



The Energy
Charter

Landholder & Community Better Practice Engagement Guide

Overview

Why does landholder & community engagement matter?

Landholder and community engagement is an important aspect of providing essential energy services to Australian communities. As we move increasingly towards a new energy future, there are growing opportunities for proactive engagement between energy businesses, landholders and communities regarding energy asset development projects and the maintenance of existing energy assets. For transmission businesses, there is likely to be an increase of asset development in line with the growth in renewable energy.

Landholders, communities and their representatives (“you”) are critical partners and stakeholders in the delivery of major energy projects. Energy businesses (“we/us”) recognise that our projects and operations may impact your lives and livelihoods and that we have a responsibility to recognise and minimise identified impacts and work towards agreeable and reasonable outcomes for everyone.

We are keen to ensure that we build mutually beneficial and trusted relationships with you over time. We want to authentically work with you through the relevant phases of any project that may impact you. We also acknowledge that you may have a long-standing and sometimes intergenerational connection to your land and recognise the knowledge and connection you have to your land.

Who is this Better Practice Guide for?

This Better Practice Landholder and Community Engagement Guide (this “Better Practice Guide”) is for you as a guide on what to expect when we engage with you about energy assets. We have put it together with the help of landholder and community representatives based on our collective experience across many energy projects to:

1. Share the high-level principles that help guide our engagement with you
2. Assist in the management of our impacts on you
3. Guide any mutual value opportunities which may exist

It has been designed to assist in the respectful engagement that needs to take place for the design, development, delivery, operation and/or maintenance of new or existing energy assets. In particular, in designing this Better Practice Guide, we’ve focused on the transmission infrastructure associated with energy projects i.e. transmission lines and gas pipelines.

What does this Better Practice Guide apply to?

This Better Practice Guide is not a technical guide. It is not focused on specific projects. Rather, its primary purpose is to encourage better engagement and outcomes for landholders and communities. You can use it to encourage us to do better and to hold us to account.

This Better Practice Guide applies to a range of different projects and assets:

- New or existing electricity transmission lines or substations
- New or existing gas pipeline assets.

Why is it important?

For more information about the importance of energy assets such as transmission lines, check out the [Energy Networks Australia Fact Sheet](#) which describes how electricity transmission lines transport electricity over long distances from traditional and renewable generators (including wind and solar facilities) to where it is needed to power homes, businesses and communities across metropolitan, regional and remote areas and between states. As part of this transition, the Australian Energy Market Operator (AEMO) designed a blueprint to manage the evolution of Australia's power system. Renewable energy zones are being developed in areas with good wind, solar and storage opportunities. In Australia there's huge investment occurring in renewable energy generation in these zones. Often, they are in locations far from traditional coal and gas plants.

Development of this Better Practice Guide

This Better Practice Guide is a #BetterTogether collaboration between transmission network service providers, landholder representatives and other community stakeholders including the National Farmers Federation, Queensland Farmers' Federation, NSW Farmers Federation, Victorian Farmers Federation, AgForce Queensland and Cotton Australia. It has been shared with stakeholders for their thoughts and feedback.

It builds on the commitments by Energy Charter CEOs to the [Energy Charter](#): a national CEO-led collaboration that supports the energy sector towards a customer-centric future. It specifically relates to principles 1.4, 3.2 and 4.1. Our core values of "Be invested, make a difference", "Be open, learn and improve", and "Think big, be bold" are brought to life through [#BetterTogether initiatives](#) such as this one, that are focused on delivering better customer outcomes for all Australians.

Our commitment to better engagement practice

Our Better Practice Engagement Principles

To ensure we grow respect, trust, confidence and build better relationships, our high-level principles to guide our engagement with you are as follows:

- A. Clear purpose** We will let you know the purpose of our engagement with you.
- B. Accessible & inclusive** We will engage with you as early as appropriate and offer you different ways to engage with us, so there's a channel that's right for you.
- C. Accurate & timely** We will ensure that our people are fully informed and empowered to talk to you about our project.
- D. Genuine** We will provide timely, accurate information that is in plain language, providing a holistic perspective of the project. We will be open, honest and transparent with you, including about what is and what isn't on the table.
- E. Close the loop** We will ask you what is important to you and we will actively listen to your input and feedback. We will be accountable and provide a clear feedback loop on what we've heard, and how we've responded and why.
- F. Share other options** We will let you know where you can go for additional information, advice, consultation or grievances.

These high-level principles will be applied flexibly considering the nature of the project or asset, its stage of development, location and your expectations. Importantly these principles help to create a benchmark for a consistent approach for us to engage with you. We have also included a Check In at the end of this Better Practice Guide to encourage you to provide your feedback on where we have done well, and where we could do better on our engagement with you.

Human Rights Considerations

Human Rights is a consideration in all aspects of community interactions. When developing and undertaking engagement approaches, we are expected to respect the human rights of the stakeholders where we operate. Our responsibility and approach may be guided by documents such as the OHCHR's [Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: Implementing the United Nations 'Protect, Respect and Remedy' Framework](#) and various Federal and State legislation.

Some Australian States and Territories have Human Rights Acts which recognise different categories of human rights and may be applicable to certain impacts. For example, the Human Rights Act (QLD) 2019 contains 23 categories of human rights, including section property (section 24) and cultural rights (sections 27 and s28).

Over time, we will continuously improve our practices, which means we will review and reflect on our engagement with you and commit to improvements in the future. This Better Practice Guide may need to be refreshed from time to time to reflect those improvements and any other changes.

Traditional Owners of the land

We recognise the Traditional Owners of the land that energy assets are located on, and our responsibility to respect their ongoing connection to the lands, skies, waters, plants and animals.

Our relationship with Traditional Owners is an important element of our ability to deliver projects in successful way. The engagement principles and approaches outlined in this Better Practice Guide provide a foundation to our engagement with Traditional Owners, however, we also acknowledge the unique aspects of each of these communities and importance of understanding the values, culture and historical connection that Traditional Owners have with their land.

Culturally appropriate engagement with Traditional Owners will occur for a range of purposes, including, access to Country, agreement making (including those related to Native Title), cultural heritage protection, and to foster respect for human rights, dignity and culture of Traditional Owner communities. In many cases, we will develop a separate Traditional Owners Engagement Plan in consultation with Traditional Owners to help guide our engagement.

For examples on engagement practices with Traditional Owners see:

- [Powerlink Queensland's Cultural Heritage website](#)
- Victorian Government's [Traditional Owner and Aboriginal Victorians Engagement Guide \(sharepoint.com\)](#)
- Victorian Government's [Traditional Owner and Aboriginal Community Engagement Framework.pdf \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

The commitment of many Energy Charter members to working with Traditional Owners is also reflected in their Reconciliation Action Plans (see links at the Energy Charter's [Communal Content Hub](#)).

A. Clear purpose on why we are engaging with you

We will communicate at the start of the project as to why we need your input. This includes in the planning phase of the project and throughout the construction of the project itself.

For example, for landholders our engagement may focus on discussing and securing access to a suitable site if the project moves forward. For the community, our engagement activities may be focused on raising awareness of the project, helping to build respectful relationships with community stakeholders, managing any social impacts and discussing opportunities for community benefits.

The “why” of the engagement is summarised through the IAP2 Public Participation Framework (outlined below). This is a commonly used, best practice, engagement framework for underpinned by seven core values to assess and drive engagement activities. Broadly, the type and level of engagement may take one of the following forms:

- To inform you: provide balanced and objective information to assist you in understanding the project, the alternatives, and the opportunities.
- To consult with you: obtain your feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.
- To involve you: to work directly with you throughout the process to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.
- To collaborate with you: to partner with you in each aspect of the decision making into the development of alternatives and identification of the preferred solution.
- To empower you: to place the final decision making in your hands.

We will make it clear at the start of our discussions with you why we need your input, so you know what to expect along the way. Where we can, we will actively collaborate with you.

More information?

Below is a diagram of the [IAP2 Public Participation Framework](#). If you would like further background on different types of engagement we'd encourage you to take a look at the [Energy Charter Better Practice Customer Engagement Toolkit](#).



B. Engagement that is accessible and inclusive

We will be accessible and inclusive in our engagement with you. This means engaging with you as early as is appropriate to ensure that our discussions with you are meaningful. We will keep you informed at all stages of the process so that you have an opportunity to have your say on key issues.

We will ensure that throughout the engagement process, our people are fully informed and empowered to talk with you about the project including third parties assisting us. This means that they will have the right information to share with you at the right time. You will not get the run around.

We will also offer you different ways to engage with us to promote two-way conversation and that are based on your engagement preferences. This may include things like:

- Holding face-to-face local community information sessions
- Meeting with you on your land
- Meetings with small groups of neighbours who are adjacent to your land
- Creating a community reference or consultation group made up of a representational cross-section of your community
- Ongoing correspondence e.g. letters, emails, newsletters
- Project website
- Online surveys or feedback forms

The project websites should be up-to-date and easy to find, with clear information on the project, current news, how and who to contact us, how to make a complaint and access our complaint process procedures.

What can you expect?

As a project reaches key milestones or periods of increased activity our engagement may increase and evolve to other more formal engagement mechanisms for example, across a wider range of stakeholders (for example as part of a regulatory process). We may also undertake research or conduct investigations which could require specific community input e.g. impact assessments. The type of engagement will depend on the nature of the project.

In addition to our usual engagement activities, other engagement methods may be used to support the approval processes, research or exploration of focus areas. This may include using:

- Dedicated project website, telephone and email address
- Project flyers, notices and newsletters
- Public displays, information sessions or drop-in sessions
- Community reference groups
- Community forums, focus groups or workshops

C. Accurate and timely communication

We will provide information that is in plain language, so that you can understand it the first time you read or hear it. Our information will be clear and informative.

For example, we will let you know:

- Information about the project, including the relevant stages of the project
- A “helicopter” overview of the stages of the project including, planning and approval timelines, site selection, project feasibility, assessments, construction and operations
- Our proposed engagement with you and what to expect at each stage of the engagement process
- When we will request your time and how much of your time we may require
- Who your point of contact is and how you can get in touch with them
- Any compensation processes that apply to you, and how compensation is determined
- Any laws or regulations that govern what we are doing
- The range of potential solutions and what options are available to you

Need more information?

If you need information or have feedback on a project, you are encouraged to get in touch with us directly. Your feedback can provide valuable information to us to assist us to improve our planning, construction or operations.

We will clearly communicate and make available a contact telephone number and email address from the early stages of project development, and proactively encourage feedback and enquiries from you. You should also be able to provide feedback free of charge, either through a 24 hour toll-free (1800) or local telephone number or via our website.

Over time, there may be additional ways for us to stay in contact with you. This could be part of our regular stakeholder group newsletter which will keep you informed on our activities more broadly. We will inform you of these opportunities so you can subscribe and keep up to date.

Some examples of our stakeholder communications:

- Powerlink Queensland’s Landholder Information is [here](#)
- Powerlink Queensland Activities on an Easement is [here](#)
- Powerlink Queensland Land Access Protocol is [here](#)
- TransGrid’s easement information is [here](#)
- TransGrid’s interactive online portal for its Energy Connect project is [here](#)

D. Genuine approach

Our aim is to be open, honest and transparent with you. Ensuring that you know all of the options that are available to you. This means we will tell you what parts of the project are open to negotiation. Equally, if the laws or regulations do not provide flexibility then we will be clear about what is not open for negotiation.

When there are some constraints

Sometimes there are constraints on process or outcomes because they are impacted by laws, regulations and safety considerations. We will identify these early on in our discussions with you.

For example:

- The Australian Energy Market Operator (AEMO) develops the Integrated System Plan (ISP) which is a whole-of-system plan that identifies optimal development paths for the National Electricity Market over the next 20 years and beyond
- The process for compensation is often set out in legislation or regulation, which means that we need to follow certain rules. This is discussed further below
- The selection of corridors, routes or substation sites are subject to a range of environmental and planning approval processes that must take into account a range of factors including:
 - o Future land use (incl. industrial)
 - o Location of homes or community infrastructure
 - o Flora and fauna

E. Close the Loop

During our engagement with you, we will ask you what is important to you, and we will actively listen to your input and feedback. It is important that we understand your perspectives and the values of your community. This might include understanding information about any reasonable activities.

We will also be accountable to you for doing what we say we will do. That means, being responsible for our actions. We will let you know what we have heard from you and provide you with clear feedback on how we have responded and why.

For example, closing the loop during the construction or maintenance period...

The critical elements of closing the loop during a construction or maintenance phase may include:

- Providing regular, proactive information about construction or maintenance activities, including timeframes, possible impacts, mitigations and project contact details
- Monitoring, evaluating and reporting on potential community impacts due to works
- Engaging with you transparently, particularly in relation to complaints handling and management, on an ongoing basis

Many of these activities will require us to be accountable to what we said we would do, and how we have achieved that.

F. Share other options

We will let you know how you can access additional information, advice or support. We will also importantly provide you with information on where to raise any concerns or grievances that you may have.

Sometimes the unexpected happens, in recognising this, we have internal grievance management processes in place to manage any complaints or issues that arise. We will provide you with information on the steps of this process at the start of our engagement with you and how this can be escalated to the relevant body.

Where to go if you need more help?

Across Australia, the [Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner](#) works collaboratively with all levels of government, scientists, experts, industry and the community to resolve complaints from community members about proposed and operational wind facilities, large scale solar facilities (5 MW or more), storage facilities, such as large scale batteries (1 MW or more) and new major transmission projects.

Energy and Water Ombudsman exist in every State and Territory:

- [ACT and New South Wales](#)
- [Northern Territory](#)
- [Queensland](#)
- [South Australia](#)
- [Tasmania](#)
- [Victoria](#)

In NSW, the former Commissioner for NSW Fair Trading, Rod Stowe is the [Landowner and Community Advocate](#), advising TransGrid on engagement practices and processes

Other resources

The following questions are designed to prompt discussion among board members and guide the tailoring of customer voice initiatives to suit their business.

There are many resources for landholders and communities, including relating specifically to renewable energy projects. For example, we would encourage you to look at:

- The Clean Energy Council's [Community Engagement Guidelines for Building Powerlines for Renewable Energy Developments](#)
- [The NSW Farmer's Renewable Energy Landholder Guide](#)
- [The Queensland Solar Farm Guidelines](#)
- Vic Water and Victorian Farmers Pipeline Easement Guidelines
- Victorian Government's [Community Engagement and Benefit Sharing in Renewable Energy](#)
- [National Wind Farm Commissioner Annual Report 2019](#) - Section 3 Community Engagement provides observations and recommendations on best practice community engagement and includes a variety of best practice engagement activities that may be implemented.

Check in!

We want to ensure our engagement with you is appropriate, addresses your interests and is clear. Consider the following questions, are you comfortable with these statements? If not, we encourage you to raise them with us, so that we can work better with you.

- Have we let you know the purpose of our engagement with you?
- Have we engaged with you as early as is appropriate and offered you different ways to engage with us?
- Are our people fully informed and empowered to talk to you about our project or can they direct you to somebody that is?
- Have we provided timely information that is in plain language, easy to access and accurate?
- Have we been open, honest and transparent with you, including about what is and what isn't on the table?
- Have we listened to what is important to you and provided a clear feedback loop on what we've heard, and how we've responded?
- Have we let you know where you can go for additional information, advice, consultation or grievances?

We would like to be accountable and discuss with you where we have done well and where we can do better. Your feedback is valuable to us.

Managing impacts on you

Our goal is for you to avoid or minimise any potential harm and maximise any potential benefits through our activities.

To achieve this goal, we will:

1. Understand the existing environment, stakeholders and community and overlay the project to identify the potential positive and negative impacts. This means working closely and as early as possible with you to understand what's important to you, and any potential impacts.
2. Engage respectfully with the local community, including Traditional Owners of the land, to seek your views and input.
3. Be sensitive to areas of biosecurity, high biodiversity, cultural and landscape value in the design and operation of our projects.
4. Minimise the impacts on agricultural land and biosecurity where feasible and explore opportunities to integrate continued agricultural production into the project, where appropriate.
5. Ensure our engagement is timely, well-informed and ongoing throughout the whole-of-asset lifecycle (from build through to decommissioning).
6. Consider impact management practices to avoid if possible, and if not, to minimise any potential negative impacts, along with increasing positive impacts for the whole-of-asset lifecycle.
7. Strive to deliver activities and projects in a sustainable environmental and social manner.
8. Embrace an adaptive approach which includes continual review of the impacts over time to identify emerging issues and respond to a changing environment.
9. Use appropriate tools to create a feedback loop from you on your experience with us in managing impacts and use that to drive continuous improvement in our approach.

Considerations for managing potential impacts

High voltage overhead transmission lines and substations may be perceived as having potential impacts for landholders and communities. Concerns include health, property value and loss of enjoyment from the visual intrusion, noise or other concerns.

Electricity powerlines, substations, transformers and other electrical sources such as common electrical appliances and wiring, all emit extremely low frequency (ELF) electric and magnetic fields (EMF). Exposure to ELF EMF at high levels can affect the functioning of the nervous system. However, exposure to high levels of ELF EMF is not normally found in the everyday environment from electrical sources. While such exposures are very unusual, there are international guidelines on limits of exposure which are aimed at preventing established harmful effects.

There has been a lot of research on whether exposure to ELF EMF from electrical sources below the exposure limits causes any health effects. Most of the research indicates that ELF EMF exposure normally encountered in the environment, including in the vicinity of powerlines, does not pose a risk to human health.

For more information, see Energy Network Australia's [Electric and Magnetic Fields Factsheet – What we know](#)

Adding value to your communities

Our goal is to genuinely find mutual value in the areas in which we operate and add value to your community. We also recognise that simply doing good things in the community does not offset our commitment to managing impacts.

To achieve this goal, we will:

1. Consider the importance of the legacy of the project and the assets and what we leave “behind”.
2. Involve you in identifying areas where we can contribute to and ideally strengthen your community through a project or projects.
3. Support the local economy by providing local employment and procurement opportunities wherever possible.
4. Aim to genuinely understand your vantage point and values and ask how we can make the experience better.
5. Look for ideas that lead to longer-term sustainable development benefits for your community, including exploring innovative opportunities with other industries or government to provide collaborative investment into your community.
6. Demonstrate responsible land stewardship over the life of the asset and welcome opportunities to enhance the ecological and cultural value of the land where we can.
7. Be authentic about what outcomes can be achieved or not.
8. Keep our promises over the longer term.
9. At the end of the asset life, we will engage with the community on plans for the responsible decommissioning.

As part of our ongoing commitment to sustainable development, we look to partner with community organisations to deliver initiatives that provide a positive impact on the people who live in the areas where our assets and projects are located.

Fair and equitable compensation processes

Fair, transparent and equitable land acquisition and compensation processes are important to build and retain trust in the communities in which we operate. While often the models for compensation are set out in regulations, we usually negotiate compensation with you so this means we can apply our high-level principles to guide our engagement with you.

In circumstances where land acquisition is required, we will:

- A. Clearly let you know the purpose of our engagement with you is to consult on land acquisition and compensation.
- B. Engage with you as early as is appropriate and offer you different ways to engage with us regarding land acquisition and compensation, ensuring that our people are fully informed and empowered to talk to you about this issue.
- C. Provide you with timely information on land acquisition and compensation that is in plain language, that is both easy to access and accurate. This should include what factors are taken into account under compensation models. Any agreements should also be in plain English.
- D. Be open, honest and transparent with you, including about what is and what isn't on the table.
- E. Ask what is important to you and actively listen to your input and feedback. We will be accountable and provide a clear feedback loop on what we have heard, and how we've responded.
- F. Let you know where you can go for additional information, advice, consultation or grievances.

One of the challenges with compensation for a landholder it is to determine “what’s reasonable?” We usually can’t publish previous compensation amounts because most landholders do not want the compensation that they have received to be made public. That’s why having independent evaluation of compensation is a good starting point.

In Queensland, landholders can go to the Land Court and seek independent guidance on whether their compensation is fair. This brings together experts to hear the landholder’s thoughts on the impact and provide comment on the level of compensation offered.

Compensation models

Compensation models are usually set out in regulations or legislation and vary in different jurisdictions and across different infrastructure. For example:

- In Queensland, the compensation model is summarised in [Powerlink’s Compensation for Land Acquisition Guide](#).
- In NSW, the compensation model is summarised in [TransGrid’s Easement Compensation Brochure](#).

Renewable energy assets like solar and wind facilities have different compensation models, because unlike linear infrastructure like transmission lines and gas pipelines, they sit in one geographical location. Renewable energy proponents are usually able to freely negotiate with landholders and adjacent neighbours about compensation, rather than being restricted by legislation. This has allowed for more flexibility in their compensation models, including yearly lease agreements and even compensation for neighbours that are impacted.

We welcome your thoughts or feedback on this Better Practice Landholder & Community Engagement Guide, by emailing us at director@theenergycharter.com.au. We are always open to continuous improvement.

Contacts

[National Farmers Federation](#)

[Queensland Farmers’ Federation](#)

[NSW Farmers Federation](#)

[Victorian Farmers Federation](#)

[AgForce Queensland](#)

[Cotton Australia](#)

[APA](#)

[Powerlink Queensland](#)

[TransGrid](#)

[Essential Energy](#)

Better Practice Ideas for businesses

MANAGING IMPACTS ON COMMUNITIES

- Have we clearly explained why the project is important and how it benefits the community?
- Have the negotiables and non-negotiables been clearly defined upfront?
- Are there early opportunities to further understand local knowledge and values, personal and local interests and priorities, and timeframe needs? For example, what is the timing of the community or landholder's mustering of cattle or crop harvests?
- Have the positive and negative impacts of the activities been identified together with any concerns as early as possible in the process?
- Have impacts on biosecurity and waste been minimised?
- Have impacts on agricultural or community activities been minimised?
- Have different cultures been acknowledged and considered, to enable better ways to fully understand and communicate how activities may have impacts, both positive and negative?

ADDING VALUE TO COMMUNITIES

- Is there investment in local projects that have shared objectives with the community, for example, vegetation management capacity building projects with local Indigenous communities or Landcare groups and engage them for ongoing work into the future?
- Is there assistance for the community to obtain new resources?
- Has there been collaboration to support resources that are valued by the community, for example, further training or development opportunities?
- Is there investment in local infrastructure that could assist the local community?
- How regularly is there dialogue with the community to lean in and help on an ongoing basis?

FAIR AND EQUITABLE COMPENSATION PROCESSES

- Is there somewhere for a landholder to go to ask whether the compensation is fair?
- Is there an allowance for engagement activities? (see Powerlink's PPAA)
- Can hardship provisions allow whole of lot purchases rather than just easements?
- Can the payment of my compensation be fast-tracked or payments drawn forward instead of waiting for the process to be completed?
- Can we put on a workshop for landholder representatives to inform them of their rights in the acquisition and compensation process?
- Is there clear information on why compensation models may be different to solar or wind facilities?
- Are there ways to support neighbouring properties who are impacted by the project?
- What supports are there for longer-term liability issues associated with infrastructure that may impact landholders?
- Does our landholder agreement meet the recommendations of the Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner outlined in the 2020 Annual Report?



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