



# Session 1 Report

## Neutrog Community Reference Panel

November 3 2025



# Background

Neutrog, with the support of local independent facilitation company DemocracyCo have set up the Neutrog Community Reference Panel (the Panel) to provide ongoing feedback on how Neutrog can meet the expectations of residents and businesses in the community.

The Panel will help Neutrog to continue to provide economic opportunities in the Hills, while minimising odour, dust and fire risk.

## About the Panel

The Panel is made up of a diverse mix of approximately 10 community members. The panel members all have different lived experiences of Neutrog and their operations, and therefore will be vital to ensure accurate, balanced and agreed-upon feedback can be reflected to Neutrog.

Initially the panel will be focused on providing specific feedback to Neutrog on the areas of fire and air quality, with the intention to form meaningful actions for Neutrog. Once these sessions are complete, we hope Panel members will continue to meet over the next two years to provide ongoing feedback, creating an important mechanism for transparency and sustained communication between the community and Neutrog. The Panel is being facilitated by DemocracyCo using deliberative and co-design engagement methods which ensure constructive, respectful, and productive conversations.

## About this Report

After every meeting of the Panel a high-level report from that session will be produced – this is that Report.

This report seeks to provide a summary overview of -

- The Process the Panel went through in this session,
- Topics - what was discussed by the Panel,
- Speakers and what they talked about.

This report was prepared by independent DemocracyCo facilitators after the session.

# Session 1

3 November, 2025

## Overview of Process

This meeting was primarily about Members of the Panel-

- Meeting each other
- Sharing their concerns about Neutrog operations
- Learning about the process
- Hearing why Neutrog are hosting this Panel and context for the Panel
- Learning about fire
- Discussing administrative matters

## Our speakers

### Context and welcome

The following speakers welcomed Panel members and provided context to the project are listed in Table 1.

If links are not provided below, video recordings of the speakers can be found at as and when they are available

- <https://www.democracyco.com.au/whats-on/neutrog-community-reference-panel/>

Speaker	What they talked about
Hazel Ashby, Marketing Manager, Neutrog	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Hazel's role in the organisation, her view on her role and organisational commitment to the process.</li><li>- Engagement process is different than processes that have come before – we hope that this is an improvement on previous processes</li><li>- Thankyou for being open to a new process – want to do things better and differently into the future and create a more transparent process.</li><li>- Most significant CEAP that they have prepared to date. <a href="https://vimeo.com/1133324720/8f35035c50?fl=tl&amp;fe=ec">https://vimeo.com/1133324720/8f35035c50?fl=tl&amp;fe=ec</a></li></ul>
Tony Aloisi, CFO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- About the process of developing Neutrog's products with a focus on what happens on site – from the point in time when materials come on the site.</li><li>- Tony talked about how materials are managed and how they try to minimise issues like odour and fire.</li><li>- Community feedback processes and how this contributes to a process of continual improvement.</li><li>- Tony talked about what they do when they get complaints from the community. When complaints come through they look at operations for that day, activities, weather and they look at what they can reverse engineer to address the problems.</li></ul>

- Tony talked about the changes they have been making over time to respond to community concerns including how they are receiving materials, how they are mulching and how they are screening.

<https://vimeo.com/1133330663/8749e6810f?fl=tl&fe=ec>

Steven Shotten, RDA

- **What is the RDA?** - its role in growing productivity, innovation, strengthening industry and connecting organisations across the region.
- **Economy of the Adelaide Hills** – highlighted the importance of manufacturing in the Hills and contribution to the diversification of the economy. Manufacturing one of the key drivers of the local economy, a significant contributor to jobs in the region. Manufacturers area significant ‘spender’ in the region and the sector provides the most exports for the region.
- **Manufacturing isn’t dead** – thriving and important sector in the Hills area.
  - o Neutrog a significant contributor to manufacturing in the hills – via job creation and exports
- **Economic impact of Neutrog** – provided modelling of Neutrog’s contribution (using ABS data)
  - o Output \$41m
  - o Employment 111+ employees
  - o Wages and salaries \$5.5m

<https://vimeo.com/1133347068/d766acdf2f?fl=tl&fe=ec>

**\*NOTE** – Megan Golding from the EPA was invited to brief the Panel. Due to technical issues however, this couldn’t happen.

## Fire

The following speakers gave expert information about fire risk and management at the site as follows:

Speaker	What they talked about
Dr Uwe Stroehler, Head of R&D Neutrog	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Explained the science of composting including-               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Why it is important to keep ‘heat’ high in composting – heat is an essential part of the composting process which can’t be avoided.</li> <li>o How composting works – the phases of compost development – smouldering and combustion</li> <li>o Turning of piles – 4 weekly to manage heat.</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Explained how they monitor ‘compost heaps’ for heat.</li> <li>- Goal is to create a stable safe pile that composts quickly so it can be moved from the top pad down to production.</li> </ul>
Frank Reagan, Mt Barker District Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Overview of his role in Fire prevention – community and industry responsibilities               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Shared responsibility by us all</li> </ul> </li> <li>- <i>Fire and Emergency Services Act 2005 and regulations</i> – with a focus on his responsibilities</li> <li>- Neutrog developing a vegetation management plan – which is currently in its draft plan.</li> <li>- The plan is a framework for the management of vegetation to reduce fuel loads on the site and perimeter – to reduce fire risk if it occurs (reduce intensity of the fire)</li> </ul>

- Provided an overview of the rules governing fire management – clearance zones etc.
- Talked about the importance of understanding risk of fire
- Presented data of two recent fires generated on Neutrog site – which were small in scale/ contained quickly.
- Fuel loads on Neutrog site are generally low and are currently sitting at about 1-2 tonne of fuel load per hectare (which is very low comparatively). This creates very low risk (all be it a small risk). This compares to other hills locations which at their peak would have much higher risk – indeed extreme risk (with 10 tonnes of fuel load per hectare)

## Discussion Themes

### Fire Discussion: Hopes and Worries

Following the panel’s learning session on fire, the Panel brainstormed their objectives for fire management (their hopes) and their issues / concerns regarding Neutrog’s fire management. These are below and will form the basis for the Panels work at Session 2.

Hopes	Worries
Exploration of fire-retardant vegetation	Spontaneous combustion
Fire monitoring & equipment	Lightning strike on the plant
Total transparency and honesty	Close proximity to township, increasing risk
Relocate the piles away	Fire Outbreak
Internal fire management at Neutrog	Exhaustion of firefighting resources
Fire monitoring and equipment	Explosion
Greater understanding (in the community regarding materials, risk and management approaches)	Lack of transparency
Eliminate risk	Dishonesty regarding reported issues
	Shutdown of other local businesses
	24 hr monitoring – not effective
	Perceptions

## Group Norms

The Panel developed their own Group Norms for inclusion in the Terms of Reference. These Group Norms set the Panel’s own expectations for how they wish to engage and interact with each other.

- Respect
- Truth telling
- Participation
- Understanding
- Questioning
- Sharing

- Imagination
- Being open
- Honesty
- Creativity
- Connecting
- Thinking
- Flexing
- Listening

In addition to these, democracyCo outlined the expectations of Panel members outside of the room, how they interact with each other outside of the process, and also others.

*It is expected that when interacting with other group members outside of sessions, that you adhere to the spirit of your shared group norms at all times.*

*It is important to note that some people may not want to talk about their role as part of the group in casual conversation, so please respect their choice.*

*In addition, DemocracyCo expect that you will at all times:*

- *respect others' right to privacy by not contacting them unless they have given you permission to.*
- *respect others' right to privacy by not sharing any personal details about them, or seeking personal information about them.*
- *share what is said, but not who said it*
- *not attempt to represent the views of the group or of individuals, other than your own.*

## Next Steps

At the next meeting the Panel will dig deeply into the issue of fire and its objectives for addressing fire risk / managing fire on the site and related issues.

## More Information

To find out more information visit

- DemocracyCo project website - <https://www.democracyco.com.au/whats-on/neutrog-community-reference-panel/>
- Neutrog's Community Portal - <https://neutrogcommunityportal.com.au/>

