Fiona Roberts:

Good afternoon and welcome to the Landowner and Renewable Energy Transition Webinar. I'm Fiona Roberts from the Hume Region Office of the Victorian Department of Energy Environment and Climate Action. You may also know us as DEECA or previously DELWP. We have a lot of information to share with you in the next 90 minutes. We have brought together government and industry experts to share their knowledge and a farmer from the northeast to share their experiences with you.

Fiona Roberts:

The purpose of this webinar is to provide information to help build your understanding about renewable energy developments and also help you know where to go for credible information in the future. This webinar is a collaboration with our regional Agriculture Victoria colleagues who deliver the Energy Smart Farming Initiative, as well as our colleagues from the Loddon Mallee office of DEECA. This webinar is being recorded and the recording slides and resources referred to in this webinar will be posted on the Energy Smart Farming website.

Fiona Roberts:

Before we get started, I will acknowledge the traditional owners whose countries we are joining this meeting from. I live and work on Yorta Yorta country. I also honour elders past and present and welcome elders and first peoples who are joining this meeting today. So, to get started in this webinar, we will hear from our six panellists and then we will have a Q&A session towards the end of the webinar. Please add your questions throughout the webinar using the Q&A function at the bottom of your Zoom screen. We'll be using the chat function as a notice board throughout the session. You can view that at the bottom of your screen, also. We have a team working in the background collating questions, and this will help get as many questions as possible to our panellists and also avoid any double ups.

Fiona Roberts:

We understand that the renewable energy transition can be challenging and it affects us all in different ways. We value respectful conversations and are looking forward to constructive questions and answers today. I would like to thank our six panellists for supporting the webinar and for generously donating time out of their busy schedules. We are aiming to cover quite a range of information in this webinar in the 90 minutes. So we will get started.

Fiona Roberts:

Our first panellist will set the scene of the renewable energy transition in Victoria. Eliza Ginnivan is the manager for regional engagement of the Victorian Transmission Investment Framework and is part DEECA's VicGrid team. Eliza is born, bred, and lives in northeast Victoria and has a deep connection to the beautiful Indigo Valley. Eliza will give us the what and why of the renewable energy transition we are seeing in Victoria. Thanks, Eliza.

Eliza Ginnivan:

Thank you very much for that. And hello to everyone. Yes, as Fiona said, the purpose of my presentation today is to give you an overview of the renewable energy transition. So what we mean by energy transition, that's the changes required to transform our economy from one that's powered by fossil fuels such as oil, coal, oil and gas, to one that's powered by clean energy sources. So I'll be setting the stage for the rest of today's presentations. For me, it's really important to understand the bigger macro level forces at play so I can make sense of what's driving the changes that I'm seeing on the ground in my regional community. My hope is that by the end of today's presentation, you'll understand how the energy transition impacts what you're seeing on your region and maybe on your farm.

Eliza Ginnivan:

So before I get underway, just a quick introduction to the organisation that I work for, which is VicGrid. So VicGrid is a Victorian government agency that is responsible for planning and developing the new infrastructure that will transport energy generated by renewables to the electricity grid. So VicGrid is putting in place a long-term plan to make sure that there's the right infrastructure in the right place at the right time to support the energy transition. We carry out this work in three ways. Policy, we give advice to government about how the rules that should govern how energy is generated and transmitted in Victoria. Planning, we plan for Victoria's future energy needs through modelling and consulting with communities. And projects. So we oversee the procurement of new transmission projects.

Eliza Ginnivan:

So that underway, let's get into what the energy transition involves. So energy, it powers every aspect of our lives, heating and cooling, lights and kitchens appliances, hospitals, schools. The fact that I can speak to you now from Melbourne and that I can live and work in Beechworth, the kids favourite devices, it's absolutely essential for everything we do.

Eliza Ginnivan:

So the energy we use comes from different sources. In Victoria, most of our energy comes from burning brown coal at the power stations in the La Trobe Valley, this energy is delivered through Victoria's electricity grid. So this is a network of generators, high voltage power lines, substations, and lower voltage lines across the state. This was built originally mainly to transfer electricity from the centralised coal fired power stations to end users, essentially in a one-way direction emanating out. However, within the next 10 years, these coal fired, power stations will be phased out and in the 2030s and 2040s, Victoria will move to full connection to renewable energy generation. Unlike our current stated in the past, this generation will be spread out across the state and much of it is going to be concentrated in designated renewable energy zones. So let's get into a bit more detail.

Eliza Ginnivan:

Next slide please. So relying on coal to meet our energy needs is a short-term solution. Coal fired power is becoming increasingly unreliable. These facilities were built a long time ago and they're really difficult to maintain. They're also the source of, the main source of Victoria's greenhouse gas emissions contributing up to 70% of our total emissions, and there are higher costs with maintaining ageing power stations and we know where higher costs end up.

Eliza Ginnivan:

But the main thing that's driving the urgency of the energy transition is that these coal-fired power stations are closing down faster than expected. So, since 2012, more than 10 large coal-fired generators have closed across Australia, including Hazelwood in La Trobe Valley. All of our coal-fired power stations are projected to close by 2038 across Australia. Yallourn in the La Trobe Valley which supplies, 22% of our state's power is slated to close in mid-2028. That's only four years away. And our largest coal-fired power station Loy Yang A will close in 2035, and that's a decade earlier than we have been working to. This means we have just over a decade to replace these major power sources that have powered our state for many, many decades with alternatives. Next slide please.

Eliza Ginnivan:

So our new energy system, it's moving from fossil fuels, which is coal, gas, and oil to renewable energy, sun and wind. In Victoria, we have the goal that by 2035, our electricity grid will be powered by 95% renewable energy. This is part of our commitment to net zero emissions by 2045. Currently, renewable energy powers 38% of our energy consumption, so that is a big ambitious goal.

Eliza Ginnivan:

During the same time though, our electricity demand is going up by 2035, Victoria's energy use will have increased by 40% or more. This is driven mostly by the electrification of homes, businesses, and vehicles as EVs come up. So it's happening really quickly. If we can't build renewable energy generation and supporting transmission lines soon, we'll see spikes in electricity prices and unreliable and electricity supply when those coal-fired power stations retire in about a decade. And transmission lines, those significant pieces of infrastructure that are needed to transfer the generation to the use take years to plan and construct. So there's a lot of urgency to act quickly to keep the lights on in Victoria. So next slide please.

Eliza Ginnivan:

So what does this transition look like? So we are going to need significant new renewable energy generation and storage capacity to replace these coal-fired power stations. This slide shows you can see at the top are the types of renewable energy generation transported by transmission lines in the middle down to the types of uses and storage at the bottom. So this new energy system, it's going to require a decentralised and diversified portfolio of generation types. You can see at the top there we've got hydroelectricity, solar farms, grid-scale batteries, onshore and offshore wind. Much of the energy that we generate in the new phase will be used closer to where it's generated. And with transmission the middle poles and wires you can see there. We also need to upgrade the transmission network to connect these new renewable energy sources. There's going to be a lot more energy coming in and this will be needed to connect all the different sources of generation to homes and businesses across the state.

Eliza Ginnivan:

We also need more storage solutions such as batteries and pumped hydro. Some battery options are down the bottom of this slide. So batteries are really important because they charge when more electricity is being generated than being used, and then they then deliver the energy back into the grid later when there's not enough wind or sunshine to meet the demand for power. So it's a really crucial part of maintaining steady and reliable energy supply. Under the energy transition household-level technologies are becoming more common, so that's rooftop solar household batteries and EVs. Microgrids and neighbourhood batteries will also boost energy security, especially for more isolated communities. So let's look at then the energy transition on a map. Next slide please.

Eliza Ginnivan:

So it's a bit of a busy map. I'll let you absorb that while I'm speaking. But you can see on this map it shows proposed and existing generation transmission and storage projects. Just want to call out the yellow. The yellow bolded icons are new transmission which will be required and you might see offshore wind down there in offshore in Gippsland, which is currently under quite significant development. So as we move from this centralised energy system to a decentralise one over the next decade, this energy transition is going to be visible across Victoria. So we really want to build the right amount of energy infrastructure in the right places at the right time. We want to make sure that we're not building more than is required to meet our needs because we'd like to minimise the impact on communities and on land use as well as keep energy bills down. So that's really important to be modelling and planning this in a centralised coherent way.

Eliza Ginnivan:

In Victoria what VicGrid is working on and the aim is that we will have energy generation concentrated in renewable energy zones. So these are spots across the state where there is really great capacity and opportunity for generation and that minimises the impact on other land use. So you can see from this map, the generation is spread out across the state. Many regions are going to be involved in the transition in some way. You'll probably have come to this seminar because you have started to see that yourself with your own eyes. You've heard about it from your neighbours. There might be prospecting and development phases of generation, wind and solar farms, transmission projects, construction and operation.

Eliza Ginnivan:

Some other factors of the energy transition that I think are important to call out are the use of land for generation storage and transmission lines. We're going to need to build a lot over the next decade. Where will it go and what's the arrangements under which that is built? Renewable energy offers diversified income streams for landholders who host a project that could be a really interesting source of income and spreading risk, particularly I know when farming can be up and down year on year. There's also considerations about the different type of use of land and making sure that our conservation and environment is protected. Renewable energy transition comes with the possibility for region wide investment and economic opportunities associated with the build out, including local jobs and sustainable economic growth.

Eliza Ginnivan:

We've also got an interest in making sure that the benefits of the renewable energy transition are shared with significantly impacted neighbours and host communities. VicGrid has been working on a plan for developing community benefits plan, which is the government's proposal to do just that. Taking into account the fact that previously regional communities have borne a lot of the brunt of transmission and generation projects and they're seeing fewer of the costs. The community benefits plan is a proposal to balance that out. And then there's also working with traditional owners to make sure that the transition can bring long-term economic prosperity and independence to Aboriginal communities. This is an ongoing and finally that regional communities get a say in how the energy transition looks and feels and what it means for communities. In my job at VicGrid, we are working to the Victorian Transmission Investment Framework, which is a plan that's just been shared in the chat and that sets out really the government's commitment to a way of engaging with communities that is early, deep and meaningful, and it's meant to bring people along at an early stage. So it's not just the last people who are consulted.

Eliza Ginnivan:

So from my perspective in closing, I believe the renewable energy transition offers a once in a generation opportunity for regional development for the community that I live in and the towns and regions that we love. It needs to be done in the right way, and I think that knowledge is power and I think this is a really great opportunity for you to ask your questions and get some answers that are going to help you as landowners in the transition. So I hope this has given you a better sense of what's driving the changes in the transition and do you feel a bit more equipped about what's coming next. Great. Thanks, Fiona.

Fiona Roberts:

Thanks, Eliza. Thanks for a great presentation and for setting the scene and explaining how the transition to renewable energy will roll out across Victoria. Please put any questions for Eliza in the Q&A chat function at the bottom of your screen.

Fiona Roberts:

Now I would like to introduce you to Paul Stark, who is a policy and farmer engagement officer at Farmers for Climate Action. Farmers for Climate Action represent approximately 8,000 farmers across Australia and they are also a member of the National Farmers Federation and Climate Action Network Australia. Thanks Paul.

Paul Stark:

Thanks Fiona, and thanks for having us along. If you want to go to the next slide. So I'm in Melbourne on Wurundjeri Land, but I'm originally from Queensland, so I do have a bit of a Victorian perspective, but we're a national organisation, so we also bring landholder experience from around Australia as well. So I'm hoping to go through what we're hearing from some of our farmers and members, the community support for renewable energy, and then also how to ensure a more positive landholder experience.

Paul Stark:

So what we're hearing from community, and we have done a lot of surveys and engagement with our members and farmers on this. So a lot of our members have said that lack of meaningful engagement has meant what should be a simple task has become far more complicated, created frustration in communities and also driven some of the opposition that exists in communities today to renewable energy and transmission infrastructure.

Paul Stark:

So some communities have been wanting upgrades to their transmission infrastructure for decades, but they won't benefit from this transmission lines which have been deployed in renewable developments. And those shows a clear lack of consultation there. There's also other issues which arising, one kilometre development overlays, which means that some farms don't have the opportunity to build infrastructure which they need. And then there's also other concerns around fencing and what developers should be and should not do. Now those concerns really stream from a lack of community consultation and positive consultation, which is required and that shows that landholders voices are sometimes not heard. And it's important that going forward that these are brought to light. So Farmers for Climate Action was really delighted to see the Dyer report. So that was released earlier this year and this... Or late last year. And this highlighted all of these concerns which we've been hearing and really highlighted two governments and policymakers, developers, everyone involved in their transmission, that communities want to be heard about the renewable energy transition.

Paul Stark:

What we see is that governments are committed to implementing these. So renewable energy is a huge opportunity for farms and particularly for landholders around Australia and in Victoria, from maintaining farm profits. So there are approximately up to $40,000 per wind turbine per year some developers offer to farmers. That's an enormous amount of money. It provides farms with a diversified income stream, but also guaranteed payments. We know that farming, you don't get the same weather every single day and climate change is just going to make it more difficult. So having a dedicated revenue stream from renewable energy is a way to ensure that your business can continue to be profitable into the future, but also that you can continue to stay on your farm and you have money coming in. And so if you want to go to the next slide, there is a lot of support for renewable energy on farms. So some of these include large-scale solar farm projects, wind farm projects, but also across Australia, farmers are taking up renewable energy, but hosting provides one of those diversified streams.

Paul Stark:

So in a recent survey which Farmers for Climate Action did, which is on the next slide, yeah, great. We surveyed over 300 farmers and they have overwhelmingly said that they support renewable energy in Australia. So 92%, but also they've said that 64% believe their communities are opposed or somewhat opposed to transmission projects in their region. What we've heard is that this opposition comes from a lack of understanding. Understanding about what transmission lines are compared to traditional power lines, a lack of understanding about what the impacts will be, and a lack of understanding about where they will be and how they'll be built. So community voices need to be valued and need to be heard.

Paul Stark:

But we've also heard that what we asked were, would you be open to hosting large-scale renewable energy projects on your farm? 52% of respondents said yes that they would be also 22% said they were unsure. And whether this not being able to make a decision yet comes from a lack of not understanding how the project will impact on their farm, whether it comes from a lack of understanding about what the project will be. This shows that there is not a large amount of opposition in communities that farmers view the positives of renewable energy, but they need to have their voices heard and to be consulted actively on it. The community also asked what would make communities more supported of large-scale renewable energy? So some ideas were community ownership consultation, which was another large over 50% responded saying consultation would increase and make communities more supportive. We saw that higher payments for hosting farmers were lower with about 35%, and payments to impacted neighbours were at 34%. Community benefits programs were 44% as well, and direct financial incentives to people impacted in the area was 34%. What this survey insights showed was that particularly farmers and regional communities, the cost is a factor, but it's not the make or break factor. Consultation and clear community benefit is more important.

Paul Stark:

And so if we go to the next slide, how to ensure a better landholder experience. What we have known from our work and engaging with farmers, our members and rural community is that building social licence. So good understanding of the project, its benefits and how it will impact on community, engaging in constructive and positive consultation, fostering understanding and education, improving long-term community benefit sharing, addressing the energy inequities in regional communities and better land use and network planning are all positive actions that need to be and are being undertaken by governments to ensure better landholder experience.

Paul Stark:

For example, the VicGrid map just before showed great use of land use and network planning, the energy inequities in communities. There are a number of factors which are helping and a number of groups advocating to remove these inequities. Community benefit sharing is a positive, which is occurring at the moment, and there are examples around Victoria of communities which have brought renewable energy into their communities and used it as a positive. So there's cooperatives and other examples. So Farmers for Climate Action views renewable energy as a massive opportunity for farms to secure their long-term profitability, to build resilience, but also to make sure that they are a part of the transition and that they're reducing their emissions.

Paul Stark:

So we have further information if you go to the next slide on our website about hosting renewables on farm, and this is a curated list which directs you to other resources, but it also shows that there is information out there and that it just needs to be brought to light and presented to farmers. So I did want to say thank you for your time. I hope this has been really insightful and that it gives you all a better understanding of our position on this, but also shows the opportunities that exist in farms and what landholders value about renewable energy.

Fiona Roberts:

Thanks Paul. Thanks for your presentation and sharing what FCA are hearing from farmers. Yeah, it's very interesting.

Fiona Roberts:

So now I'd like to go to our next panellist. Clean Energy Council is the peak body for renewable energy industry and we have Nathan Hart who is a policy officer at the CEC to outline their work with promoting best practise behaviours in the industry. Thanks Nathan for being part of this webinar. Over to you.

Nathan Hart:

Thanks so much Fiona and hello everyone. It's really great to be here today and talk to you about this really important issue. So I'm dialling in from the lands of the Wurundjeri people and just acknowledge elders past and present. And the purpose of my presentation is really to build your confidence and knowledge when developers are knocking on your door, things to look for, things to engage with and things like that. So as mentioned, the CEC or Clean Energy Council we’re the peak body for renewables or the clean energy industry, we've got a thousand members, everyone from wind, onshore wind, offshore winds, storage, renewable hydrogen, the whole ecosystem. Next slide please.

Nathan Hart:

So this is where I grew up as a kid in Benalla. It is in northeastern Victoria. We had 10 acres there. There were no other homes around that little yellow box. It was the only thing there, and this was in the '80s and '90s and it was a real time of centralisation where a lot of industry and workers left the region. It's one of the reasons that my family kind of packed up and moved to Melbourne and the energy transition is a real opportunity to reimagine our regions and reenergize the rural regions. I wonder that if we were going through the same thing today that perhaps instead of moving to Melbourne, we just would've put solar panels on our 10 acres and diversified our income through that. But I think it highlights that industry really needs to be meeting landholders and communities where they're at, need to understand their challenges and look to add value where they can. Next slide please.

Nathan Hart:

And one way that they can do that, and this is the most common kind of co-use practise in Australia is what we call agrigrazing or agrivoltaics as it's kind of academically called. And there are really mutual benefits to the landholder developers and of course stock benefits to the landholder include drought proof your income, you've got increased vegetation from the panels as they collect moisture overnight and then drop and vegetation grows under that. That creates healthier and fatter stock, meaning you can get more for them at market and panels create microclimate and reduce wind so it can help protect against erosion. The benefits of stock is that they are safer. Obviously there's fencing around the projects that reduces predation. There's a lot of shade in summer and protects them from frost, rain, and hail. There's benefits to the developer as well. It does cost about 5% more to develop and plan for agrigrazing, but they recover this through the decrease in mechanical slashing. So they have to keep the grass really low as to reduce their bushfire risk.

Nathan Hart:

But there are kind of things that they need to think for in planning. They need to plan around fencing, watering mustering. There are engineering considerations and the type of panel tracking that you use. There are contract considerations, who leases the land to who? Insurance considerations around risk, but a good developer will be able to explain all of this to you. I'm pretty sure that this picture is actually from Glenrowan West and we've got Gayle speaking later. So apologies, Gayle, if I stole a bit of your thunder with my presentation, but I just thought it's such a great example. Yeah, so experienced developers will be able to walk you through all of this. Next slide please.

Nathan Hart:

Just before I play this video, I think it's important to talk about the scale that we're seeing. Obviously if you are in a proposed renewable energy zone, you will be seeing some changes. You're obviously having a lot of developers knock on your door. It's really important that only a small percentage of those will actually stack up economically and will actually get built. So there may be a sense that there's a lot of prospecting and a lot of development happening. But to put these numbers in perspective, if we were to build 50 gigawatts of solar, so that's the entire size of the national electricity market, it would require less than 0.016 of Australia's total land or in agricultural land that is 0.027%. So I don't want to take away from this sense of change that is happening in regional areas, but it's important to put the big picture in perspective that the land that solar panels or wind farms will actually take up is really quite small in the big picture of Australia. But thank you very much, I will proceed with the video.

Greg Fowler:

Hey Gus, Gus, here mate, good boy, stop. So I'm Greg Fowler, a mixed cropping farmer from Kerang in northern Victoria. We've been farming in the area 130 years. We decided to go into renewables just to diversify part of the farm and we're still heavily into the farming, but yeah, just part of it's gone to renewables. I also run sheep in the solar, which helps on the maintenance. It saves a lot of mowing and keeps the grass down and yeah, just they do well and like the shade under the panels.

Tim Dickson:

Hi, my name's Tim Dickson. This is our family land and we're moving into renewables. We've got a battery being built on here, which great to be part of the sustainable energy solution. The battery itself, it's going to be a stabilising battery for the lines here. It's going to hold a lot of the energy produced by the renewable projects in the area.

Neil Riley:

My name's Neil. I'm the site manager here at the Solar Farms and I love it. Tim and Greg are the landowners here. The Solar Farm gives them consistent income where farming doesn't. In times of drought, the sun still shines.

Tim Dickson:

The decision to go down this way, it was initiated by dad partnership with Edify Energy. There's a number of reasons we went down this path. One is that we see renewables as being a solution for Australia moving forward, and the second part is it's an ongoing revenue stream for our family.

Greg Fowler:

When we decided to do it, I was a bit worried what dad would think of it, all that years of farming and family farm. But yeah, thought it was a good opportunity.

Nathan Hart:

Thanks so much. I love that video. Over to the next slide please.

Nathan Hart:

So the Clean Energy Council has a Best Practise Charter. The best practise charter is a commitment for 58 odd signatories designed to clearly communicate the standards that they will uphold in development. It's a commitment to engage respectfully with communities in which they plan to operate, to be sensitive to environmental and cultural values and make a positive contributions to the regions in that they operate. Again, 58 signatories there. And those 10 commitments are really the entire life cycle of the project from the moment that they're knocking on the door to 20, 40, 60 years time to when they're decommissioning the project. So I think a real powerful question that you can ask developers that they're knocking on your door. The first question should be are you a signatory to the CDC Best Practise Charter? We are bringing in a reporting requirement to this. So from July that portal will open from the 58 signatories, they'll have until the end of August to report on how they're meeting those 10 commitments.

Nathan Hart:

So if you get someone who knocks on your door and they're from Neoen or ACCIONA or something like that from October, you'll be able to go to our website and have a look at their report or their submission on how they're meeting those 10 commitments and we're continually evaluating those 10 commitments. Are they fit for purpose at the moment? Do they need to be updated and things like that. Next slide please.

Nathan Hart:

And we've kind of touched on benefit sharing already, but community benefit sharing schemes are essentially a way for a project to share the benefits with the communities that they're hosting in and their real focus among policymakers and legislators at the moment. For example, Victoria is currently considering a way to pull funds from projects. This will be really important in renewable energy zones where we have a lot of projects operating in the same area and this will enable really legacy, a different scale of benefits to be delivered. The capacity investment scheme, a federal scheme that economically kind of underwrites rights projects, has a merit criteria around benefit sharing schemes. So to win a capacity investment scheme funding contract, you need to have a really well-developed benefit sharing scheme. The most common one is for benefit funds that are designed by the community for the community. So this will involve a community referent groups made up of community members and they allocate funding to the community as they best see fit.

Nathan Hart:

There are also other models. There are neighbourhood benefit programs that develop neighbouring properties. An example of that might be bulk purchase and installation of solar panels or neighbouring properties. They're a sponsorship where you might sponsor a local sporting group or landcare group or something like that. There's ways that you can prioritise jobs within the community and local procurement. Local procurement and jobs are really the best way that regions can benefit from the energy transition and this is why it's so important that we have cross-government planning and coordination. There's employment volunteerism, essentially where the project will volunteer their staff out to landcare groups or different groups in the community and offer their staff. And then there's kind of innovative financing ways or co-equity, co-ownership models where members of the community actually own part of the project and that's seeing more and more of that come out in Victoria. Next slide please.

Nathan Hart:

I think it's important to understand the industry landscape that you can kind of put this into three broad ways. There are developers, owners, and operators. Occasionally you'll have someone who does all three of these, but there's only a handful of companies who develop, own, and operate projects. It's often that entity or operators will develop a project and these are the ones who are more commonly probably knocking on your doors wanting to get kind of an option contract or something like that. Once they have that option, then they may sell that to someone who looks to develop a project. So I think another question you could be asking developers, do you intend to develop, own and operate? Will you just develop it and then sell it? I think all of these kind of practises are reasonable and we need all of these entities operating within the ecosystem to get the amount of projects that we've built, but it's worthwhile being mindful of as a landholder that that relationship might change, it might get passed on and kind of being aware of who's going to have stewardship over that relationship from the developer side is a really important question. So next slide please.

Nathan Hart:

I just want to point out that transmission and clean energy projects are handled very differently in the regulatory and legislative space. I want to say that all clean energy projects exist on land at the moment with explicit consent and support of that landholder. Then the commercial negotiations between a developer and a landholder where the landholder wants to diversify the productivity of their land and provide a drought-proof income. Developers don't have access rights in the same way that transmission companies do and absolutely no developer can ever force you to host a project or change your farming practises. You are in control of your land. Next slide.

Nathan Hart:

So just some really key questions there to recap, do you intend to develop, own and operate the project? Being mindful of all of those different entities that kind of exist, are you a signatory to the Clean Energy Council Best Practise Charter, and if you are then from October this year you'll be able to go and have a look and see how they're adhering to those 10 commitments. Do you have experience with agrovoltaics or agrograzing as we call it, and how will the project coexist with my land and farm? Are there dual land use practises? Where will fencing be? Where will water go? How do I muster? Things like that. And then how will the project deliver lasting benefits to my neighbours and community? Noting that you've all got reputations in the community that you operate in and you want these projects to not just benefit you and drought proof your land, but to benefit your neighbours and the entire community as well.

Nathan Hart:

Then if there's something that you are exploring with a developer, I think it would be great to go and visit a project, a wind farm or a solar farm if you're in Victoria, the one in Glenrowan that Gayle's about to talk to you with, I'm sure the developer there, Gentari, would be happy to have you along. Yeah, so please get out there and have a look at projects, really marvellous engineering feats and really delivering a lot for rural and regional Australia. I've got some resources in my next slide which will be shared I think with the slide deck, but that's it for me. Thanks so much for your time.

Fiona Roberts:

Thanks Nathan for explaining the role that the Clean Energy Council does in promoting best practise in the industry and also for sharing some valuable tips. Please put any questions for Nathan in the Q&A function.

Fiona Roberts:

Right, now I would like to introduce Jarrod Lenne. Jarrod is the executive officer in the office of the Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner. The AEIC exists to support local community residents with their questions and concerns about wind farms, large-scale solar farms, energy storage facilities, and new major transmission projects. They do a very interesting range of work and I encourage you to visit their website. Thank you Jarrod.

Jarrod Lenne:

Thank you Fiona and good afternoon everyone. It has just ticked to the afternoon. I'm joining from Melbourne, the land of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation, but I grew up on the land of Yorta Yorta on a dairy farm. So it's a great pleasure to be on the panel today and to hear everyone's presentations. We've already heard about a lot of fantastic resources and key issues for everyone to work through when they're considering or responding to a project in their community or on their land, so it's a great pleasure to be part participating. Happy to move to our next slide.

Jarrod Lenne:

Just a very quick summary about the office of the AEIC. The Commissioner was created initially in November, 2015 as the Wind Farm Commissioner and the inaugural appointment. Andrew Dyer has only just retired this year, so an important independent role. The AEIC is appointed by the minister and reports to Parliament and since 2015 the work of the Commissioner has expanded from that initial wind farm focus dealing with community inquiries, project transparency and promoting best practise on wind farms, to also include solar large-scale storage, which could be batteries or pump hydro and more recently helping communities with questions about new transmission projects.

Jarrod Lenne:

So that work experience that has just this year ticked over a thousand individual cases where we've provided information support, referral assistance to community members who may be land holders or neighbours or other residents in relation to new projects. And in terms of the resources that are available on our website, and I know there'll be a bit of a plethora of resources, but I would encourage everyone to take a look at the Appendix A to our 2022 annual report, which has pretty much the collected wisdom of the previous Commissioner on all of the potential issues and opportunities that arise across all of those renewable energy projects. That case handling work, as I say, is very much the core of our unique perspective across Australia. So it's a great resource to dig into that annual report from 2022. Our 2023 annual report is going to be tabled in Commonwealth Parliament very shortly we hope. So, we're looking forward to making that available as well.

Jarrod Lenne:

The other key link there on that slide, which will be in the resources, is the guide to contacting us if you do have a question about a new project in your neighbourhood or on your own land. We provide a step through of what sort of support we can provide. As I say, it's a voluntary process. The Commissioner doesn't have any formal powers, but it's really an opportunity for both the proponent of a project and the concerned residents to articulate the concerns and the facts in any one case to look for an opportunity to have a constructive meaningful dialogue. I know that's been mentioned already and that's really the most important thing to get people talking to each other and we focus on what can be done to achieve a practical outcome with any inquiry or information request or complaint.

Jarrod Lenne:

So if we do skip over to the next slide. Of all of the many great things you could read, which include in other states the Queensland Farmers Federation's Renewable Landholder Toolkit, and the New South Wales Farmers Association's Renewable Energy Guideline, I would strongly encourage you to take a look at the considerations for landholders before entering commercial agreements. That's on our website. This is one of the key documents that aggregates the experiences of the office in helping landholders and engaging with the different kinds of commercial agreements that a developer might approach you with. As Nathan suggested, a good question might be to ask them about their signatory status to the Clean Energy Council's Best Practise Charter and whether or not they could provide you with this document could also be an early indicator of the developer's bona fides. It's not too long, it's a one cup of tea I think and a biscuit, and it really works through the types of agreements that a renewable energy project developer might put on the table.

Jarrod Lenne:

Things to consider such as particular clauses around exclusivity or confidentiality, opportunities to negotiate the dispute resolution mechanisms that might be appropriate for the particular agreement. And it also walks through the life cycle of the project, things to consider as a landholder during construction, for example, which can be a very busy time in a project as well as crystallising those ongoing farm or land use considerations that you may have. That is again also on our website and highly encourage that document as a key resource. If you read it and you think actually there's other issues that we could include, please get in touch with the office. We always keen to make sure that we're getting all of the latest insights from everyone's experiences. If we do turn over to the next slide. Thank you, Sarah.

Jarrod Lenne:

I really just wanted to keep it focused today from the office's perspective, and I think for me that's these three suggestions. Always seek facts from credible sources. That's the most important thing to do, is to make sure that you are dealing with the problems and the situations in a situation as credibly as possible, and that includes getting help. One of the things that the considerations document strongly encourages is to ensure that you are getting independent legal advice or business financial advice as part of the process. And very much industry expectation is that developers will reimburse you for reasonable costs for independent help. So that's an important practical tip I think to be aware of if you're in the position of considering a response from a developer.

Jarrod Lenne:

And I think the final one I flagged here is to be prepared even in this fast-moving energy transition period, you can expect a reasonably long journey and some uncertainty if there is a project proposed to participate in your neighbourhood or on your land. And I think it's important to remember as Nathan flagged before that not every project and not every part of every project does become a reality. That's just the nature of a project being developed and the commerciality being tested. So it may be that you initially offered participation in a project and its scale changes and it reduces the benefits to you. So there's always the challenge of uncertainty over time, so be prepared for that. One other thing I'd also flag of course, is to take care of your neighbours, keep an eye on your opportunities to encourage the developer to be developing those neighbourhood projects and be prepared for the questions that you may get as well.

Jarrod Lenne:

Final slide is the other resources and links for us. As I say, the Appendix A chapter one on Host-Landholder and Negotiations is good reading, but there's also sections in that appendix on community engagement in general and neighbour matters in particular. That's probably all I wanted to say as part of the panel, but happy to participate in the Q&A and looking forward if you do have any questions to hearing them through our inbox or 1800 number.

Fiona Roberts:

Thanks, Jarrod. Thanks, Jarrod. That's very interesting and yeah, very helpful service that the AEIC provide. I also would like to recommend the documents in that they're written in plain English, so easy to digest, so don't be put off in dipping into the resources that Jarrod's outlined.

Fiona Roberts:

So now I'd like to introduce Gayle Lee who owns a farming property in Glenrowan West that is partially leased as a solar farm. Gayle, I'll throw over to you. Thank you.

Gayle Lee:

Thank you very much. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. We started back in 2018, just in January, 2018. We had four companies approach us within six months. Within six weeks, sorry, for the establishment of a solar farm. We had absolutely no idea as to what to do, who to talk to, but we were fortunate we could find a gentleman who acted as a consultant for us to help us work our way through what was quite a confusing start to this process.

Gayle Lee:

From our point of view and what we know now, looking back, the first thing you need to do is to get yourself some good advice. It's an exciting and confusing time when people come knocking on your door with grand schemes and big chequebooks, but building on what previous speakers have said, you really need to take your time. If there's one company there, there's probably some more around, so don't think you're going to miss out just because the first one, you take your time with the first one. So just take your time, certainly get some legal advice and some accounting advice because it can make a lot of difference to you in terms of your ongoing income. It's okay to say this is an ongoing income for your farm, but you've got to make sure it works for you in terms of your taxation and legal requirements.

Gayle Lee:

Just remember when you're dealing with these big companies, and I appreciate the advice given by the people that have spoken previously, but you are the one, this is your farm and your asset and nobody looks after it like you do. So you need to make sure that you are happy with what's happening. These big companies are coming and they are looking after their interests, so make sure you look after yours.

Gayle Lee:

Sell or lease? That's if you decide to play in this field. But the next decision is whether you sell or lease, and it depends on people's personal preference. We chose to lease because some of this land's been in the Lee family for 150 years and we believe that the value is in the land and we chose lease. You've got to work out what the risks and benefits of that are. We have a lease that says that the solar farm can walk away from here with 12 months notice. So you have to work out which way you want to go.

Gayle Lee:

You need to really, as you progress through the process and as previous speakers have spoken, not all projects get up. There are some issues about some developers wanting to land bank in that they want you to sign an exclusivity agreement for a period of time and then they will sit on that land and hopefully sell it onto the developer later on. So just be aware, there are some, it doesn't always transform to a project.

Gayle Lee:

It's important once you've decided to go down the lease track to get some of the real details sorted out early. Talking about the money, how much area are they talking? The timeline? And please get this information in writing. We've seen some samples here where people are quite confused with getting phone calls about somebody promising this and then there's be another promise from somebody else the next day. So make sure you get it in writing. When you get to the point of doing the option to lease and the lease, you must be aware that, again, Jarrod just spoke about developers and contractors and O&M people. We had this situation where our developer, we chose to go with a company based in Australia. We had three internationals and one Australian company. We chose to go with the Australian company, not because they offered the most dollars, but because we felt we could work with them.

Gayle Lee:

You need to, once they develop the project, once they did all the D&A work and had it as a saleable development that was sold to a German company. And the German company in turn appoint a contractor, an EPC contractor, an engineering procurement and construct contractor, and they were actually American. So you can see that they didn't really have too many ideas about Australian agriculture. And if I was really honest, I'd say they didn't care a thing about Australian agriculture too, they just, you're going to run sheep under this, it'll all happen, it's fine. So there's some real things that you need to look at and as early as possible in terms of your project. What type of solar equipment is to be used? And fortunately our solar farm has single trackers that is one row of panels, one motor, so they turn with just one motor.

Gayle Lee:

Other solar farms in this area have dual trackers. So there's a link between a metal bar between two rows of panels. This is a real trap. It's too low for sheep to get under. Sheep try to get over and can get stuck on it. There's also the issue about having quite a number of rows of linked together and they have a cog mechanism to turn the panels and the sheep can get their wool caught. And again, they're there, they die there basically.

Gayle Lee:

Just to go through some practical farming issues, who has the right to graze the stock under the panels and discussion about liability for stock damage to panels. We've not had an issue with this, but it's something that needs to be looked at. Impact of the movement of stock, positioning of gates and security fences. We've got some gates that go nowhere, but they were designed in the US and once it's under the contract, they won't change them, basically. Are they planning to fill in the dams? The ability to fence into smaller blocks, grazing in really large blocks is difficult, so is mustering, water for firefighting control of weeds, impact of damage, sorry, impact on drainage. How do you, they take out drainage lines that have been on the farm for years will impact you for years to come. To clarify the access points and things on your farm. Make sure that you know where they're going to come in, go out, those sorts of things. And in terms of dealing with the developers at the actual construction, don't expect the impossible. You cannot expect the contractors are going to open and close gates. You need to make alternative arrangements for temporary fencing, et cetera.

Gayle Lee:

Leasing of land for solar farm in our case is not a passive investment. Don't think you can just do this and then walk away. It's not going to happen. You've got to establish a really good working relationship with the O&M team, the operations and maintenance team. And again, they're there to ensure that the solar farm operates profitably for the owner. And that's fine, that's their job, but it's your job as an owner to make sure that you can also graze your sheep underneath. So it takes some time to establish this relationship because generally the O&M people are electrical, have electricians, they've got skills in that field, but they're not into agriculture. It takes a while to get to work through things like issues with weeds and those sorts of things.

Gayle Lee:

We have been on this journey for three years and I must admit that there's been some frustrations, but in general it's worked out really well. We're very fortunate, Gentari, as you saw on one of the previous slides, managed this property and we are working together really well to ensure that the agricultural and the solar farm work together for the benefit of both parties. Thank you.

Fiona Roberts:

Wow. Thanks, Gayle. That's such valuable advice for people. And yeah, your insights will be really helpful for people when if they're in this situation, what they need to consider. And a particular note is protect your own interests. The solar developers have their own interests in mind, but it's up to you to protect your own. So any questions that you might have for Gayle, please pop them in the Q&A function down the bottom of the screen.

Fiona Roberts:

And now I would like to introduce our planning expert, Michael Juttner. He is the manager of development approvals and design renewables in the Department of Transport and Planning. Thanks Michael for joining us.

Michael Juttner:

Hi. Thank you. And thanks for the introduction. I would like to pay my respects to the Wurundjeri people who are the traditional custodians of the land where I'm joining you from. Probably before I start with my presentation, I just want to say thank you to all the speakers before me and it's been great to hear everyone's views on things. And I'd also probably like to add some anecdotal commentary on that. And it was great hearing from you Gayle, but also from Nathan about really about this interaction between developers and landowners and probably just from my anecdotal experience, because I'm not, I’m outside my swim lane now. But it's just to say that some of the things we hear are about the way these negotiations have happened in the past sometimes where it's all verbal is not to be relied on. And what you really need to do is if someone says something to you 10 years later, it's not what you remember them saying, it's what's written in the contract.

Michael Juttner:

And just to stress that, have those contracts looked at, have them reviewed, ask the proponent to pay for that legal review of them and get a good lawyer to look at them if you can. Not necessarily the same lawyer that does your wills, somebody with a bit of planning and land use experience could be helpful. But that's way outside my swim lane, but it just sort of was on the tip of my tongue at the start of the presentation.

Michael Juttner:

So I'm from the Department of Transport and Planning and in the development approvals team, and we have a team of about eight people, which is focused on processing, planning permit applications for energy projects. Majority of those are renewable energy projects and storage. Currently we have nine solar farms, six wind farms, two batteries and three waste to energy facilities. It's about $8 billion worth of development if it gets up and about three gigawatts of energy. Next slide please.

Michael Juttner:

So the minister for planning, the Honourable Sonia Kulkarni, is the decision-maker in all of this. And our team works in the department administering her applications basically. So the minister is a decision-maker for all planning permit applications for energy generation and storage projects of one megawatt or more. So that'll be anything apart from very small projects will be with the minister. The smallest turbine is about four megawatts now. So even a one turbine wind farm will go to the minister, solar farms, batteries, gas-fired power stations, waste to energy. All of those projects will go to the minister, but they effectively come to our team and we administer those permit applications on her behalf. New power lines which connect generators to the existing network, hydrogen facilities, major transmission lines and substations. Next slide please.

Michael Juttner:

I've got a couple of slides about various technologies. I don't propose to go into these in depth, but the clause in the Victorian planning provisions. So your local planning scheme is 53.13, which is for renewable energy facilities other than wind farms. There's 16 solar farms in Victoria currently operating and 86 approved, which are not yet operating. And these stats are changing all the time as projects are built and new projects are approved. Next slide please.

Michael Juttner:

So batteries, they're really, most often they're big shipping containers filled with racks and racks of the little batteries that you have in your home, I'm oversimplifying it. Again, everyone knows this, but they charge when electricity is cheap and discharge when demand is high. We're seeing increasing numbers of applications for that, for batteries across Victoria. Next slide please.

Michael Juttner:

And wind farms, again, the minister's responsible for these and the, sorry, wind farms tend to attract the most community interest out of any projects we deal with. There's currently 35 in Victoria. And just a thing about the capacity. Yeah, so they operated about 30% of their nameplate capacity due to the flexibility of the wind source. Next slide please.

Michael Juttner:

Look, I think the main reason I'm here is to talk about the new planning pathway for renewable energy projects. There was an amendment to the Victoria planning provisions, which is the local planning schemes across Victoria on 4th of April, 2024. And what that did was to update the clause 53.22, which is significant economic development. So that was an existing clause, but it added renewable energy facilities and storage. And what that meant was for these projects, objectors could no longer take decisions to VCAT, the Victorian Civil Administrative Tribunal. And also the premier announced that there would be a faster processing time of up to four months, an aim of four months. So we're starting to see projects rolling out through this new pathway.

Michael Juttner:

There was a lot of media and also political debate on this, which wasn't always factual. So what I'm trying to do here is to talk about the planning process, which is unchanged in most ways and in a really quick summary planning application is the same as a planning application if you were applying with your local council for a shed or something like that. But instead of going to the council, it goes to the minister. So the application's lodged, it's reviewed by the team, the team I work with, and we'd request any further information if we needed it from the proponent, we would then send out referrals to any agencies as required and seek inputs from other agencies. People like CFA on bushfire, aviation CASA for aeroplane impacts from turbines, etc.

Michael Juttner:

And then we'd also give notice, and that was one of the things, there was confusion through some of the ways this was reported. So there is no change to how notice is given for planning applications. Notice is they also call it advertising. So an application comes in, the department is responsible to put it on notice to all the neighbours and to the community depending on how far the impacts might be. So that process is unchanged and notice is still given.

Michael Juttner:

At the end of that, all the views of the referral authorities and other agencies and council and neighbours if they choose to make submissions, including objections, are all considered by the planner who then assesses a project and puts forward a recommendation. And then the planning application is determined by either the minister or her delegate and a decision is made. The difference is that prior to the change introduced on 4th of April this year, neighbours could then matters to VCAT if they wanted to. So you could seek a review of that decision at VCAT. Whereas now the change is that that no longer is an available avenue and that's consistent with what the government has done with other priority sectors such as the big housing build, schools, some transport projects and other matters. Next slide please.

Michael Juttner:

Another key part of what we do is to engage with traditional owners throughout the application process, and it's something that probably wasn't occurring until about five years ago and it's not embedded in the statutory system, but it is a commitment that we've made as government and that's what we've been doing. Next slide.

Michael Juttner:

There is a publicly available map. If you look up DTP and wind farms or renewable energy, there's a link to this page, which is a zoomable, you can zoom in and find where projects are, and that's publicly available. Just put in a plug for that. Next slide.

Michael Juttner:

So if you can go back one slide. I don't know if that's possible. The other thing I wanted to talk about, it was raised in Paul's submission was, and I'm going off topic here, so stop me hosts if need be, but they talk about the people not being able to build within one kilometre of a wind farm proposal. And that's something that does get raised from time to time and it's certainly out there through, we receive correspondence about that. What I'd like to try and set the record straight with everyone is there's no prohibition on building anything within one kilometre of a wind farm, but there is a requirement to obtain a planning permit to build a house or accommodation within one kilometre of a wind farm. And there's a couple of factors or things to consider. One is that the rural zone, it's not a residential zone, it's a farming zone. And so the idea is that the key purpose of that is for farming, not for housing.

Michael Juttner:

The other thing to keep in mind is these farm blocks are very large blocks usually. So what this requirement for a permit is trying to do is to say if there's going to be a wind farm there, it's not the best place to put your second house or your shearer’s accommodation because it may be affected by noise. But if you go more than the kilometre from the boundary, you don't need a permit, most, or you may need a permit if it's a second house, but it's about trying to help you find a better siting option if you do decide to go for accommodation. So it's not a prohibition and it doesn't affect any other land use or development proposal you might have other than those used for accommodation. So I just wanted to put that in there, but that's the end of my presentation. Thank you.

Fiona Roberts:

Thanks Michael. That was terrific. And yeah, I can vouch for that GIS mapping. That's a lot of fun. You can really drill down, zoom down to a granular level. So yeah, that's very handy resource. Yeah, so thanks Michael for explaining the planning approvals process for renewable energy projects and also the recent inclusion of renewables in the development facilitation pathway process and what that means for people. So thanks again, Michael.

Fiona Roberts:

And now we're going to start our Q&A. So thank you people for popping questions into our Q&A function. The team's been busy in the background collating those questions. So what we've done, we've had similar questions. We've collated it into a single question to save on repetition and try to get to as many different topics as possible. So sorry, I'm just going to grab my list of questions that have come up.

Fiona Roberts:

All right. Okay. Nathan, I think I've got a question that you might be able to answer and if any of the other panellists feel like they have something to contribute, if you could provide your response after Nathan, but insurance is a bit of an issue at the moment. It's being debated. So Nathan, how will public liability insurance cover farmers for accidents that might impact neighbouring renewable energy developments or generation facilities given that their value is so high?

Nathan Hart:

Yeah, thanks Fiona. It's a really important question and something where I'm hearing from CUC members that are out there doing community engagement and engaging with landholders. It's something that's coming back. So I think there's kind of two aspects to insurance. The first is around, does the existence of a project increase danger to their neighbours in terms of fire risk? And the international evidence of that is no, it doesn't. The Insurance Council of Australia says no it doesn't. And that is because of the access roads that they build, the emergency planning that they do, the advancements in technology coordinating with local fire brigades and having monitoring of their facilities to see if anything is changing or any type of issues are emerging so that the projects themselves are very safe and very well monitored.

Nathan Hart:

And then the other issue is what you spoke about there in terms of public liability of a landholder where there is some type of liable act where they create a hazard or a fire and that damages the facility. And I think this is no different, whether it is a renewable energy facility or another business that is neighbouring to you, it is the same. The Insurance Council of Australia has said that existing products provide enough cover for you. So if your public liability is $20 million, the insurance, which is a standard liability cover for landholders, the Insurance Council of Australia says that that is enough. And that is because it is very unlikely for that liable act to result in a hundred percent loss of any facility for all of the reasons that I've just mentioned, that the solar farm, the wind farm have very sophisticated monitoring, they have very advanced emergency management plans, and they're usually jumping onto issues well before they get out of control or something like that. So yeah, really important that the existing cover that you likely already have as a landholder in public liability is sufficient and Insurance Council says that it's currently sufficient.

Fiona Roberts:

Thanks, Nathan. In our resource pack, we will have a link to the insurance council's explanatory note so that you can read that for yourself. Thank you, Nathan.

Fiona Roberts:

So next question. It can be hard for landholders to negotiate rates for leases when there is a lot of secrecy about going rates. Are there any standard going rates for solar farms and battery energy storage systems? I'm not sure who might be able to answer that for us.

Nathan Hart:

I'm happy to have a go. The short answer is no, there's not, because these are commercial negotiations. It depends on what is the productive value of the land, where is the land located, how much is the land valued? So there isn't really a standard rate and all of these are commercial negotiations between a landholder and a developer. So yeah, I see Jarrod's got his hand up.

Jarrod Lenne:

Thanks Nathan. Hi everyone. It's Jarrod from the Office of the AEIC. One place where they may be standardised in a sense that common across a development is in the neighbourhood or neighbour payments. It's quite likely that a developer will be mindful of being consistent across the neighbours of a project.

Nathan Hart:

And also benefit sharing is another one where there might be consistent a thousand dollars per megawatt benefits to the wider community and councils and things like that. So if you're seeing a project that's 300 megawatts, you can assume $300,000 will be available to local councils and local groups.

Fiona Roberts:

Gayle, I'm just wondering if you had any experience or would like to make a comment on your negotiations as when the lease negotiations were happening.

Gayle Lee:

As I said, Fiona, we had four people approach us within six weeks, and the only reason is because the farm is close to the Glenrowan terminal station. So that was the primary reason why they're all here knocking on your door. As I said in my notes, it's worthwhile taking your time. We engaged a consultant to do the consultation with the various companies, but let me say over three months, it went from a very low level to quite a reasonable level of money. So there is an ability to negotiate. We are under a confidentiality clause of course, so we don't reveal what it is, but we have in the past indicated to people who approach us that you can get it a little bit higher than that. So that's as far as we go.

Fiona Roberts:

Thanks, Gayle. While I've got you here, I was just wondering how you went about finding a consultant, and you don't have to use the name of them, but how did you track them down? What was it a Google? Google stalking or...

Gayle Lee:

In a previous life I was general manager of a very large textile company that negotiated contracts with gas and electricity suppliers. So I went back and tapped him on the shoulder, being somebody who had been in the industry.

Fiona Roberts:

Thanks Gayle. The other aspect of getting advice is getting appropriate legal advice. You need somebody who is experienced in the lease agreements or sale agreements with renewable energy developers. So we did contact the Legal Institute of Victoria for some advice and they have a referral service. So in that resource pack, we have a link to their referral service so that you can track down appropriate legal advice. Yeah, you do need to get some savvy legal advice.

Gayle Lee:

Yeah, that's correct. And I'm not, I think as Michael said earlier, probably the local solicitor who does your will isn't the person that you require. You need to find someone who is well experienced in large commercial leases. Our lease agreement is, I won't say 50 mm thick, but it's pretty close.

Fiona Roberts:

Yeah, thanks Gayle. That's very valuable advice. Now, we've had a participant raise concerns about a proposed development that would impact his land in asking what he can do to stop the developers accessing his land. So I might throw to Jarrod and Michael Juttner for an answer on that, if that's possible.

Jarrod Lenne:

Fiona, just looking up the question as we talk, I think the proposed developer of a generational storage project, as Nathan pointed it out, has no right to access your land without negotiated agreement with you. So that would be the starting point for any consideration and happy to follow up offline if the questioner wants to contact the office for further advice or direction.

Fiona Roberts:

Yeah, thank you Jarrod. That's very good advice. If people have got any more questions, please pop them in the chat and we'll continue to answer them. Would any of the panellists like to offer a comment or something that they may have, would like to contribute to this question and answer session?

Jarrod Lenne:

Yeah, no, it's Jarrod from the Office of the AEIC. Think just to reinforce the point there from the previous conversation, that it's better to fix an agreement upfront rather than try and negotiate it later. So that time getting a landholder agreement right, is really critical. I just thought it's worth reinforcing that point.

Fiona Roberts:

Yeah, yeah. Thank you, Jarrod. That's very important and I think on Gayle's slide she had that, that development phase, you have much more influence than at the other stage. So if you are going to get things embedded in your agreement or things that you wish to happen later in the development and operation phase, you need to get it in your agreements early. So yeah, protect your interests that way.

Gayle Lee:

Can I just follow up there, Fiona? That's just so critical because once it goes to the development stage, once you get to the construction stage, that's your Bible. That governs how things are set up and you really don't have any power after that. You can't influence people after you've signed the document, so make sure you get it right the first time.

Fiona Roberts:

Yeah, thank you Gayle. Yeah, very important to have that document.

Nathan Hart:

I'll just add to that, that projects don't exist until that option agreement with a landholder has been signed. So while developers are out there talking about projects, they legally only exist once that option has been signed. So yeah, really encourage landholders to slow down that process, seek the right advice, and yeah, all the power is with you in negotiating that agreement in the early stages.

Fiona Roberts:

Thank you, Nathan, that's very valuable. I might do a final question to Gayle. Gayle, there's been a lot of interest in your experience from the participants. If you could go back in time, what is the one thing now that you wish you'd known back then?

Gayle Lee:

I think the one thing was really about getting things right, first up. We sort of made an assumption that things like where would the gates go and they’re just minor things, issues with weeds, those sorts of things. I wish we'd known a bit more upfront that we would've pushed those points earlier. We were very fortunate that we used an Australian company to negotiate or to do the development. I think that made it easier than trying to go with one of the internationals, but I mean it was sometimes a very difficult process, but really when you consider that you're dealing with a company that's developing a project of $170, $180 million, I'd have to say it went very smoothly. There was still some issues about contractors and being on site and not doing this or that, but in terms of the size of the project, it went really well.

Fiona Roberts:

Yeah, thank you Gayle. Yeah, very valuable. So that brings our Q&A to an end. Thank you everyone. If we haven't been able to get to your questions, maybe we'll be able to sort of compile some answers post webinar and share those. We'll endeavour to find the answers and share those with you after the webinar. So what I'd like to let you know is that we have two slides that have all the links to key resources that we mentioned in the webinar and that these will be available on the Energy Smart Farming website soon. So yeah, no need to hurriedly write them down or screenshot, but yes, we'll certainly make them available to you.

Fiona Roberts:

And please do our quick survey before you leave. It's four questions. It will help us to plan future events. Yeah, it won't take you long and we've got a link in the chat that you can use. Just click on that and take you straight to the survey. Or if you're a QR code sort of person, we've got that on the slide on the screen for you. Recording and resources will be available on the Energy Smart Farming website soon. We will notify you via the email you registered with when this is ready. We're hoping sometime next week.

Fiona Roberts:

I'd really like to thank all of our wonderful speakers and as well as everyone who attended the webinar, making time to attend. Also, thank you for the incredible team that we have working behind the scenes to bring this webinar to you. So thank you everyone. Thank you so much to our panellists who are so generous with their time and supported this idea that we had, that this information needed to be made available more widely. So thank you everyone.