

## Willatook Wind Farm Project Environment Effects Statement - Scoping Requirements Questions and Answers

August 2019

### What is the purpose of the scoping requirements?

Willatook Wind Farm Pty Ltd is preparing an environment effects statement (EES) for the proposed 400 MW capacity wind farm with up to 86 wind turbines covering approximately 6,750 hectares of private and public land in Willatook, south west Victoria, about 22 kilometres north of Port Fairy. The proposal would include underground cabling, overhead powerlines, access tracks, wind monitoring masts and temporary infrastructure associated with construction (i.e. construction compound, laydown areas, concrete batching plants and a potential on-site quarry).

The scoping requirements for the EES set out the matters that need to be investigated and documented within the EES by the proponent.

Final scoping requirements have been issued by the Minister for Planning after consideration of public submissions. The EES scoping requirements are available on the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) website: <https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/environment-assessment/browse-projects/projects/willatook-wind-farm>

### Why is an EES required for the Willatook Wind Farm project?

An EES is the most comprehensive and robust assessment process available in Victoria. The EES will provide an integrated and transparent examination of the potential environmental effects of the proposed project.

In December 2018, the Minister for Planning determined under the *Environment Effects Act 1978* that Willatook Wind Farm Pty Ltd should prepare an EES for the Willatook Wind Farm project. The project as proposed could have a range of significant effects relating threatened flora and fauna (particularly the state and federally listed Southern Bent-wing Bat and state listed Brolga), geoscience values, and the noise and visual amenity of the area. Additionally, there is potential for significant cumulative impacts, in particular on biodiversity and amenity values, due to the three operating wind farms within 20 km and three approved wind farms within 10 km of the project site.

The EES will need to include a detailed description of the proposed project and rigorous assessment of its potential effects on the environment and the proponent's approaches to avoidance and mitigation.

### What about the Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act?

The project was also referred to the Australian Government under the Commonwealth's *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act). The delegate for the Minister for the Environment determined on 12 June 2019 that the project is a 'controlled action' requiring assessment and approval under the EPBC Act. The provisions (or matters of national environmental significance) relevant to the Australian Government's controlled action decision under the EPBC Act are listed threatened species and communities (sections 18 and 18A).

The EES process is accredited to assess impacts on matters of national environmental significance under the EPBC Act through the Bilateral (Assessment) Agreement between the Commonwealth and the State of Victoria. The EES for the project will be undertaken in accordance with the bilateral agreement; there will be no separate assessment by the Commonwealth. The Victorian Minister's assessment will be provided to the Commonwealth to inform their decision about the approval required for the project under the EPBC Act.

The final EES scoping requirements identify matters relating to the EPBC controlled action decision, so that the EES can appropriately address these matters of national environmental significance that need to be assessed.

# Willatook Wind Farm Project EES Scoping Requirements Q&As

## **What studies are Willatook Wind Farm Pty Ltd doing to assess impacts of the project?**

Willatook Wind Farm Pty Ltd is investigating potential impacts of the project, with studies such as biodiversity, hydrogeology and hydrology, geoheritage, noise and vibration, social impact and cultural and historic heritage being undertaken.

These studies will need to include strategies to avoid, minimise or manage potential impacts.

## **What are the final scoping requirements?**

The matters to be investigated and documented in each EES are tailored to each project, its setting and the associated environmental risks. DELWP prepares draft scoping requirements for a project's EES on behalf of the Minister for Planning and exhibits them for 15 business days for public comment. Inputs to the draft scoping requirements are the proponent's referral and draft study program and advice from agencies via the technical reference group (TRG). Consistent with the Minister's requirement for an EES, the scoping requirements for the Willatook Wind Farm Project EES are targeted to specific issues with potential for significant effects. The assessment must include all potential direct, indirect, cumulative, on-site and off-site effects of the project.

Specific concerns raised by submissions largely centred around potential impacts to birds and bats (particularly Brolga and the Southern Bent-wing Bat), noise amenity, social cohesion and local roads. These issues are addressed under broader topics in the scoping requirements, to ensure they, along with other potentially significant effects, are considered in the EES.

## **Was there public consultation about the draft scoping requirements?**

Public comments were invited on the draft scoping requirements for this EES. They were exhibited for 15 business days closing on 8 August 2019. The exhibition of draft scoping requirements was publicised on the DELWP website and advertised in major and local newspapers. The proponent also distributed information on public exhibition through two public information sessions at the commencement of public exhibition of the draft scoping requirements. DELWP received eight submissions on the draft scoping requirements. All submissions were provided to the proponent to inform ongoing development of the EES.

The proponent is required to engage with the public and stakeholders to identify and respond to their issues and inform EES studies.

Willatook Wind Farm Pty Ltd has commenced, and will continue, consultation with stakeholders and the community, in accordance with a draft consultation plan. This plan will be available on DELWP's website once reviewed by the TRG, and will continue to be updated as necessary throughout the EES process.

## **What is the Technical Reference Group and its role in the EES process?**

DELWP has convened an inter-agency TRG at the request of the Minister for Planning to advise DELWP and the proponent on scoping and adequacy of the EES studies and documentation, as well as co-ordination of the EES process with other statutory processes for the project.

The organisations represented on the TRG are:

- DELWP's Environment and Planning portfolios
- Aboriginal Victoria
- Heritage Victoria
- EPA Victoria
- Regional Roads Victoria
- Glenelg Hopkins Catchment Management Authority
- Earth Resources Regulation
- Moyne Shire Council



# Willatook Wind Farm Project EES Scoping Requirements Q&As

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

The proponent will continue with the necessary information-gathering and investigations to assess the potential impacts. This generally takes at least several months. The proponent will conduct its studies and prepare the EES in close consultation with DELWP and the TRG.

When the proponent believes the EES is complete and ready for public exhibition, it will be submitted for review by DELWP, and the Minister for Planning will decide whether to authorise the EES to be exhibited. If authorised, the EES will be advertised for public comment for typically no less than 30 business days. This is the key opportunity for public comment and submission on the project's environmental effects.

The Minister will appoint an independent inquiry and planning permit application panel that will consider the EES and any formal public submissions received and produce a report, which at the end of the process, will inform and enable the Minister to issue an assessment of the environmental effects of the project. The Minister's assessment will inform statutory decision-makers responsible for the project's approvals (including the Commonwealth with regard to the required approvals under the EPBC Act).

After the Minister has received the inquiry and planning permit application panel's report and made his assessment, both the report and the Minister's assessment will be published on the DELWP website.

## **When does Willatook Wind Farm Pty Ltd expect to release its EES?**

The most recent timeline for the EES, provided by the proponent, indicates that the EES is expected to be ready for public exhibition in the first half of 2020.