fund; \$10m fund to commence early next year; continue to finalise governance arrangements.
- NWTD Regional Economic Development Plan: recent review involved engagement with key stakeholders to inform next iteration of the Plan; now moving towards pre-construction and construction phase.

Strategic Benefit Payment: Eligible landholders have been advised that they will be entitled to a Strategic Benefit Payment of \$200K per km plus CPI to be paid over 20 years; ongoing discussions about implementation.

Challenges: Recent instability in Tasmanian politics has led to perceived project uncertainty, questions from landholders about compensation and raised questions about the status of the whole of State Business Case

Transgrid: Michael Johnson

Transgrid is a key player in Project EnergyConnect, to build the 700km NSW section of the interconnector. This project, a joint effort with ElectraNet, aims to connect the electricity grids of NSW, South Australia, and Victoria, facilitating the sharing of energy between these states.

- Transgrid and Energy Connect delivery partner Elecnor Australia co-funded remote bushfire camera at Galore Hill to support NSW Rural Fire Service efforts; Watch Towers Networks platform enables real-time bushfire monitoring in the Riverina region and public access through the Central Watch dashboard for community safety.
- Working to minimise any impacts on agricultural land.

Hume Link Community Investment and Benefits Program: 118 applications received for funding.

- Transgrid identified priority areas where community is seeking funding and is committed to ensuring initiatives funded are fit for purpose and meet the needs of a broad cross-section of the communities where infrastructure is being built.
- Transgrid delivery partners HumeLink East and HumeLink West each have up to \$2 million available (\$4 million total) to support community investment initiatives.

Challenges in explaining the technical aspects of project costs to communities

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concurrent Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) assessments for VNI-West, Hunter Transmission Project and Central West Orana REZ. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Fair and equitable compensation and benefits across communities impacted by transmission lines and REZs. <p>Future focus</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rolling out Strategic Benefit Payments • Cultural immersion programs; Wiradjuri education module celebrating Wiradjuri language, stories and traditions. • Biodiversity stewardship agreements. • Seeking expressions of interest for Transgrid Biodiversity Offset Package <p>Transgrid's Discovery hub in Wagga has been operating for one year and provides a space for community to stage events; it also enables access to energy information and is a space shared with the community.</p>
Item 7	<p>Joy Thomas</p> <p>Actions and future Agenda items</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tas Farmers CEO Nathan Calman to provide a progress report on TasNetworks' strategic benefit payment framework for Tasmanian farmers. • Central Irrigation Trust (CIT) CEO Greg McCarron to share progress on the joint energy purchasing group in South Australia, led by SACOME, seeking approval from the ACCC. • Update on the Regional Energy Accord and Developer Rating Scheme.
Item 8	Meeting closed at 12.40 pm