

ENVIRONMENT EFFECTS STATEMENT

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 are 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



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1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose of this document

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

This Plan is a public document, available on the DELWP website. It has been prepared in accordance with the Ministerial guidelines for assessment of environmental effects under the Environment Effects Act 1978 and the EES Consultation Plan Advisory Note (DELWP, 2018). The purpose of the plan is to also provide the framework for consultation on the draft planning scheme amendment proposed as part of the project.

This Plan provides an overview of the guiding principles and objectives of the project engagement program, identifies key stakeholders, and provides an overview of planned engagement activities and timeframes until the completion of the project. In accordance with these 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 for project communities, obtain insight from local knowledge on existing conditions, and understand concerns around potential impacts and 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.

These documents note that consultation is a key aspect of the environment 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** by the proponent 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 both the scoping requirements for the EES, and the review of 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 during appropriate stages of the project including in response to the most current advice regarding Covid-19 restrictions.



1.2 Background

In August 2020, the Victorian Minister for Planning announced that the Western Renewables Link requires an Environment Effects Statement (EES) under the Environment Effects Act 1978 (EE Act). 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 EE Act.

A Technical Reference Group convened by DELWP, comprising statutory decision-makers and subject matter experts from government, meet regularly during the development of the EES and review and comment on documents. The community and interested stakeholders will be provided with project and EES updates and opportunities to provide feedback. Community and stakeholder feedback will be 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 Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) website:

www.planning.vic.gov.au/environment-assessment/what-is-the-ees-process-in-victoria.

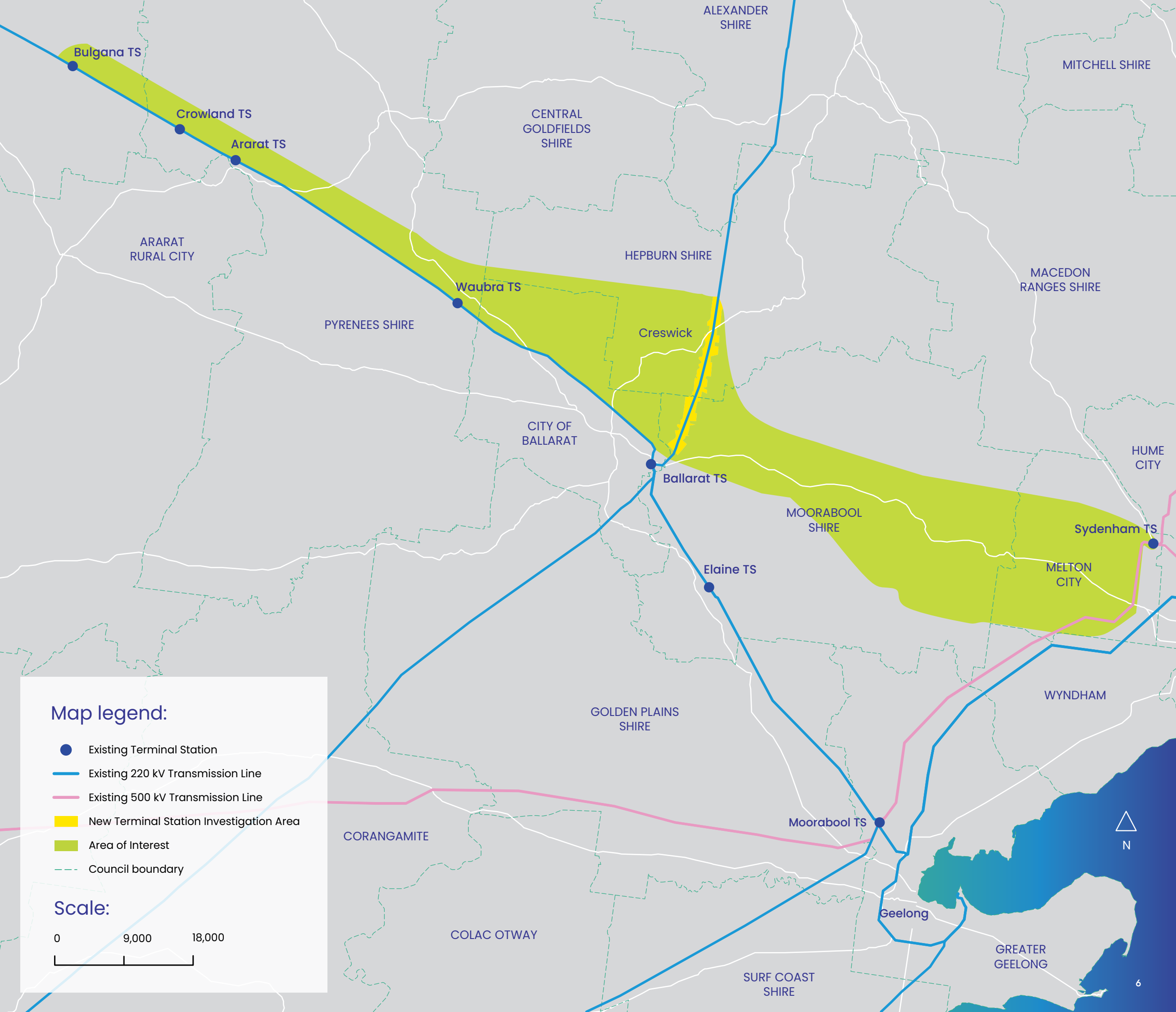
1.3 Overview

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 generated across the State and the retiring of some coal generators in the Latrobe Valley. The current energy network needs upgrading to more efficiently share this renewable energy with all Victorians.

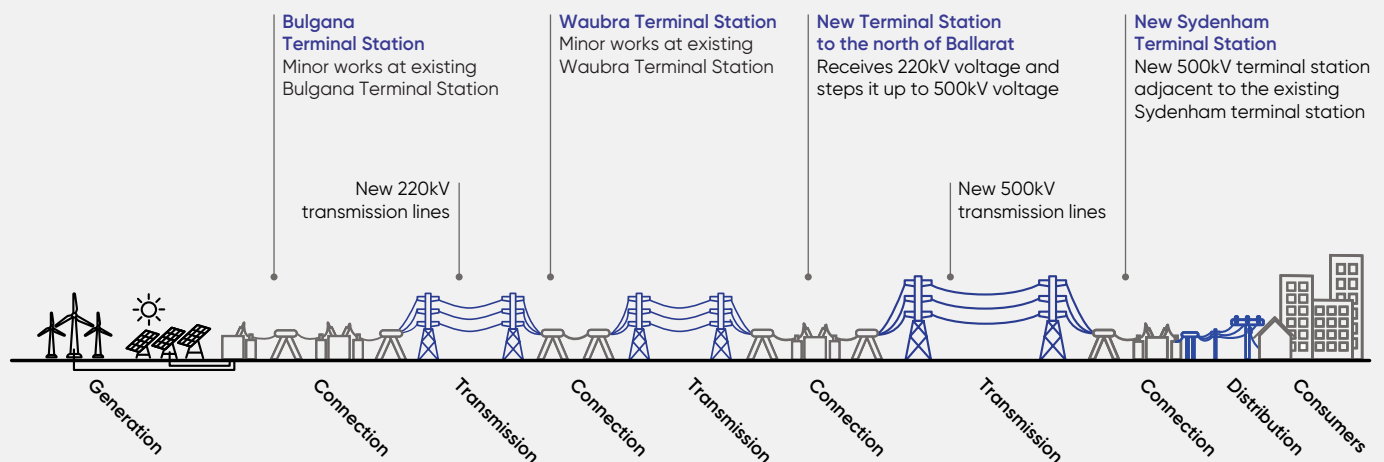
Western Victoria is emerging as an important renewable energy generation region. The Western Renewables Link (project) is planning for the construction and operation of a new approximately 190-kilometre overhead electricity transmission line.

Starting in Bulgana in Victoria’s west, the project will connect to a new terminal station north of the existing Sydenham Terminal Station in Melbourne’s north-west. A new terminal station will also be constructed to the north of Ballarat. Figure 1 shows the Area of Interest defined for this project. This is a broad geographical area which will be investigated to understand existing constraints and opportunities which will assist in determining a least constrained corridor.

Figure 1 Project area of Interest



Western Renewables Link



New overhead double circuit 220kV transmission line between the existing Bulgana Terminal Station, connecting to the existing Waubra Terminal Station and a new terminal station to the north of Ballarat.

From there, a new overhead double circuit 500kV transmission line connecting to a new terminal station at Sydenham.

For illustrative purposes only

This critical, State-significant project is planned to be completed by 2026. It will unlock renewable energy resources in western Victoria, helping to deliver affordable and clean energy to Victorians.

The project will include:

- A new terminal station to the north of Ballarat.
- New 220 kilovolt (kV) double circuit overhead transmission lines from the new terminal station to Bulgana (via Waubra).
- New 500kV double circuit overhead transmission lines from the new terminal station north of the existing Sydenham Terminal Station to the new terminal station north of Ballarat.
- Several minor upgrades including to existing electricity infrastructure.

The project is being delivered by AusNet Transmission Group Pty Ltd (AusNet Services). AusNet Services will prepare the EES, which will help inform decisions about required planning and other approvals and manage development activities as well as the construction, operation and maintenance of the new transmission line. The new transmission line will be owned, operated and maintained by AusNet Services for the next 30 years.

Broad community and stakeholder engagement activities will be ongoing throughout the life of the project. There will be targeted engagement held through different stages of the project to inform critical decisions.



Who is AusNet Services?

AusNet Services is the largest diversified energy network business in Victoria, owning and operating three regulated networks – electricity distribution, gas distribution and the majority of the state-wide electricity transmission network.

Headquartered in Melbourne, Australia, AusNet Services employs around 1,700 people to service 1.5 million consumers. For more information visit AusNet Services' website, www.ausnetservices.com.au.

1.3.1 Engagement to date

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 scope of the Western Renewables Link.

For more information, see the "The role of the Regulatory Investment Test for Transmission (RIT-T) process in the development of the WVTNP" fact sheet available here:

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

Dec 2021 – Ongoing

Land Liaison Officers will make all reasonable efforts to contact all identified landholders on the proposed route and will work closely with them over the coming months to understand their particular land use and requirements. In consultation with landholders, the alignment of the proposed transmission line easement, tower and access track locations will be determined.

Nov 2021

Webinars on the proposed route and how it was selected will be held to provide an opportunity for the community to give feedback on the proposed route and ask questions directly of the technical specialists working on the project. More information on dates is available on the project website.

Dec 2021

In-person community information sessions on the proposed route, underground construction, agriculture, bushfire, visual impact, the EES, planning and design will be held to provide an opportunity for the community to ask questions directly of the technical specialists working on the project. More information on dates and locations is available on the project website.

2022

Further technical studies, including impact assessment and recommendations of additional mitigation measures and selection of alternatives.

Engagement on updates to the proposed route will continue with landholders and community.

Late 2022

Submission of the EES for the project to the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP).

Early to mid-2023

Exhibition of the EES and Planning Scheme Amendment (PSA) to take place, followed by the EES and PSA Inquiry and Advisory Committee (IAC) Hearing.

Mid to late-2023

At the conclusion of the Hearing, the Inquiry will deliver a written report to the Minister with conclusions and recommendations to help inform the Minister's assessment

Late 2023

The Minister's Assessment Report is provided to the statutory decision makers and is published on the DELWP website.

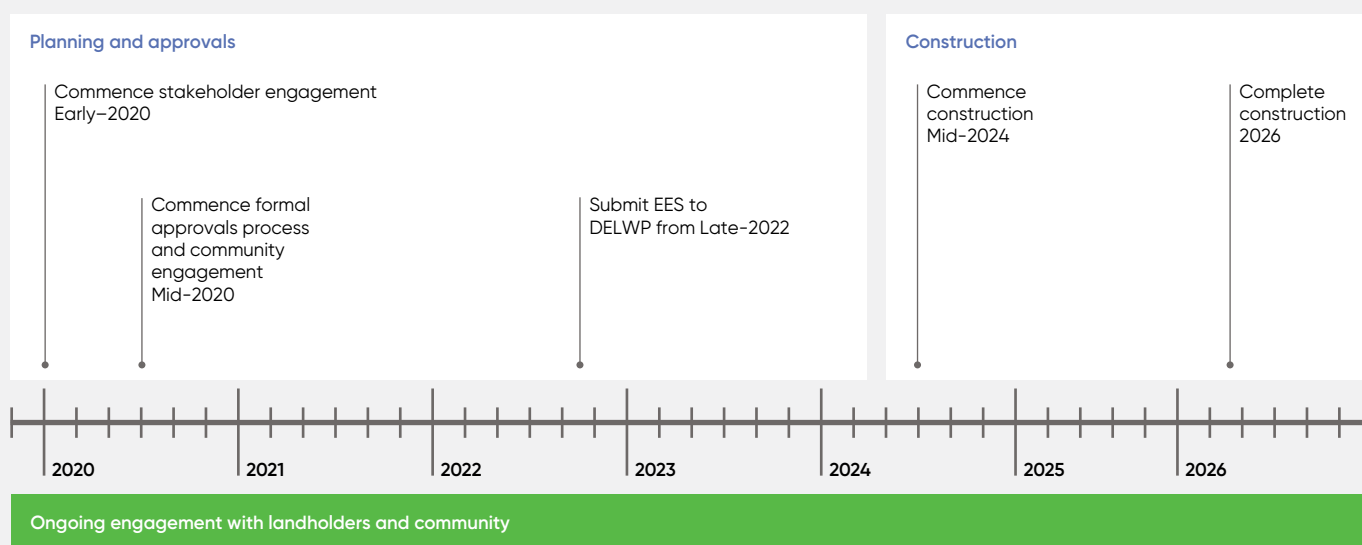
Engagement prior to EES Referral lodgement

AusNet Services commenced the project in late 2019 preparing for the planning, design, consultation, construction, operation and maintenance of new overhead transmission infrastructure proposed between the existing Bulgana Terminal Station and a new terminal station north of the existing Sydenham Terminal Station. 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 global 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

Project timeline





2. Communications and engagement framework

2.1 Engagement principles

AusNet Services 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 Services engagement principles are framed by these values and guide both the design and delivery of all our communication and engagement activities.

Understanding	<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 who will be impacted and how.
Openness	<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.
Respect	<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.
Responsiveness	<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.



2.2 Engagement objectives

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



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.

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 share 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.

The project provides regular updates via email and the website on the outcomes of the engagement, including what feedback has been received and how this feedback has been considered in project planning, design and methodology.

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

2.3 Overview of key project engagement phases

This section provides an overview of the key project engagement phases, what the community can expect to hear from the project and how community feedback will be used. The project will continue to engage with all stakeholders and the community throughout the project lifecycle.

An overview of the purpose of engagement across each key phase and identification of how feedback will be used is provided in Table 1.

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 has 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	<p>To build project awareness and commence community engagement to seek input on the project area of interest, including identification of places of environmental, social and community importance.</p> <p>To commence conversations with landowners to understand needs and impacts.</p>	Community and landowner input assists with identification of opportunities and constraints within the project Area of Interest to inform decision-making about identifying a preferred project corridor.
Late 2020 Commencement of EES	<p>EES draft scoping requirements are exhibited by DELWP on behalf of the Minister for Planning, inviting comments for consideration in the finalisation of the scoping requirements.</p> <p>AusNet Services hosted a webinar with DELWP to explain the purpose of the scoping requirements and how people could make submissions to DELWP.</p>	All submissions received are considered by DELWP during the finalisation of the scoping requirements which set out the matters to be addressed in the EES. DELWP provide AusNet Services with redacted copies of the submissions to maintain anonymity of the individual/organisation making the submission. This enables AusNet services and relevant specialists to understand the depth of detail underpinning views expressed in submissions.
Early 2021 to late 2022 EES preparation and ongoing engagement (The focus of this Consultation Plan)	<p>To seek community and stakeholder feedback on EES investigations and project design for consideration by technical specialists and to assist in the identification values based on local knowledge for consideration in design and assessments, and to identify opportunities for community benefits.</p> <p>This Consultation Plan specifically addresses this phase of the EES process.</p>	<p>Feedback will assist in the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of existing values and matters to be considered in EES studies • Identification of opportunities to maximise benefits • Development of a preferred design
Early to mid 2023 Public exhibition and EES Inquiry and PSA Inquiry Advisory Committee (IAC)	<p>The EES and draft planning scheme amendment will be exhibited for public comment. The Minister for Planning will appoint an Inquiry to review public submissions received on the EES and the draft planning scheme amendment.</p> <p>After the exhibition period, a public hearing will be held.</p>	At the conclusion of the hearing, the Inquiry will deliver a written report to the Minister with conclusions and recommendations to help inform the Minister's assessment.
Late 2023 Minister's assessment	There is no formal engagement whilst the Minister makes an assessment, however project communications will be ongoing throughout this period including updates to the project website and DELWP website. If the Project is approved by decision-makers following their consideration of the Minister's assessment, AusNet Services will continue to consult with community and stakeholders during construction and operation. A separate consultation plan will be prepared detailing the approach to consultation throughout the construction phase.	DELWP will publish the IAC's report when it publishes the Minister's assessment on its website, which will occur as soon as possible after the Minister has provided the Minister's assessment to the proponent and decision-makers



3. 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.

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 interests 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.

Throughout all phases of engagement, AusNet Services will continue to seek advice from local communities and councils about community groups. 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 confidence or access to technology to engage remotely. Where required, the project can provide assistance through materials printed in other languages, mail out surveys or engagement materials, engage interpreters for phone calls to guide people through information and engagement tools to help all individuals engage in the process.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impacts to property during construction and operation (land use, business, amenity and environmental impacts) Access to properties for environmental investigations to inform the EES Health and safety concerns including 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 Community engagement sessions Webinars Mail outs Community Consultation Group (CCG) Dedicated project hotline and email Consistent point of contact with the project

Table 2 Project stakeholder analysis

Stakeholder group	Likely engagement interests and needs	Stakeholder approach
<p>Surrounding landholders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Landholders who live in the vicinity of the proposed route (no specific distance) but do not have a proposed easement 	<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 progression and impacts Social and economic impacts and benefits Community impacts and benefits How feedback has been considered and/or influenced project or design decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community engagement sessions Webinars Mail outs Community Consultation Group (CCG) Dedicated project hotline and email Consistent point of contact with the project
Other community members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Locally specific information about the project, its progression and impacts Social and economic benefits Community impacts Amenity and environmental impacts Potential impacts to sites and areas with cultural heritage significance Local community benefits (and their equitable distribution) Economic impacts Disruptions from construction 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"> Up-to-date and broad project information in an accessible format Online engagement and interactive portals Virtual information and interactive information session Face to face sessions Fact sheets/printed materials Advertising Project updates Community Consultation Group (CCG)
Consumer representatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Environmental, social and economic impacts including local benefits 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/printed communication materials
Industry and market participants	<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 to 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"> • Social and economic impacts and community benefits • Environment and amenity impacts • 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 (Department and Ministers)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental assessment and planning approvals processes • Social, economic and environmental 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental assessment and approval • Social, economic and environmental 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 • Social, economic and environmental 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 • Online engagement and interactive portals • Virtual information and interactive information session • Face to face sessions • Project updates • Factsheets/printed materials
Community groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental, social and economic impacts • 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 • Online engagement hub and interactive portals • Virtual information and interactive information session • Face to face sessions • Project updates • Community Consultation Group (CCG) • Factsheets/printed materials
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 Aboriginal 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



4. 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.

4.1 Ensuring safety during the Covid-19 pandemic

As the project continues to navigate the impacts of Covid-19, the engagement approach has and will continue to be adjusted to ensure the safety of landowners, communities, our consultants and contractors, and the project team. Engagement activities that would usually be delivered face-to-face have been delivered via alternative communication mediums including online forums and telephone.

The global Covid-19 pandemic has impacted project activities under the State of Emergency and State of Disaster declared by the Chief Health Officer in Victoria and the Public Health Commander pursuant to emergency powers under the Public Health and Safety Wellbeing Act 2008. The project is following advice from the Victorian Government including social distancing requirements, wearing of masks, having a Covid Safe Plan and complying with the Covid-19 roadmaps.

4.2 Engagement tools

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. This list includes both traditional methods as well as alternative communication methods that have been adapted to the Covid-19 global pandemic. It is anticipated that all methods will be used at various points over the duration of the EES.

It is anticipated that all methods will be used at various points over the duration of the EES.

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.

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

Community drop-in sessions Informal, face-to-face, drop-in sessions for local communities in the project Area of Interest, and any other interested stakeholders to get project information and ask questions.

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

Online engagement hub built into the project website. This has been designed to provide a central hub of project information and interactive opportunities to participate through digital engagement tools. Written materials such as e-updates and printed communication materials and advertising will direct people to the online engagement hub on the website as a central project resource.

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

Interactive online mapping tool available on the online engagement hub. The map base and detail will be updated throughout the course of the project to reflect decision gateways and new information.

Stakeholder briefings Continued briefings with project stakeholders including government representatives, interest groups, regulators, community members and landholders.

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

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

Dedicated project hotline and email to provide 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 e-updates distributed to anybody who subscribes via specific engagement sessions or the online engagement hub. Sent 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.

Printed communication materials such as project factsheets, posters and other collateral will be distributed to key locations and to directly impacted landowners to raise awareness of the project and opportunities to be involved. Printed communication materials will be prepared and distributed to support planned engagement activities.

To ensure equitable access, all material and content available on the website will also be made available in hard copy.

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

A summary of engagement activities and the feedback received will be made publicly available via the project website. An e-update will be emailed 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. Further detail of project engagement activities can be found at www.westernrenewableslink.com.au

4.3 Activity schedule

Table 3 provides a high-level overview of the proposed engagement schedule over the life of the project. This Plan relates specifically to activities during the planning and approvals phase.

The engagement schedule outlined below has been developed to reflect the program of technical investigations and the planned schedule of meetings of the Technical Reference Group (TRG) established for this EES. This has been undertaken to ensure that information presented to the TRG and project communities is up to date and relevant. 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.

The schedule will continue to be reviewed as the project progresses, and in line with advice and restrictions with the Covid-19 pandemic.

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.

The nature of the feedback can determine how project investigations and decisions are influenced. The project will ensure that a rigorous environmental impact assessment and planning process is undertaken which explores matters of importance to project communities and individuals.

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.

Table 3 High level overview of 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 e-update (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 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 landowners Dedicated project hotline and email Project e-update (or postal update where requested) Printed communication materials including factsheets, 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

Table 3 High level overview of proposed engagement schedule

EES Engagement Phase	Indicative time period	Key Engagement Activities	Parts of EES process it will inform
Commencement of EES	Late 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote exhibition of draft scoping requirements (undertaken by DELWP) Update online engagement hub with EES information including link to DELWP website Assist DELWP to deliver webinar to help people understand the purpose of the scoping requirements and how to make a submission Dedicated project hotline and email Project e-update (or postal update where requested) Printed communication materials including factsheets Advertising 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Minister considers submissions received when finalising the scoping requirements. After removing all personal details, DELWP provides the submissions to AusNet Services to incorporate relevant matters into the assessments for the EES.
EES preparation and ongoing engagement	Mid 2020 to early 2021	<p>Update online engagement hub including but not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Online question portal Interactive online mapping tool Online community Question and Answer sessions Virtual and drop-in information sessions Targeted meetings/workshops CCG Council Advisory Group Dedicated project hotline and email Database updates Printed communication materials as required including factsheets, maps, brochures and flyers Project e-update (or postal update where requested) Advertising Public summary of engagement findings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scope and methodology of EES technical investigations Preparation of existing conditions reports

Table 3 High level overview of proposed engagement schedule

EES Engagement Phase	Indicative time period	Key Engagement Activities	Parts of EES process it will inform
	Early 2021 to late 2022 (continued)	<p>Update online engagement hub including but not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online question portal • Interactive online mapping tool • Online community Question and Answer sessions • Targeted meetings/workshops • Community Consultation Group (CCG) • Council Advisory Group • Dedicated project hotline and email • Database updates • Printed communication materials as required including factsheets, maps, brochures and flyers • Project e-update (or postal update where requested) • Advertising • Public summary of engagement findings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project design, preparation of impact assessment and mitigations • Opportunities to enhance social benefits
Public exhibition and inquiry	Early to mid 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update online engagement hub • Virtual and drop in information sessions • Dedicated hotline and email • Community Consultation Group (CCG) • Council Advisory Group • Email and postal updates • Printed communication materials including factsheets and summary reports • Advertising 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inquiry report
Minister's assessment of environmental effects	Late 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update online engagement hub • Dedicated project hotline and email • Community Consultation Group (CCG) • Council Advisory Group • Email and postal updates • Printed communication materials including factsheets • Advertising 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minister's Assessment



5. Recording, monitoring and reporting

5.1 Monitoring the effectiveness of our approach

AusNet Services is committed to continuous improvement of stakeholder and community engagement throughout the life of the project. 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. The following table provides a summary of some of the ways the project will monitor activities and how this is measured as part of the EES process. It is important to note that the evaluation framework has been designed for the full duration of the project and that some objectives and opportunities to capture evaluation data relate to the whole of project program, including the EES process.

Some 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 TRG convened for the EES. These meetings will provide advice and review the EES process to ensure integrity and consistency with the EE Act 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
Strengthen relationships with stakeholders and community to foster trust, awareness and understanding of the project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How effectively the project has engaged with affected stakeholders and community • How far engagement has reached • How effective was the project 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
Develop and maintain a social license to develop, construct and operate through best practice stakeholder engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How effectively was the engagement delivered in line with this Plan • How learnings from each phase influence the approach • Community and stakeholders interested in the project can contribute feedback to inform the project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tracking of deliverables against the Plan • 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
Increase awareness, understanding and support of the Project including the process of the design, approvals, construction and operations	<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
Proactively engage with stakeholders to identify potential impacts and investigate possible mitigations, and provide timely responses to issues via easily accessible communication channels	<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 TRG
Facilitate genuine stakeholder and community input to minimise impacts, maximise benefits and meet commitments made to the community	<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



5.2 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.



6. 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* <p>*local government area that the proposed route traverses through</p>




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

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

Stakeholder group	Key members	
Community groups	<p>Key local environmental and interest groups (listed below according to LGA)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environment Victoria • Western Victoria Transmission Network Project Rippon Association <p>Ballarat</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ballarat Environment Network • Miners Rest Landcare Group • Regional Sustainability Alliance Ballarat • Ballarat Renewable Energy and Zero Emissions (BREAZE) • Ballarat Climate Action Network • Ballarat Bushwalking and Outdoor Club • Ballarat Field Naturalists Club • Bird Life Ballarat <p>Hepburn</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hepburn Wind (Hepburn Community Wind Park Co-Operative Ltd) • Sustainable Hepburn Association • Creswick and District Historical Society • Transitions Creswick • Mollongghip community energy • Wattle Glen Landcare Group <p>Melton</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Melton Environment Group • Western Plains North Green Wedge Coalition Group • Pinkerton Landcare and Environment group • Toolern Landcare Group to Melton 	<p>Moorabool</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moorabool Environment and Sustainability Advisory Committee (Council advisory committee) • Moorabool Landcare Network • Moorabool Environment Group • Friends of the Lerderderg • Bunanyung Landscape Alliance • Bacchus Marsh Community Coalition • Lal Lal EPA • Moorabool and Central Highlands Power Alliance • Friends of Werribee Gorge and Long Forest Mallee • Pentland Hills Landcare Group • Coimadai Landcare Group • Rowsley Landcare Group • Moorabool Catchment Landcare Group • Northern Grampians • Wimmera Mallee Sustainability Alliance • Friends of the Grampians <p>Pyrenees</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Waubra Wind Farm Community Fund Inc. • Waubra Community Foundation • Other local community and action groups
	<p>Traditional Owner and Aboriginal Groups</p> <p>Registered Aboriginal Parties and Traditional Owner Groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Barengi Gadjin Land Council Aboriginal Corporation • Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation • Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation • Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation • Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation • Boon Wurrung Foundation • Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation 	



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Need an interpreter?



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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/environment-assessment/what-is-the-ees-process-in-victoria) including information about the environment assessment process managed by DELWP.

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 Statement of Expectations.

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