

Draft Guideline

Transmission Efficiency Test and revenue determination guideline for non-contestable network infrastructure projects

March 2026

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1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of this guideline

The AER is required to make revenue determinations for Network Operators authorised or directed to carry out² infrastructure projects³ under the Electricity Infrastructure Investment Act 2020 (NSW) (EII Act) and Electricity Infrastructure Investment Regulation 2021 (NSW) (EII Regulation). These projects relate to implementation of the NSW Electricity Infrastructure Roadmap.⁴

The Infrastructure Planner for a renewable energy zone (REZ) must make assessments and recommendations to the Consumer Trustee about REZ network infrastructure projects required for the REZ.⁵ This includes assessing and recommending options to provide the intended network capacity for the REZ, staging and sequencing of REZ network infrastructure projects, funding, procurement and cost recovery for the recommended REZ network infrastructure projects and other matters prescribed in the EII Regulation.

Following this process, a Network Operator may be selected to carry out a network infrastructure project in one of two ways:

- a) Under a non-contestable process, a Network Operator is selected directly by the Infrastructure Planner.
- b) Under a contestable process, a Network Operator is selected through a competitive assessment process conducted by the Infrastructure Planner.⁶

In both cases, the Network Operator must be authorised by the Consumer Trustee, or authorised or directed by the Minister,⁷ before carrying out the network infrastructure project. We must make a revenue determination for Network Operators with an authorisation.⁸ Under

² EII Act, s. 38 and EII Regulation, cl. 47. Carrying out an infrastructure project is defined in s.30A of the EII Act and may include owning or controlling, planning, designing commissioning, constructing, financing, operating, and/or maintaining assets.

³ Under s. 30A the EII Act, infrastructure projects is defined as either a REZ network infrastructure project or a priority network infrastructure project. In this guideline, references to a 'project' or 'network infrastructure project' are referring to either. Where the EII Act and EII Regulation specify differences in processes for these types of network infrastructure projects, these differences are noted in this Guideline. The key difference is that REZ network infrastructure projects are authorised by the Consumer Trustee and require the Consumer Trustee to calculate a maximum capital cost. This is not required for REZ network infrastructure projects directed by the Minister, or for priority network infrastructure projects authorised or directed by the Minister.

⁴ Under the roadmap NSW will plan and implement up to five renewable energy zones (REZs). For a detailed explanation of the roadmap and the entities undertaking it, please see <https://www.energy.nsw.gov.au/nsw-plans-and-progress/major-state-projects/electricity-infrastructure-roadmap>.

⁵ EII Act, s. 30 and EII Regulation, cl. 43.

⁶ EII Regulation, cls. 43(2) and 45.

⁷ EII Act, ss. 31(1)(b), 32(1)(a) and 36(2). The Consumer Trustee may authorise or the Minister direct or authorise a REZ network infrastructure project. EII Act, ss. 32(1)(b) and s. 36(2), The Minister is the only person able to authorise or direct a priority network infrastructure project.

⁸ EII Act, s. 38(1).

either approach the Network Operator has no discretion in the identification of network or non-network options and selection of the preferred project to be carried out.

The regulatory process varies between the non-contestable and contestable processes. However, both processes provide consumer protections by seeking to limit the costs of carrying out network infrastructure projects to an efficient, prudent and reasonable level. The non-contestable process is subject to a more typical regulatory assessment by us, while the contestable process relies on the Infrastructure Planner conducting a competitive assessment process to reveal prudent, efficient and reasonable costs.

To meet the objectives of the EII Act, we are required to prepare guidelines setting out how we will exercise our functions under Part 5 of the EII Act for non-contestable revenue determinations.⁹ We have based the non-contestable revenue determination process and regulatory framework on Chapter 6A of the National Electricity Rules (NER). Chapter 6A of the NER does not apply to a revenue determination under the EII Act, however we are required, as far as is reasonably practicable, to make guidelines consistent with Chapter 6A of the NER, as that Chapter applies to making a revenue determination.¹⁰ Therefore, as part of our Guideline for NSW non-contestable network infrastructure projects (Guideline) we include a modified version of Chapter 6A of the NER, which we refer to as EII Chapter 6A (**Appendix A**).

Our application of this Guideline which includes EII Chapter 6A will be consistent with NER Chapter 6A, except where the EII Act or EII Regulation require an alternative approach, or we consider that compelling reasons exist to deviate based on the relevant objects and principles of the EII Act. In these instances, we shall provide reasons in our non-contestable revenue determination.

It is important to read this Guideline in conjunction with the EII Act, EII Regulation and any supporting guidelines, incentive schemes and models referred to herein.

Consistent with the NSW Government policy paper,¹¹ in developing this Guideline we have sought to:

- maintain consistency with NER Chapter 6A, NER guidelines, incentive schemes and models to the extent appropriate
- enable the EII Act framework to adapt as rule changes to the national framework are made by the Australian Energy Market Commission or changes to the applicable NER guidelines, incentive schemes or models are made by us
- ensure we have a clear basis to apply an approach that is consistent with the equivalent NER Chapter 6A rules when making or administering revenue determinations under the EII Act

⁹ EII Act, s. 64(4).

¹⁰ EII Regulation, cl. 47A(3)(b).

¹¹ NSW Government (Office of Energy and Climate Change), [Regulatory framework for the Transmission Efficiency Test and Regulator's determinations for network infrastructure projects: Policy paper](#), April 2022. We note from 1 January 2024 the Office of Energy and Climate Change is known as Energy, Climate Change and Sustainability and is part of the NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water.

- support continuous improvement by maintaining flexibility for us to adjust aspects of the framework over time in response to market developments and as we, the Infrastructure Planner, Consumer Trustee and Network Operators gain more operational experience implementing the EII Act framework
- substantially replicate Chapter 6A of the NER to provide clarity and certainty for Network Operators and investors in network infrastructure projects.

1.1.1 Our approach to this Guideline

Clause 47A(4) of the EII Regulation prescribes what our Guideline for non-contestable revenue determinations must and must not deal with. It states that our Guideline must deal with matters set out in the NER, Chapter 6A, including:

- a) The building blocks approach
- b) The regulatory asset base
- c) Return on capital (applying the AER Rate of Return Instrument).
- d) Depreciation
- e) The estimated cost of corporate income tax
- f) Forecast operating expenditure (opex)
- g) Forecast capital expenditure (capex)
- h) Reopening of a revenue determination for capex
- i) Network support pass through
- j) Cost pass through
- k) Shared assets.¹²

Our approach to these matters is set out in **Appendix A** (EII Chapter 6A), with additional explanatory material in this Guideline for matters where our approach differs significantly to our application of the NER. The body of this Guideline focuses on how we will undertake our regulatory role in making non-contestable revenue determinations,¹³ including:

- which of our NER guidelines, incentive schemes and models apply to non-contestable determinations, or where we will develop specific EII guidelines, incentive schemes and models, (**section 3.3**)
- the information and consultation requirements on a Network Operator in submitting a revenue proposal to us, (**sections 3.5.1 and 3.5.2**)
- our approach to assessing a Network Operator's revenue proposal and making a revenue determination (i.e., a propose/respond model), with a focus on where this approach significantly deviates from our application of NER Chapter 6A, (**chapter 5**)

¹² As far as reasonably practicable we will be consistent with the NER Chapter 6A (in accordance with cl. 47A(3)(b) of the EII Regulation) and will have regard to the AER's NER Shared Asset Guideline where applicable. We intend to provide further clarification on how we will deal with shared assets in a future update of this guideline.

¹³ EII Regulation, cl. 47A(3)(a). We have developed a separate guideline for our role under the contestable process, available at: <https://www.aer.gov.au/industry/registers/resources/guidelines/revenue-determination-guideline-nsw-contestable-projects>.

- how we will apply the Transmission Efficiency Test to each network infrastructure project, (**section 5.2**)
- our approach to depreciation, (**section 5.3**).

Clause 47A(5) of the EII Regulation states that our Guideline for non-contestable revenue determinations must not deal with the following matters under the NER, Chapter 6A:

- a) Pricing
- b) Benchmarking reports
- c) The X-factor
- d) Small-scale incentive schemes
- e) Demand management innovation allowance mechanism
- f) Contingent projects
- g) Transmission consultation procedures
- h) Removal of assets from the regulatory asset base.

The EII Regulation contains a framework for the AER to make revenue determinations for contestable augmentations.¹⁴ The guideline sets out the process we will follow for assessing a non-contestable cost component of a contestable augmentation revenue determination (**chapter 6**).

The EII Regulation provides that a non-contestable revenue determination can include projects where there is at least:

- one contestable component¹⁵ derived as a result of a competitive assessment process; and
- one component that is not a contestable component.¹⁶

We refer to this type of non-contestable revenue determination as a 'hybrid revenue determination'. The guideline sets out how we will deal with the contestable and non-contestable components of a hybrid revenue determination (**chapter 7**).¹⁷

[The AER's Network alternative support payment guideline¹⁸ was made following the March 2025 AEMC Rule Change Determination - National Electricity Amendment \(Improving the cost recovery arrangements for transmission non-network options\) Rule \(ICRA Rule\). The ICRA Rule provides for cost recovery arrangements for the implementation of network infrastructure projects that have a non-network option \(NNO\) component either prior to or during the 5-year regulatory control cycle. The eligibility criteria and the process required to make an application to the AER for a NNO component cost recovery methodology under the EII framework is set out in this guideline \(chapter 8\).](#)

¹⁴ EII Regulation, cl. 47E.

¹⁵ 'Component' is defined in Schedule 4 of the EII Regulation as a 'component, of a revenue determination, means a component referred to in the Act, section 38(2) and includes part of a component'

¹⁶ See definition of 'non-contestable revenue determination' in Schedule 4 of the EII Regulation.

¹⁷ EII Regulation, cl. 47A(6)(b).

¹⁸ [The Network alternative support payment guideline was made under Ch 6A of the NER](#)

1.2 Who are we?

The AER exists to ensure energy consumers are better off, now and in the future. We are the economic regulator for electricity and gas networks in every state and territory in Australia except Western Australia. We regulate electricity networks under the National Electricity Law (NEL) and NER. We also regulate natural gas pipelines under the National Gas Law and the National Gas Rules.

On 12 November 2021 we were appointed as a Regulator under the EII Act.¹⁹ A key function in this role is to apply a Transmission Efficiency Test and make revenue determinations for Network Operators authorised by the Consumer Trustee or authorised (or directed) by the Minister to undertake network infrastructure projects in NSW (under Part 5 of the EII Act).²⁰ This Guideline applies to non-contestable revenue determinations, including contestable components of a non-contestable revenue determination. Other functions undertaken by us under the EII Act, which are not covered by this Guideline, include:

- making annual contribution determinations in relation to the Electricity Infrastructure Fund (Part 7 of the EII Act);
- approving a risk management framework developed by the Consumer Trustee (Part 6 of the EII Act); and
- being consulted on tender rules in relation to long-term energy service agreements (Part 6 of the EII Act).

1.3 Authority for this Guideline

This Guideline is consistent with the regulatory framework for making revenue determinations established under the EII Act and EII Regulation.²¹ The NSW Government developed these regulations based on policy positions published in April 2022.²²

Section 38(5) of the EII Act requires us to publish guidelines on our website about the Transmission Efficiency Test. We apply the Transmission Efficiency Test to calculate the prudent, efficient and reasonable capital costs for development and construction of a network infrastructure project (Transmission Efficiency Test guideline). Clause 47 of the EII Regulation also requires us to publish guidelines about the exercise of our functions more broadly under Part 5 of the EII Act, which include making (and remaking) revenue determinations. We have combined these two functions into a guideline relating to non-contestable network infrastructure projects (this Guideline) and a separate guideline for contestable network infrastructure projects (Contestable Guideline).²³

¹⁹ IPART has also been appointed as a Regulator to undertake certain functions under the EII Act. See: <https://www.aer.gov.au/networks-pipelines/nsw-renewable-energy-zones>

²⁰ EII Act, s. 36A.

²¹ See Electricity Infrastructure Investment Regulation 2021 (NSW). Also, EII Act s. 64(4) and EII Regulation, cl. 47A.

²² NSW Government (Office of Energy and Climate Change), [Regulatory framework for the Transmission Efficiency Test and Regulator's determinations for network infrastructure projects: Policy paper](#), April 2022.

²³ Our [Revenue determination guideline for NSW contestable projects](#) was published on 19 August 2022.

Any references in the EII Act or EII Regulation to ‘transmission efficiency test guidelines’ and ‘guidelines published by the regulator under clause 47’ should be taken to refer to this Guideline and our Contestable Guideline.

We may amend this Guideline from time to time. Should we amend this Guideline, we will publish the proposed amendment on our website for a period of at least 20 business days and consider any submissions received within that period.²⁴ We are not required to consult on any amendments we consider to be minor or administrative.²⁵ It is likely that most updates to Appendix A resulting from relevant changes to Chapter 6A of the NER will be minor or administrative in nature.²⁶ However, should a change to Chapter 6A of the NER have a material impact on Appendix A, we will consult on the proposed change.

1.4 Interaction with the National Electricity Rules

Chapter 6A of the NER sets out the national framework for economic regulation of transmission network service providers (TNSPs), including the making of revenue determinations.²⁷

Some differences exist between the EII and NER revenue determination approaches which reflect that the scope of our assessment under the EII Act is narrower than the scope of our assessment of a TNSP’s revenue proposal under the NER. For example, revenue determinations made under the EII Act will not consider the prudence of the authorised network option against other potential network options. The Infrastructure Planner performs this role. Our assessment is limited to considering the prudence, reasonableness and efficiency of capital costs the Network Operator proposes in its revenue proposal to comply with the terms of the Consumer Trustee’s authorisation or the Minister’s authorisation or direction.

1.4.1 EII non-contestable framework

Section 37 of the EII Act sets out principles that we must consider in making our revenue determination. The principles are:

- a) a Network Operator is entitled to recover the prudent, efficient and reasonable costs it incurs in carrying out the infrastructure project,
- b) incentives should be given to Network Operators to promote economic efficiency,
- c) a Network Operator is entitled to revenue for the ongoing ownership, control or operation of an infrastructure project that is commensurate with the regulatory and commercial risks to the Network Operator,
- d) a Network Operator is entitled to be informed of material issues being considered by the regulator under Division 3 of Part 5 of the EII Act,

²⁴ EII Regulation, cl. 47C(1).

²⁵ EII Regulation, cl. 47C(2)(b).

²⁶ EII Regulation, cl. 47C(2).

²⁷ The National Electricity Law and NER do not regulate the carrying out of a network infrastructure project by a Network Operator under the EII Act.

- e) other principles prescribed by the EII Regulation.²⁸

The EII Act²⁹ and EII Regulation³⁰ require that a revenue determination include amounts for different components including:

- a) repayment of capital costs as determined under the Transmission Efficiency Test
- b) return on capital costs that have not been repaid
- c) an allowance for operating costs
- d) indexation of the regulatory asset base
- e) the estimated cost of corporate income tax of the Network Operator
- f) an increase or decrease in the Network Operator's revenue resulting from the operation of AER incentive schemes
- g) other risks for which the Network Operator is not already compensated under the component specified in the EII Act, section 38(2)(b)
- h) repayment of prudent, efficient and reasonable capital costs not included in part (a).³¹

Taken together, these efficiency principles and revenue determination components replicate the structure of the building block model that we apply to regulated network businesses under the NER.

1.4.2 Application of this Guideline to distribution network projects

We expect network infrastructure projects under the EII Act to generally be of the nature of transmission networks. However, it is possible that brownfields network infrastructure projects could involve distribution assets. The building block framework we will apply to transmission networks under the EII Act is aligned to the framework we also use for regulating distribution networks under the NER. For simplicity, we intend to apply this Guideline to both transmission and distribution network infrastructure projects.

²⁸ Including EII Regulation, cls. 46(1)(b), (2) and (3).

²⁹ EII Act, s. 38(2).

³⁰ EII Regulation, cl. 50A.

³¹ This component is included because the TET only applies to development and construction capital costs not capex related to other activities such as replacement or augmentation.

2 Overview of the non-contestable framework

Under the EII Act, the Infrastructure Planner will make assessments and recommendations about certain matters relating to regulated network infrastructure projects, to the Consumer Trustee.³² Following consideration of the Infrastructure Planner's recommendation, the Consumer Trustee may:

1. Recommend that the Minister direct a Network Operator to complete a REZ network infrastructure project; or
2. Authorise a Network Operator to carry out a REZ network infrastructure project.³³

In addition to directing a Network Operator to carry out a network infrastructure project (only on the recommendation of the Consumer Trustee),³⁴ the Minister may also direct or authorise a Network Operator to carry out a priority network infrastructure project.³⁵

We have no role in the authorisation or direction of network infrastructure projects. Our role as the Regulator is to determine the amount payable to the Network Operator for carrying out the network infrastructure project³⁶ irrespective of how that project was authorised or directed. We do this by assessing the prudence, efficiency and reasonableness of the Network Operator's proposed costs in relation to authorised or directed network infrastructure project.³⁷ For network infrastructure projects with one or more NNO components, we provide a process for Network Operators to seek an adjustment of a previously approved network support allowance within the five-year revenue determination process, or to seek approval of a methodology to determine how costs may be adjusted in the future.³⁸

Table 1 sets out the key steps for a revenue determination associated with the non-contestable framework with indicative timing. It covers the process for an initial determination, made following a new authorisation by the Consumer Trustee (or direction by the Minister), and subsequent determinations that are made (generally) every five years or in accordance with the EII Act.³⁹

Broadly, non-contestable revenue determinations include two stages:

³² EII Act, s. 30(1) and EII Regulation, cl. 43.

³³ EII Act, s. 31(1).

³⁴ EII Act, s. 33.

³⁵ EII Act, ss. 32(1) & 36(2).

³⁶ EII Act, s. 38(1).

³⁷ EII Act s. 38(6).

³⁸ Applications for non-network option projects, including eligibility and timings, are dealt with in Chapter 8 of this Guideline.

³⁹ EII Act s. 40.

- **Pre-lodgement**, including steps that the Infrastructure Planner, Consumer Trustee or Network Operator must undertake to recommend a network infrastructure project and to enable the Network Operator to submit its initial or subsequent revenue proposals.
- **Revenue determination**, including steps we will take to consider and consult on a revenue proposal and the preliminary position paper before making the final determination. Further detail on our assessment approach is set out in chapter 5.

Table 1: Key process steps of a revenue determination associated with the non-contestable framework

Milestone	Initial determination	Subsequent determination (generally every 5 years)
Pre-lodgement		
Consumer Trustee or Minister notifies the AER that an authorisation or direction has been made to a Network Operator.	The authorisation or direction is published.	n/a
AER develops and issues information notice under s.38(7) of the EII Act to a Network Operator.	Best endeavours to provide at least 80 business days before Network Operator's revenue proposal is due.	At least 80 business days before Network Operator's revenue proposal is due.
Network Operator submits a cost allocation methodology for approval by the AER. ⁴⁰	Best endeavours to submit at least 60 business days before Network Operator's revenue proposal is due to be submitted .	At least 60 business days before Network Operator's revenue proposal is due to be submitted .
AER decides to approve or refuse to approve a Network Operator's cost allocation methodology	Not more than 30 business days from receipt of Network Operator's cost allocation methodology.	Not more than 30 business days from receipt of Network Operator's cost allocation methodology.
Network Operator consults with stakeholders on the network infrastructure project and its draft revenue proposal.	Network Operator uses best endeavours to conduct pre lodgement stakeholder consultation consistent with the AER's Better Resets Handbook. ⁴¹ Where stakeholder engagement issues are identified by the Network Operator, these are raised with the AER early.	Prior to submitting a revenue proposal to the AER, noting the time required to accept stakeholder submissions and incorporate them into a final revenue proposal.

⁴⁰ Our request for a cost allocation methodology will be included in the information notice issued under EII Act, s. 38(7).

⁴¹ AER, *Better resets handbook - Towards consumer centric network proposals*, December 2021.

Milestone	Initial determination	Subsequent determination (generally every 5 years)
Revenue determination		
Network Operator submits to the AER its revenue proposal and response to information notice. ⁴²	By the date specified in the Consumer Trustee's authorisation or Minister's direction or authorisation, or stated in contractual arrangements, for making a revenue determination.	At least 160 business days before the end of the current regulatory control period under the EII Act.
AER conducts compliance and confidentiality checks and publishes compliant revenue proposal for public consultation and submissions.	Publish compliant revenue proposal upon completion of compliance check.	Publish compliant revenue proposal upon satisfactory compliance check.
Submissions on Network Operator's revenue proposal close	15 business days from the date of publishing the Network Operator's revenue proposal.	15 business days from the date of publishing the Network Operator's revenue proposal.
AER commences assessment under EII Act and EII Regulation, and this Guideline.	We may request further or clarifying information during our assessment process.	We may request further or clarifying information during our assessment process.
AER advises the Network Operator of material issues under consideration and consults with the Infrastructure Planner. ⁴³	Periodically throughout the revenue determination process, including but not limited to before our final determination.	Periodically throughout the revenue determination process, including but not limited to before our final determination.
AER publishes a preliminary position paper for public consultation	Approximately 55 business days from receipt of Network Operator's revenue proposal.	Approximately 55 business days from receipt of Network Operator's revenue proposal.
Submissions on preliminary position paper close	20 business days from the date of publishing the preliminary position paper.	20 business days from the date of publishing the preliminary position paper.
AER considers submissions received.	Ongoing from receipt of stakeholder submissions.	Ongoing from receipt of stakeholder submissions.

⁴² EII Regulation, cl. 48.

⁴³ EII Regulation, cl. 48; EII Act s. 37(1)d. If the revenue determination relates to a REZ network infrastructure project, cl. 49(1A) of the EII Regulation requires the AER to consult with the Consumer Trustee.

Milestone	Initial determination	Subsequent determination (generally every 5 years)
AER makes its final determination. ⁴⁴	126 business days from date of receipt of Network Operator's revenue proposal.	126 business days from date of receipt of Network Operator's revenue proposal.
Annual revenue adjustment process consistent with the revenue control mechanism in the determination. ⁴⁵	N/A	See section 5.5.

Note: All timing is indicative only.

The EII Regulation indicates that, if we are unable to make a revenue determination within 126 business days, we must prepare a report to the NSW Energy Minister that sets out our reasons for not making the determination within that timeframe, the date by which we expect to make the revenue determination and publish the report on our website.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Although the AER is required to make the final determination within 126 business days after it has received the Network Operator's revenue proposal, EII Regulation, cl. 53(4) provides that the AER is required to publish the revenue determination as soon as reasonably practicable but not before the Infrastructure Planner has notified the regulator that, in the Infrastructure Planner's opinion, the project financial close of the network infrastructure project has been reached under the recommended contractual arrangements for the project.

⁴⁵ EII Act, s. 40 and EII Regulation, cl. 51.

⁴⁶ EII Regulation, cl. 50(3).

3 Pre-lodgement

There are steps that the Infrastructure Planner, Consumer Trustee, Network Operator and AER must undertake before a Network Operator is able to submit its initial or subsequent revenue proposal and for us to commence assessing that proposal. This section outlines:

- The roles and responsibilities of the Consumer Trustee, Network Operator and AER, under the EII Act and EII Regulation in completing the key process steps set out in Table 1.
- How we will approach the pre-lodgement process.

3.1 Consumer Trustee authorisation or Minister's authorisation/direction

As noted in chapter 1, the Consumer Trustee may authorise, or the Minister direct or authorise a Network Operator to carry out a REZ network infrastructure project based on the recommendations of the Infrastructure Planner.⁴⁷ The Infrastructure Planner's recommendations for a REZ network infrastructure project must cover:

- the different options for network infrastructure projects to provide the intended network capacity for the renewable energy zone
- staging and sequencing of network infrastructure projects
- funding, procurement and cost recovery for the recommended network infrastructure projects
- other matters prescribed by the EII Regulation.⁴⁸

Should the Consumer Trustee recommend the Minister give a direction⁴⁹ to a Network Operator to carry out a REZ network infrastructure project the Minister's direction must specify:

- the Network Operator to whom the direction applies,
- the location and description of the infrastructure project,
- the date by which the Network Operator, taking all reasonable steps, must comply with the direction,
- other matters prescribed by EII Regulation.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ EII Act, s. 31(1). For priority network infrastructure projects, the Minister does not require recommendations from the Infrastructure Planner. See EII Act, ss. 32(3) and 34(1).

⁴⁸ EII Act, s. 30(2).

⁴⁹ EII Act, s. 31(1)(a).

⁵⁰ EII Act, s. 32(2), EII Regulation, cl. 20(1)(a); specify the grounds on which the Minister is satisfied giving the direction is consistent with the objects of the Act, and (a1); specify the contractual arrangements that the network operator is required to enter to carry out the infrastructure project, and (b); contain other matters the Minister considers relevant. The direction may also specify those matters set out in s.32(2A) of the EII Act.

3.2 Maximum capital cost for a REZ network infrastructure project

Where the Consumer Trustee authorises a Network Operator to carry out a REZ network infrastructure project, the Consumer Trustee must also set a maximum capital cost for the prudent, efficient and reasonable capital costs to develop and construct each network infrastructure project,⁵¹ and to notify us of that amount.⁵²

This maximum capital cost remains confidential and acts as an upper constraint on the capital expenditure (capex) allowance for development and construction costs that we can determine as part of applying the Transmission Efficiency Test.⁵³ This maximum amount does not apply to costs determined under the transmission efficiency test when adjusted in accordance with an adjustment mechanism provided in the determination on the differences between the estimated and actual capital costs, or in accordance with the EII Regulation.⁵⁴ This maximum amount also does not apply in relation to the review or remaking of the determination.⁵⁵

3.3 Application of guidelines, incentive schemes and models

The EII Regulation requires us to make guidelines that are consistent with Chapter 6A of the NER as far as reasonably practicable.⁵⁶

Where applicable, we intend to apply our current NER Chapter 6A guidelines, incentive schemes and models to non-contestable infrastructure projects under the EII Act,⁵⁷ subject to terminology modifications (see Appendix A).

The benefits of this approach include:

- It achieves the requirements in the EII Regulation of maintaining consistency with NER Chapter 6A, NER guidelines, incentive schemes and models to the extent appropriate.⁵⁸
- The current NER Chapter 6A guidelines, incentive schemes and models were developed through extensive stakeholder consultation, including with TNSPs, who will likely be the Network Operators for non-contestable determinations.

⁵¹ Excluding priority network infrastructure projects.

⁵² EII Act, ss. 31(2) and 38(6). The Consumer Trustee must also give the Minister written notice of the maximum amount as soon as practicable after giving the regulator written notice under s.31(2A) of the EII Act.

⁵³ EII Act, ss. 31 and 38(6).

⁵⁴ EII Act, s 38(6A).

⁵⁵ EII Act, s. 40(3).

⁵⁶ EII Regulation, cl. 47A and 47B. The list in the EII Regulation is not exhaustive and we may also apply any other supporting guidelines, incentive schemes or models that are consistent with those made under Chapter 6A of the NER.

⁵⁷ A small number of NER transmission guidelines, incentive schemes and models are not relevant given the nature of network infrastructure projects under the EII Act.

⁵⁸ EII Regulation, cl. 47B(3).

- Network Operators (who are likely to be incumbents) and other key stakeholders are familiar with the policy intent, application and operation of the guidelines, incentive schemes and models.
- Minimising the possibility for inconsistency between the EII Act and NER guidelines that have no material differences, including in their application.
- Reducing the administrative burden on Network Operators, stakeholders and us by not having to consult on a suite of EII Act specific guidelines that are identical to or are not materially different to their NER equivalent.
- It sets a reasonable precedent should we have a regulatory role in renewable energy zones in other jurisdictions.

The following NER Chapter 6A guidelines, models and incentive schemes, as updated from time to time will apply to Network Operators under the EII framework.⁵⁹

1. AER NER guidelines

- a) Better Resets Handbook – Towards consumer centric network proposals
- b) Expenditure forecast assessment guideline
- c) Expenditure incentives guideline

2. AER NER incentive schemes

- a) Efficiency benefit sharing scheme
- b) Capital expenditure sharing scheme

3. AER NER models

- a) Electricity post-tax revenue model (PTRM) and associated handbooks, as modified in accordance with the AER's guidance note 'Amendments to NER PTRM for determinations under the Electricity Infrastructure Investment Act and Regulations'⁶⁰
- b) Electricity roll-forward model and associated handbooks
- c) The Financeability Guideline as developed under the NER Chapter 6A.6.3A also applies under the EII Framework to the extent that the NER and EII frameworks are consistent.⁶¹

In its revenue proposal, a Network Operator may propose to modify the application of a guideline, incentive scheme or model but must provide reasons for doing so. Depending on the circumstances and the reasoning, we may be willing to consider modifying our current incentive schemes and we would do this on a case-by-case basis.

⁵⁹ All current relevant supporting handbooks, guidance notes and the like published on the AER's website will also apply to Network Operators under the EII framework.

⁶⁰ The guidance note provides direction on how to modify the PTRM to remove sections or calculations that are to be excluded from an EII determination, such as the X-factor smoothing (EII Regulation, cl. 47A(5)(e)). Revenue smoothing occurs through the annual contribution determination process under EII Act, s. 56.

⁶¹ In accordance with EII Regulation cl. 47A(3)(b), EII Chapter 6A must be consistent with the NER Chapter 6A as reasonably practicable, after accounting for the matters set out in cl.47A(4)–(5). As an example, under the EII Framework, X-factors are explicitly identified as a matter to be excluded from our non-contestable guideline and as such, any discussion in our financeability guideline around adjusting X-factors to address financeability concerns will not be considered for the purposes of a non-contestable determination.

We will amend or update guidelines, incentive schemes and models made under Chapter 6A of the NER in accordance with the NER. When this occurs, we will direct Network Operators, scheme entities and other key stakeholders to the consultation process. This approach aligns with that outlined in section 1.1.1 and avoids duplication of consultation processes unless material differences arise.

4. EII specific guidelines and guidance notes

EII Guidelines

We will develop specific EII Guidelines dealing with confidentiality and the service target performance incentive scheme. The service target performance incentive scheme would apply to non-contestable determinations from the second regulatory control period onwards.⁶² As such, we will commence development of an EII service target performance incentive scheme at a later date.⁶³ We will consult with stakeholders on the development of this scheme as well as the Confidentiality Guideline.

*EII Guidance Notes*⁶⁴

We will also develop a guidance note outlining how under the EII Act and EII Regulation, we will apply incentive schemes for use in a non-contestable revenue determination (EII incentive schemes guidance note).⁶⁵ Our existing EII incentive scheme guidance outlines the relationship of network expenditure between the EII framework and the NER and explains similarities and any departures from the existing incentives schemes under the NER. It also outlines how the Efficiency Benefit Sharing Scheme and a Capital Expenditure Sharing Scheme will apply to non-contestable revenue determinations.

We have published a guidance note outlining our approach to the application of the cost allocation and ring-fencing requirements for Network Operators.⁶⁶ These requirements apply to any Network Operator providing EII regulated transmission services, which include the following services:

- (a) developing, constructing, or owning EII assets⁶⁷,

⁶² EII Regulation, cl. 47B(2).

⁶³ EII Ch 6A, cl. 6A.19.2.

⁶⁴ Guidance notes are non-binding and are intended to provide general guidance and expectation of our preferred approach.

⁶⁵ [AER - Draft Guidance note - Incentive schemes for non-contestable projects in NSW - 3 August 2023.](#)

⁶⁶ [Cost allocation methodology and ring-fencing for EII regulated transmission - Guidance Note, May 2025.](#)

⁶⁷ 'EII asset' is defined in cl. 9A.2.1 of Ch 9A (NSW) as 'Network infrastructure that: (a) forms part of a REZ network infrastructure project or a priority transmission infrastructure project that is the subject of an EII authorisation; and (b) is specified in an EII revenue determination for a Network Service Provider as being network infrastructure for which the Network Service Provider is entitled to payment; and (c) is not the subject of a cost recovery declaration, but, for the avoidance of doubt, does not include network infrastructure that is, or forms part of, a designated network asset, an identified user shared asset or funded augmentation, unless the asset is: (d) the subject of an EII authorisation (for the purpose of paragraph (a)); or (e) specified in an EII revenue determination (for the purposes of paragraph (b)).'

- (b) using EII assets to provide a prescribed transmission service; or connection service that is provided to serve Transmission Network User, or group of Transmission Network Users, at a single transmission network connection point.⁶⁸

For guidance on the requirements on Network Operators providing these services, please refer to our guidance note which will be updated to address any legislative changes that occur over time.

3.4 Submitting a cost allocation method

Under clause 6A.19.4 of EII Chapter 6A, a Network Operator must submit a cost allocation methodology to us for approval in compliance with the Cost Allocation Guideline.⁶⁹ We consider it likely that most Network Operators subject to a non-contestable determination will be incumbent TNSPs and as such have an existing cost allocation methodology that they can update to address the EII Act, EII Regulation and guidance note. This reduces the administrative burden of having to prepare an additional cost allocation methodology.

A Network Operator must submit a cost allocation method to the AER no less than 60 business days prior to the ~~deadline for date that~~ the Network Operator ~~to is due to~~ submit its revenue proposal.

We will publish a decision as to whether we have approved or refused to approve a Network Operator's cost allocation methodology within 30 business days of receiving it, failing which we will be taken to have approved it.⁷⁰

3.5 Notifying the AER of an intention to submit a revenue proposal

We encourage open engagement between a Network Operator and us, including prior to lodging a revenue proposal to assist in early identification of potential issues.

When preparing its initial or subsequent revenue proposal, a Network Operator should, provide an overview of its approach to issues like:

- a) The methodology the Network Operator intends to use to forecast operating expenditure and capital expenditure.
- b) The Network Operator's approach to stakeholder consultation in developing its revenue proposal.
- c) The Network Operator's approach to applying incentive schemes and pass-through events.
- d) Any other matter the Network Operator considers relevant to bring to our attention.

We expect that we and the Network Operator would commence these discussions at a reasonable time in advance of the Network Operator submitting its revenue proposal. We intend to have an open dialogue with Network Operators on any emerging issues through

⁶⁸ Ch 9A (NSW), cl 9A.2.1.

⁶⁹ EII Ch 6A, cl. 6A.19.4(a) to (c).

⁷⁰ EII Ch 6A, cl. 6A.19.4(d).

bilateral and stakeholder engagement meetings prior to the submission of their formal revenue proposal. Where possible, we will provide feedback to the Network Operator and other stakeholders on any pre-lodgement issues to support and facilitate the engagement process between the Network Operator and its stakeholders in the development of the revenue proposal. The level and timing of our feedback may vary depending upon the nature of the engagement undertaken by the Network Operator and the availability of information and data available to us.

3.5.1 Pre-lodgement stakeholder consultation

We expect a Network Operator will use its best endeavours to engage with stakeholders ahead of submitting its revenue proposal to us. This may include, but is not limited to, consulting stakeholders on the nature of the project through to the costs that it proposes to incur to meet the requirements of the Consumer Trustee's authorisation or the Minister's authorisation or direction.

We expect that a Network Operator, where possible and appropriate, will incorporate the findings of this pre-lodgement stakeholder engagement into its revenue proposal. We acknowledge that a non-contestable infrastructure project may have interlinkages with a contestable project that is based on extensive commercially sensitive information. We appreciate that this may constrain the information shared as part of the Network Operator's stakeholder engagement.

For an initial revenue determination, the timing between an authorisation or direction and the due date for a revenue proposal is unknown and may vary between non-contestable determinations. In these instances, we expect that a Network Operator will use its best endeavours to publish a draft of its revenue proposal for public comment and reflect consumer views in its revenue proposal to us. To allow for constructive pre-engagement and feedback loop, we recommend that the draft revenue proposal should be available for AER and stakeholder comment well in advance of the formal submission date of the revenue proposal. The level of feedback AER staff and stakeholders can provide will be dependent on the supporting models, analysis and data made available by the Network Operator during the pre-lodgement process. The provision of information and its associated timing is something that the Network Operator should discuss with the AER and other parties to manage stakeholder time and resources during the pre-lodgement process.

For subsequent revenue determinations our expectation is that a Network Operator will publish a more comprehensive draft revenue proposal that incorporates the findings of its consumer engagement and AER expectations and allows sufficient time for stakeholders to make a submission. The revenue proposal submitted to the AER should set out how the Network Operator has responded to the submissions received on the draft revenue proposal.

In undertaking stakeholder consultation, a Network Operator should aim to satisfy the principles set out in the *AER's Better Resets Handbook – Towards consumer centric network proposals*:⁷¹

- a) Clear, accurate and timely

⁷¹ AER, *Better Resets Handbook - Towards consumer centric network proposals*, 9 December 2021.

- b) Accessible and inclusive
- c) transparent
- d) measurable.

Our guidance note on regulation of actionable ISP projects also provides helpful advice on best practice stakeholder consultation for large transmission projects.⁷²

The Network Operator's stakeholder consultation will be narrower than that of TNSPs under the NER, as the Consumer Trustee's authorisation or Minister's authorisation or direction will specify most aspects of the non-contestable project. A Network Operator should adapt our guidance on consumer engagement to reflect the more limited scope of their engagement.

We do not expect Network Operators to re-engage with stakeholders on issues that remain unchanged and previously consulted on and settled by the Infrastructure Planner, Consumer Trustee or Minister. Where it is appropriate to rely on the outcomes of earlier engagement processes to support its revenue proposal, a Network Operator may decide to do so.

3.5.2 Information notices under section 38(7) of the EII Act

Under the EII Act, we will issue written notices to a Network Operator requiring it to provide information that we require to make a revenue determination.⁷³ A Network Operator must comply with any information notice we issue unless it has a lawful excuse.⁷⁴ If a Network Operator to whom a notice is issued holds a licence under the *Electricity Supply Act 1995* (NSW), it is also a condition of the licence that the licensee complies with the notice.⁷⁵

Prior to receiving a revenue proposal, we will issue a notice for information we require to be included in a proposal to enable us to make a revenue determination. Before issuing this information notice, we will engage with the relevant Network Operator. We may also issue a draft information notice to the Network Operator for comment. The information notice will, as a minimum, include the information contained in section 4.1.1 of this Guideline but may also include expenditure and other information to support our assessment of the Network Operator's revenue proposal. Where relevant, information provided in response to a notice may be required to be subject to independent assurance (audit or review) and be supported by a statutory declaration.

We may also request information be provided voluntarily during our assessment of a revenue proposal to assist us in making our revenue determination.

⁷² AER, *Guidance note - Regulation of actionable ISP Projects*, March 2021.

⁷³ EII Act, s.38(7)-(8) and EII Regulation, cl. 48.

⁷⁴ EII Act, s.38(9).

⁷⁵ EII Act, s.38(9A). However, under s.38(9B) a person cannot be both prosecuted for an offence against subsection (9) and dealt with by the Minister for a contravention of a licence condition under the *Electricity Supply Act 1995* (NSW), Schedule 2, clause 8 in relation to the same act or omission.

4 Revenue determination process

This section sets out the revenue determination process, including the contents of a Network Operator's revenue proposal and consultation processes.

4.1 Revenue proposal

4.1.1 Contents of a revenue proposal

A revenue proposal from a Network Operator must include all information and matters set out in EII Chapter 6A, Schedule 6A.1.⁷⁶ It must further:

1. Include a statement of how the Network Operator's revenue proposal is consistent with the relevant Consumer Trustee authorisation or Minister's direction or authorisation and, if it is different, identify and provide reasons for the differences.
2. Identify any parts of the revenue proposal the Network Operator claims to be confidential and the ground for the confidentiality claim in accordance with the EII Act, EII Regulation and EII Confidentiality Guideline.⁷⁷
3. Include the revenue (in total and annually) to be paid to the Network Operator for carrying out the project, including a break-down of the total and annual amounts into their components (as set out under section 38 of the EII Act and the EII Regulation).⁷⁸
4. Include a schedule of payments setting out quarterly amounts proposed to be paid to the Network Operator by the Scheme Financial Vehicle (as defined under the EII Act) for carrying out the project, and the methodology by which these quarterly amounts are to be calculated from the total revenue.⁷⁹
5. Include a formulaic description of any mechanisms that will be used to adjust⁸⁰ the revenue proposed to be paid to the Network Operator and the schedule of payments within the regulatory control period (for example, to adjust payments for actual inflation). For each mechanism, provide:
 - a) a description of the components to be adjusted
 - b) the timing of the adjustment for each component, or relevant trigger event
 - c) a detailed explanation of the proposed method of indexation, escalation or adjustment
 - d) identification of the authoritative source (or sources) of indices or data to be used for any indexation, escalation or adjustment.
6. Include proposed costs incurred by the Network Operator in complying with a regulatory requirement and how those costs were calculated.⁸¹

⁷⁶ Some matters in EII Chapter 6A, Schedule 6A.1 only apply to subsequent regulatory control periods. These are noted in appendix A.

⁷⁷ This is currently a draft guideline.

⁷⁸ EII Act, ss. 38(1) and 38(2) and EII Regulation, cls. 48 and 50A.

⁷⁹ EII Regulation, cl. 52.

⁸⁰ EII Regulation, cl. 51.

⁸¹ EII Regulation, cl. 46(1).

7. Include payments required to be made by the Network Operator to the Infrastructure Planner under any contractual arrangement. These costs may include the costs of early development works, preparatory activities and project management undertaken by the Infrastructure Planner (including land, easements, project development work, client delivery and related costs) that are being passed through to the Network Operator.
8. Include for all financial values the dollar terms in which the amounts are presented.
9. Total development and construction capex necessary to carry out the network infrastructure project according to the Consumer Trustee's authorisation or Minister's direction or authorisation.
 - a) A forecast of development and construction capex the Network Operator will incur in the first regulatory control period.
 - b) A forecast of development and construction capex the Network Operator will incur in one or more subsequent regulatory control periods.
 - c) How the proposed staging of development and construction capex complies with the terms of the Consumer Trustee's authorisation or Minister's authorisation or direction.
 - d) Any actual or forecast development and construction capex the Network Operator has or expects to incur before the commencement of the first regulatory control period.
10. Include matters relating to depreciation for the purposes of clause 47D(3) of the EII Regulation.

~~10.~~ Include any methodology for a network alternative support payment that has been previously approved by the AER under EII Chapter 6A.6.6A(a) in relation to a NNO component that forms part of the revenue proposal.

11.

~~11.~~ 12. Be accompanied by an overview paper which includes:

- a) a summary of the revenue proposal, the purpose of which is to explain the revenue proposal in reasonably plain language to electricity consumers
- b) a summary of the scope and terms of the Consumer Trustee's authorisation or the Minister's direction or authorisation and the network infrastructure project required to be carried out
- c) a description of how the Network Operator has engaged with electricity consumers and, if so, what feedback was provided and how that feedback has been taken into account in developing the revenue proposal and
- d) for each determination after the initial determination, a comparison of the Network Operator's proposed revenue cap with its approved revenues for the preceding regulatory control period (by total and by component).

A revenue proposal must be accompanied by the information requested in an information notice issued under the EII Act.⁸²

The Network Operator must also provide a public version of its revenue proposal that includes a summary of its pre-lodgement engagement and any supporting information (including a response to any information notice) for publication on our website.

⁸² EII Act, s. 38(7).

4.1.2 Treatment of confidential information through revenue determination process

The EII Confidentiality Guideline⁸³ will set out handling of confidential information in relation to:

- a Network Operator's revenue proposal, which is required for the AER to make a revenue determination under sections 38 of the EII Act and clause 48 of the EII Regulation.
- a Network Operator's responses to any information notices we issue under section 38(7) of the EII Act.
- any other information provided by the Network Operator that is necessary for us to perform our functions.

The Confidentiality Guideline will also set out how Network Operators should submit confidentiality claims to us and our process for considering confidentiality claims.

A Network Operator is entitled to include commercially sensitive information as part of its revenue proposal.

Consistent with this Guideline, a Network Operator should discuss its approach to confidential information with us prior to lodging the revenue proposal so that any issues can be addressed prior to submission.

We may publish on our website the Network Operator's revenue proposal and other information it may provide in response to an information request under section 38 of the EII Act. However, we must not publish this other information if we are satisfied that it is confidential or commercially sensitive.⁸⁴

When publishing our revenue determination, we can decide not to publish parts of our revenue determination if we are satisfied that it is not appropriate, considering the following matters:

- the public interest;
- the extent to which publishing the part of the revenue determination would disclose information that is confidential or commercially sensitive; and
- the effect of publishing the part of the revenue determination on future competitive assessment processes.⁸⁵

Therefore, when assessing a Network Operator's confidentiality claims we may have regard to the above-mentioned matters.

⁸³ EII Regulation, cl. 47 requires us to publish guidelines on its website about the exercise of our functions under Part 5 of the Act, including making a revenue determination.

⁸⁴ EII Regulation, cl. 53(7) and (8).

⁸⁵ EII Regulation, cl. 53(6).

4.2 AER preliminary position paper

We will publish a preliminary position paper approximately 55 business days after receiving the Network Operator's revenue proposal. The purpose of this paper is to provide an early indication of our assessment of the revenue proposal and receive feedback from stakeholders.

The preliminary position paper will set out:

- a short summary of the revenue proposal including the areas where we are likely to accept the Network Operator's proposed position in our final decision
- a short summary of the areas of differences between our assessment and the Network Operator's revenue proposal. Where practical, we will provide an indication of the materiality of these differences on the total revenue amount proposed by the Network Operator.
- explanation of our position on any material and/or contentious matters where we are unlikely to accept the proposed revenue proposal position and are seeking further information from the Network Operator
- our position on any material issues raised in written submissions on the revenue proposal
- upcoming timelines and milestones for the revenue determination process
- information on how stakeholders can provide feedback to the AER.

We will undertake our usual confidentiality checks prior to publication of a preliminary position paper in relation to the revenue proposal or financeability request in accordance with clause 6A.11.2A of EII Chapter 6A.

4.3 Consultation on revenue proposal and preliminary position paper

We intend to publish and consult on:

- The Network Operator's revenue proposal and information requested under an information notice⁸⁶ as soon as practicable following our compliance and confidentiality checks.⁸⁷
- Our preliminary position paper.

We will provide an opportunity for stakeholders to make submissions on the Network Operator's revenue proposal and our preliminary position paper. We will provide stakeholders approximately 15 business days to provide submissions on the revenue proposal and 20 business days to provide submissions on the preliminary position paper.

⁸⁶ EII Act, s. 38(7).

⁸⁷ This is consistent with the requirement set out in EII Chapter 6A, cl. 6A.11.3.

We will publish all stakeholder submissions on our website, except where a stakeholder provides a submission in confidence. We prefer submissions that we can publish to enhance the transparency of our determination processes. Where a confidential submission is provided, we request that stakeholders also provide a redacted version suitable for publication.

We may hold a public forum after releasing our preliminary position paper. We will advise of our intention at the time of publishing our preliminary position paper.

We encourage stakeholders to make written submissions and participate in the public forum if they wish to be involved in the revenue determination process.

5 AER's assessment approach

5.1 Compliance review of the revenue proposal

Upon receipt of the Network Operator's revenue proposal, we will:

- a) undertake a compliance review of the proposal to ensure that it meets requirements set out in EII Act and EII Regulation and this Guideline, including the completeness of models
- b) assess whether the Network Operator has submitted information in compliance with our EII Confidentiality Guideline
- c) assess whether the revenue proposal is consistent with the requirements of an authorisation made by the Consumer Trustee, or a direction or authorisation issued by the Minister; and
- d) assess that the Network Operator's response to any information notice we issue under the EII Act is complete
- e) for a REZ network infrastructure project authorised by the Consumer Trustee, assess whether the Network Operator's proposed capital cost to develop and construct a project exceeds the maximum capital cost set by the Consumer Trustee.

If the Network Operator's revenue proposal does not comply with requirements (a)–(e), we will notify the Network Operator, Consumer Trustee and Infrastructure Planner and discuss the areas of non-compliance as soon as practicable after receiving the revenue proposal.⁸⁸

If we notify the Network Operator of non-compliance in its revenue proposal the Network Operator must, within 10 business days of that notice, resubmit its revenue proposal or provide further information in a form that complies with the relevant requirements that we have set out. We note in these circumstances the operation of clause 50(1) of the EII Regulation means that the 126-business day timeframe for making a non-contestable revenue determination will not start until the Network Operator submits a compliant proposal.⁸⁹

If we accept the Network Operator's revenue proposal, we will publish the public version of it on our website for consultation, noting that we are unable to consider stakeholder views on aspects of the network infrastructure that have been set out in the Consumer Trustee's authorisation or Minister's authorisation or direction as these are matters outside the control of the Network Operator.

⁸⁸ EII Act, s. 31(3). Noting that such discussions must preserve the confidentiality of the Consumer Trustee's maximum capital cost, where applicable.

⁸⁹ Relevantly, clause 50(1) states that the '*regulator must make a revenue determination in relation to a network operator within the following period after the regulator has received the information from the network operator required by clause 48...*'. See also clause 48(1) & (3) of the EII Regulation.

5.2 Transmission Efficiency Test and forecast capital expenditure

We will apply the Transmission Efficiency Test and forecast capital expenditure objectives, factors and criteria to calculate the total capex allowance a Network Operator may recover for a REZ network infrastructure project. The following section sets out our approach applying the Transmission Efficiency Test to development and construction capex and assessing a Network Operator's broader forecast capital expenditure.

5.2.1 Subsequent revenue proposals

In subsequent revenue proposals, Network Operators may seek to recover capex other than development and construction capex. In these instances, we will apply:

- a) The Transmission Efficiency Test for any further development and construction capex (where it goes beyond the initial regulatory control period)⁹⁰
- b) Our forecast capital expenditure assessment for all remaining capex proposed (which is equivalent to the Transmission Efficiency Test).

Therefore, in subsequent revenue proposals the Transmission Efficiency Test is an input to determine a Network Operator's total capex allowance (assuming development and construction capex extends beyond the initial regulatory period).

Our assessment process for the Transmission Efficiency Test and forecast capital expenditure is set out at clause 6A.6.7 of EII Chapter 6A.

5.2.2 Staging development and construction capex beyond the initial regulatory control period

We expect that a Network Operator will incur most development and construction capex within the first five years. However, we note that depending on the size and nature of the network infrastructure project, some building of the infrastructure may be staged beyond the initial regulatory control period, meaning development and construction capex would form part of the Network Operator's subsequent revenue proposals.

If development and construction capex is to be staged over more than one regulatory control period, we expect that the Consumer Trustee's authorisation or Minister's direction will state the timing, and if so, how this is reflected in any maximum capital cost the Consumer Trustee sets.

A Network Operator must provide a forecast of its development and construction capex necessary to carry out the network infrastructure project as required under the Consumer Trustee's authorisation (as detailed in section 4.1).

⁹⁰ EII Regulation, cl. 51(4) permits us to adopt, without recalculation, the existing capital costs calculated using the transmission efficiency test for the previous determination.

5.2.3 Prudent, efficient and reasonable

In applying the Transmission Efficiency Test, we must determine that the capital costs for development and construction for the network infrastructure project are prudent, efficient and reasonable.⁹¹

Where practicable, we intend to ensure consistency between the NER Chapter 6A framework and the EII framework. In calculating the capital costs, we will calculate costs that are prudent and efficient as per our current *Expenditure Forecast Assessment Guideline for Electricity Transmission* (Expenditure Assessment Guideline). In our Expenditure Assessment Guideline, we state:

“We consider that the notion of efficient costs complements the costs that a prudent operator would require to achieve the expenditure objectives. Prudent expenditure is that which reflects the best course of action, considering available alternatives. Efficient expenditure results in the lowest cost to consumers over the long term. That is, prudent and efficient expenditure reflects the lowest long-term cost to consumers for the most appropriate investment or activity required to achieve the expenditure objectives.”⁹²

In assessing whether the capital costs are reasonable, we will assess whether the costs, and the calculation of those costs, are based on reason or reasonably open based on the facts before us.

Accordingly, in calculating prudent, efficient and reasonable capital costs, we will calculate costs that are prudent and efficient as per our current Expenditure Assessment Guideline, whilst ensuring that the calculations are reasonably open based on the facts before us.

5.2.4 Our approach to assessing forecast capex (other than development and construction capex)

The transmission networks we regulate under the NER are established ‘brownfield’ networks. That is, extensive infrastructure already exists. Therefore, our assessments examine the following additional categories of forecast capex:

- a) augmentations to the existing network (augmentation expenditure or augex)
- b) replacement of the existing network (replacement expenditure or repex)
- c) non-network capital expenditure
- d) connections and customer-initiated works capital expenditure.

⁹¹ EII Act, s. 38(4).

⁹² AER, [Expenditure Forecast assessment guideline for transmission](#), 2013, p. 9. The Expenditure Assessment Guideline is framed around an assessment against the National Electricity Objective. In applying the guideline, we will have reference to the objectives of the EII Act.

In subsequent regulatory control periods and depending on the nature of the network infrastructure project, we expect to receive revenue proposals that include capex other than development and construction capex. Our approach to assess forecast capex is consistent with our Transmission Efficiency Test for assessing prudent, efficient and reasonable development and construction capex.

Some differences between the NER and EII regulatory frameworks may require us to modify the assessment techniques described in our expenditure forecast assessment guideline.⁹³

Potential modifications might include:

- a) Limited trend analysis in our initial determination but will be used for subsequent determinations.
- b) Predictive modelling for replacement expenditure and augmentation expenditure will be more relevant for subsequent determinations, where this category of capex is included in a Network Operator's revenue proposal.
- c) No cost benefit analysis as the assessment of different project options is done by the Infrastructure Planner in making recommendations to the Consumer Trustee.
- d) In considering the need for material replacement and augmentation expenditure in subsequent determinations, we will have regard to any instructions from the Consumer Trustee or Minister.⁹⁴
- e) We expect that applicable demand forecasts will be developed by the Infrastructure Planner, forming part of the basis of the Consumer Trustee's authorisation or Minister's authorisation or direction. Therefore, we will only assess a Network Operator's demand forecasts to the extent that they relate to any investment that is left to the discretion of the Network Operator.

5.2.5 Pre-period costs

It is possible that a Network Operator may incur costs related to the carrying out of a network infrastructure project prior to the first regulatory period commencing. As there will not be an existing determination or RAB for the Network Operator, these costs (if validly incurred) will need to be included in the post-tax revenue model as an opening RAB (together with appropriate financing costs). For these pre-period costs to be factored into amounts payable to a Network Operator they must be included in a Network Operator's revenue proposal for the initial regulatory period. The Network Operator will need to provide justification that the costs are:

- consistent with the relevant authorisation or Ministerial direction;
- related to the carrying out of the infrastructure project; and
- prudent, efficient and reasonable.

⁹³ Our assessment techniques are summarised in cl. 2.4 of the *AER's Expenditure Forecast Assessment Guideline – Transmission*.

⁹⁴ However, we expect any material augmentation will be covered by a separate authorisation or direction and separate revenue determination rather than being assessed as part of broader capex in a subsequent revenue determination under the original authorisation or direction.

We will review the information provided by the Network Operator on the pre-period costs before deciding whether ~~or not~~ to include them in our determination. We expect most pre-period costs to be capital expenditures but will review any operating expenditures proposed to be recovered.

5.3 Depreciation

The approach to calculating depreciation is captured in the EII Regulation and EII Chapter 6A (**Appendix A**).

Under the EII Regulation we must calculate the depreciation using the depreciation schedules prepared in accordance with NER Chapter 6A.⁹⁵

Our standard assessment approach, consistent with NER Chapter 6A.6.3 and the equivalent EII clause 6A.6.3, is set out in our assessment approaches for regulatory depreciation as in our regulatory determinations.⁹⁶ One of the key considerations behind determining a depreciation schedule is ensuring it is calculated using a profile that reflects the nature of the asset (or category of assets) over its economic life.⁹⁷

5.3.1 Amending the depreciation schedule for financeability

The EII Regulation and EII Chapter 6A allow us to modify a depreciation schedule if a Network Operator is unable to efficiently obtain finance to carry out the infrastructure project (a financeability issue).⁹⁸ Specifically, we may depreciate the asset (or group of assets) using a profile that differs from the nature of the assets that we consider is appropriate to address a financeability issue.⁹⁹

To modify a depreciation schedule for a financeability issue, we must be satisfied that it is reasonably necessary to ensure:

- a) the non-contestable revenue determination is consistent with the objects of the EII Act, specified in section 3(1)(a)–(c), and
- b) the Network Operator is capable of efficiently obtaining finance to carry out the network infrastructure project.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵ EII Regulation, cl. 47D(2). Where there is consistency between the NER Chapter 6A and EII Chapter 6A, for the purposes of determining depreciation in accordance with this EII Regulation, we will refer to EII Chapter 6A in this guideline.

⁹⁶ See for example our regulatory determination for Transgrid's 2023–28 regulatory control period under the NER and our determination for Transgrid's WSB augmentation project under the EII Framework. AER, *Transgrid 2023–28 – Draft Decision – Attachment 4 – Regulatory depreciation*, September 2022, pp. 3–7; AER, *Transgrid 2024–29 – Draft Decision – Waratah Super Battery project (non-contestable) – Appendix A – Assessment approaches*, September 2023, pp. 13–17.

⁹⁷ EII Chapter 6A, cl. 6A.6.3(b)(1).

⁹⁸ EII Chapter 6A.6.3A(n)(1); EII Regulation, cl. 47D(3).

⁹⁹ EII Chapter 6A, cl. 6A.6.3A(n)(1). Any amendments for financeability must still conform with EII 6A.6.3(b)(2)–(3).

¹⁰⁰ EII Regulation, cl. 47D(3).

The process under which we will assess an application to amend the depreciation for a financeability issue is outlined in EII Chapter 6A.6.3A. Under EII Chapter 6A, a Network Operator can submit a financeability request to us,¹⁰¹ in which they can propose adjustments to the asset (or group of assets) to be depreciated on a basis other than on a straight-line depreciation approach.¹⁰²

EII Chapter 6A.6.3A sets out certain conditions under which a Network Operator may submit a financeability request to the AER. These conditions relate to:

- whether the relevant project (that is, the project the Network Operator is submitting a financeability request for) is an actionable ISP project¹⁰³
- whether it has obtained concessional financing in relation to this project or any other ISP project and whether any benefits are being retained by the Network Operator.¹⁰⁴

Following the Network Operator submitting a financeability request, we will apply the financeability test set out in EII Chapter 6A, to determine whether or not a financeability issue exists.¹⁰⁵ The financeability test assesses whether there is a financeability issue on a whole of regulated business basis—that is, if the Network Operator is also a Service Provider under the National Electricity and Gas Rules, we will take a view on financeability inclusive of any regulated assets.¹⁰⁶ As part of this test, we must determine the Network Operator's financeability position¹⁰⁷ prior to and after the inclusion of the ISP project, in relation to a financeability threshold.¹⁰⁸

If the financeability test demonstrates that there is a financeability issue, we must, as part of our final decision, address the financeability issue by:¹⁰⁹

- a) preventing the Network Operator's financeability position (as determined through the financeability test) from deteriorating below a particular threshold (also determined through the financeability test); or
- b) preventing the Network Operator's financeability position from deteriorating from its initial position prior to the ISP project.

¹⁰¹ EII Chapter 6A, cl. 6A.6.3A(b).

¹⁰² EII Chapter 6A, cl. 6A.6.3A(b)(4).

¹⁰³ EII Chapter 6A, cl. 6A.6.3A(d).

¹⁰⁴ EII Chapter 6A, cl. 6A.6.3A(e).

¹⁰⁵ EII Chapter 6A, cls. 6A.6.3A(i) to (l).

¹⁰⁶ EII Chapter 6A, cl. 6A.6.3A(j).

¹⁰⁷ The Network Operator's financeability position is calculated using the Maximum Allowable Revenue (MAR) derived from the prevailing Post Tax Revenue Model (PTRM). That is, the assessment is based on a Network Operator's regulated business only and will use the benchmark gearing ratio set out in the applicable RORI, or the benchmark gearing ratio as adjusted for the increased equity component in that ratio in accordance with any relevant concessional finance agreement.

¹⁰⁸ The financeability threshold is equivalent to the benchmark credit rating in the applicable RORI.

¹⁰⁹ EII Chapter 6A, cl.6A.6.3A(m).

5.3.2 Financeability guideline

The AER has published a Financeability Guideline¹¹⁰ under the NER Chapter 6A covering the aspects set out in the previous section relating to demonstrating and assessing a financeability issue.¹¹¹ The guideline sets out, among other considerations, how we will determine the financeability position of a Network Operator submitting a financeability request,¹¹² the financeability threshold at which a financeability issue is identified,¹¹³ and how modifications to the depreciation schedule will be made in the AER's PTRM.¹¹⁴ To ensure regulatory consistency in the treatment of financeability across the two frameworks, we will apply the Financeability Guideline in the context of the EII framework when considering any financeability request submitted by a Network Operator.

5.3.3 Forecast operating expenditure

Consistent with our approach to assessing forecast capex, we will apply our current expenditure forecast assessment guideline to assess Network Operators' revenue proposals and determine an opex allowance under the EII Act. We may modify our assessment approach to reflect differences between the EII framework and the NER framework where we identify the need to do so. Should we materially modify our approach, we will set these modifications out in our determination.

5.3.4 Establishing base opex for the initial revenue determination

In our initial determination for a network infrastructure project, we will have no base year from a preceding regulatory control period on which to assess revealed opex. In establishing a base from which to assess a Network Operator's proposed opex allowance we will consider the following factors in addition to our usual assessment approach:

- a) Input costs, metrics and benchmarks associated with any other NEM networks that the Network Operator or other similar businesses may own and operate (if applicable).
- b) Any elements of a contestable project that may impact the relevant non-contestable project's opex costs.
- c) The outcome of any detailed project review if required.
- d) Our approach to setting regulated opex for other network projects with similar characteristics (e.g. growth projects undertaken by TNSPs).

We expect that a Network Operator's initial proposed opex allowance should at a minimum adopt the general expectations set out in our expenditure forecast assessment guideline and be in accordance with the approved cost allocation methodology, and should identify and quantify:

¹¹⁰ [AER – financeability guideline – Final decision – November 2024.](#)

¹¹¹ NER Chapter 6A, cl. 6A.6.3A(p).

¹¹² NER Chapter 6A, cl. 6A.6.3A(p).

¹¹³ NER Chapter 6A, cl. 6A.6.3A(r)(3).

¹¹⁴ NER Chapter 6A, cl. 6A.6.3A(s).

- a) the number and cost of permanent and casual staff engaged to operate and/or maintain EII regulated network assets either exclusively or on a pro rata basis as appropriate
- b) the cost of external contractors, consultants and other service providers providing operating and/or maintenance services in relation to the regulated network assets
- c) the cost-of-service contracts, insurance and other ongoing expenses exclusively associated with the regulated network assets.

5.4 Adjustment of a revenue determination

A network operator may include in its revenue proposal mechanism/s to adjust any amount provided for in our revenue determination. However, clause 51 of the EII Regulation provides the AER with discretion as to whether or not to include an adjustment mechanism in its determination. The EII Regulation also state that a provision in our determination may specify that a particular adjustment:

- a) must be carried out at particular times or in particular circumstances
- b) may or may not require the revenue determination to be revised and remade.

5.4.1 Assessment of adjustment mechanisms

We note that the EII non-contestable framework is largely consistent with the NER Chapter 6A framework and therefore provides for a number of adjustment mechanisms including pass through events and nominated pass through events. In assessing any proposed adjustment mechanisms, the AER may have regard to the nominated pass-through event considerations referenced in the EII Chapter 6A Rules.

The ability of a network operator to propose adjustment mechanisms under the EII framework should not be interpreted as a retreat from incentive-based regulation. Incentive regulation is fundamental to promoting efficiency in both Chapter 6A of the NER and the EII Act.¹¹⁵ For example, we note that we continue to expect expenditure forecasts proposed by a network operator and any adjustment mechanisms to be respectively unbiased estimates and symmetrical in their application.

5.4.2 Process for adjusting a Network Operator's revenues

The following sets out our process for adjusting a Network Operator's revenues as set out in our revenue determination.¹¹⁶

1. *Network Operator submits to the AER proposed revenue adjustments, adjusted revenue and an adjusted payment schedule for the regulatory control period* – The information must be submitted by a specified date prior to the date the adjusted revenue will apply.
2. *Network Operator's revenue adjustment proposal must include evidence supporting the proposed adjustments* – This evidence would include details of inputs into the revenue adjustment mechanism and any supporting information.

¹¹⁵ EII Act, s. 37(1)(b).

¹¹⁶ EII Regulation, cl. 51.

- AER undertakes a compliance check and notifies the Network Operator whether we agree with the proposed revenue adjustments, adjusted revenue and an adjusted payment schedule for the regulatory control period* – We would review the Network Operator’s proposal and undertake a compliance check against the relevant revenue adjustment provisions contained in our determination. We would advise the Network Operator whether we agree with the proposed revenue adjustments, require further information or require the Network Operator to amend and resubmit its proposal. We may amend the proposal if the Network Operator fails to submit an amended proposal that meets our requirements. Once we have approved the revenue adjustment proposal, we would advise the Network Operator and publish the adjusted revenue and payment schedule for the regulatory control period.

For annual adjustments, we expect Network Operators to provide all relevant information required for us to assess the proposed adjustment at least 63 business days prior to the start of the annual period in which the adjusted revenue will first apply.

Our revenue determination may specify a trigger event which requires us to assess a proposed adjustment event outside of the annual process.¹¹⁷ A Network Operator must provide us with the relevant information to assess proposed adjustment as soon as practicable following the trigger event. Where the AER approves a revenue adjustment, the adjusted revenue will apply from the start of the next full quarter (unless otherwise specified in the revenue determination).

We will endeavour to make revenue adjustment decisions within 42 business days of receipt of the revenue adjustment proposal.

5.5 Payments to be made by the Network Operator to the Infrastructure Planner

The EII Regulation sets out a range of costs a Network Operator is entitled to recover.¹¹⁸ We will determine these costs as part of our non-contestable revenue determination process. However, where a Network Operator is required to make payments to the Infrastructure Planner under a contractual arrangement as part of a relevant authorisation,¹¹⁹ we will pass them through as part of our non-contestable revenue determination. That is, we do not review the efficiency, prudence or reasonableness of these costs but must still include them in our non-contestable revenue determination.

¹¹⁷ EII Regulation, cl. 51(2)(b).

¹¹⁸ EII Regulation, cl. 46(1)(b).

¹¹⁹ EII Regulation, cls. 46(1)(b)(ii) and 50A; EII Act, s. 38(2).

5.6 Transferring REZ network infrastructure to the NER

The EII Act provides for a network operator who is subject to a non-contestable revenue determination (and is also subject to an existing determination under the NER) to have its REZ network infrastructure assets transferred to the NER.¹²⁰ Clauses 54A–D of the EII Regulation set out the process and Ministerial Direction required for a Network Operator's REZ network infrastructure to be transferred to a revenue determination made under the NER.

¹²⁰ EII Act, s. 42.

6 Non-contestable components of contestable augmentation determination

This section sets out the process for assessing a non-contestable cost component of a contestable augmentation revenue determination.

6.1 Framework for contestable augmentations

The EII Regulation contains a framework for the AER to make revenue determinations for contestable augmentations.¹²¹ A contestable augmentation is a network infrastructure project carried out by a network operator to augment an existing network infrastructure project that is subject to a contestable revenue determination.¹²² The contestable augmentation would be a separate network infrastructure project, subject to its own authorisation and revenue determination.¹²³

Under the EII Regulation, cost components of a contestable augmentation are determined through one of three methods:

1. as a result of a competitive assessment process (contestable costs)¹²⁴; or
2. using an appropriate referenced costs process contained in the contractual arrangements for the existing network infrastructure project (referenced costs)¹²⁵; or
3. by an AER assessment of the prudent, efficient and reasonable cost based on the application of our non-contestable Guideline (non-contestable costs)¹²⁶.

After establishing an amount for each cost component, the AER must then combine the amounts into a revenue determination for the Network Operator.¹²⁷

Our process for assessing non-contestable cost components as part of a contestable augmentation must be set out in this Guideline.¹²⁸

The broader process we will undertake in making a contestable augmentation determination, including information requirements and consultation with the Network Operator, will be set out in our Contestable Guideline. Any updated Contestable Guideline will also set out our approach to assessing contestable and referenced costs.

¹²¹ EII Regulation, cl. 47E.

¹²² EII Regulation, cl. 3.

¹²³ EII Regulation cls. 47E(1) & 48(1A).

¹²⁴ EII Regulation, cl. 47E(2).

¹²⁵ EII Regulation, cl. 47E(3).

¹²⁶ EII Regulation, cl. 47E(4).

¹²⁷ EII Regulation, cl. 47E(6).

¹²⁸ EII Regulation, cl. 47E(6).

6.2 Assessment of non-contestable cost components

Our assessment of non-contestable cost components is only one component of a broader contestable augmentation determination. Most process elements of this Guideline will, therefore, not be relevant to that assessment. Relevant sections of the Guideline are set out below.

In proposing non-contestable costs, a Network Operator should have regard to the consultation expectations set out in section 3.5.1 of this Guideline.

Our assessment of proposed non-contestable costs will largely reflect the process set out in section 5 (AER's assessment approach) of this Guideline. However, the EII Regulation requires us to also take into account the contractual arrangements for the related network infrastructure project, and any other contract entered into by the network operator under an authorisation in relation to the contestable augmentation.¹²⁹ These requirements reflect the expectation that the structure of our determination, including adjustments and incentive schemes, will reflect the structure of the contestable determination for the related network infrastructure project.

The period for which we must set out the schedule of amounts required to be paid to the network operator for a contestable augmentation must also correspond with the term of the contractual arrangements for the related network infrastructure project.¹³⁰ This may be a period of greater than five years. In these circumstances, we consider that bespoke models will need to be used to determine non-contestable cost components for the relevant project term.

6.3 Timeframe for our assessment

The timeframe for making a contestable augmentation determination differs from a standard non-contestable determination. The standard timeframe for the AER to make a revenue determination for a contestable augmentation is 84 business days.¹³¹ However, we may, by written notice to the network operator, extend the time period by a further 42 business days if satisfied the extension is reasonably necessary because:

- the revenue determination is complex, and
- we are not satisfied that a cost component should be considered a contestable or referenced cost.¹³²

Noting this shorter timeframe, we expect to use a truncated approach to that set out in table 1 (section 2 of this Guideline). We expect to generally undertake a single round of public consultation either on the relevant non-contestable cost components as set out in the

¹²⁹ EII Regulation, cl. 47E(5).

¹³⁰ EII Regulation, cl. 52(2)(d).

¹³¹ EII Regulation, cl. 50(a1).

¹³² EII Regulation, cl. 50(2A).

revenue proposal, or on an issues paper that we develop.¹³³ Consistent with our approach to contestable determinations, we will not undertake consultation on contestable or referenced cost components of a contestable augmentation.

¹³³ The AER may publish on its website information given to the AER under clause 48 that relates to a determination under clause 47E(4) for a contestable augmentation (EII Regulation, cl. 53(7)(b)).

7 Hybrid revenue determination

This section sets out how we will approach and deal with the contestable and non-contestable components of a hybrid revenue determination.

7.1 Framework for hybrid revenue determinations

The definition of a ‘non-contestable revenue determination’¹³⁴ covers determinations for projects where there is at least:

- one contestable component;¹³⁵ and
- one component that is not a contestable component.¹³⁶

We refer to this type of non-contestable revenue determination as a ‘hybrid revenue determination’.

As required by the EII Regulation, this Guideline sets out how we:

- apply our Contestable Guideline to a contestable component of a hybrid revenue determination, where the AER is satisfied that the competitive assessment process was genuine and appropriate.¹³⁷
- apply this Guideline to a contestable component of a hybrid revenue determination, where the AER is not satisfied the competitive assessment process was genuine and appropriate.¹³⁸

This Guideline must also provide that the schemes specified in clause 47B (1)(a) and (b) (that is, the efficiency benefit sharing scheme and the capital expenditure sharing scheme) do not apply to a contestable component of a hybrid revenue determination.¹³⁹ Further, the EII Regulation requires that all adjustments for a contestable component of a hybrid revenue determination, whether or not the revenue determination is reviewed and remade, must be carried out in accordance with the contractual arrangements the Network Operator entered into as required under the relevant authorisation.¹⁴⁰

7.2 Contestable components

Contestable components of a hybrid revenue determination are components where the costs are derived as a result of a competitive assessment process.¹⁴¹ The approach to determining

¹³⁴ See definition of ‘non-contestable revenue determination’ in Schedule 4 of the EII Regulation.

¹³⁵ ‘Contestable component of a non-contestable revenue determination’ is defined in Schedule 4 of the EII Regulation as a ‘component where the costs of the component are derived as a result of a competitive assessment process.’

¹³⁶ EII Regulation, Schedule 4, definition of ‘non-contestable revenue determination’.

¹³⁷ EII Regulation, cl. 47A(6)(a).

¹³⁸ EII Regulation, cl. 47A(6)(b).

¹³⁹ EII Regulation, cl. 47B(1A).

¹⁴⁰ EII Regulation, cl. 51(3)(b).

¹⁴¹ EII Regulation, Schedule 4.

these components is underpinned by the policy intent of the contestable framework which is that the competitive market is relied upon to produce an outcome that is prudent, efficient and reasonable. Under the EII Regulation, the Infrastructure Planner may undertake a competitive assessment process to select a Network Operator or a person who will assist a Network Operator to carry out all or part of a project. For a competitive assessment process, the Infrastructure Planner must develop the eligibility criteria, a selection process and must request binding bids from two or more Network Operators or persons to assist a Network Operator.¹⁴²

In the context of hybrid revenue determinations, a contestable process will be used to procure specific aspects of a project (for example, the development and construction capital costs associated with a project). The responsibility for undertaking the contestable processes and for engaging with the AER on contestable components at the pre-lodgment stage (for example, when consulting on the procurement strategy or providing the AER with a procurement report for its genuine and appropriate decision) rests with the Infrastructure Planner. However, we expect the Network Operator to engage with the Infrastructure Planner on any contestable process undertaken as part of a hybrid project, and with the AER on the development of the contestable components of its revenue proposal

The AER may also request information from the Infrastructure Planner to support our assessment of contestable components in a Network Operator's revenue proposal.

The contestable approach set out under the EII Regulation provides the process and assessment framework for dealing with contestable components of a hybrid revenue determination. This framework and how the Contestable Guideline will be applied to contestable components is discussed below.

7.2.1 Evaluation of a competitive assessment process

Section 3 of the AER's Contestable Guideline sets out the following evaluation criteria which the AER applies when assessing whether a competitive assessment process for a contestable component is '*genuine and appropriate*':

1. A sufficient level of competitive tension exists, such that a competitive outcome is likely to be achieved. (section 3.1 of the Contestable Guideline)
2. The competitive assessment process supports detailed, credible and compliant submissions from proponents. (section 3.2 of the Contestable Guideline)
3. Decision-making, governance and probity arrangements ensure a fair and rigorous process. (section 3.3 of the Contestable Guideline)
4. The outcome of the procurement process can be reflected in a revenue determination. (section 3.4 of the Contestable Guideline)

For contestable components we apply these evaluation criteria to both our assessment of the Infrastructure Planner's procurement strategy (which is generally provided to the AER before the competitive assessment process commences) and our review of the procurement process following its completion.

¹⁴² EII Regulation, cl. 45.

7.2.2 Procurement strategy

The Infrastructure Planner is required to consult with the AER before and during a competitive assessment process.¹⁴³ It must also provide the AER with any requested information about, or obtained from, the competitive assessment process.¹⁴⁴

We require the Infrastructure Planner to consult the AER on its procurement strategy for the competitive assessment process for contestable components of a hybrid revenue determination. In reviewing a procurement strategy, we will apply section 4 of the Contestable Guideline. This sets out our approach to the review, the required contents of a procurement strategy, and how any amendments to a procurement strategy should be managed.

Consistent with the Contestable Guideline, we will endeavour to notify the Infrastructure Planner whether we are satisfied that the process outlined in the procurement strategy is likely to result in a genuine and appropriate competitive assessment process within 40 business days of receipt of the strategy.

7.2.3 Monitoring and assessment of a competitive assessment process

(a) Monitoring of the competitive assessment process

We will monitor the competitive assessment process for contestable components and may request information about the progress of the competitive assessment process and the Infrastructure Planner's compliance with its procurement strategy, as set out in section 5.1 of our Contestable Guideline.

(b) Assessment of the competitive assessment process

Before we accept the outcomes of a competitive assessment process, we must be satisfied that the process was genuine and appropriate.¹⁴⁵ To assist our assessment we require the Infrastructure Planner to provide us with a report at the conclusion of the competitive assessment process and prior to the submission of the Network Operator's revenue proposal. The information to be included in the report is set out in section 5.2 of our Contestable Guideline.

We apply section 5.3 of the Contestable Guideline when assessing a competitive assessment process. Following our assessment, we advise the Infrastructure Planner of the outcome. As set out in table 2 in section 7.5.1 below, the provision of the Infrastructure Planner's report on the competitive process and our assessment of whether the process was genuine and appropriate will occur at the pre-lodgement stage of the hybrid revenue determination process (i.e. before the Network Operator submits its revenue proposal to the AER).

¹⁴³ EII Regulation, cl.45(4)(a).

¹⁴⁴ EII Regulation, cl.45(4)(b).

¹⁴⁵ EII Regulation, cl.45(6)(c).

Consistent with section 7.4 of the Contestable Guideline, if we are not satisfied that the competitive assessment process for a contestable component was genuine and appropriate (or a of an element of the contestable component is not the result of a genuine and appropriate process) we will give written notice to the Infrastructure Planner and Network Operator¹⁴⁶ stating the reasons why and provide them an opportunity to respond. If, following the Infrastructure Planner and Network Operator's response, we are still not satisfied that the competitive assessment process was genuine and appropriate we will inform the Network Operator and Infrastructure Planner of the outcome and assess the contestable component (or an element of the contestable component) using our non-contestable approach. We will consult with the Infrastructure Planner and Network Operator on assessing the contestable component (or an element of the contestable component) using the non-contestable approach as well as any additional information required for us to undertake this assessment.

(c) Preparation of the Network Operator's revenue proposal

Following the AER's assessment of the competitive process, and contingent upon the process being found to be genuine and appropriate, the Network Operator is able to incorporate relevant information about the contestable components into the revenue proposal it submits to the AER.

The Network Operator's hybrid revenue proposal will comprise information relating to both contestable and non-contestable components. This will include the information set out in section 4.1.1 of this Guideline and a statement of whether the contestable components in the Network Operator's revenue proposal are consistent with the contractual arrangement agreed through the competitive assessment process. A Network Operator should engage with the AER prior to submitting a revenue proposal to clarify expectations around the contents of the revenue proposal. This pre-lodgement engagement will assist in identifying any specific information we require to enable us to make our hybrid revenue determination. We will also include specific information we require in the information notice we issue to the Network Operator prior to the submission of the revenue proposal. We note the information and consultation requirements for contestable components included in a hybrid revenue proposal will differ depending upon whether the AER has found the competitive assessment process to be genuine and appropriate or not.

Section 7.5 below provides further information on the process and timing of our assessment of a competitive assessment process and the steps to be undertaken following the submission of the Network Operator's revenue proposal.

7.2.4 Assessment of contestable components

As set out in section 7.4 of the Contestable Guideline when assessing contestable components, we will take into account the principles set out in section 37 of the EII Act and clause 46 of the EII Regulation. In particular, if we are satisfied that the competitive assessment process was genuine and appropriate we must accept the resulting costs to be prudent, efficient and reasonable. Additionally, if a contestable component comprises development and construction capital costs, as stated in section 7.3 of the Contestable

¹⁴⁶ If the Network Operator has been authorised under Part 5 Division 3 of the EII Act we must advise them of any material issues under s.37(1)(d) of the EII Act.

Guideline, we will consider those capital costs established through the competitive assessment process to have met the requirements of the Transmission Efficiency Test.

If we are satisfied that the competitive assessment process for a contestable component was genuine and appropriate we would accept the cost of that contestable component as an input for the purposes of determining the maximum allowed revenue and schedule of amounts payable to the Network Operator as part of our hybrid revenue determination.

Costs subsequently included in a Network Operator's revenue proposal that were not the result of a genuine and appropriate competitive process would be assessed for prudence, efficiency and reasonableness in accordance with section 5 and Appendix A (EII Chapter 6A) of this Guideline.

7.2.5 Application of certain incentive schemes

When making a hybrid revenue determination we will not apply the efficiency benefit sharing scheme or the capital expenditure sharing scheme to any contestable components.¹⁴⁷ We may, however, apply these and other incentive schemes to non-contestable components – refer to section 3.3 of this Guideline.

7.2.6 Adjustments

Clause 51(3)(b) of the EII Regulation provides that all adjustments for a contestable component of a non-contestable revenue determination, whether or not the revenue determination is reviewed and remade, must be carried out in accordance with the contractual arrangements the Network Operator entered into as required under the relevant authorisation.¹⁴⁸

For contestable components, if there is an adjustment clause in the contractual arrangements that reflects the outcome of a genuine and appropriate competitive assessment process, the Network Operator is entitled to recover any costs resulting from the application of that adjustment clause. This is regardless of whether the contestable process was undertaken by the Infrastructure Planner for the Network Operator; or undertaken by the Infrastructure Planner for someone assisting the Network Operator, such as a development and construction contractor. The Network Operator can propose an adjustment mechanism in the hybrid revenue proposal that aligns with the adjustment clause in the contractual arrangements. Where the contractual arrangements do not set out the specific method of recovery of an adjustment amount by the Network Operator, we will review the proposed cost recovery method on a non-contestable basis.

Adjustment mechanisms may also be proposed by the Network Operator to reflect risks associated with non-contestable components of a revenue proposal resulting from the application of contestable component adjustment mechanisms. We will review any such adjustment mechanisms on a non-contestable basis.

We will determine on a case by case basis whether the application of an adjustment mechanism requires us to review and remake a hybrid revenue determination, When

¹⁴⁷ EII Regulation, cl. 47B(1A).

¹⁴⁸ EII Regulation, cl. 51(3)(b).

reviewing the application of adjustment mechanisms for contestable components of a hybrid revenue determination we will apply section 7.5 of our Contestable Guideline which sets out our approach to dealing with adjustments not requiring a redetermination (section 7.5.1) and adjustments requiring a redetermination (section 7.5.2). We do not intend to review the quantum of any proposed contestable adjustment amounts. Instead, we will undertake compliance checks to ensure that we are satisfied that the process followed for determining these amounts was appropriate and aligns with the process set out in the relevant contractual arrangements for the contestable components.

7.3 Non-contestable components

When reviewing non-contestable components of a hybrid revenue determination (including any proposed incentive schemes and adjustment mechanisms) we will apply the process steps and assessment approach set out in sections 2 to 5 and Appendix A (EII Chapter 6A) of this Guideline.

7.4 Making a hybrid revenue determination

Consistent with the requirements set out in this Guideline and EII Chapter 6A, we will apply the building block approach to determine the Network Operator's regulated revenues and schedule of amounts payable for each year of the regulatory period for a hybrid revenue determination. This involves taking the costs of any assets or services procured through a genuine and appropriate contestable process (as well as assessed capital and operating expenditures associated with non-contestable components) and including them in the calculation of the building blocks in the PTRM.

We expect these contestably procured outputs to typically comprise of development and construction capital expenditure (although other forms of capital costs and operating and maintenance expenditures may also be an output from a contestable process). These outputs from the contestable process form inputs into the PTRM. The PTRM is used to combine these costs with any other (non-contestable) building block costs and to derive the regulated revenues and schedule of amounts payable.

A further output from a genuine and appropriate contestable process may be adjustment mechanisms that are included in the contractual arrangements that have been entered into as required under the relevant authorisation. The application of these adjustment mechanisms in our revenue determination will be limited to adjusting the relevant contestable components from the competitive assessment process. As such, our hybrid revenue determination will ensure the contestably procured inputs can be separately identified and tracked over time so that any updates as a result of an adjustment can be applied to the appropriate component.

7.5 Process for making a hybrid revenue determination

A hybrid revenue determination is a non-contestable revenue determination. As such, the steps for making a hybrid revenue determination should as far as is reasonably practicable be consistent with the standard non-contestable process set out in this guideline and

EII Chapter 6A. The only modifications to the process are to accommodate the operation of a competitive assessment process for a contestable component.

7.5.1 Additional pre-lodgement steps

For hybrid revenue determinations the inclusion of contestable components gives rise to additional process steps. These additional steps are associated with the AER's role and functions related to a competitive assessment process (we discuss this for contestable components in more detail in section 7.2 above).

Each of these additional process steps is to be undertaken by the Infrastructure Planner at the pre-lodgement stage of the hybrid revenue determination process. This will allow the AER to make its decision on whether the competitive assessment process for contestable components was 'genuine and appropriate' prior to the Network Operator submitting its revenue proposal to the AER. We expect the Network Operator will also engage with the Infrastructure Planner while these pre-lodgement steps are undertaken.

The timing of the AER's 'genuine and appropriate' decision at the pre-lodgement stage of the revenue determination process provides the Network Operator, Infrastructure Planner, and other relevant stakeholders with the earliest possible indication of the assessment method that will be applied to the Network Operator's proposed costs for the project.

The Network Operator will know prior to the submission of its revenue proposal whether a proposed contestable component will be subject to a contestable or non-contestable assessment. This will in turn inform what information the Network Operator needs to include to support the assessment of these costs in its revenue proposal. This process will also provide an opportunity for the Network Operator to engage with stakeholders on the non-contestable components of the project prior to submitting its revenue proposal, which is a key part of the non-contestable revenue determination process.

Table 2 sets out the key process steps associated with a hybrid revenue determination with indicative timing. The pre-lodgement steps for contestable components will need to be undertaken concurrently with the pre-lodgement steps for non-contestable components.

Table 2: Key process steps associated with a hybrid revenue determination

Milestone	Initial determination	Subsequent determination (generally every 5 years)
Pre-lodgement – contestable components		
The Infrastructure Planner consults with the AER on its intended competitive assessment process for contestable components and provides its procurement strategy to the AER.	Best endeavours by the Infrastructure Planner to provide its procurement strategy to the AER at the earliest opportunity prior to the commencement of the competitive assessment process.	n/a.

Milestone	Initial determination	Subsequent determination (generally every 5 years)
<p>The AER notifies the Infrastructure Planner whether it is satisfied that the process outlined in the procurement strategy for a contestable component is likely to result in a genuine and appropriate competitive assessment process.</p>	<p>Best endeavours by the AER to notify the Infrastructure Planner whether it is satisfied with the procurement strategy within 40 business days of receipt of the strategy.¹⁴⁹</p>	<p>n/a</p>
<p>The Infrastructure Planner undertakes the competitive assessment process for a contestable component in accordance with the procurement strategy and consults with the AER (and provides requested information) during the process.</p>	<p>The AER conducts ongoing monitoring throughout the competitive assessment process.</p>	<p>n/a</p>
<p>The Infrastructure Planner evaluates tenderers and selects the successful proponent for a contestable component. The Infrastructure Planner provides the AER with a report on the conduct of the competitive processes.</p>	<p>Best endeavours for the Infrastructure Planner to submit the report to the AER as soon as possible after the completion of the competitive assessment process.</p>	<p>n/a</p>

¹⁴⁹ The AER's feedback on the strategy is not required before the Infrastructure Planner commences the competitive assessment process.

Milestone	Initial determination	Subsequent determination (generally every 5 years)
<p>The AER reviews the report on the competitive assessment process for a contestable component and decides whether it is satisfied the process was genuine and appropriate.</p>	<p>Best endeavours for the AER to notify the Infrastructure Planner whether it is satisfied with the competitive process within 42 business days.</p> <p>If we are satisfied the process was genuine and appropriate we will advise the Infrastructure Planner.</p> <p>If the AER is not satisfied the competitive assessment process was genuine and appropriate it will give written notice to the Infrastructure Planner and the Network Operator¹⁵⁰ stating the reasons why we are not satisfied and give them the opportunity to respond. If, following the Infrastructure Planner and Network Operator's response, we are still not satisfied, we would consult with the Infrastructure Planner on the approach to progressing the project and its contestable components (likely under a non-contestable approach).</p>	<p>n/a</p>
<p>Pre-lodgement – non-contestable components</p>		
<p>Consumer Trustee or Minister notifies the AER that an authorisation or direction has been made in relation to a Network Operator.</p>	<p>The authorisation or direction is published.</p>	<p>n/a</p>
<p>AER develops and issues information notice under s. 38(7) of the EII Act to a Network Operator.</p>	<p>Best endeavours to provide at least 80 business days before Network Operator's revenue proposal is due.</p>	<p>At least 80 business days before Network Operator's revenue proposal is due.</p>

¹⁵⁰ If the Network Operator has been authorised under Part 5 Division 3 of the EII Act.

Milestone	Initial determination	Subsequent determination (generally every 5 years)
Network Operator submits a cost allocation methodology for approval by the AER. ¹⁵¹	Best endeavours to submit at least 60 business days before Network Operator's revenue proposal is due.	At least 60 business days before Network Operator's revenue proposal is due.
AER decides to approve or refuse to approve a Network Operator's cost allocation methodology	Not more than 30 business days from receipt of Network Operator's cost allocation methodology.	Not more than 30 business days from receipt of Network Operator's cost allocation methodology.
Network Operator consults with stakeholders on the network infrastructure project and its draft revenue proposal.	Network Operator uses best endeavours to conduct pre lodgement stakeholder consultation consistent with the AER's Better Resets Handbook. ¹⁵² Where stakeholder engagement issues are identified by the Network Operator, these are raised with the AER early.	Prior to submitting a revenue proposal to the AER, noting the time required to accept stakeholder submissions and incorporate them into a final revenue proposal.
Hybrid revenue determination		
Network Operator submits to the AER its revenue proposal and response to information notice. ¹⁵³	By the date specified in the Consumer Trustee's authorisation or Minister's direction or authorisation, or stated in contractual arrangements, for making a revenue determination.	At least 160 business days before the end of the current regulatory control period under the EII Act.
AER conducts compliance and confidentiality checks and publishes compliant revenue proposal for public consultation and submissions.	Publish compliant revenue proposal upon completion of compliance check.	Publish compliant revenue proposal upon satisfactory compliance check.
Submissions on Network Operator's revenue proposal close	15 business days from the date of publishing the Network Operator's revenue proposal.	15 business days from the date of publishing the Network Operator's revenue proposal.

¹⁵¹ Our request for a cost allocation methodology will be included in the information notice issued under EII Act, s. 38(7).

¹⁵² AER, *Better resets handbook - Towards consumer centric network proposals*, December 2021.

¹⁵³ EII Regulation, cl. 48.

Milestone	Initial determination	Subsequent determination (generally every 5 years)
AER commences assessment under EII Act and EII Regulation, and this Guideline.	We may request further or clarifying information during our assessment process.	We may request further or clarifying information during our assessment process.
AER advises the Network Operator of material issues under consideration and consults with the Infrastructure Planner. ¹⁵⁴	Periodically throughout the revenue determination process, including but not limited to before our final determination.	Periodically throughout the revenue determination process, including but not limited to before our final determination.
AER publishes a preliminary position paper for public consultation	Approximately 55 business days from receipt of Network Operator's revenue proposal.	Approximately 55 business days from receipt of Network Operator's revenue proposal.
Submissions on preliminary position paper close	20 business days from the date of publishing the preliminary position paper.	20 business days from the date of publishing the preliminary position paper.
AER considers submissions received.	Ongoing from receipt of stakeholder submissions.	Ongoing from receipt of stakeholder submissions.
AER makes its final determination. ¹⁵⁵	126 business days from date of receipt of Network Operator's revenue proposal.	126 business days from date of receipt of Network Operator's revenue proposal.
Annual revenue adjustment process consistent with the determination. ¹⁵⁶	N/A	See sections 5.5 and 7.2.6 of this guideline.

Note: Timing is indicative only.

¹⁵⁴ EII Regulation, cl. 48; EII Act s. 37(1)d. If the revenue determination relates to a REZ network infrastructure project, cl. 49(1A) of the EII Regulation requires the AER to consult with the Consumer Trustee.

¹⁵⁵ Although the AER is required to make the final determination within 126 business days after it has received the Network Operator's revenue proposal, EII Regulation, cl. 53(4) provides that the AER is required to publish the revenue determination as soon as reasonably practicable but not before the Infrastructure Planner has notified the regulator that, in the Infrastructure Planner's opinion, the project financial close of the network infrastructure project has been reached under the recommended contractual arrangements for the project.

¹⁵⁶ EII Act, s. 40 and EII Regulation, cl. 51.

7.5.2 Stakeholder engagement and confidentiality

In assessing confidentiality claims, the AER will have regard to the EII Act objectives¹⁵⁷ and the principles set out in s.37 of the EII Act and clause 46 of the EII Regulation. We seek to ensure that regulatory processes and decisions are undertaken in an open and transparent manner. The approach to stakeholder engagement and confidentiality for hybrid revenue determinations aligns with the current non-contestable approach set out in the EII Act and EII Regulation. More detail around our approach is set out in **Table 3** below.

Table 3: Approach to stakeholder engagement and confidentiality for hybrid determinations

Stage	Description
Pre-lodgement for contestable components	External stakeholders will have limited visibility of any contestable components in the pre-lodgment phase of a hybrid revenue determination process given the commercial sensitivity of the process while it is underway.
Submission and publication of the revenue proposal	<p>We expect that a Network Operator’s hybrid revenue proposal will clearly separate out the contestable and non-contestable components of a hybrid project. We consider this will facilitate stakeholders’ understanding and engagement on the key elements of the proposal.</p> <p>Contestable components of a hybrid revenue proposal may potentially be significant relative to non-contestable components. So that stakeholders are informed of the process that was undertaken for a contestable component, we expect as a minimum a Network Operator’s revenue proposal to include a summary of the competitive assessment process, as well as the contestable cost component amount and each adjustment mechanism which may vary this amount.</p> <p>Generally, we expect the Network Operator will seek to provide stakeholders with as much information as possible on both the contestable and non-contestable components of a hybrid revenue proposal. It therefore follows that we expect narrowly confined confidentiality claims over the elements of a hybrid revenue proposal. This should be taken into account when developing and implementing hybrid projects.</p> <p>Any confidentiality claims made by the Network Operator over contestable and non-contestable parts of the revenue proposal will be assessed by the AER in accordance with the AER’s EII Confidentiality Guideline.</p> <p>Consistent with the current non-contestable practice, the AER will publish the public version of a hybrid revenue proposal once compliance and confidentiality assessments are complete.¹⁵⁸</p>

¹⁵⁷ The objects of the EII Act include: to improve the affordability, reliability, security and sustainability of electricity supply; and to encourage investment in generation, storage, network and related infrastructure by reducing risk for investors.

¹⁵⁸ Publication is permitted under cl.53(7)(a) of EII Regulation although we are not permitted under cl.53(8) to publish information if we are satisfied that the information is confidential or commercially sensitive.

Stage	Description
<p>Post-lodgement</p>	<p>Due to the nature of the competitive assessment process, stakeholders are not able to influence the outcomes of contestable components if they were derived from a ‘genuine and appropriate’ competitive assessment process. As such, consultation and engagement is focused on the non-contestable aspects of the Network Operator’s revenue proposal. This may include matters such as costs for activities of the network operator (for example, pre-period costs, capital costs and operating expenditure), and mechanisms to adjust these costs (for example, adjustments and the application of incentive schemes). Stakeholders are therefore encouraged to engage and provide submissions on the non-contestable aspects of the Network Operator’s revenue proposal and the AER’s preliminary position paper.</p> <p>Notwithstanding the above, we expect information on the nature of and outcomes from a competitive assessment process for a contestable component to be included in a Network Operators’ revenue proposal.</p>
<p>Publication of a hybrid revenue determination</p>	<p>Prior to publication of the hybrid revenue determination the AER may consider any confidentiality claims made by the Network Operator over contestable or non-contestable components.¹⁵⁹ Consistent with the AER’s current practice, the EII Confidentiality Guideline and clause 53(6) of the EII Regulation will be applied. Under clause 53(6) the AER may decide not to publish part of a revenue determination if satisfied it is not appropriate, taking into account: the public interest; the extent to which information is confidential or commercially sensitive; and the effect on future competitive assessment processes.</p>

We value meaningful consumer engagement as part of our regulatory processes. We strongly encourage Network Operators to provide as much information as possible to stakeholders on both contestable and non-contestable components throughout the hybrid revenue determination process. We consider this facilitates an open and productive engagement process and will result in a more robust regulatory process and better-informed decisions.

Our approach to dealing with confidentiality claims within the context of hybrid revenue determinations will be consistent with our EII Confidentiality Guideline. We will undertake the same processes and procedures as for non-contestable revenue determinations, including early pre-lodgement discussions with Network Operators on their proposed approach to information provision.

7.5.3 Timeframe for making a hybrid revenue determination

Once we receive a compliant revenue proposal, we will have 126 business days to make a hybrid revenue determination.¹⁶⁰ If we are unable to make a revenue determination within this timeframe, we will follow the process set out in section 2 of this guideline in accordance with clause 50(3) of the EII Regulation.

¹⁵⁹ Under cl. 53(4) of the EII Regulation the AER is required to publish the revenue determination as soon as reasonably practicable but not before the Infrastructure Planner has notified us that, in their opinion, the project financial close of the network infrastructure project has been reached under the recommended contractual arrangements for the project. Clause 53(5) also requires us to consult with the Infrastructure Planner prior to publication of the revenue determination, notice, reasons or schedule.

¹⁶⁰ EII Regulation, cl. 50(1)(b).

8 Cost recovery arrangements for non-network options

This section sets out how we will approach and assess applications from Network Operators for cost recovery arrangements associated with the implementation of a non-network option (NNO) component of a network infrastructure project.

8.1 Framework for NNO determinations

In March 2025, the Australian Energy Market Commission (AEMC) updated NER Chapter 6A¹⁶¹ to improve the cost recovery certainty and timing flexibility for transmission network service providers that implement network infrastructure projects with a NNO component. In its application to Network Operators in NSW, the rule:

- creates a process by which a Network Operator can apply to the AER to adjust their network alternative support payment allowance to account for a significant new or changed NNO component mid-regulatory period.¹⁶²
- enables the approval of a proposed payment methodology for a network alternative support payment allowance for a NNO component that is consistent with the operating expenditure objectives, criteria and factors.¹⁶³

Determinations made by the AER in relation to an adjustment of network alternative support payment allowance or an approval of methodology for a NNO component are collectively referred to as a 'NNO determination'.

The AER will decide on each application for a determination on a case-by-case basis, having regard to the matters in this guideline, and the facts and circumstances relevant to an application.

8.2 Pre-application

An application by a Network Operator for a NNO determination should include all relevant information and evidence to assist the AER's consideration of the application, including its assessment of the prudence, efficiency and reasonableness of the costs.¹⁶⁴ Submitting an application that meets the eligibility criteria and materiality thresholds is the responsibility of the applicant.

Network Operators may engage with us before applying for a NNO determination. The primary aim of early engagement is to assist Network Operators to submit high-quality applications that provide all the information required to allow the AER to make an informed and timely NNO determination.

¹⁶¹ Improving the cost recovery arrangements for Transmission non-network options | AEMC

¹⁶² See EII Chapter 6A.7.2A(a)

¹⁶³ See EII Chapter 6A.6.6A(a)

¹⁶⁴ EII Regulation, cl. 46(1)(b)(i)

Generally, we will not provide advice at the pre-application stage on whether a proposed NNO support payment allowance adjustment or payment methodology is likely to be considered prudent, efficient and reasonable. We encourage early engagement where:

- the application will be made before the revenue proposal, and the infrastructure planner has informed us that the network infrastructure project is expected to be authorised.
- there is sufficient information available on the NNO component or payment methodology.

We note that there may be multiple NNO components that fall under single revenue determination for a network infrastructure project. Individual applications are not required for each NNO component provided each NNO component is part of the same contract.

Where NNO components fall under different contracts, each NNO component will require its own application for a NNO determination even though they form part of the same revenue determination.

8.3 Lodging an application – timing

Depending on the circumstances, a Network Operator can make a relevant application for a NNO determination at one of the following 3 stages:

- before an initial revenue proposal for a network infrastructure project is submitted
- as part of a revenue proposal
- during a regulatory control period.

It is the Network Operators' responsibility to ensure applications provide sufficient time for the AER to align with the decision-making timeframes.

Where applicable, competitive assessment processes should be largely finalised to enable Network Operators to provide information on costs, payments and payment methodologies in an application that is likely to reflect the final agreement between a NNO service provider and the Network Operator.

8.4 Lodging an application – eligibility & thresholds

Consistent with clauses 6A.6.6A(b) and 6A.7.2A(b) of EII Chapter 6A, an application submitted by a Network Operator must comply with all relevant requirements in this Guideline. This includes any eligibility criteria or materiality thresholds that apply.

The eligibility criteria and materiality threshold will ensure that the AER has all relevant information needed to undertake a timely assessment of an eligible application, and that applications relate only to financially significant NNO components as intended by the ICRA Rule.

Table 4: NNO applications made before the initial revenue proposal for a network infrastructure project is due

Applications for a payment methodology for a network alternative support payment made before the initial revenue proposal for a network infrastructure project is due	
<u>Eligibility criteria required before the AER will accept an application</u> ¹⁶⁵	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>The application must:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <u>be made after the Network Operator has been given an authorisation to carry out the network infrastructure project (6A.6.6A(a2)(1)).</u> ○ <u>not be for a network infrastructure project for which a revenue determination has previously been made (6A.6.6A(a2)(2)).</u> ○ <u>be made at least 60 business days prior to the date that the revenue proposal to which it relates is submitted (6A.6.6A(a2)(3)).</u> ○ <u>comply with the relevant requirements of this Guideline (6A.6.6A(b)).</u>
<u>Additional eligibility criteria</u>	<u>The application must be consistent with the terms and scope of the authorisation that the Network Operator is subject to.</u>
<u>Materiality threshold</u>	<u>The expected average annual payment of each NNO component of the network infrastructure project must be valued at \$5 million or more.</u>

Table 5: NNO applications made at the same time as a regulatory proposal

Applications accompanying a revenue proposal to make a determination to set a methodology for a network alternative support payment ¹⁶⁶	
<u>Eligibility criteria required before the AER will accept an application</u> ¹⁶⁷	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>The application must:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <u>comply with operating expenditure objectives, criteria and factors (6A.7.2A(b)(1)-(3)).</u> ○ <u>comply with requirements set out in this Guideline (6A.7.2A(b)(4)).</u>
<u>Additional eligibility criteria</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>The application must:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <u>be consistent with the terms and scope of the authorisation that the Network Operator is subject to.</u> ○ <u>include the relevant information outlined in Chapter 4 of this Guideline.</u>¹⁶⁸
<u>Materiality threshold</u>	<u>The expected average annual payment of each NNO component of the network infrastructure project must be valued at \$5 million or more.</u>

Table 6: NNO applications made during a regulatory control period

<u>Applications during a regulatory control period, to make a determination to:</u>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>adjust the network alternative support payment allowance, or</u> • <u>set a methodology for a network alternative support payment, or</u> • <u>adjust a methodology for a network alternative support payment previously determined under EII clause 6A.6.6A or clause 6A.7.2A.</u> 	
<u>Eligibility criteria required before the AER will accept an application</u> ¹⁶⁹	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>The application must:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <u>comply with operating expenditure objectives, criteria and factors (6A.7.2A(b)(1)-(3)).</u> ○ <u>comply with requirements set out in this Guideline (6A.7.2A(b)(4)).</u>
<u>Additional eligibility criteria</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>The application must:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <u>be consistent with the terms and scope of the authorisation that the Network Operator is subject to.</u> ○ <u>be accompanied by any methodology for a network alternative support payment that has been previously approved by the AER under clause 6A.6.6A or clause 6A.7.2A.</u>
<u>Materiality threshold</u>	<p><u>The expected average annual payment of each NNO component of the network infrastructure project must be valued at \$5 million or more.</u></p>

8.5 Factors considered in making a determination

This section describes the relevant factors we may consider in making a NNO determination.

Section 5.3.3 of this Guideline provides that consistent with our approach to assessing forecast capex, we will apply our current expenditure forecast assessment guideline to assess and determine an operating expenditure allowance under the EII Act. However, we may modify our assessment approach to reflect differences between the EII framework and the NER framework where we identify the need to do so.

The opex objectives, criteria and factors under clauses 6A.6.6A(a)(3)-(5) and 6A.7.2A(b)(1)-(3) of EII Chapter 6A are the same criteria we are required to assess when deciding whether to accept a Network Operator’s proposed forecast opex in a non-contestable revenue determination under clause 6A.6.6 of EII Chapter 6A. In the context of a non-contestable

¹⁶⁵ EII Ch 6A.6.6A(e)(2)

¹⁶⁶ NB: a proposal for an NNO support payment allowance could form part of the revenue proposal

¹⁶⁷ EII Ch 6A.6.6A(e)(2)

¹⁶⁸ Chapter 4 of this Guideline outlines the information and supporting documentation Network Operators must include in a revenue proposal. This includes relevant information for a NNO application that accompanies a revenue proposal or that is made during a regulatory control period to demonstrate the application meets the eligibility criteria and materiality threshold.

¹⁶⁹ EII Ch 6A.6.6A(e)(2)

revenue determination, we interpret these criteria together as requiring consideration of whether forecast opex can be considered to be ‘prudent, efficient and reasonable’. Table 7 below defines ‘prudent’, ‘efficient’ and ‘reasonable’, and outlines the key considerations in our assessments of ‘prudent, efficient and reasonable’ costs.

Table 7: How we assess ‘prudent’, ‘efficient’ and ‘reasonable’

<u>Factors</u>	<u>Key considerations</u>
<p><u>Prudent</u></p> <p><u>Whether there is a need to contract the proposed NNO service or develop a payment methodology for a NNO service (as relevant).</u></p>	<p><u>Whether there is sufficient information and evidence to satisfy the AER of the need for and scope of the relevant NNO service. This must include evidence that the NNO service being considered is within the scope of an authorised or directed network infrastructure project.</u></p>
<p><u>Efficient</u></p> <p><u>Whether the network alternative support payment allowance adjustment or methodology for a network alternative support payment (as relevant) reflects efficient costs, or the least cost that the Network Operator could reasonably achieve in the circumstances.</u></p>	<p><u>Whether there is sufficient information and evidence to satisfy the AER. This may include evidence that the NNO payments or methodology reflect:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>efficient costs; or</u> • <u>the least cost that a Network Operator could reasonably achieve in the circumstances.</u>
<p><u>Reasonable</u></p> <p><u>Our interpretation of ‘reasonable’ depends on a tailored assessment of the specific context of the NNO component and how the Network Operator justifies the reasonableness of its proposal.</u></p>	<p><u>Whether there is sufficient information and evidence to satisfy the AER.</u></p> <p><u>We would consider information provided to us by the Network Operator regarding what limitations or constraints were present in the development of the methodology.</u></p>

The specific information the AER considers in any assessment will vary on a case-by-case basis depending on the nature and circumstances of the application and the available information and evidence. In assessing an application, the AER may also have regard to factors and information as set out in Table 8.

Table 8: Other factors and information the AER may have regard to

<u>Factors</u>	<u>Key considerations</u>
<p><u>The extent to which the forecast payments or methodology:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>is the outcome of a competitive assessment process; or</u> • <u>where a competitive assessment process is not possible, reflects the least cost the Network Operator could reasonably achieve in the circumstances through a direct or negotiated approach to a NNO provider.</u> 	<p><u>Whether there is sufficient information and evidence to satisfy the AER. This may include evidence of:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>a competitive assessment process taking place for the NNO service considered; or</u> • <u>a comparison of costs across comparable NNO services to determine reasonable cost, where a competitive assessment process was not possible.</u>
<p><u>Whether a proposed contract for a NNO service or payment methodology contains elements that will or will likely result in unnecessary costs being incurred.</u></p>	<p><u>Whether there is sufficient information and evidence to satisfy the AER. This may include information regarding:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>the mix of cost components and structure of payment methodologies;</u> • <u>risks or triggers that result in unnecessary or unreasonable cost components;</u> • <u>any terms that may be unreasonable, unnecessary or overly ambiguous; or</u> • <u>any conditions that may be unreasonable, unnecessary or overly ambiguous.</u>
<p><u>Whether a proposed contract for a NNO service or payment methodology is not unreasonable in the circumstances.</u></p>	<p><u>Whether there is sufficient information and evidence to satisfy the AER. This may include evidence and information relating to:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>the costs of realistic alternatives for obtaining the same service or otherwise meeting the identified need, including network and non-network alternatives;</u> • <u>the level of compensation needed to recover all reasonable costs incurred, net of alternative revenue sources, in developing the NNO service; and</u> • <u>payments or payment methodologies for similar services in similar circumstances, including other NNO services reviewed by the AER or in other publicly available information.</u>
<p><u>Any other matters the AER considers relevant</u></p>	<p><u>As appropriate, and as needed depending on the nature and circumstances of the application and NNO services considered.</u></p>

Section 8.6 below outlines the type of information and supporting documentation Network Operators must include in an application to demonstrate that forecast expenditure for NNO services, or a methodology for a network alternative support payment is prudent, efficient and reasonable.

8.6 Relevant information required for applications

Consistent with clause 6A.6.6A(e)(1) of the EII Chapter 6A, this section sets out the information to be included in an application submitted by a Network Operator to the AER for a NNO determination. The application must:

- demonstrate the NNO component meets the eligibility criteria and materiality thresholds set out in section 8.4 above.
- demonstrate expenditure for a proposed network alternative support payment allowance adjustment or methodology for a network alternative support payment is prudent, efficient and reasonable as set out in section 8.5 above.

8.6.1 Demonstrating eligibility and thresholds

The AER considers that Network Operators should provide the following information to demonstrate that the application meets the **eligibility criteria** for a NNO determination:

- all relevant details for the NNO component of the network infrastructure project and related contract, including the NNO services being engaged, the service provider(s), the proposed payments and payment methodologies, and details of any other costs, costs components and triggers for all other potential expenditures involved
- a statement with supporting documentary evidence demonstrating that:
 - the Network Operator is subject to an authorisation to carry out the network infrastructure project.
 - the NNO component of the network infrastructure project is within the terms and scope of the authorisation the Network Operator is subject to.
- where applicable, all relevant information outlined in Chapter 4 of this Guideline or any previously determined payment methodologies for the NNO component has been provided.

Where there are multiple NNO components that fall under single revenue proposal or revenue determination for a network infrastructure project, each NNO component will need a separate application for a NNO determination if the NNO components have separate contracts. NNO components that are part of the same contract can be combined into a single application for a NNO determination.

To determine that a NNO component meets the materiality threshold, the Network Operator must provide the AER with details of all assumptions and calculations used to show that the expected average annual payments for the each NNO component is forecast to exceed \$5 million. For each NNO component, this information should be presented in an Excel spreadsheet that shows how the expected average annual payment was calculated, and include any assumptions, the application of CPI, and estimates of the time cost of money. The spreadsheet should show all formulas and input data.

8.6.2 Demonstrating prudent, efficient and reasonable

The AER considers that the Network Operator must provide the information outlined in Table 9 below to demonstrate a methodology is prudent, efficient and reasonable.

Table 9: Demonstrating prudent, efficient and reasonable

Criteria	Information to be provided	Examples
Prudent	<u>An explanation with supporting documentary evidence outlining why the Network Operator believes contracting the NNO component is prudent.</u>	<u>This can include a statement with supporting documentary evidence showing that any costs adjustment or payment methodology is for a NNO component of a network infrastructure project that is authorised/directed and/or required to achieve the scope of the authorised/directed network infrastructure project including by any amendments to the original authorisation/direction.</u>
	<u>An explanation and supporting documentary evidence to demonstrate the prudence of the structure of the components of the payment methodologies, and the conditions for triggering a payment or component of a payment in the draft contract.</u>	<u>For example, unnecessarily large cost components, or unnecessary cost components may not be considered prudent. Likewise, triggers for costs that could be considered unnecessary, or overly ambiguous and likely to result in unnecessary costs being incurred may not be considered prudent.</u>
Efficient	<u>An explanation with supporting documentary evidence outlining why the Network Operator believes the methodology is efficient.</u>	<p><u>This can include:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <u>• a description of a competitive tender or procurement process used to establish the payment or payment methodology, including the type of approach(es) used, the offer(s) received, any subsequent negotiations or actions taken to achieve a competitive methodology.</u> <u>• where a competitive process was not available, a description of why a competitive process was not possible, the approach(es) to supplier(s) used in place of a competitive process, the offer(s) received, what steps the Network Operator took to achieve the least cost offer, including any subsequent negotiations or actions to achieve the best available offer in the circumstances.</u> <u>• an explanation of why the methodology is efficient and does not result in unreasonable costs, or an unreasonable risk of unnecessary costs.</u>

Criteria	Information to be provided	Examples
Reasonable	<u>An explanation with supporting documentary evidence outlining why the Network Operator believes the methodology is reasonable.</u>	<u>This can include a description of any limitations or constraints that impacted the development of the methodology.</u>

8.7 Consultation on an application

Clauses 6A.6.6A(c) and 6A.7.2A(d) of EII Chapter 6A state that the AER may, but is not required to, consult on an application in a manner it considers appropriate before making a NNO determination.

In practice, the consultation process may include:

- publishing notification that an application has been received, and the likely timeframe for the assessment
- publishing a summary of the application with appropriate redactions for confidential and commercially sensitive information, including an outline of the NNO services and/or payment methodologies being assessed
- calling for submissions on the application, where the AER considers sufficient non-confidential material is available for stakeholders to meaningfully consider the application
- using information requests and targeted consultation with the Network Operator or other parties as necessary
- publishing a summary of the determination with appropriate redactions for confidential and commercially sensitive information, including our reasoning for decisions.

If a NNO determination application is made with a revenue proposal, then the consultation processes for non-contestable revenue determinations as set out in this guideline will apply.

8.8 Timeframe for decision

The AER's timeframes for making its decision aim to balance the need to ensure that a NNO determination for a payment methodology or network support allowance adjustment can be made in a timely manner, while allowing for any consultation processes that the AER may carry out as part of the NNO determination process, including seeking further information from the relevant Network Operator, or other parties as necessary. Table 10 below outlines the timing for decisions depending on the type of NNO application that is submitted.

Table 10: Timing for decisions

<p><u>Application for a NNO determination made under clause 6A.6.6A(a1)(1A) – prior to a revenue proposal</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Within 40 business days from the later of:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <u>the date we receive an application that meets the eligibility criteria and materiality threshold set out in this Guideline, or</u> ○ <u>the date we receive the additional information sought by the AER in a subsequent information request, provided that the additional information requested by the AER is received more than 60 days before the date the revenue proposal is submitted.</u>¹⁷⁰
<p><u>Application for a NNO determination made under clause 6A.7.2A – at the same time as a revenue proposal</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>The decision timeframe is the same as the non-contestable revenue decision timeframe set out in this Guideline and the EII Regulation.</u>
<p><u>Application for a NNO determination made under clause 6A.7.2A – during a regulatory control period</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Within 40 business days from the later of:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <u>the date we receive an application that meets the eligibility criteria and materiality threshold set out in this Guideline, or</u> ○ <u>the date we receive the additional information sought by the AER in a subsequent information request.</u>

If the AER is satisfied that the making of a NNO determination involves issues of such complexity or difficulty that the 40-business day limit should be extended, the AER may extend that time limit by a further period of up to 60 business days. In this case, the AER will advise the Network Operator in writing of the additional time required. It is expected this option to extend the timeframe for a decision will only be used in exceptional circumstances.

¹⁷⁰ CI 6A.6.6A(a2)(3) EII Chapter 6A requires that applications for a NNO determination made before an initial revenue proposal, must be submitted at least 60 business days prior the date that the related revenue proposal is to be submitted. If additional information is received less than 60 days before the date the revenue proposal is submitted, it is considered that the application is submitted under cl 6A.7.2A and forms part of the revenue proposal.

Appendix A: EII Chapter 6A

This Appendix A is published separately but can be accessed at the following link:

<https://www.aer.gov.au/documents/aer-appendix-eii-chapter-6a-december-2025>

Glossary

Term	Definition
AER	Australian Energy Regulator
Competitive assessment process	Has the meaning given to that term in the EII Regulation.
Consumer Trustee	Has the meaning given to that term in the EII Act The Consumer Trustee is required to act independently and in the long-term financial interests of NSW electricity consumers. AusEnergy Services Limited (formerly AEMO Services Ltd) has been appointed as the Consumer Trustee.
Contestable augmentation	Has the meaning given to that term in the EII Regulation
Contestable component	Has the meaning given to that term in the EII Regulation
Contractual arrangement	Contracts that the Network Operator enters as required under the Consumer Trustee's authorisation or Minister's authorisation or direction. This includes contracts made between the Infrastructure Planner and the Network Operator for carrying out a network infrastructure project under section 63(4)(a) of the EII Act. Contractual arrangements may also encompass any contracts between the Network Operator and a service provider selected by the Infrastructure Planner through a competitive assessment process to assist the Network Operator to carry out all or part of a Project.
EII Act, the Act	<i>Electricity Infrastructure Investment Act 2020 (NSW)</i>
EII Regulation	<i>Electricity Infrastructure Investment Regulation 2021 (NSW)</i>
Hybrid revenue determination	A non-contestable revenue determination that includes at least: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - one contestable component derived as a result of a competitive assessment process; and - one component that is not a contestable component.
Infrastructure Planner	Has the meaning given to that term in the EII Act The Infrastructure Planner performs a range of planning and contracting functions. The Energy Corporation of NSW has been appointed to undertake the role of Infrastructure Planner for the five renewable energy zones listed in section 23 of the EII Act.
Infrastructure project	Has the meaning given to that term in the EII Act
NER	National Electricity Rules
Network Operator	Has the meaning given to that term in the EII Act
NSW Government	The NSW Government department or entity responsible for developing and implementing policy and legislative proposals relating to the NSW Infrastructure Roadmap (which is enabled by the EII Act).

Term	Definition
	The relevant department or entity may change from time to time in line with NSW machinery of government changes.
PTRM	post-tax revenue model
Project, network infrastructure project	A REZ Network Infrastructure Project or Priority Network Infrastructure Project as defined in the EII Act.
Priority network infrastructure project	Has the meaning given to that term in the EII Act.
Procurement strategy	A strategy for undertaking a competitive assessment process.
RAB	Regulatory asset base
Regulator	A person or body appointed as a regulator under section 64 of the EII Act. The AER has been appointed as a Regulator for the purposes of Part 5 of the EII Act.
Renewable Energy Zone (REZ)	Has the meaning given to that term in the EII Act.
REZ network Infrastructure project	Has the meaning given to the term in the EII Act.
Transmission Efficiency Test	The test to be applied to calculate the prudent, efficient and reasonable capital costs for development and construction of a network infrastructure project under section 38(4) of the EII Act.