

Western Outer Ring Main Gas Pipeline: EES Scoping Requirements process

Western Outer Ring Main Gas Pipeline Project EES – Final Scoping Requirements FAQs

September 2020

What is the purpose of the scoping requirements?

APA VTS (Operations) Pty Ltd (hereafter 'APA') is preparing an environment effects statement (EES) for the Western Outer Ring Main Gas Pipeline Project, and the EES scoping requirements set out the matters that need to be investigated and documented within the EES.

Final EES scoping requirements have been approved by the Minister for Planning and are available on the DELWP website: <https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/environment-assessment/browse-projects/projects/western-outer-ring-main-gas-pipeline>

Why is an Environment Effects Statement (EES) required for the Project?

An EES is the most comprehensive and robust assessment process available and will provide for an integrated and transparent examination of the proposed project and its effects, which is necessary because of the array of potential effects, the substantial public interest and the different statutory approvals typically required for this type of major project.

The Minister for Planning determined under the *Environment Effects Act 1978* that APA should prepare an EES for the Western Outer Ring Main Gas Pipeline Project in December 2019. In the procedures and requirements, the Minister identified key environmental risks that would need to be addressed in the EES, namely:

- effects on biodiversity and ecological values within and near the site, associated with adjacent road/ rail reserves, conservation and riparian areas, including: native vegetation; ecological communities and species of flora and fauna listed under the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988*; and other habitats or protected species;
- effects on waterways, wetlands and groundwater hydrology, quality and aquatic ecology, including groundwater dependent ecosystems within and near the project site;
- effects on Aboriginal and historic cultural heritage values in the vicinity of the project site;
- effects on the land uses of the site and surrounding areas;
- effects on land stability and erosion related to the construction and operation of the project, including rehabilitation works;
- effects of project construction and operation on amenity, including potential air quality and noise effects on nearby sensitive receptors (especially residents);
- positive and adverse socio-economic effects, at local and regional scales, potentially generated by the project, including indirect effects of the project construction workforce on the capacity of local community infrastructure; and
- waste management during construction and operation.

The EES documentation will need to include a detailed description of the proposed project and rigorous assessment of its potential effects on the environment and approaches to mitigation. The EES will inform the public and stakeholders, and seek feedback. Ultimately it enables the Minister to issue an assessment of the environmental effects of the project at the end of the process. The Minister's assessment will inform statutory decision-makers responsible for the project's approvals.

The project was also referred to the Commonwealth under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act). A delegate for the Commonwealth Minister for the Environment determined on 21 February 2020 that the project is a controlled action, as it is likely to have a significant impact on listed threatened species and communities.

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What studies are APA doing to further identify any associated risks with the project?

In preparing the EES, APA are undertaking a range of technical investigations to assess the potential impacts of the project. These investigations include biodiversity, groundwater and surface water, noise, vibration, greenhouse gases, cultural heritage, socioeconomic conditions, land use, air quality and ground movement/stability.

These studies will inform strategies to avoid, minimise or mitigate potential impacts which will form an important part of the EES documentation.

What are the final Scoping Requirements?

The set of matters to be investigated and documented in each EES are tailored to the project and its environmental risks. The draft scoping requirements for a project are prepared by the department on behalf of the Minister and then exhibited for 15 business days for comment by interested parties. The draft scoping requirements for the EES were informed by the proponent's referral and draft EES study program, as well as advice from agencies represented on the Technical Reference Group (TRG) and advice from the Commonwealth Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment.

The scoping requirements outline a broad scope of issues that must be addressed by APA in the EES. Assessment of effects as required by the scoping requirements must include discussion of all potential direct, indirect, on-site and off-site effects as result of the proposed project. Consistent with the Minister's decision for requiring an EES, the final scoping requirements cover a range of matters that need investigation, including impacts on energy efficiency, security, affordability and safety; biodiversity and habitats; water and catchment values; cultural heritage; social, economic and amenity issues; and waste management.

The broad nature of the final scoping requirements will ensure that the specific concerns raised through submissions are addressed in the EES. However, some minor refinements and editorial changes have been made to the scoping requirements to strengthen the clarity of issues and better reflect the local context, these changes included:

- The scope of the project description was updated to require further details such as the pipeline size and depth, proposed fill disposal sites, as well as details of proposed upgrades to the existing compressor station at Wollert;
- Further emphasis was placed on the need to consider both existing and reasonably foreseeable land uses in the EES;
- The need to include monitoring measures for compliance with the EMF was clarified;
- The need to evaluate potential fugitive emissions from the project and associated impacts was specified;
- Further emphasis was placed on the need to consider the impacts of sodic soils;
- Further clarification was provided regarding the need to assess the implications of greenhouse gas emissions from the project.

Was there public consultation for the draft scoping requirements?

An integral part of the EES process is the proponent engaging the public and stakeholders to identify and respond to their issues in conjunction with their EES studies.

APA has already commenced consultation with stakeholders and the community on the EES. APA is also preparing a consultation plan for the EES, outlining the opportunities and approaches for its community engagement during the preparation of the EES. The plan will be refined following advice from DELWP and the TRG and when completed will be published on the DELWP website.

Under its EES consultation plan the proponent needs to inform the public and stakeholders about the EES process and its associated investigations, ensuring it provides opportunities for input and engagement on these investigations.

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Draft scoping requirements for the EES were exhibited for a period of 15 business days and closed 1 August 2020. Notice of the draft scoping requirements' exhibition was publicised on the DELWP website and via advertisements in major and local newspapers.

Two submissions were received on the draft scoping requirements. Submissions were received from a local council and a Government authority.

Most of the issues raised in submissions received were environmental effects that the Minister identified in the decision to require an EES and were already included in the draft scoping requirements and therefore the final scoping requirements. Submitters provided a valuable perspective on planning issues and local issues of concern.

Submissions received have been provided to the proponent and the technical reference group to inform the ongoing development of the EES.

The key issues raised in the submissions relevant to the EES scope related to:

- Clarifications regarding the scope of works to be conducted for the project;
- Ensuring impacts on both existing and reasonably foreseeable land uses are considered in the EES;
- Assessment of impacts associated with sodic soils (particularly sedimentation and erosion) as well as soil disposal;
- Monitoring of compliance with the project's Environmental Management Framework (EMF);
- Ensuring impacts associated with easement maintenance during operations are adequately considered; and
- Ensuring the implications of greenhouse gas emissions from the project are adequately assessed, including fugitive emissions.

What happens now the Minister has issued the final scoping requirements?

The proponent will proceed with the necessary information-gathering and investigations to inform the EES. This is expected to take at least several months. It will conduct its studies and prepare the EES in close consultation with DELWP and a technical reference group consisting of lead statutory agencies and the relevant local council.

The proponent will also need to implement its EES consultation plan to engage the public and stakeholders about the EES process and its associated investigations, ensuring it provides opportunities for input and feedback on these investigations. The consultation plan is reviewed and amended in consultation with DELWP and the TRG prior to being published on the DELWP website.

When the EES is ready, it will be reviewed by DELWP, and the Minister for Planning will decide whether to authorise the EES to be exhibited. If authorised, the EES will be advertised for public comment for a period of 30 business days. There will be further opportunities for public comment on the project's environmental effects when the EES is exhibited.

The EES and the submissions received, together with the draft planning scheme amendment, will be referred to an inquiry to be appointed under the *Environment Effects Act 1978*.

An inquiry will consider all the information before it, having undertaken a formal hearing process and will report to the Minister, who will then make an assessment and provide it to decision-makers (including Earth Resources Regulation and the Commonwealth with regard to the required approval under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*).

After the Minister has made an assessment, the report of the inquiry and the Minister's assessment will be published on the DELWP website.

When does APA expect to have an environmental effects statement released?

The EES is expected to be released in 2021 (timing to be confirmed), when it goes on exhibition for public comment. During this period APA will undertake planned engagement activities.

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What is the Western Outer Ring Main Project?

APA proposes to construct a high pressure gas transmission pipeline within the Melton, Hume, Whittlesea and Mitchell local government areas. The project proposes installation of a new gas compressor and associated process control equipment and pipework within APA's existing gas compressor station site at Wollert and 50km of buried pipeline (Figure 1). The pipeline would connect the eastern and western sections of the Victorian Transmission System between Plumpton and Wollert, allowing for an increased gas storage at the Iona Underground Gas Storage facility to meet winter peak gas demands.



Figure 1: Proposed pipeline route (source: APA).