

Ag Energy Taskforce Record of Meeting

26 March 2026

10.00 am – 12.10 pm (EDST, virtual meeting)

Item	Topic
Item 1	<p>Present: Stephanie McKechnie (QFF), Sam Forzisi (AgForce Qld), Steven Ford (Pioneer Valley Water, Mackay), Chris Gillitt (Canegrowers), Karin Stark (Farm Renewables Consulting), Greg McCarron (Central Irrigation Trust SA), Connie Mort (NSW Farmers), Chris Sounness (Wimmera Southern Mallee Development), Anna Hooper (Australian Grape & Wine), Arezoo Boroomandnia (Research Fellow, University of Sydney), Sabiene Heindl (The Energy Charter), Lisa Penson (The Energy Charter), Joy Thomas (Chair, Ag Energy Taskforce).</p> <p>Apologies: Dr Simon Maddocks (PPSA), Nick Savage (NSW Farmers)</p>
Item 2	<p>The Chair: update on national policy issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fuel supply issues, a moving picture: National Cabinet 20 March, Commonwealth ministers & state Premiers. • Energy Ministers' Ministerial Council in December 2025 and focus on a gas preservation policy; three major LNG companies will be forced to set aside as much as a quarter of their gas for domestic use; and aimed at lowering prices on Australia's east coast. • AEMO's draft Integrated System Plan 2026 released Dec 2025; Appendix 8 focus Social Licence.
Item 3	<p>Sabiene Heindl, CEO, The Energy Charter</p> <p><u>Developer Rating Scheme (DRS)</u> emerged as a recommendation from former Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner's (AEIC) 2023 Community Engagement Review:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Scheme has been co-designed with the help of Equifax Australia. • Discussion amongst DRS folk about the mandatory nature; financial capability enables developers to commit to, and undertake, proper community engagement; remains central. • Developers will be rated every 12 months / which developers will want to be part of the Scheme. • Seven criteria form part of the Scheme. Sabiene to provide the Scheme's final methodology; financial and governance competencies must be passed to achieve a star rating but the star rating itself is done on the basis of community engagement - per entity, not project. • Equifax's DRS website to be live over coming weeks; developers to be listed on website with a star rating designed to give landholders, community & local govt visibility about the business. • Equifax will have a report to developers about where they're doing well and where they are not. • Landholders may be inclined to seek a copy of the report (possibly confidentially), as part of their negotiating power (while there's no obligation on a developer to hand over such reports) • It's expected that over the years, a developer's star rating could improve. • Criteria or methodologies: there'll be a maturity framework incorporating eg what engagement should look like for a landholder, for a neighbour and broader community, to enable visibility around the maturity framework and conversations with renewable developers about their ambition around seeking to improve. • The star rating only applies to the community engagement component; if that is not passed, a developer will not achieve a star rating; the Scheme's criteria is going to expand, de-commissioning being considered and potentially other issues built into the Scheme. • Opportunity for Ag Energy Taskforce to provide guidance on what members might expect to see as part of the Scheme – eg could be things like community benefits funding. <p>Discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What opportunity exists to provide feedback to Equifax regarding a particular developer and project over the previous twelve months would be of value; eg in NSW and the NSW the Energy and Water Ombudsman, a complainant must show that they have attempted to deal with a

	<p>complaint directly with the provider or the developer prior to approaching the Ombudsman; a complainant must meet a certain threshold.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instances where a developer sells a development to another developer vis a vis commitments made for example, re-decommissioning. What safeguards for landholders and communities? <p>Sabiene to take issues to the C'wealth, Equifax and the AEIC regarding mechanisms available for entities to feed into the DRS; DEECCW will commission a large piece of work on this; important that the Taskforce feed into this, and where the DRS criteria might land.</p> <p>The Chair thanked everyone for their input; a further briefing on the DRS to be arranged for Taskforce (<i>28 April, DCCEEW and Equifax invited to discuss the Developer Rating Scheme with Taskforce</i>)</p>
<p>Item 4</p>	<p>Prof Ben Hayes, Research Director, Zero Net Emissions Agriculture CRC</p> <p>Co-funding from Govt to establish the CRC with industry partners across ag supply chains, large pastoral companies, smaller family pastoral operations, horticulture, grains cropping; and Elders, Coles, Rabo Bank and other banks.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ag industry feedback showed an ambition to reduce emissions but pathways unclear and concern about risk to profit; new technologies in development to reduce emissions must have productivity benefit and profit. • CRC includes producer demonstration sites, with industry partners able to see how low emissions technologies work on farm but also on business. • Currently selecting 25 sites around Aust representing major ag ecological zones and farming practices; on those sites, emissions to be measured in detail with machines that measure methane, flux towers, pasture sampling and soil carbon measurements. <p>CRC Four programs:</p> <p><u>Program 1: Low emissions plant solutions</u></p> <p>Focused on low-emissions broad-acre, horticultural and livestock systems, legumes and setting options as well as reducing emissions in cattle & sheep via delivery of new low emissions pastures & forage systems.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biggest source of ag emissions in Aust is from grazing cattle and sheep; the plant program is developing pastures for sheep and cattle to lower emissions eg leucaena in beef production in the north and other pastures. • Reducing nitrous oxide emissions (about 20%) from cropping and mixed farming. <p><u>Program 2: Towards Methane Free Cattle and Sheep</u></p> <p>Providing the genetic, nutrition and rumen microbial manipulation solutions, and quantification required to transition livestock production to a low-methane emission future.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Part of this is through genetics, selecting animals for lower emissions; this to be expanded with DNA markers that enable this to be done cheaply and early in the animal's life; and projects around altering the rumen of the animals towards lower emissions. <p><u>Program 3: Whole Farm and Mixed Enterprises Systems Analysis</u></p> <p>Taking on the industry identified challenge of developing a single platform where trusted guidelines, resources, and benchmarking tools are integrated.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building on the existing carbon calculator and taking into account international benchmarks, given ag product exported; accounting for a new technology adopted to reduce emissions. <p><u>Program 4: Delivering Value from Net Zero</u></p> <p>Developing renewable energy & circular economy solutions to create profitable opportunities for agribusinesses & rural communities. Improving supply chain management & enhancing access to key export markets.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional ways to reward farmers / producers for adopting low emissions tech; Australian Carbon Credit Unit (ACCU) Scheme only addresses carbon source, carbon in the soil, soil carbon sequestration and planting trees; CRC looking at alternative models to reward farmers.

- Stocktake of emissions reduction technologies; activities adopted now like reducing emissions intensity eg greenhouse gas per unit of kilo of beef or litre of milk.
 - In beef, improving fertility, improving growth rates with a big effect on emissions; current document on CRC website, snapshot of projects; one is new pastures and forages to reduce emissions, eg things like brassicas and plantains.
- Current project, sampling vegetation species across the north & screened for impact on emissions
- Another project for grazing; developing a biodegradable biopolymer used in human medical applications and embedded with methane reducing substances; when developed, can be given to an animal orally and over time, a release of a substance that reduces methane.

The CRC's Agrivoltaics project is integrating profitable agricultural production and renewable energy generation focusing on how to use solar cells infrastructure to improve agricultural production.

Other ideas being tested: using the infrastructure for hydroponics to produce high value vegetables eg the solar voltaic project at Uni of Melbourne, Dookie Campus, developed prior to the CRC; the CRC now building on that. Solar cells providing shade for grapes in a mini vineyard in the hottest part of the day; some early evidence that this might improve wine production and potentially the wine characteristics.

Another project at Tatura where solar cells are set over the top of an orchard to provide shading.

The CRC's producer demonstration sites are underway and spread around the country where greenhouse gas emissions are being measured while implementing technologies.

A partnership between Dept of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry's Ag and Land Sectoral Plan and the CRC, particularly around the carbon calculators; also engagement with Dept of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water in terms of aligned goals.

An initiative under scope with Cotton Research and Development Corp, on farm or regional production of fertilizer, will likely use renewable energy; other entities are doing work on biofuel, not the CRC.

Stephanie: a common issue is the height of solar panels that don't allow cattle to graze underneath when there is little economic advantage to raise panels, an expensive undertaking.

Karin pointed to the well-known solar Agrivoltaics project [Jack's Solar Garden in Colorado](#), a pioneering commercial project with different crops; ground mounted panels with cattle grazing in one part of the solar farm; and another is the US [Midwest Agrivoltaic Systems](#)

Connie: one of the CRC aims is ensuring that producers and farmers are rewarded from data they generate and value through the supply chains; NSW Farmers concern about the barriers or potential punishment for those not there yet; when much of the market concentration is on either buyers or suppliers, service providers, banks, insurance etc are all focused on their own net zero goals and that can flow down to farmers; potentially a non-tariff barrier to participation and whether this reduces access to finance or supplies? Is there a focus from the CRC around mitigating that 'stick approach'?

Ben: there has been that kind of activity in the past with various issues like meat quality etc; an imperative to move quickly to get some of these alternatives in place – including setting models where people along the supply chain reward farmers for supplying low emissions product. The banking sector and finance sector are also moving with low interest loans for adopting technologies; the Clean Energy Finance Corporation (CEFC) has low interest loans available that have been adopted.

Arezoo Boroomandnia (One Basin CRC): also interested in renewable energy solutions and integration into farming systems and energy consumption in irrigation such as used for pumping, lighting, food

processing etc. **Ben** noted Zero Net Ag Emissions CRC is doing life cycle assessments of various technologies; working with One Basin CRC and aim to do Agrivoltaic projects together with joint funding.

In addition:

- Nitrous oxide release from fertilizers is about 30% of farmers' emissions; the manufacture of fertilizer is another 20-25%, largely around energy required. Some companies are making slow emissions, slow-release fertilizer products to reduce nitrous oxide emissions.
- Some biological products are coming through but are more expensive than conventional fertilizers; further work is needed to identify cost effective products that lower emissions.
- Also looking at waste streams from agriculture and human food to turn into fertilizer; challenge is the consistency of the nutrient profile.
- Some are producing their own fertilizer, largely green ammonia; a current scoping study (about a month away) to identify where the technology is; some companies claim they can do it; prior to projects being funded, need to look at the technology and does it make economic sense.
- A road show is planned in 2027; farmer and grower groups partnering with the CRC have access to information; and producer demonstration sites will be a focus for field days. Taskforce members are welcome to contact Ben via email or through information on the CRC website.

Chris Sounness, CEO Wimmera Southern Mallee Development

Systems Thinking for Food Security

Fuel security and urea supply; Wimmera Southern Mallee Development is collecting this information as part of the food resilience work and how the fuel supply chain works.

- Ag sector has gone through tremendous transformation using leading edge technology.
- Agriculture is a leading Aust industry in terms of productivity over 30 years; though productivity gains are putting regional towns under pressure resulting in negative population growth.
- A changed discussion is needed to look at opportunities to increase land values and increase productivity.
- Challenges: rural communities thinning, energy costs rising, climate volatility is real and Australia's emissions may compromise export market opportunities.
- Food systems involve the energy system, the water system, the land, the workforce and infrastructure, but all are interdependent of each other; when one fails it impacts others.
- How to design a new system; current challenges around global conflicts and related fuel security, access to fertilizer, supply chain weakness; opportunity to re-design for converging systems & for more productive and efficient of land, for energy production, food production & to manage water; and land use to build housing for skilled workforce to support industries; infrastructure planning is needed as an enabler.
- The phrase 'co-existence' between agriculture and energy - indicates a minimum standard with just tolerance of each other, yet there is little ambition in 'co-existence'.
- Opportunities for agriculture; for new revenue streams and to reduce input costs eg biofuels / green ammonia to increase food resilience production; on farm, biofuels to power logistics and lower emissions; green ammonia as a key input and a way to store energy and build grid resilience and allow export of energy, and in supporting food processing capability.
- Opportunities for energy; far more constructive land access agreements due to the alignment between farming, communities and energy industry and to support social licence.
- Local production delivering outcomes for communities to thrive; agriculture community needing access to energy; increasing the regional workforce base.
- To build a new system by bringing together farmers, the ag engineering community and energy infrastructure towards an export commodity system.
- A shift in logic and language; shifting from energy projects and agricultural land (triggering disputes and focus on compliance) to energy designed into the production system where farmers are seen as energy producers, a partner in energy production.

Item 5

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A shift from current erosion of community trust with top-down imposition - to community trust built through shared economic development; a shift from value extraction to value compounded with multiple uses of land towards productivity. • Wimmera-Southern Mallee has provided a submission to the Senate Select Committee on Productivity in Australia focused on productivity and population. <p>AgriEnergy: Wimmera-Southern Mallee region: about 1.5 million tonnes of grain is produced; about \$30 billion worth of renewables and transmission in the region waiting to occur; 60% of fertilizer costs are energy linked; fuel is heavily related to the price of energy;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AgriEnergy at scale - capability for one farm to be a food producer, a carbon storage producer and a natural capital store on the same land; a whole system design to enable compounding value rather than a focus on one industry. • The Covid experience showed the need for a more resilient system with sovereign capability on shore eg local biofuel production, local fertilizer production while also taking advantage of selling on overseas markets. • Energy and ag to work together, stop seeing energy projects as land use conflicts; energy industry to partner with biofuel and ammonia production opportunities (sovereign capability) • How to do more locally at smaller scale and develop a collective voice so the energy industry and agriculture industry come together and articulate the opportunities.
<p>Item 6</p>	<p>National, jurisdictional and industry updates on key issues</p> <p><u>NSW Farmers: Connie Mort</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NSW Farmers attending a Walcha branch meeting with the AEIC, Tony Mahar to discuss the realignment of the New England REZ transmission project and EnergyCo's / NSW Govt communication with the community and their concerns around impacts. • Central West Orana REZ is well into construction phase with significant works underway; some poor communication with the community with significant tree clearing along a major road as part of the project, damage to the environment and little information about restoration of biodiversity. • Disappointing that learnings from poor community engagement and decision making have not led to improved outcomes; NSW Farmers regularly flagging this with NSW Minister and Depts. • The South-West REZ is in a more sparsely populated region; a concentration of wind and solar projects; landholder groups struggling with engagement with developers and the conduct of some developers; not a positive experience. • Apparent misalignment with the planning process and feedback opportunities; one project received sufficient objections which went to the NSW Independent Planning Commission, a step prior to final planning approval is granted; a smaller number of locals impacted and the opp for them to raise concerns not granted to that community; councils are not properly resourced to manage certain issues, communities are not getting access to information. • The Hunter-Central REZ and the New England REZ will be connected via the Hunter Transmission Project; some impacts but not to the extent of other REZ areas. • NSW Farmers is advancing discussions with the AEIC, Tony Mahar and his team on public liability insurance options, including for neighbours of renewable energy projects <u>not to be held</u> liable under their own public liability insurance, for example, in the case of a fire on their property going into a renewable project next door. • Progress is needed to clarify issues for other communities regarding neighbour liability. • Continuing to work with the Developer Rating Scheme; RELA Access scheme, launched in Canberra on 26 March. <p><u>Karin Stark, Farm Renewables Consulting</u> early bird tickets are now available for the National Renewables in Agriculture Conference in Orange on 12 August.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A range of interesting speakers; focus on fuel and fertilizer shortages and supply shocks • Solar technology to produce green fertilizer / hydrous ammonia plant • Electric powered farm vehicles; biofuels on farm.

- See Saw Wines using floating photovoltaic (FPV) panels on vineyard dams.

Andrew Chamberlin, QFF

- Qld Govt has asked QFF to review the 2023 Landholder Toolkit for renewable energy; recent changes in Qld legislation incl to strategic policy arrangements and re markets and the way renewable energy projects have developed; prob more emphasis on batteries and hybrid projects.
- QFF is considering ways to better prepare land holders to have discussions around tax, financial and legal advice; considering whether might need a technical advisor to help them with detailed engineering issues occurring on site – looking at plans, reading reports and understanding the EIS; QFF consulting on these issues.
- Toolkit draft in a month or two; appreciate any input/suggestions from Taskforce members.
- With the South Qld / Northern NSW drought hub, writing an energy literacy program based on QFF 10 years of farm assessments; 450 energy audits completed and on farm energy water assessments over that time; considering consolidating into a useful package of information.
- [Queensland Ag Energy Hub](#) includes 130-odd case studies; intention is to progress to a structured energy literacy program and discuss eg the energy/water nexus.
- Working with TAFE to develop a micro- credential for energy use on farms; to include a structured learning program for farmers to understand energy market fundamentals, energy use on farm, conducting energy assessments, reviewing and understanding technical proposals; doing the same with tariffs and understanding efficiency, demand management, and looking ahead to new technologies etc; some emphasis on batteries and solar on farm as it is in conjunction with TAFE Clean Energy batteries part.
- Some overlap in the projects; hoping to see information being available over coming months and looking at best way to present information to farmers whether case studies, videos or podcasts.

Chris Gillitt, Canegrowers

- Plans for a wind farm in the Proserpine cane district; significant work with the community, trade-off between engaging too early versus engaging later when more details are available.
- Community concern about de-commissioning in the future, interference with use of drones, land use conflicts in an area of good agricultural land.
- Alinta Energy purchased the project as part of a portfolio of another business; the new location unacceptable to growers; suggestions that Community Benefit Agreements are a bribe; community would prefer access to cheaper power rather than other infrastructure or facilities.
- QFF involved in supporting Canegrowers in terms of engagement.

Update on smart meter issue: issues with larger pumps when the smart meters are rolled out; rules specifications mean a lower tolerance on the amperage draw particularly during startup of a motor; it's deemed as a customer's responsibility for costs for a CT meter incl the need to change switchboards.

- Canegrowers letter to Qld Minister requesting they direct Ergon to recognise that the issue is meter related and not customer fault and the metering costs upgrades to be absorbed by Ergon.
- Under QCA (Qld Competition Authority) determination process – explanation regarding additional metering costs which can be recovered if included in the tariffs for small customers.
- The issue doesn't appear to be widespread; little response from Govt, but an inquiry received from Qld Treasury seeking to know the extent of the problem.
- Ergon have a portal where customers can request any metering changes to be delayed, potentially flagging they might have an issue.

Chris to discuss with Karin the potential solution/s.

Greg McCarron, Central Irrigation Trust, SA

	<p>Currently, two pricing resets underway in SA; decades old infrastructure to be replaced; questions around the need for more infrastructure demand, more assets, more revenue, more profit; robust discussions with companies around the right level of development, how much is speculative, how much is real.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The SA component is detailed in the draft ISP 2026 re what level of infrastructure required. • Re-elected SA state govt and decisions regarding projects – eg extension to BHP’s Olympic Dam expansion; significant desal plant and water supply scheme for that on the west of SA, pumping water hundreds of kms north will be a significant energy user. • SA Govt has an underwriting scheme for energy, frequency and control in the network, ultimately funded by consumers on their power bills; scheme to fund guarantees that companies will sign with the Govt to be available to put power into the grid. • SA has large scale renewables though there are flexibility concerns; power stations that are closing down and gas to close; need to ensure security; currently awaiting those costs from the pricing resets and consumer impact. <p>The Chair observed the issues raised by Greg - where companies are building their asset base (largely driven by energy transition) with associated costs involved – was a justification for establishing the Ag Energy Taskforce in 2014 with agriculture and industry concerns about energy costs, undermining their comparative advantage</p> <p><u>Sam Forsizi, AgForce</u> The Qld Govt is developing its code of conduct for renewable energy developers; AgForce concern that it sits within State Code 23 Wind Farm Development; also dealing with fuel and fertilizer shortages.</p>
<p>Item 7</p>	<p>The Chair, other issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Review of the <i>#Better Practice Social Licence Guideline</i> is being conducted by Next Generation Engagement; Kirsty O’Connell has engaged some Taskforce members seeking feedback regarding the experience with the energy sector/energy businesses and developers. • Taskforce members are now invited to join a meeting with Next Generation Engagement on Monday 18 May – 2-4pm to hear about issues raised as part of the <i>#Better Practice Social Licence Guideline</i> Review; prior to that meeting Sabiene and Kirsty will brief The Energy Charter businesses as feedback about their performance. • Taskforce members are invited to join a meeting on Tuesday 28 April – 1-2pm arranged by The Energy Charter with DCCEEW and Equifax to discuss the Developer Rating Scheme
<p>Item 8</p>	<p>Meeting closed at 12.10 pm</p>