

Consultation Plan

A planned approach to informing the public and obtaining input from stakeholders in preparing the Environment Effects Statement



Delivered by

AusNet

Community and stakeholder engagement is vital to the success of this project.



Version	Section	Change	Rationale
2	All sections	Editorial changes.	Minor editorial changes.
2	1.3.1, 4.2	Removed information about engagement that was undertaken which is captured in other reports of what has been done.	Removed information about what has been done that is covered in separate reports. Minor editorial changes.
2	1.3.1	Removed footer from this section and placed it at the end of section 4.2.	Text moved for readability.
2	3.1, 4.3, 5.1	Reference to social media removed.	AusNet Services social media pages will be used to promote community sessions in place of a dedicated page for the project. Other traditional methods of engagement will continue to be used which provides better opportunity for detailed discussions about technical and other matters.
2	Appendix A	Updated titles for currency: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aboriginal Victoria is now First Peoples State Relations. Windfarm Commissioner now Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner. Melbourne Airport included. 	Updated for currency.
3	All sections	Updated with Western Renewables Link name change, logo and contact information.	Updated for currency.
4	All sections	Updated with changes to Western Renewables Link project, EES referral and expected timelines, and for currency.	Updated for currency.



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Introduction

This plan outlines the Western Renewables Link project consultation program and communication and engagement activities that will be delivered as part of the environmental impact assessment and planning scheme amendment process for the Western Renewables Link.

This plan is a public document, available on the Department of Transport and Planning (DTP) website, formerly the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP). It has been prepared in accordance with the Ministerial guidelines for assessment of environmental effects under the *Environment Effects Act 1978* (Vic) and the Environment Effects Statement (EES) Consultation Plan Advisory Note (DELWP, 2018).

This plan aligns with the consultation requirements for the draft Planning Scheme Amendment, proposed as part of the project, as outlined under the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* (Vic).

This plan outlines the guiding principles and objectives of the project engagement program, identifies key stakeholders, and provides an overview of planned engagement activities and timeframes until completion of the EES process. In accordance with the guiding documents, this plan also outlines how consultation will:

- **Inform** stakeholders, project communities and the general public about the project, draft Planning Scheme Amendment and EES investigations.
- **Seek feedback** from stakeholders and project communities throughout the preparation of the EES and draft Planning Scheme Amendment to identify and understand issues of concern and importance, obtain insight from local knowledge about existing conditions, understand concerns around potential impacts and identify appropriate mitigation or management measures.
- **Respond to feedback** from stakeholders, communities and the general public including demonstrating how this feedback can inform or influence project decisions.

We recognise that consultation is a key aspect of the environmental assessment process in Victoria. It is a requirement of the EES and Planning Scheme Amendment process that consultation undertaken by the proponent includes both:

- **Informal consultation** to feed into design refinement, and to assist in the development of a sound EES and draft Planning Scheme Amendment; and
- **Formal opportunities** for public input into the scoping requirements for the EES and feedback on the exhibited EES and draft Planning Scheme Amendment.

As part of the EES process, there will be ongoing opportunities for community input.

This plan will be reviewed and updated in response to community feedback and as appropriate throughout the development of the project.



Background

As a result of proposed changes to the project, in August 2023 AusNet referred the Western Renewables Link project to the Victorian Minister for Planning for a new decision on the assessment requirements under the *Environment Effects Act 1978 (Vic)*. The Minister accepted the new referral in August 2023 and subsequently issued a new decision requiring an EES for the modified project.

This followed the Victorian Minister for Planning's original confirmation in August 2020 that the Western Renewables Link required an EES under the *Environment Effects Act 1978 (Vic)*. In September 2020, the Commonwealth Minister for the Environment determined that the project requires assessment and approval under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act)*.

The EES process is accredited to assess impacts on matters of national environmental significance (MNES) under the EPBC Act through the Bilateral Assessment Agreement between the Commonwealth and the State of Victoria. The Commonwealth Minister, or delegate, will decide whether the project is approved, approved with conditions, or refused under the EPBC Act, after having considered the Minister for Planning's assessment under the *Environment Effects Act 1978 (Vic)*.

A Technical Reference Group convened by DTP, formerly DELWP, comprising statutory decision-makers and subject matter experts from government, meets regularly during the development of the EES and reviews and comments on documents.

The community and interested stakeholders are provided with project and EES updates and opportunities to provide feedback. Community and stakeholder feedback is considered by specialists completing the EES assessments and in ongoing refinement of the project design. At the end of the EES process, the Minister provides a final assessment of the environmental effects and recommendations to the statutory decision-makers for them to consider when deciding whether to provide an approval and what conditions should be attached to the approval.

Further information on the EES process and Ministerial Assessment can be found on the DTP website: www.planning.vic.gov.au/environmental-assessments/environmental-assessment-guides.



Regulatory Investment Test for Transmission (RIT-T)

In 2017, the Australian Energy Market Operator (AEMO) commenced a Regulatory Investment Test for Transmission (RIT-T) to identify the most economically efficient investment option to increase the amount of electricity that can be transported across western Victoria. The investment option selected within the RIT-T process informed the initial scope of the Western Renewables Link. For more information, visit:

www.westernrenewableslink.com.au/news/the-role-of-the-regulatory-investment-test-for-transmission-rit-t-process-in-the-development-of-the-wvtnp/

Project overview

The Western Renewables Link project is a proposed 190-kilometre overhead electricity transmission line from Bulgana in western Victoria to Sydenham in Melbourne's north-west.

The Western Renewables Link will unlock renewable energy resources in western Victoria and will deliver more clean energy to Victorians.

Victoria's energy network was originally built to carry energy generated in the Latrobe Valley to the rest of the state. However, Victoria's power system has changed significantly with the introduction of renewable energy and the retiring of coal generators. Western Victoria is emerging as an important renewable energy generation region. The current energy network needs upgrading to more efficiently share this renewable energy with all Victorians.

The proposed project includes the construction of a 500kV double circuit overhead transmission line, and a new 500kV switchyard and associated equipment near the existing Bulgana Terminal Station.

The project is being delivered by AusNet Transmission Group Pty Ltd (AusNet). AusNet is preparing the EES, managing development activities, and (pending approvals) will manage the construction, operation and maintenance of the new transmission line.

Broad community and stakeholder engagement activities will be ongoing throughout the development and life of the project and targeted engagement will be undertaken as appropriate at each stage of the project.

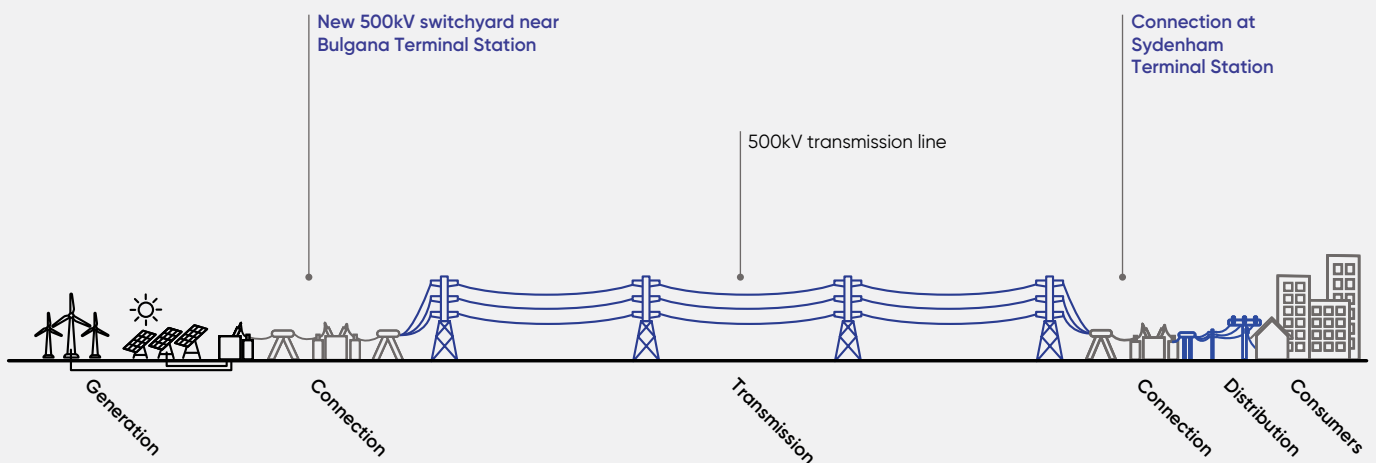
You can find all the latest project information on the [project website](#).



Who is AusNet?

AusNet is an Australian energy delivery services business. AusNet own and operate the Victorian electricity transmission network, an electricity distribution network and a gas distribution network. Headquartered in Melbourne, Australia, AusNet employs around 1,300 people who service 1.6 million consumers. For more information visit AusNet Services' website, www.ausnetservices.com.au.

Western Renewables Link

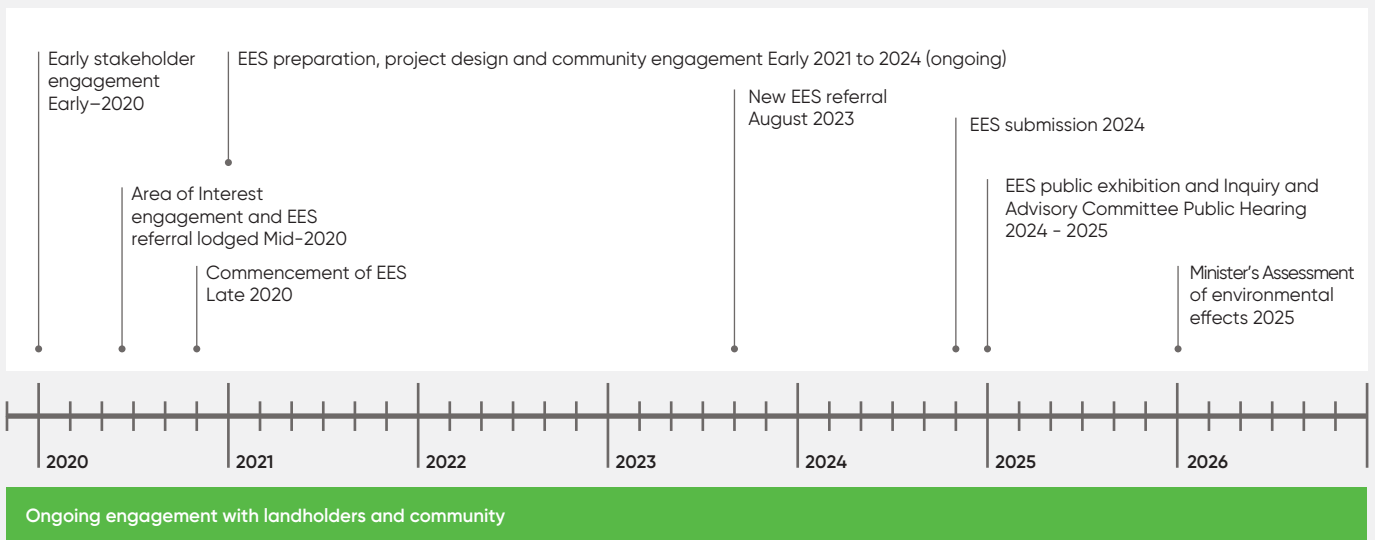


Proposed overhead 500kV double circuit transmission line from Bulgana to Sydenham

For illustrative purposes only



EES timeline



Section 01

Bulgana to Waubra

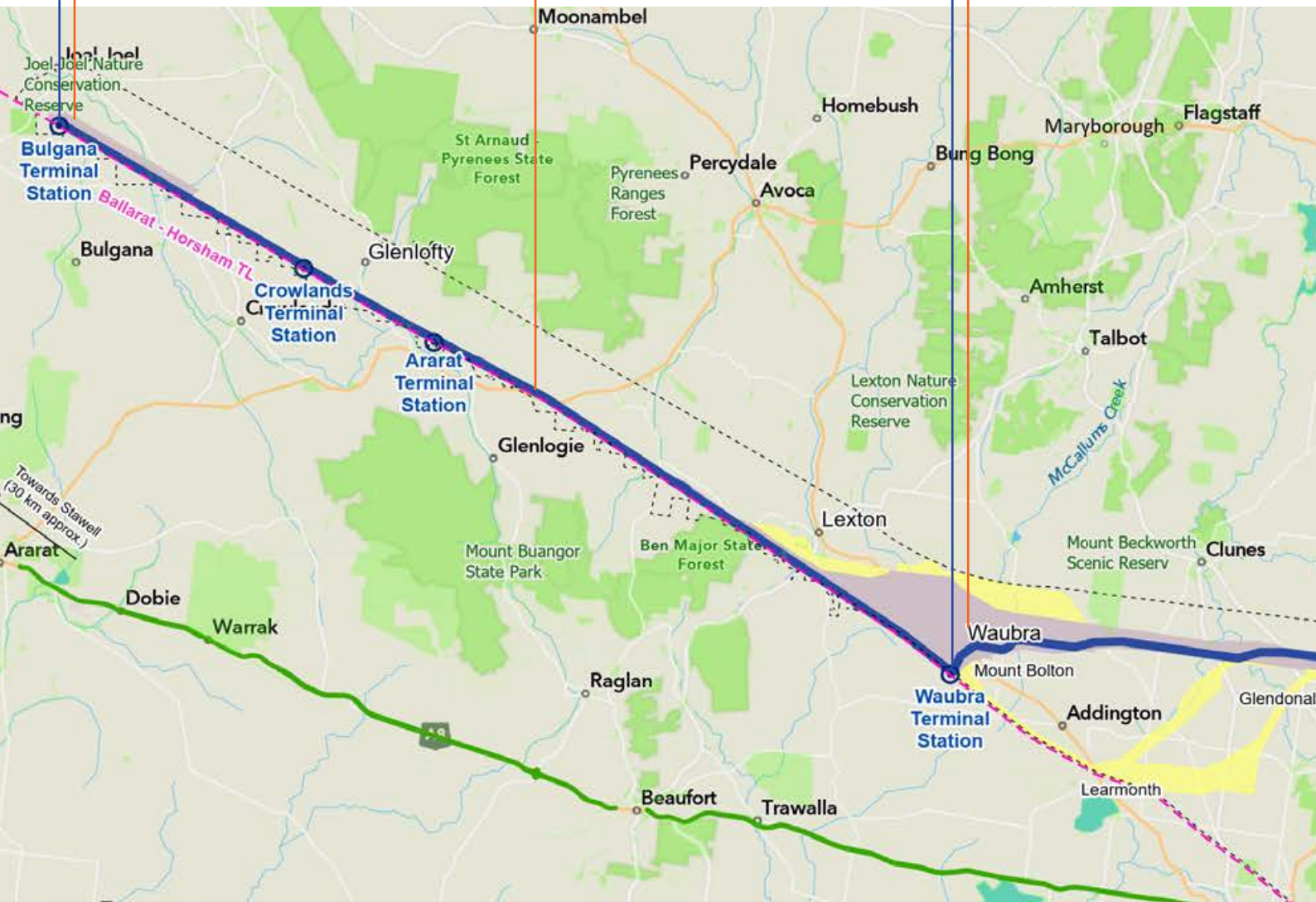
Proposed 500kV switchyard near Bulgana Terminal Station

Previous 220kV section from north of Ballarat to Bulgana now proposed as 500kV

Section 02

Waubra to Glendonald

We are working with landholders to identify a new proposed route to the north of Waubra



Proposed route

Figure 1 Project Area of Interest

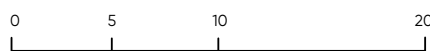
Figure 1 shows the Area of Interest defined for this project. The Area of Interest for the Western Renewables Link project is a broad geographic area from Bulgana in western Victoria to Sydenham in Melbourne's north-west. The area was defined to allow consideration of feasible route alternatives that could unlock the renewable energy potential of western Victoria.

Under the 2023 EES referral, the area of interest had minor updates to include: a larger area around the existing Bulgana Terminal Station for the new 500kV switchyard, and some small areas to the south of the existing Bulgana to Waubra 220kV transmission line that may be required for access tracks and construction purposes.

Map legend

- Updated proposed route (2022)
- Single corridor
- Multiple corridors
- Area of interest
- ⊙ Existing terminal station
- - - Existing transmission line
- Parks, reserves and forests
- Western Highway

Scale:



Kilometres



Section 03

Glendonald to Mount Prospect

The southern option at Hepburn Lagoon has now been identified as the proposed route going forward

Section 04

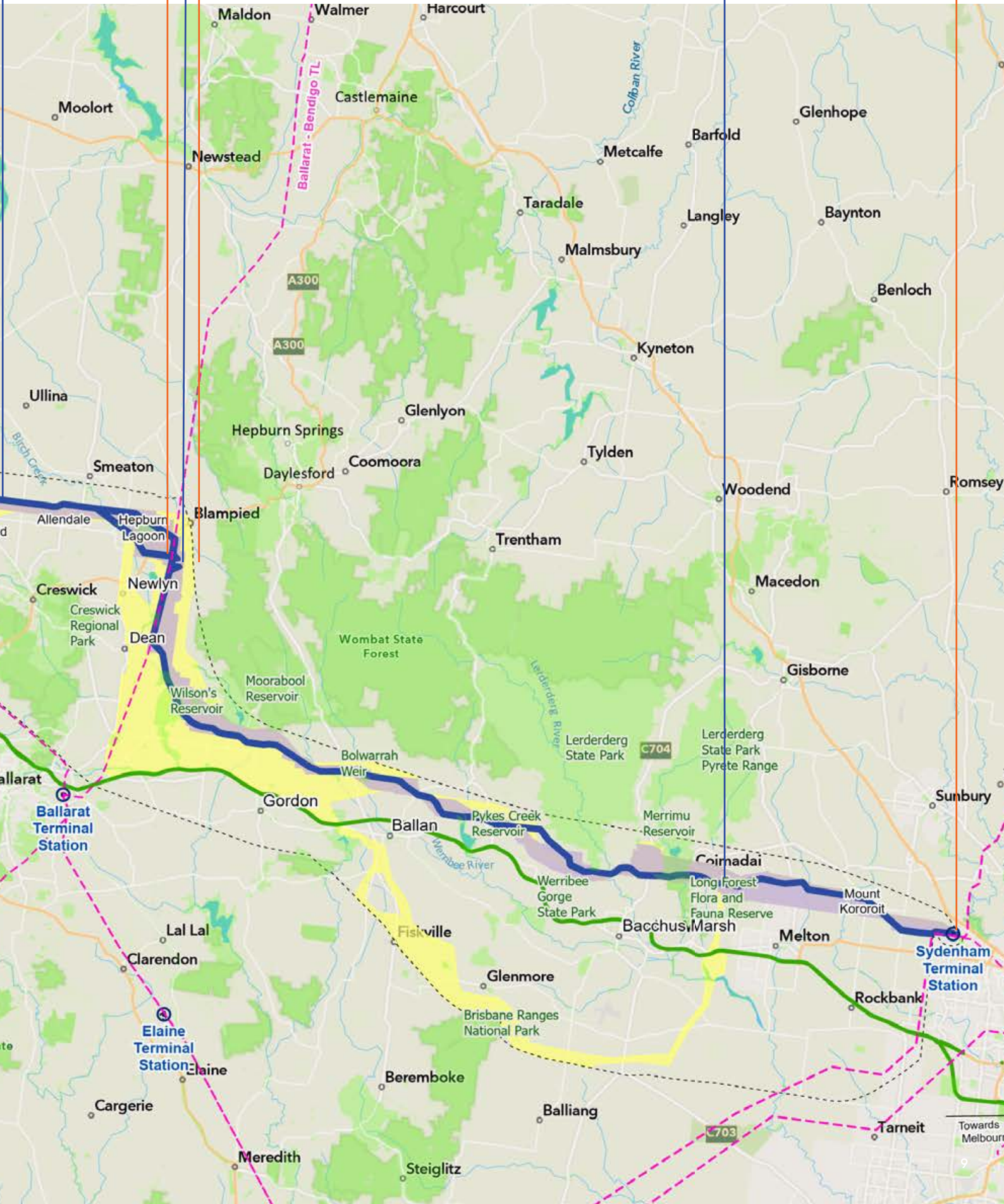
Mount Prospect to Long Forest

Terminal Station north of Ballarat is no longer required

Section 05

Long Forest to Sydenham

Sydenham Terminal Station Rebuild will be completed as a separate project





Communications and engagement framework

Engagement principles

AusNet is committed to delivering extensive and meaningful engagement, in an open, inclusive, accessible and timely manner throughout the planning and delivery of the project.

The approach is underpinned by four key values – Understanding, Openness, Respect and Responsiveness. AusNet engagement principles are framed by these values and guide both the design and delivery of all our communication and engagement activities.

<p>Understanding</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will seek to identify benefits for the community or areas for improvement based on feedback from the community. • We will seek to understand the community in which we operate, who will be interested and why. • We will seek to understand the impact of our project on the community that will be impacted and how.
<p>Openness</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will be open and transparent with all stakeholders. • We will be authentic in our dealings with stakeholders. • We will set clear expectations with stakeholders about what they can influence or provide input on.
<p>Respect</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will treat all stakeholders with respect. • We will ensure our information is useful and accessible to stakeholders. • We will engage with stakeholders as early as possible.
<p>Responsiveness</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will communicate with and respond to stakeholders in a timely manner. • We will ensure the information we provide is consistent and accurate. • We will deliver what we say we will, when we say we will.

Engagement objectives

The following engagement objectives provide the framework for how the project will engage stakeholders and community throughout the life of the project.

There will be multiple engagement activities undertaken during key project phases to seek feedback as we progress the planning and decision-making process. The project will promote all engagement activities and provide up-to-date information about the process, so that stakeholders and communities can easily and meaningfully have their say.

For the purpose of this plan, engagement is defined as a planned process with the purpose of working with communities and stakeholders to inform decisions, share knowledge and strengthen relationships.

Community, for the purpose of this project, refers to a group of people that has something in common such as identity, behaviours, interests or values. A community often shares a sense of place in a given geographical area (e.g., a country, city, town or neighbourhood) or in virtual space through communication platforms.

A stakeholder refers to an individual, group or organisation with a stake or interest in the outcome of a decision. Stakeholders may also have the ability to influence the decision given their role or position.

This plan acknowledges that groups or individuals may fall across both categories.

As such, 'community' is used in the broadest sense and also encompasses stakeholders.

Successful coordination and integration of stakeholder and community engagement, planning and design is critical to the achievement of successful project outcomes.



The communications and engagement objectives for this project are to:

- Facilitate genuine stakeholder and community engagement, seeking input to minimise impacts, maximise benefits and meet commitments made to the community.
- Strengthen relationships with the community and stakeholders to foster trust, awareness and understanding of the project.
- Establish and maintain social licence to develop, construct and operate through best practice community and stakeholder engagement.
- Provide timely information to all stakeholders, including the design, planning and approvals, construction and operations processes.
- Minimise impacts to stakeholders by proactively mitigating potential impacts and promptly responding to stakeholder inputs.

Key EES engagement phases

This section provides an overview of the key EES engagement phases, what the community can expect to hear from us and how community feedback will be used.

Table 1 Key engagement phases

Communications and engagement planned for project stage	Purpose of communications and engagement	How feedback is informing the project
Early 2020 Early stakeholder engagement	To build awareness of the project with local governments and agencies and help determine the best way to engage with those communities.	Stakeholder feedback helped to shape the engagement and communications approach including the project team's understanding of issues and points of interest.
Mid 2020 Area of Interest engagement and EES referral lodged	To build project awareness and commence landholder and community engagement to seek input on the project area of interest, including identification of places of environmental, social and community importance.	Community and landholder input assisted with identification of opportunities and constraints within the project Area of Interest to inform decision-making about identifying a project corridor.
Late 2020 Commencement of EES	To seek community and stakeholder feedback on the EES draft scoping requirements exhibited by DELWP (now DTP) on behalf of the Minister for Planning.	All submissions received were considered by DTP during the finalisation of the scoping requirements which set out the matters to be addressed in the EES. DTP provided AusNet with redacted copies of the submissions to maintain anonymity of the individual/organisation making the submission. This enabled AusNet and relevant specialists to understand the detail underpinning views expressed in submissions.



Stakeholders

The design of the communications and engagement approach aims to ensure all stakeholders that are likely to be impacted and interested in the project can contribute feedback to inform the project. This includes opportunities to avoid, minimise, mitigate and manage impacts.

Throughout all phases of engagement, we will continue to seek advice from local communities and Councils about community needs. This may include Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities, those facing time or mobility barriers, those with low literacy, or those who do not have the skills or access to technology to engage remotely. Where required, the project can provide assistance and support to enable individuals to access the project information and engagement tools and engage in the process.

As part of the development of this plan, an assessment was undertaken of the likely stakeholders for the project. This list is not exhaustive. As the project progresses, it is likely that additional stakeholders will be identified and likely areas of interest in the project will evolve.

Table 2 provides an overview of the stakeholder groups and their likely interest. At an individual stakeholder level, these interests may be more varied or specific. A more detailed list of stakeholders within these groups is provided in Appendix A.

Table 2 Project stakeholder analysis

Stakeholder group	Likely engagement interests and needs	Stakeholder approach
Landholders with a proposed easement on their land; and/or their land is proposed to be used temporarily for construction e.g., laydown construction facility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impacts to property during construction and operation (land use, business, visual impact, amenity and environmental impacts). • Access to properties for environmental investigations to inform the EES. • Health and safety concerns including electromagnetic fields and fire risk and management. • How feedback has been considered and/or influenced project or design decisions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted approach including one-on-one meetings and phone calls with a dedicated Land Liaison Officer as a central point of contact for the project. • Community information and engagement sessions. • Webinars. • Mailouts. • Community Consultation Group. • Dedicated project hotline and email. • Landholder guides and fact sheets.

Table 2 Project stakeholder analysis

Stakeholder group	Likely engagement interests and needs	Stakeholder approach
<p>Surrounding landholders: Landholders who live in the vicinity of the proposed route (no specific distance) but do not have a proposed easement on their property</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impacts to property during construction and operation (land use, business, amenity and environmental impacts). • Health and safety concerns including fire risk and management. • Locally specific information about the project, its progress and impacts. • Environmental, social and economic impacts. • Community impacts and benefits. • How feedback has been considered and/or influenced project or design decisions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community information and engagement sessions. • Webinars. • Fact sheets and printed materials. • Project updates. • Mailouts. • Community Consultation Group. • Landscape and visual assessments. • Meetings as requested. • Project updates. • Dedicated project hotline and email.
<p>Other community members</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Locally specific information about the project, its progress and impacts. • Environmental, social and economic impacts. • Community impacts and benefits. • Potential impacts to sites and areas with cultural heritage significance. • Local community benefits (and their equitable distribution). • Disruptions from construction. • Terminal station locations. • Reliability and security of network supply. • Input into preferred consultation approach. • How feedback has been considered and/or influenced project or design decisions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community information and engagement sessions. • Webinars and online engagement tools. • Fact sheets and printed materials. • Virtual information and interactive information session. • Community Consultation Group. • Project updates. • Advertising. • Dedicated project hotline and email.
<p>Consumer representatives</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental, social and economic impacts. • To be informed of approvals processes and opportunities for input. • Input into preferred consultation approach. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted meetings. • Project updates. • Fact sheets and printed communication materials.
<p>Industry and market participants</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic and technical aspects of the project. • Relevant social, economic and environmental impacts. • Future connection opportunities. • Interface activities with other transmission network service providers. • Input into preferred consultation approach. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted meetings. • Project updates. • Printed communication materials.

Table 2 Project stakeholder analysis

Stakeholder group	Likely engagement interests and needs	Stakeholder approach
Local councils across western Victoria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social and economic impacts on local residents and businesses including agriculture. • Environmental impacts including impacts on landscape and visual amenity. • Potential impacts to sites and areas with cultural heritage significance. • Local community impacts and local jobs creation. • Relevant permits and approvals processes including program and coordination. • Opportunities for communities and stakeholders to be involved in planning and approval processes. • Cumulative impacts of other projects occurring in the area. • Access to public areas for environmental investigations to inform the EES. • Input into preferred consultation approach. • How feedback has been considered and/or influenced project or design decisions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted project updates. • Council Advisory Group. • Technical Reference Group meetings. • Targeted meetings.
Members of Parliament	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental, social and economic impacts. • Community impacts and benefits. • Potential impacts to sites and areas with cultural heritage significance. • Measures to avoid, minimise and manage impacts and enhance community benefit. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted project updates. • Targeted meetings.
State Government (Department and Ministers)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental assessment and planning approvals processes. • Environmental, social and economic impacts. • Measures to avoid, minimise and manage impacts and enhance community benefit. • Access to public/crown land for environmental investigations to inform the EES. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted project updates. • Targeted meetings. • Technical Reference Group meetings.
Commonwealth Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental assessment and approval. • Environmental, social and economic impacts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted project updates. • Targeted meetings.
Regulators and policymakers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental assessment and approval. • Economic and technical aspects. • Delivery and compliance with necessary approvals/standards. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted project updates. • Targeted meetings. • Technical Reference Group meetings.
Industry bodies/associations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Network and economic impacts. • Environmental, social and economic impacts. • Input into preferred consultation approach. • How feedback has been considered and/or influenced project or design decisions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted meetings. • Project updates. • Printed communication materials.

Table 2 Project stakeholder analysis

Stakeholder group	Likely engagement interests and needs	Stakeholder approach
Special interest groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental, social and economic impacts. • Potential impacts to sites and areas with cultural heritage significance. • Approvals processes and opportunities for input. • Input into preferred consultation approach. • How feedback has been considered and/or influenced project or design decisions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Up-to-date and broad project information in an accessible format. • Community information and engagement sessions. • Webinars and online engagement tools. • Fact sheets and printed materials. • Project updates. • Webinars. • Briefings and meetings as requested. • Dedicated project hotline and email.
Community groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental, social and economic impacts. • Community impacts and benefits. • Potential impacts to sites and areas with tangible and intangible cultural heritage significance. • Approvals process and opportunities for input. • Input into preferred consultation approach. • How feedback has been considered and/or influenced project or design decisions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Up-to-date and broad project information in an accessible format. • Community information and engagement sessions. • Fact sheets and printed materials. • Project updates. • Webinars. • Community Consultation Group. • Briefings and meetings as requested. • Dedicated project hotline and email.
Registered Aboriginal Parties / Traditional Owner Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential impacts to sites and areas with cultural heritage significance. • Social and environmental impacts. • Economic and social benefits, particularly in relation to First Nations people participation and employment opportunities. • Land management issues for Crown land subject to (or under negotiation for) Land use Activity Agreement. • Input into preferred consultation approach. • How feedback has been considered and/or influenced project or design decisions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted project updates. • Targeted meetings. • Community forums. • Workshops. • Briefings. • Project updates. • Up-to-date and broad project information in an accessible format. • Fact sheets and printed materials.



Engagement activities and communication tools

This section provides an overview of the key engagement and communications activities that will be delivered throughout the EES process. As with all engagement processes, the project will evolve, as will the engagement approach. At each stage of the process, the project team will capture, and document lessons learnt to adjust the approach as required.

The following illustrates the range of communication and engagement tools and activities that will continue to be used to keep people informed and provide meaningful opportunities for involvement.

Community information and engagement sessions are face-to-face, drop-in sessions for local communities in the project area, and any other interested stakeholders, to receive project information and ask questions. These include opportunities to talk to specialists and project team members.

Online webinars provide the public with the opportunity to receive project updates and hear from technical specialists and the project team about key topics.

Pop-ups in local shopping centres provide the opportunity for the community to collect written information about the project and ask questions directly of the project team.

Dedicated project hotline and email provides a direct contact point for the community and stakeholders to ask questions and seek support to participate in the process. All public information and collateral can be made available to people via the project hotline and email.

Project collateral such as project fact sheets and guides are published on the website and distributed to landholders and at community engagement sessions to raise awareness of the project and opportunities to be involved. To ensure equitable access, all material and content available on the website is also made available in hard copy.

Project eUpdates (email updates) are distributed to subscribers at regular intervals and at key project milestones to keep people informed and highlight opportunities to get involved. Where requested, postal updates can also be distributed to individual households.

Project website provides regularly updated detailed project information, an interactive map, FAQs and project materials.

Interactive online mapping tool on the project website allows users to view the project corridors and proposed route from end-to-end and also to zoom in to view specific land parcels.

Online engagement hub built into the project website provides an interactive hub of project information and opportunities to participate through digital engagement tools.

Online question portal hosted on the engagement hub allows the public to submit specific questions to the project team at any time via the 'Contact us' page at www.westernrenewableslink.com.au/contact.

Stakeholder briefings are provided to project stakeholders including government representatives, interest groups, regulators, community members and landholders.

Community Consultation Group has been established to enhance communication both within the community and between the community and the project team.

Council Advisory Group is made up of key local council representatives to provide regular updates and input and feedback on key decisions. Meetings are held online or face-to-face.

Media and advertising through key local media outlets and digital channels is used to provide project updates and raise awareness of opportunities to participate in upcoming engagement.



Land Liaison Officers

In addition to the public and community stakeholder engagement methods outlined, one-on-one consultation with directly impacted landholders will be ongoing throughout all project phases. Delivered by a dedicated team of Land Liaison Officers, this engagement will focus on face-to-face meetings and direct email and phone channels.

Accessibility

Where required or requested, assistance will be provided to meet the needs of stakeholders.

This may include translations or interpreters including Auslan. Additional support or face-to-face engagement methods will be provided, including assistance with written collateral or providing hard copy collateral where stakeholders or communities face barriers to internet access. The project team will continue to work with local government and community groups to understand the needs of their communities and adapt engagement methods appropriately.

Community Engagement Summary Reports

A summary of engagement activities and the feedback received is made publicly available via the project website every six months. An eUpdate is sent to project subscribers and posted on the website at the end of each engagement phase or relevant project milestone. Hard copies are available upon request and can be sent via post.

The Community Engagement Summary Reports are available on the project website, resources page www.westernrenewableslink.com.au.

Engagement schedule

The engagement schedule in Table 3 provides a high-level overview of the engagement delivered to date as well as the proposed engagement schedule throughout the EES process, planning and approvals phase. The schedule will continue to be reviewed as the project progresses.

The engagement schedule has been developed to reflect the program of technical investigations and the planned schedule of meetings of the Technical Reference Group established for this EES. This allows the greatest opportunity to respond to project and community issues as they emerge. Upcoming topics and themes for consultation will be advertised on the project website and via collateral.

Stakeholder input and feedback will inform project investigations and decisions and we will ensure that matters of importance to project communities and individuals are explored through the EES process. Feedback received from stakeholders and the community can influence the EES and project outcomes in a variety of ways. This may include local knowledge which can contribute to additional investigations, changes to consultation activities to improve access, suggestions on how to avoid, minimise or manage impacts to individual properties, or opportunities to promote lasting community benefits.

At the end of each engagement phase or engagement activity, feedback will be collated and analysed. A public summary will be prepared reporting on activities undertaken, participation, feedback received and how this informed project and design decisions.

Engagement prior to EES Referral lodgement (2020)

AusNet commenced the project in late 2019 preparing for the planning, design, consultation, construction, operation and maintenance of new overhead transmission infrastructure proposed between Bulgana and Sydenham terminal stations. Stakeholder engagement commenced in early 2020. Initial engagement activities sought to build awareness of the project amongst local governments and agencies, understand existing and emerging community issues, and to seek advice on how best to engage with those communities. This feedback informed the development of this plan including engagement approach and methods.

In response to the declaration of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, the planned engagement approach was adjusted to reflect public health and safety advice. This included a pivot to online platforms including interactive engagement tools on the project website and a greater reliance on remote forms of engagement including phone calls, video conference and email.

An overview of early engagement completed prior to lodging an EES referral on 19 June 2020 can be found at www.planning.vic.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0032/474566/Attachment-G-Stakeholder-engagement-overview.pdf

Changes to the project

AusNet referred the Western Renewables Link project to the Minister for Planning for a new decision under the *Environment Effects Act 1978* (Vic) to reflect proposed changes to the project, including the removal of construction works associated with Sydenham Terminal Station. The Minister for Planning confirmed on 22 August 2023 that an Environment Effects Statement will be required for the Western Renewables Link project based on the new project form (as outlined in the referral no. 2023R-04), published to the Department of Transport and Planning website on 11 August 2023.

The Western Renewables Link is now proposed as a 500kV transmission line from Bulgana to Sydenham. As a result, the proposed terminal station to the north of Ballarat will no longer be required and new terminal station works will be required near Bulgana Terminal Station. The Sydenham Terminal Station Rebuild will be completed as a separate project in order to meet urgent timeframes.

Since the 2020 Referral, the construction of a new terminal station north of the existing Sydenham Terminal Station now no longer forms part of the project, though the Western Renewables Link will still need to connect into a terminal station at that location. These connection works will be included in the Western Renewables Link Environment Effects Statement assessment.

Table 3 High level overview of engagement delivered and proposed engagement schedule

EES engagement phase	Indicative time period	Key engagement activities	Parts of EES process it will inform
Early stakeholder engagement	Early to mid-2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch website with online engagement hub. • Targeted meetings/workshops. • Project eUpdate (or postal update where requested). • Printed communication materials including factsheets and flyers. • Dedicated project hotline and email. • Establish complaints process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EES engagement approach. • Stakeholder database. • Issues of concern and values for consideration in existing conditions assessments.
Area of interest engagement and EES referral lodged	Mid-2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update of online engagement hub. • Online community mapping tool to identify important destinations, sites and features within the Area of Interest. • Online community question and answer sessions. • Targeted meetings with landholders. • Dedicated project hotline and email. • Project eUpdate (or postal update where requested). • Printed communication materials including factsheets and flyers. • Advertising opportunities to be involved, key engagement stages and engagement activities. • Targeted briefings/workshops. • Public summary of engagement findings and how this has informed project decisions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EES engagement approach. • Stakeholder database. • Identification of preferred project corridor. • Preparation of existing conditions reports.
Commencement of EES	Late-2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoted exhibition of draft scoping requirements, undertaken by DELWP (now DTP). AusNet assisted DELWP to deliver a webinar to explain the purpose of the scoping requirements and how people could make submissions to DELWP. • Updated online engagement hub with EES information including link to DELWP (now DTP) website. • Dedicated project hotline and email. • Project eUpdate (or postal update where requested). • Printed communication materials including fact sheets. • Advertising. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Minister considered submissions received when finalising the scoping requirements. After removing all personal details, DTP provided the submissions to AusNet to incorporate relevant matters into the assessments for the EES.

Table 3 High level overview of engagement delivered and proposed engagement schedule

EES engagement phase	Indicative time period	Key engagement activities	Parts of EES process it will inform
<p>EES preparation and ongoing engagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single corridor (June 2021) • Proposed route (November 2021) • Updated proposed route (August 2022) • New EES referral (August 2023) <p>Engagement on Planning Scheme Amendment</p> <p>EES submission to DTP to review to ensure the draft EES adequately addresses the scoping requirements before it is released.</p>	<p>Early 2021 to 2024 (ongoing)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community information and engagement sessions involving technical specialists and covering key topics such as the proposed route, underground construction, agriculture, bushfire, visual impact, and the EES process. • Webinars and online community question and answer sessions. • Face-to-face discussion dinners and pop-up events in local shopping centres. • Targeted briefings, meetings and workshops. • Community Consultation Group. • Council Advisory Group. • Project materials including fact sheets, guides, maps, brochures and flyers published to the website and printed. • Website and online engagement hub updates. • Dedicated project hotline and email. • Interactive online mapping tool. • Database updates. • Project eUpdates (or postal update where requested). • Advertising. • Public summary of engagement findings. • Land Liaison Officers working with landholders on the proposed route to provide information about the project, listen to their concerns and work with them to understand their land use and requirements and minimise impacts through project design. • Updates regarding the 2023 EES referral and why it was required were communicated to landholders and community via eUpdate to project subscribers and a website update. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scope and methodology of EES technical investigations. • Preparation of existing conditions reports. • Project design, preparation of impact assessment and mitigations. • Opportunities to enhance social benefits. • Identification of the proposed corridor, proposed route and updates to the proposed route based on feedback and input from landholders and the community. • The alignment of the proposed transmission line easement, tower siting and access track locations has been determined in consultation with landholders. • Construction planning and approach.

EES engagement phase	Indicative time period	Key engagement activities	Parts of EES process it will inform
<p>Public exhibition and inquiry</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exhibition of the EES and Planning Scheme Amendment, followed by EES and Planning Scheme Amendment Inquiry Advisory Committee Public Hearing • At the conclusion of the Public Inquiry, the Inquiry Advisory Committee will deliver a written report to the Minister with conclusions and recommendations to inform the Minister's Assessment. 	<p>2024-2025</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website and online engagement hub updates. • Community information sessions. • Webinars and online community question and answer sessions. • Dedicated hotline and email. • Community Consultation Group. • Council Advisory Group. • Project eUpdates (or postal update where requested). • Mailouts • Printed communication materials including factsheets and summary reports. • Advertising. • Land Liaison Officers working with landholders on the proposed route. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inquiry report.
<p>Minister's Assessment of environmental effects</p>	<p>2025</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website and online engagement hub updates. • Dedicated project hotline and email. • Community Consultation Group. • Council Advisory Group. • Project eUpdates (or postal update where requested). • Mailout. • Printed communication materials including fact sheets. • Advertising. • Land Liaison Officers working with landholders on the proposed route. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minister's Assessment.

Recording, monitoring and reporting

Monitoring the effectiveness of our approach

AusNet is committed to continuous improvement of stakeholder and community engagement throughout the EES process. Monitoring the effectiveness and success of this plan will occur at regular intervals.

Project objectives and outcomes provide a framework for the monitoring and evaluation process. Table 4 provides a summary of the ways the project will monitor activities and measure outcomes. Some objectives and opportunities to capture evaluation data relate to the project delivery beyond the EES process.

Data will be captured as part of the EES program such as participation, reach and effectiveness of communication and engagement during the relevant phases and the project will be able to report against achieving engagement objectives.

In addition to the measures outlined below, the project team will meet regularly with the Technical Reference Group convened for the EES. These meetings will provide advice and review the EES process to ensure integrity and consistency with the *Environment Effects Act 1978 (Vic)* guidelines.

Table 4 How we will measure the effectiveness of our approach

Engagement objective	What we will measure	How we will measure it as part of the EES program
<p>Facilitate genuine stakeholder and community engagement, seeking input to minimise impacts, maximise benefits and meet commitments made to the community.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timely delivery of engagement activities to maximise opportunities to influence design and planning. • Transparency around what the public can influence and what cannot be Influenced. • Closing the loop with participants about how findings have informed project decision-making. • Participant satisfaction with delivery of engagement activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrated consideration of community and stakeholder input in project development and decision-making. • Participant feedback captured during engagement activities. • Report back to the community and Stakeholders.
<p>Strengthen relationships with the community and stakeholders to foster trust, awareness and understanding of the project.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How effectively the project has engaged with affected stakeholders and community. • How far engagement has reached. • How effective the project was in identifying stakeholders and their engagement needs. • Responsiveness to issues and complaints. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number and diversity of participants. • Website visits and downloads of information documents. • Participant feedback captured during engagement activities. • Monitoring issues/complaints recorded through stakeholder interactions.
<p>Establish and maintain social licence to develop, construct and operate through best practice community and stakeholder engagement.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How effectively was the engagement delivered in line with this plan. • How learnings from each phase influenced the approach. • How community and stakeholders interested in the project could contribute feedback to inform the project. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tracking of deliverables against the plan. • Annual stakeholder engagement surveys. • Documentation of how continual improvement of approach is occurring. • Feedback on how community and stakeholder input was used. • Demonstrated consideration of community and stakeholder input in project development/decision-making.

Engagement objective	What we will measure	How we will measure it as part of the EES program
<p>Provide timely information to all stakeholders, including the design, planning and approvals, construction and operations processes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How aware the community and stakeholders are of the project. • The timeliness of information received by community and stakeholders. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number and rate of website visits. • Number of participants. • Comparison of participation to the stakeholder analysis. • Review of methods used to distribute communications. • Participant feedback captured during engagement activities. • Monitoring issues/complaints recorded through stakeholder interactions.
<p>Minimise impacts to stakeholders by proactively mitigating potential impacts and promptly responding to stakeholder inputs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The timeliness of information received by impacted community and stakeholders regarding impacts. • Response times in getting back to enquiries from the public. • The extent to which the community and stakeholder contributes to impacts and mitigation actions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effectiveness of methods used to distribute communications. • Participant feedback captured during engagement activities. • Monitoring issues and complaints recorded through stakeholder Interactions. • Feedback from the project team on how community and stakeholder input was used. • Feedback from Technical Reference Group.

Our commitment to reporting back

The project will adopt a robust data collection method that allows for effective capturing and sharing of findings in accordance with the *Australian Privacy Act 1988*.

Data collected through face-to-face and online engagement activities will be consolidated and shared with the broader project team to inform planning, design and decision-making processes in an iterative way.

After each stage of engagement, the project will prepare a summary of engagement activities and feedback. All findings will then be consolidated into a single report when investigations conclude. This dedicated consultation report will form part of the EES document and will be publicly available through the EES exhibition process.

The EES consultation report will include a summary of who was engaged, how the project engaged and what matters the project engaged on. Importantly, it will share what was heard and how this feedback has been incorporated into the project planning and design process.

Consultation materials and public information will be updated throughout the EES to reflect emerging issues and new information as it becomes available. This will include the production of materials such as fact sheets or the addition of new Frequently Asked Questions to reflect common enquiries received through interactions and submissions.

A summary of engagement activities and the feedback received is made publicly available via the project website every six months. An eUpdate is sent to project subscribers and posted on the website at the end of each engagement phase or relevant project milestone. Hard copies are available upon request and can be sent via post.

The Community Engagement Summary Reports are available on the project website, resources page www.westernrenewableslink.com.au.



Appendix A: Stakeholder list

Stakeholder group	Key members	
Host landholders and surrounding landholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Landholders who have a proposed easement on their property 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residents with line-of-sight of transmission infrastructure (Surrounding Landholders)
Broader community members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local community within the project Area of Interest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Victoria-wide community
Consumer representatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Australian Energy Regulator Consumer Challenge Panel • Energy Consumers Australia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Major energy users • Public Interest Advisory Centre
Industry and market participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Property developers • Renewable energy stakeholders • Retailers • Transmission Network Service Providers (TNSPs) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Renewable energy generator developers • Victorian Network businesses • Energy generators
Local councils in Area of Interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City of Ballarat* • Hepburn Shire Council* • City of Melton* • Moorabool Shire Council* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Northern Grampians Shire Council* • Pyrenees Shire Council* • Ararat City Council <p>*Local Government Area that the proposed route passes through</p>

Stakeholder group	Key members	
Members of Parliament	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State Member for Buninyong • State Member for Koroit • State Member for Macedon • State Member for Melton • State Member for Ripon • State Member for Sydenham • State Member for Wendouree 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State Members for Western Victoria • State Members for Western Metropolitan • Federal Member for Ballarat • Federal Member for Gorton • Federal Member for Mallee • Federal Member for Wannon
State Government (Department and Ministers)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attorney General • Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action • Department of Health • Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions • Department of Premier and Cabinet • Department of Transport and Planning • Department of Treasury and Finance • Minister for Energy, Resources, and Climate Action • Minister for Industrial Relations • Minister for Industry and Innovation • Minister for Local Government • Minister for Planning • Minister for Regional Development • Minister for Trade and Investment • Minister for Treaty and First Peoples • Minister for Water • Premier • Regional Development Victoria • Shadow Minister for Energy and Resources • Shadow Minister for Environment and Climate Change • Shadow Minister for Planning • Valuer-General 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agriculture Victoria • Central Highlands Regional Partnership • Central Highlands Water • Corangamite Catchment Management Authority • Country Fire Authority • Electrical Safety Commission • Emergency Management Victoria • Energy Safety Victoria • Environment Protection Authority Victoria • Fire Rescue Victoria • First Peoples – State Relations • Forest Fire Management Victoria • Glenelg Hopkins Catchment Management Authority • Grampians Wimmera Mallee Water • Greater Western Water • Heritage Victoria • Invest Victoria • Melbourne Water • Municipal Association of Victoria • North Central Catchment Management Authority • Parks Victoria • Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment Management Authority • Southern Rural Water • Victorian Farmers Federation • Victorian Planning Authority • VicTrack • Wimmera Catchment Management Authority • Wimmera Southern Mallee Regional Partnership



Stakeholder group	Key members
Commonwealth Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner • Civil Aviation Safety Authority • Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry • Grampians Regional Development Australia • Melbourne Airport • Melbourne Regional Development Australia • Minister for Climate Change and Energy • Minister for the Environment and Water • The Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency
Regulators and policymakers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Australian Energy Regulator • Australian Energy Market Commission • Energy and Water Ombudsman Victoria • Essential Services Commission
Industry Bodies and Associations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Australian Energy Council • Central Victorian Greenhouse Alliance • Clean Energy Council • Committee for Ballarat • Energy Networks Australia • Highlands Potatoes and Ag Inc • RE Alliance
Special interest groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Australian Conservation Foundation • Australian Wind Alliance • Bacchus Marsh, Fiskville and Melton Airfields • Birdlife Australia • Bushwalking Victoria • Energy Grid Alliance • Environment Victoria • Eureka Orienteers • Environmental Justice Australia • Federation University • Friends of the Earth • Grampians New Energy Taskforce • Goldfields Track Association • Grow West • Great Dividing Trail Association • Loddon Mallee New Energy Taskforce • Melbourne and Ballarat Airports • Murray River Group of Councils • National Trust (Victoria) • Project Platypus • Victorian Farmers Federation • Victorian National Parks Association • Wimmera Development Association • Yes to Renewables

Stakeholder group

Key members

Community groups

- Key local environmental and interest groups (listed below according to LGA)

Ararat

- Western Victoria Transmission Network Project Rippon Association

Ballarat

- Ballarat Bushwalking and Outdoor Club
- Ballarat Climate Action Network
- Ballarat Environment Network
- Ballarat Field Naturalists Club
- Ballarat Renewable Energy and Zero Emissions (BREAZE)
- Bird Life Ballarat
- Miners Rest Landcare Group
- Regional Sustainability Alliance Ballarat

Hepburn

- Creswick and District Historical Society
- Hepburn Wind (Hepburn Community Wind Park Co-Operative Ltd)
- Kingston Power Alliance
- Mollongghip community energy
- Sustainable Hepburn Association
- Transitions Creswick
- Wattle Glen Landcare Group

Melton

- MacPherson Park users
- Melton Environment Group
- Pinkerton Landcare and Environment group
- Toolern Landcare Group to Melton

Moorabool

- Bacchus Marsh Community Coalition
- Bunanyung Landscape Alliance
- Coimadai Landcare Group
- Friends of the Lerderderg
- Friends of Werribee Gorge and Long Forest Mallee
- Lal Lal EPA
- Moorabool Catchment Landcare Group
- Moorabool and Central Highlands Power Alliance
- Moorabool Environment Group
- Moorabool Environment and Sustainability Advisory Committee (Council advisory committee)
- Moorabool Landcare Network
- Pentland Hills Landcare Group
- Regional Victoria Power Alliance
- Rowsley Landcare Group
- Stop Ausnet Towers

Northern Grampians

- Friends of the Grampians
- Wimmera Mallee Sustainability Alliance

Pyrenees

- Waubra Community Foundation
- Waubra Wind Farm Community Fund Inc.
- Other local community and action groups




Traditional Owner and Aboriginal Groups

Registered Aboriginal Parties and Traditional Owner Groups:

- Barengi Gadjin Land Council Aboriginal Corporation
- Boon Wurrung Foundation
- Djaara (Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation)
- Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation
- Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation
- Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation



Western Renewables Link

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PO Box 638, Ballarat VIC 3353

Information straight to your inbox

Sign up for information straight to your inbox at the project website www.westernrenewableslink.com.au.

Feedback

You can provide feedback on this document via our website www.westernrenewableslink.com.au or by calling 1300 360 795 or by emailing info@westernrenewableslink.com.au.

Translation and interpretation services



If you need an interpreter, please call 13 14 50.

If you are deaf and/or find hearing or speaking with people on the phone difficult, please contact the National Relay Service on voice relay number 1300 555 727, TTY number 133 677 or SMS relay number 0423 677 767.

Complaints

If you have a query, a compliment or a complaint, you can let us know by using the online enquiry form on www.westernrenewableslink.com.au. Or you can let us know by:

 1300 360 795
 info@westernrenewableslink.com.au
 PO Box 638, Ballarat VIC 3353

You can also lodge a complaint or provide feedback directly to your Land Liaison Officer.

Complaint handling steps:

1. You can lodge a complaint with AusNet as outlined above.
2. We will acknowledge receipt of a complaint within two working days.
3. We aim to resolve the complaint within ten working days.
4. Where we cannot reach a resolution within ten working days, we will keep you informed of the progress being made with handling the complaint and provide a revised timeframe for resolving the complaint.
5. At any time, you may request to have your complaint escalated to the project senior management team.

If your complaint or question relates to the RIT-T process, you can raise it with AEMO by emailing WestVicRITT@aemo.com.au.

If your complaint or question relates to the Environment Effects Statement process, you can raise it with the Department of Transport and Planning by emailing environment.assessment@delwp.vic.gov.au.

If your complaint cannot be resolved, you can escalate your complaint to the Energy and Water Ombudsman Victoria.

Other sources of information

Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner (www.aeic.gov.au) including information about how to make a complaint, best industry practice and resources for landholders.

Australian Energy Market Operator

(www.aemo.com.au) including information on the Regulatory Investment Test for Transmission (RIT-T) process for this project.

Energy and Water Ombudsman Victoria

(www.ewov.com.au) including information about complaints and dispute resolution.

Energy Safe Victoria

(www.esv.vic.gov.au) including information about the safe design and operation of high voltage transmission networks in Victoria.

Environment Effects Statement Process in Victoria

(www.planning.vic.gov.au/environmental-assessments/environmental-assessment-guides) including information about the environment assessment process managed by the Department of Transport and Planning.

Essential Services Commission

(www.esc.vic.gov.au) including information about the regulation of transmission licenses in Victoria and the Electricity Transmission Company Land Access Code of Practice.

Valuer General of Victoria

(www.land.vic.gov.au/valuations/first-time-here/about-valuer-general-victoria) including general information about how land is valued in Victoria.

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