

Gippsland Offshore Wind Transmission 2 GW Project

Environment Effects Statement
(EES) Consultation Plan

11/03/2025

Acknowledgements

We acknowledge the Gunaikurnai people, and in particular the Brataualung and Brayakaulung clans, as the original custodians of the land, water, sea and sky of much of Gippsland, including the areas in which this project will be undertaken. We acknowledge Gunaikurnai First Peoples' unique ability to care for Country and their deep spiritual connection to it.

We honour Elders past and present whose knowledge and wisdom has ensured the continuation of Gunaikurnai culture and lore. We are committed to genuinely partnering and meaningfully engaging with Victoria's First Peoples to support self-determination, the protection of Country, and the endurance of spiritual and cultural practices in the 21st century and beyond.

VicGrid 

VICTORIA
State
Government 

Document control

Document history

V0.1	29 October 2024	Draft submitted for DTP Impact Assessment Unit review
V0.2	25 November 2024	Distributed for TRG review
V1	13 February 2025	Distributed for second TRG review
V2	11 March 2025	Final, approved to be released

Contents

1.	Introduction	4
1.1	Purpose of this plan	5
2.	The project.....	6
2.1	Context.....	6
2.2	Project objectives	7
2.3	Project description.....	8
2.4	Study area	8
2.5	Transmission study area refinement process	9
3.	Project stakeholders	11
3.1	Background and social context	11
3.2	Overview of stakeholders.....	12
3.3	Traditional Owners and First Peoples.....	19
3.4	Landholder engagement	19
4.	Engagement to date	20
4.1	Relevant standards	20
4.2	Engagement activities undertaken to date.....	22
4.3	Feedback to date	23
4.4	Evaluation of engagement outcomes.....	24
4.5	Community benefits sharing	25
5.	EES consultation approach	26
5.1	Consultation objectives	26
5.2	Managing engagement challenges and contingency planning	26
5.3	Engagement program	27
5.4	Communications and engagement methods and tools.....	30
5.5	Inclusive and accessible engagement approach	32
5.6	How feedback will inform the EES	32
5.7	How feedback will be captured and considered	34
5.8	Recording and reporting of feedback.....	34
6.	Monitoring and evaluation	35
6.1	Monitoring and evaluation of EES engagement	35
7.	Responding to complaints.....	36
7.1	Project contact details	36
8.	Data protection and privacy	37

1. Introduction

Victoria's energy system is changing. Coal-fired power stations are becoming unreliable and closing down. There is an urgent need to change our power grid to carry energy from new renewable sources and batteries across the state to Victorian homes, businesses, hospitals, schools and other vital services. VicGrid is ensuring this change delivers the safe, reliable and affordable power Victoria needs to keep the lights on.

VicGrid is putting in place a new way of planning energy infrastructure that gives First Peoples, landholders, communities, and regional stakeholders a real voice in the process and ensures the benefits of the energy transition are shared more fairly.

Offshore wind plays a key role in the energy transition and Victoria has some of the best offshore wind resources in the world. Areas off the coast of Gippsland are Australia's first declared offshore wind zone and a second zone has also been declared in the Southern Ocean region off Victoria's South West coast.

The Victorian Government has set ambitious targets of generating at least 2 gigawatts (GW) of offshore wind power by 2032, 4 GW by 2035, and 9 GW by 2040.

To support the achievement of the first 2 GW target, VicGrid is developing the Gippsland Offshore Wind Transmission 2 GW project (the project), a new transmission line to connect offshore wind energy to the power grid.

A coordinated approach will minimise the amount of transmission lines required – avoiding the potential 'spaghetti effect' of multiple powerlines; minimising impacts on local communities, cultural heritage and the environment; and keeping energy bills down.

On 24 September 2024, the Minister for Planning declared the project as public works under the Victorian *Environment Effects Act 1978* (EE Act), meaning that VicGrid must prepare an Environment Effects Statement (EES) for the project.

On 15 November 2024, under delegation from the Commonwealth Minister for the Environment, the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water declared the project a controlled action under the Commonwealth *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act). Assessment of the project under the EPBC Act is to occur through the EES process under the bilateral agreement between the Commonwealth and Victoria.

The EES must assess the potential environmental effects of the project, including impacts on biodiversity and ecological values, cultural heritage, social, surface water environments, visual, landscape, agricultural, and other land use values. It will also evaluate the feasibility of measures to avoid, mitigate, and manage these impacts.

The matters to be investigated and documented will be outlined in the scoping requirements, issued by the Victorian Minister for Planning after a period of public exhibition and feedback.

The EE Act requires 'the proponent to prepare and implement a public consultation plan for informing the public and consulting with stakeholders during the preparation of the EES'. Further information on the EES process is available at www.planning.vic.gov.au/environmental-assessments/environmental-assessment-guides/environment-effects-statements-in-victoria.

1.1 Purpose of this plan

Consultation is an important part of the EES process, playing a vital role in building understanding of the project and its potential impacts. It enables stakeholders, communities and Traditional Owners to participate and provide feedback on local knowledge and experience to inform project development and technical assessments. Engaging with all stakeholders, including government stakeholders and decision-makers, is essential to fostering confidence in the project's processes, ensuring transparency, and supporting informed decision-making.

This EES Consultation Plan (the plan) sets out how VicGrid will:

- identify stakeholders and their perspectives and/or concerns
- inform stakeholders, communities and Traditional Owners about the project, the program of EES studies, and how they can be involved
- seek feedback from people during the preparation of the EES
- respond to enquiries
- explain how feedback is used.

The plan has been developed in accordance with the *Ministerial Guidelines for Assessment of Environmental Effects under the EE Act* (<https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/environmental-assessments/environmental-assessment-guides/ministerial-guidelines-for-assessment-of-environmental-effects>).

It will be reviewed and updated in response to stakeholder feedback as the project progresses.

2. The project

2.1 Context

The Victorian Government has committed to emissions reduction through the *Climate Change Act 2017*, which establishes a long-term target of net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2045. Meeting net-zero emissions will require unprecedented amounts of renewable energy generation to meet the demand for electricity.

To support achieving net-zero emissions, the Victorian Government has legislated offshore wind energy generation targets, including an initial target of at least 2 GW of installed offshore wind energy capacity by 2032.

In December 2022, the Commonwealth Minister for Climate Change and Energy declared an area in Bass Strait off the coast of Gippsland in Victoria as suitable for offshore renewable energy generation. In May 2024, the first feasibility licences for offshore wind projects in this declared area were awarded.

About VicGrid

VicGrid is the Victorian Government body responsible for coordinating the development of Victoria's renewable energy zones (REZs).

VicGrid is putting in place a long-term strategic plan – the Victorian Transmission Plan – that will identify what renewable energy generation, storage and transmission projects Victoria needs, when they will be needed and where they should be built.

The plan will aim to ensure an affordable, reliable, safe and secure transition to net-zero emissions. The approach also aims to build community understanding and support for the energy transition and encourage and coordinate energy industry investment.

To build trust and minimise impacts, VicGrid is transforming how community engagement is conducted for transmission projects. Unlike past projects, VicGrid emphasises early, ongoing dialogue and transparent information sharing, ensuring community feedback helps shape planning and decisions.

The Gippsland Offshore Wind Transmission 2 GW project is VicGrid's first project to be delivered under this new framework, demonstrating VicGrid's commitment to a new standard of collaborative project development.

VicGrid's commitment to improved community engagement extends beyond simply holding meetings. It actively seeks diverse perspectives, including those of Traditional Owners, key stakeholders, landholders, local community groups, and businesses to ensure all voices are heard. This is achieved through a range of engagement methods, including online platforms, community-led roundtable meetings, interactive workshops, a local presence at the Rosedale hub, and face-to-face conversations in local communities. By fostering a culture of open communication and collaboration, VicGrid aims to build lasting relationships and ensure the benefits of the energy transition are shared equitably across Victoria.

VicGrid's responsibilities include:

- Coordinating the planning and development of Victoria's REZs.
- Changing how electricity transmission infrastructure is planned and developed to benefit all Victorians, through the Victorian Transmission Investment Framework (VTIF). - a policy and planning framework that will support Victoria's renewable energy transition and deliver cheaper, more reliable renewable energy to homes and businesses.
- Coordinating the delivery of the transmission required to connect new offshore wind energy resources to the grid.
- Working with the Australian Energy Market Operator (AEMO) to deliver major infrastructure upgrades.
- Engaging with landholders, First Peoples, communities and industry much earlier than under previous arrangements to make sure our approach improves outcomes and minimises impacts on host communities and the environment.
- Investing an initial \$480 million in projects to strengthen and modernise Victoria's energy grid.

2.2 Project objectives

VicGrid's Offshore Wind Transmission Development and Engagement Roadmap sets out the following 11 objectives for coordinated offshore wind transmission:

- Ensure that Victoria has sufficient transmission infrastructure in place to power our state as energy demand increases and ageing coal-fired generators close.
- Support Victoria's offshore wind energy targets, the 95% renewable energy target by 2035 and the net-zero emissions target by 2045.
- Guide efficient, effective and responsible investment in viable transmission infrastructure that is high performing, resilient and built with future needs in mind.
- Ensure that energy consumers and Victorian taxpayers do not pay unnecessary costs for duplicative infrastructure.
- Provide confidence to offshore wind project developers that their energy can connect to the grid in a timely manner.
- Reduce cumulative impacts on land, environment and communities.
- Reflect and uphold the critical values, expectations and priorities of First Peoples, host landholders and communities, and stakeholders.
- Ensure benefits that flow from new transmission infrastructure developments is appropriate and equitable.
- Facilitate a simpler and more straightforward consultation process for local communities.
- Ensure that the surrounding communities are kept as safe as possible from any incident that may occur during the construction and ongoing operation of the project.
- Adopt the very best in technology and process to minimise risk within the landscape of the proposed study area.

2.3 Project description

The Gippsland Offshore Wind Transmission 2 GW project is proposed to connect future offshore wind energy generation off the coast of Gippsland to the existing Victorian electricity grid.

The project broadly comprises:

- a double-circuit, 500 kilovolt (kV) high-voltage alternating current (HVAC) overhead transmission line
- an onshore connection hub, comprising high-voltage substation plant and equipment, including transformers, synchronous condensers and switchgear
- a grid connection substation near Loy Yang Power Station.

The transmission line will be supported by a series of above-ground towers between the connection hub in Giffard to the grid connection point near the Loy Yang Power Station.

The final location and design of each tower, including the foundation types and total footprint, is dependent on the specific ground conditions, environmental constraints and distance between other towers. Proposed transmission tower locations will be determined after a preferred route is identified and in consultation with landholders.

The following is not part of the project:

- the offshore windfarms and associated onshore and offshore transmission infrastructure
- the REZ Curtailment and Abatement Service (RCAS)
- future infrastructure required to support the longer-term targets for offshore wind energy
- geotechnical and environmental investigations, site surveys and locating existing utilities and services not connected to the construction and operation of the project.

2.4 Study area

In March 2024, VicGrid confirmed the study area for the transmission needed to achieve at least 2 GW of offshore wind energy. The study area is 50 km to 55 km in length and has a width varying from 3 km to 12 km. It starts around 6 km inland from the coast, in the area of Giffard, and extends north-west past Stradbroke West to Willung, across to Flynns Creek and terminates at the Loy Yang Power Station (Figure 1).

Selecting a broad study area helps to retain flexibility to respond to new information that is identified through community and landholder engagement, technical studies and field work.

The study area will be refined to a preferred corridor, and then a preferred route. Refer to Section 2.5 for information on the refinement process.

The study area is nominated as the project area for the purpose of the EES. A more specific project area and footprint will not be determined until further technical studies and on-ground environmental assessments are undertaken. It is anticipated that the final disturbance footprint would be less than approximately 2% of the study area.

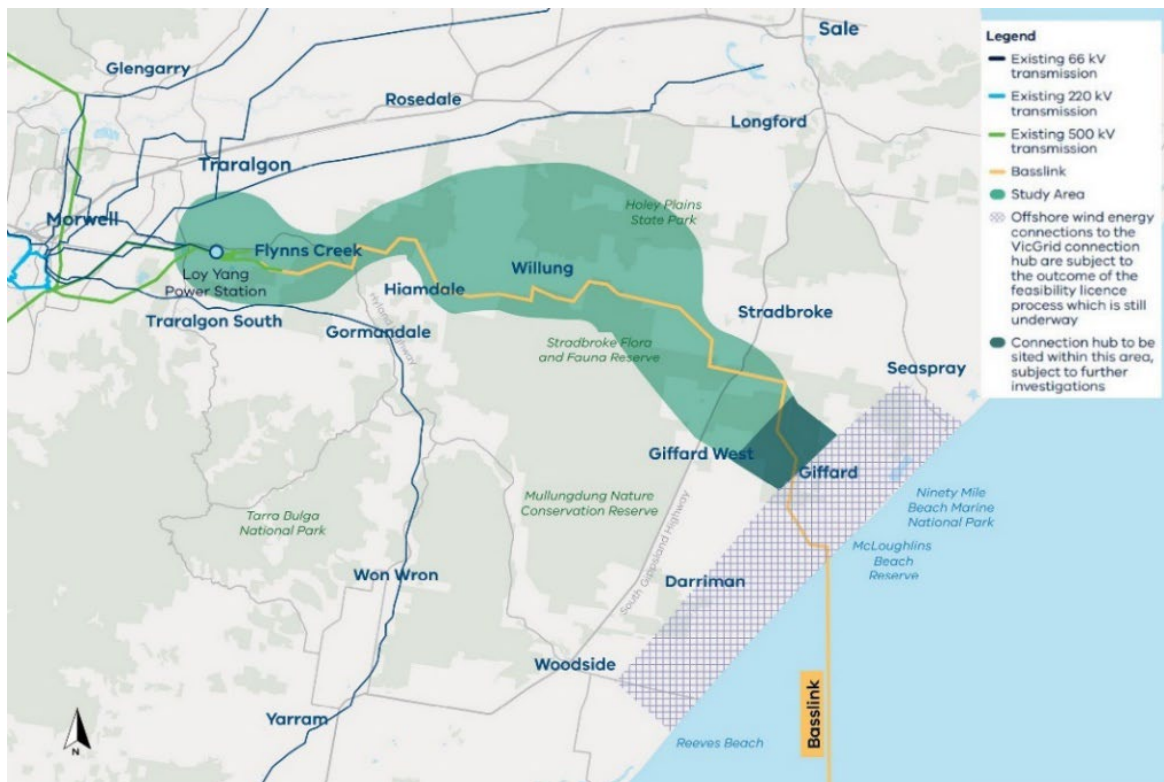


Figure 1: Study area and indicative connection hub

2.5 Transmission study area refinement process

The study area will be iteratively refined to a preferred corridor, then a route and easement.

VicGrid is refining the transmission study area by applying a range of criteria to help understand and compare potential impacts and identify suitability of land for hosting transmission.

The refinement process is designed to consider technical, environmental, social and economic factors, and aims to minimise the project's impact on host communities.

There are three key stages of refinement:

- Study area: A broad geographic area for the proposed offshore wind transmission that VicGrid will progressively narrow over time to a corridor or corridors.
- Corridor: One or more geographic areas of connected land narrowed down from the study area.
- Route: Narrower area and final stage before easement selection, with micro-siting of towers to minimise impacts on land use and operations.

The route will form the basis of the reference design, which will be used for the impact assessment in the EES.

The final project design will be defined as an easement, a legally secured right-of-way for the transmission infrastructure to be built and maintained.

Figure 2 depicts the timeframes for the refinement process and its interface with the study program and EES process. The preferred corridor will be determined concurrently with the commencement of the existing conditions reports, and the reference design will be determined prior to the commencement of the impact assessment reports.

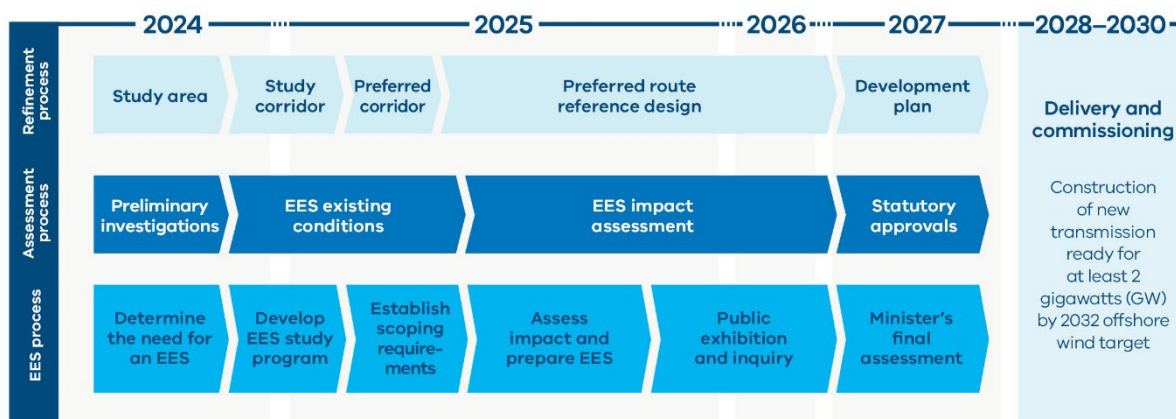


Figure 2: Alignment of the EES, assessment and refinement processes

The refinement process will be carried out concurrently with the development of the EES and will be informed by technical investigations and extensive fieldwork, as well as landholder and community engagement. An integral part of the refinement process is the place-based, collaborative approach to engagement with landholders, communities and First Peoples. This is discussed in Section 4.

VicGrid has completed preliminary desktop investigations to identify and assess areas suitable for further investigations. In December 2024, VicGrid provided a public update on this work and identified:

- areas not suitable for further investigation, which have been removed from the study area
- areas suitable for further investigation to host transmission infrastructure.

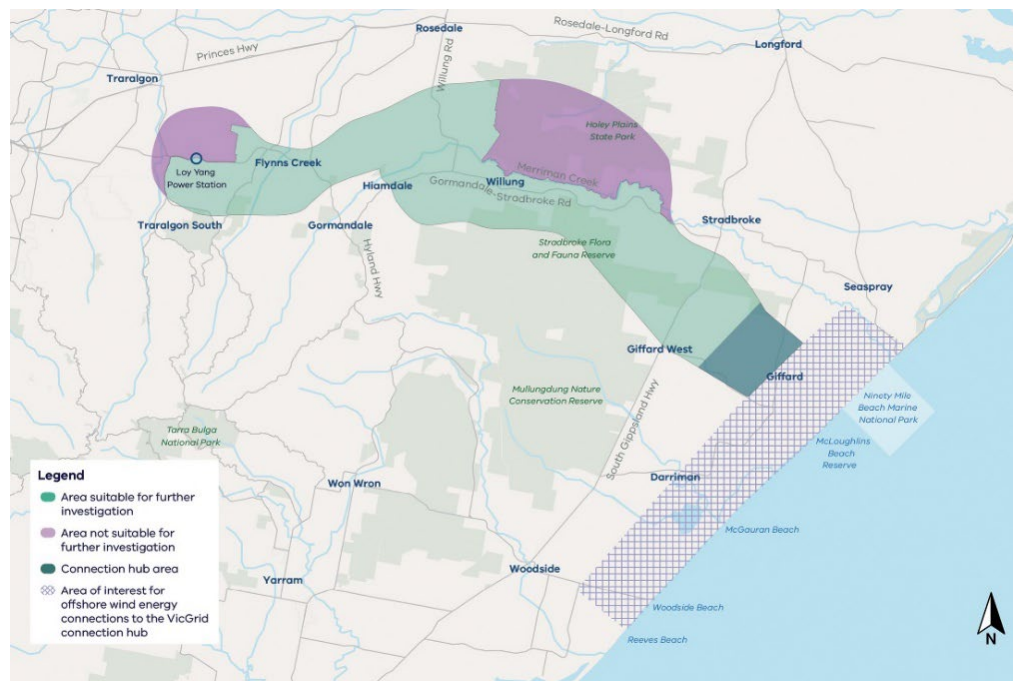


Figure 3: Refined study area map

3. Project stakeholders

3.1 Background and social context

The project is located in the Gippsland region, which spans both coastal and rural areas and includes towns such as Traralgon, Giffard and Yarram, governed by the Latrobe City Council and Wellington Shire Council. According to the 2021 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data, Gippsland has a population of around 271,000, with a predominantly rural, low-density population.

Community profile

- Median age: Gippsland's median age is 45, significantly higher than the Victorian state median of 37, reflecting its ageing population.
- Cultural diversity: The region has a rich European heritage, particularly among Italian and Greek communities, alongside a growing presence of immigrants from South and Southeast Asia.
- Employment and industries: Agriculture, energy production, and manufacturing are the main drivers of Gippsland's economy. The region is renowned for its dairy farming, beef production, cropping, and timber industries. Energy production, traditionally coal-based, is now transitioning to renewables, creating challenges and opportunities for the workforce.
- Education and skills: Educational attainment in Gippsland is below the Victorian average, with fewer residents holding tertiary qualifications. However, institutions like Federation University and TAFE Gippsland are critical in reskilling and preparing the workforce for renewable energy industries.
- First Peoples: The Gunaikurnai people, the Traditional Owners of the land, hold deep cultural connections to the region. Several culturally significant sites exist within the project area, necessitating close collaboration with the Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation (GLaWAC) to protect and honour cultural heritage.

Socio-economic context

The Gippsland region has historically been a hub for energy production, predominantly through coal-fired power stations like Yallourn Power Station and Loy Yang Power Station. With the transition to renewable energy and the planned closures of these coal-fired power plants, the region is shifting toward sustainable energy solutions. This project is critical to support this transition, helping to connect offshore wind energy to the electricity grid.

The region's social fabric is deeply connected to agriculture, with many local communities in Giffard and Willung relying on farming as a primary economic activity. The local reliance on farming highlights the importance of balancing land use needs with the development of new infrastructure.

As Gippsland transitions to renewable energy, the project brings opportunities for job creation and economic diversification, addressing concerns about the region's economic future as traditional energy sources are phased out. However, there are also concerns about land use impacts, environmental preservation, and the protection of multi-generational livelihoods.

3.2 Overview of stakeholders

Stakeholders are individuals or organisations that affect or can be affected by a project. Engagement should give a voice to the broadest range of attitudes, interests, and perspectives within the project's context. Throughout the engagement process, consideration will be given to those potentially affected by or interested in the project decisions and outcomes. Key stakeholders for the project are summarised in Table 1.

EES Technical Reference Group

The technical reference group (TRG) is set up by the department and membership drawn from government agencies, regional authorities, municipal councils and registered Aboriginal parties (RAPs) that have a statutory, policy or technical interest in relation to the project. TRGs are formed project-by-project and are guided by specific terms of reference developed by the department.

VicGrid participates in TRG meetings by providing information and promoting, discussing, or responding to project and EES issues.

The project TRG members are:

- Country Fire Authority (CFA)
- Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) (Agriculture Victoria)
- DEECA (Regions, Planning and Environmental Assessments)
- Department of Transport and Planning (DTP) (State Planning Assessment and Facilitation)
- DTP (Gippsland)
- Environment Protection Authority (EPA)
- First People State Relations
- GLaWAC
- Heritage Victoria
- Latrobe City Council
- Wellington Shire Council
- Parks Victoria
- West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority

Key stakeholders

Note: this list is not in order of priority or importance.

Table 1: Key stakeholders

Category	Key stakeholders	Key stakeholder interest/s
Statutory decision-makers	<p>Commonwealth and state energy, environment and treasury ministers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Hon. Chris Bowen MP – Minister for Climate Change and Energy (Cth) The Hon. Tanya Plibersek MP – Minister for the Environment and Water (Cth) The Hon. Jaclyn Symes MP (Vic) – Treasurer of Victoria The Hon. Lily D'Ambrosio MP (Vic) – Minister for Energy and Resources The Hon. Sonya Kilkeny MP (Vic) – Minister for Planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Holistic understanding of project rationale and process Project objectives support broader energy, planning and environment policies Project cost Community and stakeholder sentiment and consultation
Elected representatives	<p>Commonwealth:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Darren Chester MP– Member for Gippsland Russell Broadbent MP - Member for Monash <p>State:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Hon. Harriet Shing MP - Member for Eastern Victoria Region Danny O'Brien - Member for Gippsland South Jordan Crugnale - Member for Bass 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Electorate / constituent issues Community consultation process
Commonwealth Government departments and agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW) Department of Industry, Science and Resources (DISR) Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offshore wind industry development and regulation Effective management of the energy market and grid performance Network planning Project objectives support broader renewable energy policies Environmental approvals

Category	Key stakeholders	Key stakeholder interest/s
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner (AEIR) 	
Victorian Government departments and agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC) Department of Treasury and Finance (DTF) Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Change (DEECA) Department of Transport and Planning (DTP) Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions (DJSIR) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project rationale, benefits, timeline, scope, delivery Coordination and alignment with broader Victorian energy projects Opportunities to review key project information Impacts to services and operation during project construction and ongoing maintenance Compliance and conformance with relevant legislation. Providing detailed technical and procedural guidance on aspects of the EES Process
Energy market and regulatory bodies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Australian Energy Market Operator (AEMO) Australian Energy Regulator (AER) Australian Energy Market Commission (AEMC) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential impacts to the transmission and energy network Network and transmission planning Energy network rules
Statutory bodies	<p>Regional focus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regional Development Victoria (RDV) Agriculture Victoria Parks Victoria <p>Regulatory authorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Environment Protection Authority (EPA) Worksafe Victoria <p>Water and catchment management authorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gippsland Water Southern Rural Water East Gippsland Water West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority <p>Emergency services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Victoria Police 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding project rationale and benefits Environmental impacts relating to sphere of influence/responsibility, e.g. irrigation districts Involvement in decisions that may impact assets and operations Emergency management and response Public safety

Category	Key stakeholders	Key stakeholder interest/s
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emergency Management Victoria (EMV) State Emergency Service (SES) Country Fire Authority (CFA) Ambulance Victoria Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) Energy Safe Victoria (ESV) Essential Services Commission (ESC) 	
Local government, incl. interfaces and alliance groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wellington Shire Council Latrobe City Council South Gippsland Shire Council One Gippsland 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impacts on council plans, planning schemes and local approvals pathways Understanding and avoiding/minimising adverse impacts on local environment, residents, and businesses Opportunities to regenerate or transition local industries, businesses, and the economy Community consultation process
Registered Aboriginal Parties and Traditional Owners	Registered Aboriginal Party: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation (GLaWAC) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partnership and collaboration as rights holders Impact on land, sky and sea, country and cultural values Compliance with legislation and regulations (e.g. Native Title Act) Yoorrook Justice Commission Development of Cultural Heritage Management Plans (CHMP) Opportunities for Aboriginal businesses and employment
Landholders and residents in and near the transmission study area	Landholders comprise: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Directly impacted (they are located in the study area) Indirectly impacted (they are located near the study area) <p>It is important to note that landholders are diverse and have differing perspectives depending on factors, including but not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Property size Property history, e.g. multigenerational ownership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding the 'why' of the project: why is it needed and why here? Visual impacts of overhead transmission and substations Impacts on agricultural land: fragmentation, reduced ability to farm Transmission technology types (e.g. overhead and underground, tower types) Support to understand highly technical information

Category	Key stakeholders	Key stakeholder interest/s
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Property use, e.g. primarily residential or primarily farming/commercial (such as forestry) • Property location, e.g. scenic/coastal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compensation and land use planning arrangements • Benefit sharing arrangements • Impact on property values / council rates • Transparency / responsiveness of the project to concerns/questions raised
Community groups	<p>Local community groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voices of the Valley • Better Transmission Gippsland (BTG) <p>Special interest groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Landcare • Biodiversity • Friends-of groups • Recreational clubs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transmission technology types (e.g. overhead and underground, tower types) • Support to understand highly technical information • Understanding the broader energy transition • Benefit sharing arrangements • Community consultation process • Cumulative impacts of multiple projects in the region • Impacts on tourism • Biodiversity
Peak bodies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) • Committee for Gippsland (C4G) • Gippsland Trades and Labour Council • GROW Gippsland • Environment Victoria • Victorian National Parks Association (VNPA) • Gippsland Climate Change Network (GCCN) • Destination Gippsland • Clean Energy Council (CEC) • Australian Wind Alliance (AWA) • Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VCCI) • Energy Networks Australia (ENA) • Australian Energy Council (AEC) • GippsDairy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impacts relating to sphere of influence/responsibility, e.g. agricultural/farming operations • Regional economic development and how benefits of the energy transition flow through to local communities and businesses, e.g. jobs and investment • Growth of major new industries to replace coal-focused industries • Environmental and amenity impacts

Category	Key stakeholders	Key stakeholder interest/s
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Energy Consumers Australia • Trade unions • Chambers of commerce 	
Industry – energy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transmission network service providers (TNSPs) • Offshore wind energy developers (holding feasibility licences) • Other projects (including onshore renewable energy projects) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordination with existing, planned, and future development activities • Impact on current and upcoming projects • Connection points and network access • Interface with infrastructure • Involvement in project development and assessment • Coordination with existing stakeholder and community engagement mechanisms • VicGrid’s role in coordinating projects, offshore and onshore
Utilities and essential services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Telecommunications • Gas • Electricity distribution • Water distribution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impacts on and protection of utility assets • Future planning • Protecting current and future pipeline corridors
Education and jobs/training providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Federation University Australia (Gippsland Campus) • TAFE Gippsland • Morwell Innovation Centre <p>Schools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary • Secondary • Technical 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrating energy issues into training programs, school curriculum and excursions • Potential partnerships for research and evaluation
Wider Victorian community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gippsland residents and communities • Energy consumers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact on energy prices • Growth of new offshore wind industry in Victoria
Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Gippsland print news, radio and social media • Energy podcasts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear information and updates about the project • Involvement in key milestone media opportunities

Category	Key stakeholders	Key stakeholder interest/s
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Energy trade publications • Victorian and national print news, radio and social media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role in shaping public understanding of the impacts and benefits of offshore wind transmission

3.3 Traditional Owners and First Peoples

VicGrid understands and respects Traditional Owners' legal and cultural rights, along with their deep connections with Country and Sea Country as original custodians. VicGrid is committed to the *Pupangarli Marnmarnepu 'Owning Our Future' Aboriginal Self-Determination Reform Strategy* and will continue to build a partnership approach with GLaWAC.

Building on the principles of the GLaWAC Pathways to Partnership approach for major projects, VicGrid will continue discussions with GLaWAC on ways to minimise potential impacts to tangible and intangible cultural heritage and values.

Partnerships with Traditional Owners and First Peoples will support the protection of Country, maintain spiritual and cultural heritage and practices, and acknowledge broader aspirations if First Peoples are impacted by new critical energy infrastructure.

3.4 Landholder engagement

VicGrid recognises the importance of landholders in the transmission study area as key stakeholders in the planning and delivery of the project and has been engaging directly with landholders across Gippsland since 2023.

VicGrid is committed to building transparent and collaborative relationships with landholders, respecting their property rights and working to minimise the project's impacts on host communities.

Feedback to date has already informed the identification of the study area. VicGrid will continue to engage with landholders to build their feedback, concerns and local knowledge into project decision-making, including decisions about corridor refinement, impact assessments and approaches for mitigating impacts.

Engagement activities will include:

- individual and group meetings to provide personalised information and discuss specific impacts
- a dedicated landholder liaison team to offer ongoing support
- updates on project progress, compensation processes, and land access requirements.

4. Engagement to date

4.1 Relevant standards

VicGrid is committed to giving landholders, communities and First Peoples an active voice in the planning and delivery of the project. It is important to consult with these stakeholders and First Peoples authentically and regularly to ensure they are informed and have opportunities to contribute to the planning, development and delivery of the project.

The most widely recognised standard for engagement and consultation in Australia is the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum of Public Participation set out in Table 2.

Table 2: International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum of Public Participation (Source: cdn.ymaws.com/www.iap2.org/resource/resmgr/pillars/Spectrum_8.5x11_Print.pdf)

	Public participation goal	Promise to the public
Inform	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	We will keep you informed.
Consult	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.
Involve	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.
Collaborate	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.
Empower	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.	We will implement what you decide.

The spectrum helps practitioners to define the public's role in an engagement program. It is important to note that the spectrum does not advocate a linear approach from informing to empowering, rather, it suggests that different projects and/or stakeholders will be engaged with at different levels at different times.

VicGrid's engagement approach is also guided and informed by:

- The Victorian Government Public Engagement Framework 2021-2025
www.vic.gov.au/public-engagement-framework-2021-2025

- The Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action Community Charter
www.deeca.vic.gov.au/communities-and-regions/community-charter
- The Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action Pupangarli Marnmarnepu 'Owning Our Future' Aboriginal Self-Determination Reform Strategy 2020-2025
www.deeca.vic.gov.au/aboriginalselfdetermination/self-determination-reform-strategy
- *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic)*
www.legislation.vic.gov.au/in-force/acts/charter-human-rights-and-responsibilities-act-2006/015
- Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water's Interim Engaging with First Nations People and Communities on Assessments and Approvals
www.dcceew.gov.au/environment/epbc/publications/engage-early
- *Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic)*
www.legislation.vic.gov.au/in-force/acts/equal-opportunity-act-2010/030
- *Privacy Act 1988 (Cwlth)*
<https://www.legislation.gov.au/C2004A03712/2019-08-13/text>
- EE Act Guidance
www.planning.vic.gov.au/environmental-assessments/environmental-assessment-guides/preparing-an-ees-consultation-plan
- AEIC (Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner) Report
www.aeic.gov.au/publications/2023-annual-report
- National Guidelines for Community Engagement and Benefits for Electricity Transmission Projects
www.dcceew.gov.au/energy/renewable/community-engagement/transmission

Non-government reference documents include:

- The Energy Charter Best Practice Social Licence Guideline
www.theenergycharter.com.au/better-practice-social-licence-guideline/
- Partnerships with Traditional Owners and First Peoples
gunaikurnai.org/pathways-to-partnerships/

4.2 Engagement activities undertaken to date

The Victorian Government published three Offshore Wind Implementation Statements in 2022 and 2023, to support and guide industry, stakeholders, and the community in developing the offshore wind sector.

The statements introduced a roadmap for planning new offshore wind transmission, emphasising collaboration with local communities and stakeholders through direct and ongoing engagement to understand and address local priorities and concerns.

Early 2023 - VicGrid's engagement efforts sought to understand what mattered most to the local communities, landholders, stakeholders and First Peoples when planning offshore wind transmission. This feedback shaped the draft options assessment method, which proposed criteria for assessing and shortlisting transmission infrastructure options.

Mid-2023 – The draft options assessment method was published inviting input from the Gippsland community and Victorians on proposed project objectives and guiding principles. Feedback collected via surveys, mapping, and stakeholder briefings helped refine the assessment criteria and provided valuable insights into balancing their relative importance when assessing locations for new transmission infrastructure.

Early 2024 – VicGrid published the Gippsland Options Assessment Report which described multiple options assessed using the options assessment method, and set out a study area, connection hub area and preferred technology type for the new transmission. Face-to-face engagement sessions supported this announcement, providing clarity on how the options assessment method guided decision-making. A dedicated landholder liaison team was established to work with landholders in the study area.

Mid-2024 – Community updates summarised earlier feedback and outlined next steps, including planning and environment assessment processes and on-the-ground field surveys to inform the project's development and refinement.

Table 3 summarises the phases of engagement described above, including their duration and respective objectives.

Table 3: Engagement to date

Engagement timeframe	April to May 2023	May to August 2023	November to December 2023	December 2023 to April 2024	May to October 2024
Project objective	Assess technical feasibility and evaluate land use, environmental, cultural, and heritage constraints to identify viable transmission infrastructure options and potential corridor areas.	Rapid appraisal of technically feasible options, using assessment criteria informed by feedback, to narrow down to a shortlist for detailed evaluation.	Detailed appraisal of shortlisted options using quantitative and qualitative measures linked to assessment criteria, informed by feedback.	Confirm preferred options.	Refining preferred options and next steps.
Engagement aim	To facilitate stakeholder understanding of VicGrid's role, approach, and opportunities to participate in consultations.	To understand the importance of factors informing the options assessment method, the project objectives and guiding principles.	To inform and report back to stakeholders.	To announce a broad study area between 3 km and 12 km wide and seek feedback from affected landholders and communities.	To report back on what we heard and share next steps for the project.
Engagement outcome	Feedback gathered informed the draft options assessment method.	These values and priorities were considered in the analysis of options and informed the final options assessment method.	Communicated the final options assessment method and Phase 2 Summary Report.	Informed stakeholders of the decision, explained the rationale and provided opportunities for collaboration to help improve stakeholder relationships and overall project outcomes.	Stakeholder awareness of next steps for the project, including refining the study area and planning and environment assessment processes.

4.3 Feedback to date

During the consultation process, community and stakeholder feedback highlighted several key themes including:

Visual impacts

- Concerns about the visual impact of overhead transmission lines on landscapes, tourism, scenic views, and community well-being.
- A strong preference for undergrounding transmission lines to reduce visual and environmental impacts.

Land use and farming

- Restrictions on farming activities, including aerial farming technologies due to transmission easements.

- A preference for using existing infrastructure corridors to minimise disruption.
- Questions about offshore wind targets would impact land use.

Environmental concerns

- Potential effects on biodiversity, particularly marine wildlife.

Health and safety

- Concerns about health risks from electromagnetic fields (EMF).
- Safety hazards posed by transmission lines during extreme weather events, such as bushfires.

Community and social impacts

- Uncertainty about the project's effects on mental health and potential community division
- Perceptions that Gippsland is disproportionately affected without receiving adequate benefits.

Cultural heritage

- The importance of considering cultural heritage.

Family heritage

- Family and generational connections to the land.

Costs and compensation

- Questions about the project's impact on consumer energy bills and suggestions for alternative funding mechanisms.
- Clarity on compensation for property value declines and greater community benefits, such as local infrastructure improvements for those most affected.

4.4 Evaluation of engagement outcomes

By balancing technical, economic, social and environmental factors, engagement has informed decision-making, strengthened relationships, promoted transparency and driven practical adjustments aligned with community and stakeholder needs.

Key actions included:

- **Feedback integration:** Community input shaped the draft options assessment method and refined project objectives and principles.
- **Transparency:** Information was shared via reports, face-to-face sessions and direct discussions and enquiry responses, explaining how decisions were made.
- **Inclusivity:** Resources supported participation from diverse stakeholders.
- **Knowledge sharing:** Sessions increased community understanding of project impacts and decisions.
- **Evaluation:** Feedback reports 'closed the loop' and guided improvements for future engagements.

This approach ensured statutory requirements were met, relationships strengthened, and the process remained open and transparent.

4.5 Community benefits sharing

VicGrid's draft REZ Community Benefits Plan features:

- the introduction of new REZ Community Energy Funds to benefit regional communities
- payments for host landholders
- guidance for payments for significantly impacted neighbours
- a commitment to co-design a new approach to benefits for Traditional Owners.

REZ Community Energy Funds are an opportunity to invest directly in projects that improve local energy outcomes and create other benefits for communities in regions hosting energy infrastructure.

Local decision-making that responds to local needs and priorities will be a cornerstone of these funds and decisions about investments will be made in consultation with regional community reference groups with broad community and industry representation.

The aim is to ensure communities benefit in a meaningful and lasting way based on their vision of the energy priorities for their region.

The REZ Community Energy Funds and Traditional Owner benefits will be funded by transmission companies building major new lines and through access fees charged in Victoria's new renewable energy zones.

The new approach to benefit sharing will apply in regions hosting renewable energy zones and to communities impacted by new transmission developments.

5. EES consultation approach

5.1 Consultation objectives

Government legislation includes provision of requirements for engagement, including public exhibition and submissions periods, and public hearing processes through the EES Act and the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*. During the development and assessment of the EES, the project seeks to achieve the following:

- Inform and involve landholders, community, First Peoples and stakeholders about the scope of the project, including the policy context, project objectives and project timelines.
- Gather local knowledge to inform assessment methods and results of technical assessments enhancing decision-making and ensuring the project is informed by a wide range of perspectives.
- Build awareness and understanding of the EES process and the potential impacts of the project, ensuring information and opportunities for involvement are shared through broad engagement activities that reach landholders, the broader community and all interested stakeholders in the region.
- Encourage community and stakeholder participation in the EES process ensuring their feedback is heard and incorporated.
- Provide clear and accessible communication materials that are relevant to the project phase and decisions, are inclusive for all stakeholders and are easy to understand.
- Report findings to the project team to influence corridor refinement and minimise impacts to host landholders and communities and inform decision-making and technical assessments.
- Demonstrate responsiveness by showing how feedback and concerns have been considered as the project and EES develop.
- Develop an accessible EES ensuring it is inclusive and comprehensive for all stakeholders.

5.2 Managing engagement challenges and contingency planning

Given the size and complexity of the study area, the project may encounter challenges including:

- reaching all stakeholders effectively, especially in remote or hard to reach areas
- variability in stakeholders' capacity or availability to participate
- unforeseen external factors such as adverse weather, competing time priorities for stakeholders, or community fatigue.

To address these challenges, the engagement program will consider planning to maintain inclusivity and responsiveness.

Key measures include:

- Actively seeking feedback about engagement methods to identify any gaps in accessible communications and engagement opportunities.
- Partnering with councils and local organisations to tap into current local knowledge of the most effective communications and engagement channels and methods.

- Coordination with other active proponents and agencies in the region to provide streamlined engagement activities.
- Flexible scheduling and engagement formats to adapt to unforeseen delays or accessibility issues.
- Enhanced digital engagement tools to ensure stakeholders can participate regardless of location.
- Additional engagement phases or targeted outreach to address gaps in participation.
- Transparent communication with stakeholders about identified limitations and the steps being taken to address them.

5.3 Engagement program

The engagement program (summarised in Table 4) is being delivered in four phases with a strong focus on landholders and First Peoples. This approach ensures ongoing opportunities for feedback and meaningful influence on project decision-making whenever possible.

Note: Timelines are subject to change, and the EES Consultation Plan will be updated accordingly to reflect any adjustments.

Table 4: Proposed engagement from 2024 to 2027

	Scoping of EES Mid 2024 to early 2025	EES preparation 2025	Public review 2026	Assessment and Approvals 2026 to 2027
Transmission location refinement	Refinement to a preferred corridor	Refinement to a preferred route	Refinement to a transmission easement	Prepare for construction and commissioning
Project objectives and activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inform preferred corridor and connections hub Learn more about the study area and seek input to help identify a preferred corridor Start environmental, planning and cultural heritage investigations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stakeholder collaboration and EES preparation Identify a preferred corridor and then a route through collaboration with landholders, First Peoples, technical studies and on-the-ground investigations Keep landholders, community, First Peoples and stakeholders informed about the decision-making process Plan and develop the EES submission 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transmission design and planning for EES exhibition and review Confirm a preferred route, transmission easement and reference design Public review and decision on planning and environment assessment Develop management plans and program as per the EES plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EES assessment and final approvals The EES is assessed by the Victorian Minister for Planning and the Commonwealth Minister for the Environment and Water Begin preparing the transmission easement for construction in line with the approvals
EES activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish scoping requirements Determine the need for an EES DTP consultation on draft scoping requirements Establish scoping requirements Establish a TRG to guide EES preparation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigate project effects and prepare EES Complete technical studies and collate information to address the final scoping requirements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EES public exhibition and independent review The EES is exhibited for public review Subject to the direction of the Victorian Minister for Planning, an inquiry considers the project's potential environmental effects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EES final approvals Preparation of Inquiry report Statutory approvers consider the Minister's Assessment and make their decision regarding the project approvals
Community and stakeholder engagement purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build relationships and foster transparency Develop relationships with landholders in the study area Continue to work collaboratively with GLaWAC Introduce the EES process, explain the role of stakeholders and communities and provide project timelines Ensure stakeholders and communities are aware of the opportunity to respond to the EES scoping requirements Identify where consultation and engagement should be modified or adapted Build awareness of the project in communities in and around the study area Maintain transparency in decision-making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaboration and knowledge sharing Continue to work collaboratively with GLaWAC Provide information and updates on the technical assessments being undertaken for the EES Gather stakeholder and local knowledge about the project's potential impacts, ideas about mitigations and opportunities for improvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EES exhibition and public review Provide information about any refinements to the project reference design assessed through the EES process Present and explain how community and stakeholder feedback has been considered and influenced any design or operational updates Raise awareness for the exhibition of the EES, encourage participation and assist landholders, community and stakeholders to make a submission 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Post-EES reporting and next steps Report back on EES assessment outcomes and approval requirements and next steps for the project
Tools and activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Landholder visits Community Advisory Group (CAG) or roundtable Establishing TRG Community and landholder information sessions Factsheets and other publications Interactive map and visual aids 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Landholder visits CAG or roundtable Regular updates to TRG Community and landholder information sessions Factsheets and other publications Interactive map and visual aids Surveys 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Landholder visits EES consultation report Stakeholder and community briefings EES statutory exhibition - EES documents available on project website and council offices Community information sessions CAG or roundtable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Targeted engagement with landholders and key community groups Web and social media Phone and email enquiries Community newsletters E-news Works notifications

	Scoping of EES Mid 2024 to early 2025	EES preparation 2025	Public review 2026	Assessment and Approvals 2026 to 2027
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surveys • Web and social media • Phone and email enquiries • Community newsletters • Works notifications • Media announcements and advertising • Stakeholder briefings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Web and social media • Phone and email enquiries • Community newsletter • Works notifications • Media announcements and advertising • Stakeholder briefings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Factsheets and other publications • Interactive map and visual aids • Web and social media • Phone and email enquiries • Community newsletters • Media announcements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholder briefings • Media announcements
How feedback will be used	Feedback will influence EES scoping requirements.	Feedback will influence EES study and preparation.	Feedback will influence the finalisation and assessment of the EES.	Feedback will influence the assessment of the EES

5.4 Communications and engagement methods and tools

VicGrid will use a range of tools during the EES process to support engagement, share information and consult with landholders, communities and First Peoples, as outlined in Table 5.

Table 5: *communications and engagement methods and tools*

Tool	Description of use
Animations, videos and visual aids	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use visual content to communicate project processes and benefits in an easily digestible format
Briefings (group or individual)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inform stakeholders about the project, including news, milestones and engagement opportunities Useful tool for gathering feedback from stakeholders at all levels
Call centre and dedicated email inboxes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A communication channel for landholders and community to raise concerns, ask questions and receive specific project information
Community advisory group or community-led roundtable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A group comprising landholders, communities, businesses and other parties that have an interest in the project VicGrid is supporting a community-led roundtable trial that may be considered a type of community advisory group Led by an independent facilitator, the roundtable membership comprises landholders, community members, representatives from stakeholder groups such as local councils and peak groups Four places are reserved for interested community members to apply for membership VicGrid may set up alternative community feedback mechanisms to capture feedback regarding the EES
Community hub/s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A local place or shopfront where people can drop in for a conversation with the project team The hub/s may be permanent or temporary and will be advertised widely VicGrid is currently trialling the Rosedale hub – a temporary hub at the Rosedale Neighbourhood House every Thursday until at least the end of May 2025. The hub is being promoted through postcard and social media to enhance wider community awareness and engagement
Community information sessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicate information about the project in a publicly accessible forum Give interested parties an opportunity to ask questions directly to the project team and engage more deeply with the project
Community newsletters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inform stakeholders about the project, including news, milestones and engagement opportunities
Community pop-ups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Informal face-to-face forum where community and other stakeholders can ask questions and learn about the project. Useful for speaking to people who may not have engaged with the project but live in the area
Social media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inform broader audiences about project news, milestones and engagement opportunities
Email newsletters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide subscribers with regular updates, including news, milestones and engagement opportunities
Engage Victoria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicate information about the project, project updates, latest news and announce engagement opportunities

Tool	Description of use
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek feedback on the project via their public participation tools, including surveys, interactive maps, and Q&A • Publish fact sheets, reports and other publications • Facilitate broader engagement by providing an interactive and accessible platform for community input.
Engagement reports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report back on engagement periods, informing stakeholders about what was heard and how it has influenced the project
Fact sheets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide targeted information to stakeholders in a way that is accessible, easy to understand and highly visual • Used to support discussions at face-to-face community events
Individual and neighbourhood landholder meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate with landholders and other stakeholders in a private forum • Useful for consulting with landholders about the project and its potential impacts on them or their property.
Industry forums	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide an opportunity for industry professionals to share expertise, insights and explore solutions to sector-specific challenges
Interactive map	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Used to visually illustrate changes in the study area and how they impact landholders and communities • Easily communicate hard-to-understand concepts and ideas
Letter drops and direct emails	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform landholders and communities about specific localised impacts
Community notices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform local communities about specific localised impacts and project updates • Displayed in public noticeboards for broader community visibility • Ensure timely, transparent and widespread information sharing • Complement other communication methods.
Media and advertising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share information about project milestones and engagement opportunities • Communicate project information to large audiences across several channels • Print, digital and out-of-home (OOH) media opportunities improve likelihood of exposure and the reach of our messages • Regional media including newspapers and radio (The Bridge, Gippsland Times, Latrobe Valley Express, ABC Gippsland, TRFM)
Post cards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate information directly to landholders and communities about upcoming events and engagement opportunities • Distributed via mailout, pop-ups and meetings with stakeholders
Technical Reference Group (TRG)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government agencies, regional authorities, local government and Registered Aboriginal Parties (RAPs) that have a statutory, policy or technical interest in relation to the project • Advise the department and proponent on matters relating to the EES
VicGrid website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate information about the project, project updates, latest news and announce engagement opportunities • Publish fact sheets, reports and other publications • Facilitate broader engagement by providing a central platform for stakeholders to stay informed
Webinars	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate information about the project, project updates, latest news and engagement opportunities

Tool	Description of use
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Useful for reaching larger audiences who may not have the time or ability to attend face-to-face events Facilitate broader outreach Provide recorded sessions for flexible viewing and ongoing access to information
Works notifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicate information about project works to landholders, communities and other stakeholders

5.5 Inclusive and accessible engagement approach

To ensure robust community and stakeholder engagement that is accessible, targeted, and inclusive, the following considerations have been integrated into this plan to address potential barriers to participation.

Culturally and linguistically diverse communities (CALD)

While the Gippsland region has a predominantly English-speaking population, VicGrid will collaborate with local government and community groups to identify opportunities for targeted engagement with any CALD communities impacted by the project. Where necessary, materials will be translated, and interpreter services will be provided to facilitate understanding and participation.

Literacy levels

Recognising varied literacy levels, all written materials will be produced in plain English. To enhance accessibility, technical reports will include supplementary visual tools such as videos, infographics, and iconography to convey complex project information in an easily understandable manner.

Digital accessibility

Acknowledging that limited internet access or digital literacy may pose barriers, VicGrid will offer alternative participation methods. These include providing printed materials, maintaining telephone support, and conducting face-to-face engagement sessions wherever feasible.

Difficult to reach stakeholders

VicGrid is aware that some stakeholders may face additional challenges in accessing engagement opportunities, including those living in remote areas, elderly residents, people with disabilities, individuals experiencing socio-economic disadvantage, and young people, who may face barriers related to awareness, accessibility or digital exclusion with some channels.

To address these barriers, VicGrid will explore tailored approaches, such as proactive outreach, partnerships with community organisations, youth networks, and mobile engagement units to ensure equitable participation. Auslan interpreters can be used to ensure inclusivity and accessibility for people who may face significant barriers to engagement.

5.6 How feedback will inform the EES

As outlined in the EES Consultation Plan Advisory Note, consultation is essential for building understanding of community and project issues and implications of projects. It ensures that stakeholders' knowledge and views are incorporated in project planning, assessment, and decision-making.

The following aspects of the project are critical for safety, regulatory, and technical reasons and will be informed where relevant by feedback from regulators and relevant responsible agencies:

- **Stable and reliable infrastructure:** The transmission network must be designed to ensure long-term stability and reliability.
- **Safety:** Ensuring the safety of the transmission infrastructure and associated facilities, including fire risk management.
- **Sustainable solutions:** The project must incorporate sustainability measures that minimise ongoing resource use and provide long-term benefits to the community and environment.
- **Regulatory compliance:** The project must meet all necessary safety, environmental, and operational regulations as set out in approved management plans.

Community and stakeholder feedback will play an essential role in informing the following aspects of the project and the EES:

- **Local knowledge:** Stakeholders' deep understanding of the region's geography, land use and community needs will be essential in refining the project's design. Local knowledge will help in identifying areas that require special consideration including cultural heritage and environmental hotspots.
- **Assessments of potential impacts:** Feedback will guide the focus of technical assessments to ensure that all relevant environmental, social, and economic impacts are considered.
- **Farming practices:** Feedback from farmers and landholders will influence how the project addresses the impact of transmission infrastructure on agricultural activities. This includes minimisation of disruptions to farming operations and ensuring that land access does not interfere with crop management or livestock farming.
- **Infrastructure on properties:** Landholders' concerns about how the transmission infrastructure will affect their properties will inform decisions. This includes evaluating ways to minimise visual impacts and disruptions such as irrigation systems or access roads.
- **Landscape:** The project's visual impact on landscapes is a key concern. Feedback will inform mitigation strategies to address those impacts.
- **Biodiversity:** First Peoples, community and stakeholders will provide insights on how to protect local ecosystems, including flora, fauna and marine life. Feedback will guide strategies to minimise impacts on biodiversity such as route alignments to avoid sensitive habitats and environmental mitigation measures.
- **Community benefits:** Ideas about potential community uses of the land, such as recreational activities or infrastructure that benefits local residents, will be considered.
- **Cultural heritage:** Engagement with First Peoples will help ensure that both cultural and historic heritage values are understood and respected throughout the project.
- **Employment and economic development:** Stakeholders will provide insights into how the project can support local employment and generate income opportunities that benefit the region.
- **Consultation approach:** Feedback will help shape the ongoing consultation process, ensuring that community members remain informed and engaged throughout the project and the EES process.
- **Construction management:** Local feedback and ideas will help the project plan for the project's construction in ways that minimise impacts.

5.7 How feedback will be captured and considered

VicGrid is committed to collecting, recording, and considering all feedback throughout the consultation process to ensure transparency and responsiveness in developing the EES. The following steps will be undertaken:

- **Engagement with the TRG:** The TRG will be informed of all consultation activities, feedback gathered, and emerging issues. VicGrid will seek the TRG's advice on how best to integrate feedback into the project.
- **Incorporation into technical studies:** All feedback received to date, as well as future consultation input, will be incorporated into the preparation of technical studies. Each technical report will clearly demonstrate how stakeholder and community feedback has been considered.
- **Consultation management system:** Interactions with community members and stakeholders will be recorded in VicGrid's consultation database.
- **Project updates and reporting:** VicGrid will provide regular project updates and produce an EES consultation report to capture feedback and describe how it has informed project planning. This report will serve as a record of how community concerns and suggestions have shaped the EES process.

Community members and stakeholders will have the opportunity to make formal submissions on the EES, which will be reviewed by an Independent Assessment Committee. This Committee will consider all submissions and feedback when developing its recommendations to the Victorian Minister for Planning regarding the project's assessment and statutory approvals.

5.8 Recording and reporting of feedback

VicGrid will generate reports on what is heard from landholders, communities and First Peoples during engagement periods. They will be shared directly with our technical specialists undertaking EES impact assessments.

This EES process only applies to the Gippsland Offshore Wind Transmission 2 GW project, and not any other project, proposed or in development, within the region.

Table 3 in Section 4.2 of the plan summarises how VicGrid has reported back what we have heard so far and how it has influenced project decisions.

We will also prepare an EES Consultation Report that outlines the types of feedback collected and how it has been considered or implemented in the development of the project. This report will be published on VicGrid's website and Engage Victoria.

6. Monitoring and evaluation

6.1 Monitoring and evaluation of EES engagement

A summary of engagement, feedback and how this has been considered will be prepared and presented in the EES Consultation Report. To ensure continuous improvement, VicGrid will undertake regular evaluation of implementation activities under this plan consistent with the Victorian Government's Public Engagement Framework 2021-2025 evaluation framework. (<https://www.vic.gov.au/public-engagement-framework-2021-2025/evaluation-framework>).

The framework uses outcome and process criteria to inform decisions, build relationships, and share knowledge.

Key adaptive measures include:

- **Continuous monitoring:** Regularly assess engagement activities using the framework's criteria to identify gaps and areas for enhancement.
- **Real-time adjustments:** Implement immediate changes to strategies, tools and communication methods based on live feedback and assessment data.
- **Feedback integration:** Systematically incorporate stakeholder feedback into refining engagement practices and tools.
- **Tool diversification:** Introduce and test alternative methods to better engage underrepresented groups or address emerging challenges.
- **Resource reallocation:** Adjust resources to address identified gaps, support engagement objectives and improve outreach to key stakeholders.
- **Ongoing learning:** Capture lessons learned and share best practices to continuously improve engagement practices for future phases.
- **Transparent reporting:** Document changes and their outcomes in public-facing reports to build trust, ensure accountability and demonstrate responsiveness to evaluation findings.

This approach ensures the engagement process remains dynamic, responsive to stakeholder needs, and focused on achieving meaningful and effective outcomes throughout the project lifecycle.

7. Responding to complaints

VicGrid treats all complaints with sensitivity and urgency. Complaints relating to any aspect of the EES process will

Key principles underpinning VicGrid's complaint handling process include:

- Stakeholders can submit complaints by phone, email and in-person.
- All complaints will be promptly addressed, with interactions and resolutions tracked throughout the project using the stakeholder database.
- Complaints will be reviewed regularly to identify recurring issues and implement improvements where applicable.
- Complaints will be resolved within 21 days of receipt to ensure timely and effective responses.
- If a complaint remains unresolved, stakeholders will be informed of other avenues they may pursue to resolve their complaint.

7.1 Project contact details

Email: vicgrid@deeca.vic.gov.au

Phone: 1800 418 341

8. Data protection and privacy

VicGrid is committed to safeguarding the privacy and security of all data collected during the EES consultation process. All personal and project-related information will be managed in accordance with the Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014 (Vic) and the Information Privacy Principles (IPPs).

Key commitments include:

- collecting only data relevant to the EES process and informing stakeholders of its purpose and use
- ensuring secure storage and limited access to authorised personnel
- using data exclusively for engagement, feedback analysis, and project refinement
- retaining data only as necessary and securely disposing of it after the project's completion
- providing stakeholders with clear avenues to inquire about or address data-related concerns.

These measures ensure transparency, build trust, and maintain compliance with statutory obligations.

vicgrid.vic.gov.au

