

Terms of Reference

Victoria to New South Wales Interconnector West
Inquiry and Advisory Committee



Department
of Transport
and Planning

Version: 29 September 2026

The Victoria to New South Wales Interconnector West (VNI West) Inquiry and Advisory Committee (IAC) is appointed to inquire into, and report on, the environmental effects of the proposed VNI West transmission project (the project) as assessed in the environment effects statement (EES), in accordance with these terms of reference.

For context, the project outline is provided in **Appendix 1** and the procedures and requirements the Minister issues for the EES are provided in **Appendix 2**.

The IAC is appointed pursuant to section 9(1) of the *Environment Effects Act 1978* (EE Act) as an inquiry, and established under Part 7, section 151(1) of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* (P&E Act) as an Advisory Committee.

Name

1. The IAC is to be known as the 'VNI West IAC' (the IAC).

Composition and expertise

2. The IAC will consist of a Chair, at least one Deputy Chair and appropriately qualified members with expertise in:
 - a. biodiversity and ecology;
 - b. aboriginal cultural heritage;
 - c. agriculture; and
 - d. electrical transmission infrastructure and engineering.

Purpose of the IAC

3. The IAC is appointed by the Minister for Planning (the Minister) under section 9(1) of the EE Act to inquire into and report to the Minister on the environmental effects of the project, focusing on the matters listed in Clause 8.
4. The IAC must inquire into and report to the Minister on the environmental effects of the project, having regard to:
 - a. the significance of residual environmental effects; and
 - b. the issues raised in submissions and the proponent's response to submissions.
5. The IAC is also appointed as an Advisory Committee under Part 7, section 151(1) of the P&E Act to:
 - a. review draft Amendment GC316 to the Gannawarra, Buloke, Loddon and Northern Grampians Planning Schemes (draft PSA);
 - b. consider any relevant issues raised in public submissions received in relation to the draft PSA; and
 - c. consider whether the draft PSA contains provisions and controls that are appropriate for the project and recommend any changes to the draft PSA that it considers necessary.
6. The IAC must produce a report of its findings and recommendations to the Minister. This report will inform the Minister's assessment under the EE Act of the environmental effects of the project. The report also needs to provide consideration of the draft PSA.

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7. It is not the role of the IAC to examine and report on the EES process itself undertaken to date, or consultation undertaken by the proponent for the EES.

Scope and focus of the IAC

8. The IAC should focus its proceedings on examining the “key environmental matters” and “other environmental matters” as listed below.
- a. Key environmental matters:
 - i. biodiversity and ecology;
 - ii. aboriginal cultural heritage;
 - iii. land use (as it pertains to agricultural and socioeconomic aspects); and
 - iv. the Environmental Management Framework to the extent relevant to the management of matters listed from (i) to (iii).
 - b. Other environmental matters:
 - i. historic heritage;
 - ii. landscape and visual;
 - iii. greenhouse gas emissions and climate change;
 - iv. catchment values and hydrology;
 - v. land use (as it pertains to bushfire aspects);
 - vi. roads and transport, aviation, community amenity, electromagnetic fields; and
 - vii. the Environmental Management Framework to the extent relevant to the management of matters listed from (i) to (vi).
9. The IAC does not need to provide advice on matters which are not listed above in Clause 8. In providing its advice the IAC must consider the following:
- a. the exhibited EES and draft PSA;
 - b. submissions and information provided to the IAC by the proponent, state agencies, local councils and submitters; and
 - c. the views (if known) of Traditional Owners and Registered Aboriginal Parties.

Process

Stage 1 – Submissions

10. Submissions on the EES, including the draft PSA, are to be provided in writing on or before the close of submissions date.
11. Submissions on the EES, including the draft PSA, will be collected by the office of PPV through the Engage Victoria platform. All submissions should state the name and address of the person making the submission. Submissions should be collected and managed in accordance with the privacy guidance on the PPV website.
12. Petition responses should be treated as a single submission and only the first name listed from a petition submission should be registered and contacted.
13. Pro-forma submitters should be registered and contacted individually if they provide their contact details. However, the IAC is to encourage pro-forma submitters who want to be heard to present as a group at the hearing, given their submissions raise the same issues.
14. The IAC should not consider submissions (in relation to the EES and draft PSA) that are outside its scope.
15. The IAC should make submissions and material presented to it available for public inspection by publishing the submissions and material on the Engage Victoria website, unless the IAC directs otherwise in accordance with Clause 16.

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16. Requests for submissions or other material to be kept confidential should be clearly stated in writing with reason to the IAC through PPV, consistent with the process outlined in the IAC's Privacy Collection Statement. The IAC should review these and base its decision to maintain confidentiality on whether it would be fair to the proponent and other parties to the hearing. The IAC may direct that submissions or other material presented to it be kept confidential in appropriate circumstances.
 17. The IAC must provide (unredacted) copies of all submissions on the EES and draft PSA (including any confidential submissions) to the following:
 - a. the proponent;
 - b. Department of Transport and Planning (DTP) (Impact Assessment Unit and Energy & Infrastructure Assessment);
 - c. Gannawarra, Buloke, Loddon and Northern Grampians Shire Councils;
 - d. Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation and Barengi Gadjin Land Council Aboriginal Corporation; and
 - e. First Peoples-State Relations.
 18. The IAC should retain written submissions and other material presented to it for five years after the time of the IAC's appointment.

Stage 2 – Directions hearing

19. The IAC should hold a directions hearing to make directions it considers necessary or appropriate as to the conduct, scope or scheduling of its proceedings, including the public hearing.

Stage 3 – Inquiry by public hearing

20. The IAC should examine the matters referred to in Clause 8a through a public hearing, with expert evidence only called on these matters.
21. A quorum of at least two of its members present or participating through electronic means, one of whom should be the IAC Chair or Deputy Chair.
22. When it conducts a public hearing, the IAC has all the powers of an Advisory Committee that are specified in section 152 of the P&E Act.
23. The IAC should ensure the hearing is:
 - a. conducted in an open, orderly, equitable and respectful manner. Adversarial behaviour should not be permitted at the public hearing and questioning of experts and submitters needs to be regulated by the IAC in the context of understanding and resolving matters.
 - b. conducted with a minimum of formality and without legal representation being necessary for parties to be effective participants.
 - c. exploratory and constructive, focusing on understanding and resolving matters.
24. The IAC may:
 - a. limit the time of parties submitting at the hearing;
 - b. prioritise hearing from submitters who are directly affected by the project;
 - c. conduct concurrent hearing sessions to hear from submitters;
 - d. limit the time available for proponent and parties to question experts;
 - e. regulate the questioning of experts to ensure questions and answers are focused on assisting the IAC to understand the project's potentially significant residual effects; and
 - f. direct the proponent to produce an audio recording of the hearing in a format that can be published on the Engage Victoria website. Any other recording by any other person or organisation may only occur with the prior consent of, and strictly in accordance with, the directions of the IAC.
25. The IAC may direct that a submission or evidence is confidential in nature and the hearing be closed to the public and not be recorded for the purposes of receiving that submission or evidence.



Stage 3 – Inquiry by written submissions

26. The IAC should examine the other environmental matters identified in Clause 8b by written submission only, including the proponent's written responses to these submissions.
27. All material considered through the written submissions needs to strictly focus on the relevant matters in clause 8b and not include the presentation of evidence or expert witnesses.
28. The IAC can inform itself by considering other written information provided at the direction of the IAC in relation to other environmental matters in clause 8b.

Stage 4 – Report

29. The IAC must produce a written report for the Minister containing its:
 - a. analysis on the environmental effects of the project having particular regard to both the key environmental matters and other environmental matters identified in Clauses 8a and 8b;
 - b. findings and conclusions on the significance of impacts and whether acceptable environmental outcomes can be achieved, having regard to legislation, policy and best practice;
 - c. recommendations on the appropriateness and effectiveness of the proposed environmental management measures for the project and/or additional specific measures that it considers necessary and appropriate to prevent, mitigate or offset adverse significant environmental effects;
 - d. recommendations relating to any feasible modifications to the design or management of the project necessary and appropriate to reduce or mitigate significant environmental effects;
 - e. recommendations for any appropriate conditions/requirements that may be lawfully imposed on any approval for the project; including the draft PSA, necessary and appropriate to reduce or mitigate environmental effects;
 - f. recommendations as to the structure and content of the proposed Environmental Management Framework, including monitoring of environmental effects, reporting on the effectiveness of mitigation measures, contingency plans and site rehabilitation; and
 - g. specific findings and recommendations about the likely impacts on relevant matters of national environmental significance under the EPBC Act and their acceptability, including appropriate controls and environmental management.
30. The IAC in its capacity as an Advisory Committee must include in its written report for the Minister advice on whether the draft PSA is an appropriate means by which to facilitate the project, and any recommended modifications to the draft PSA.
31. The IAC's report needs to:
 - a. focus on the key environmental matters identified in Clause 8a;
 - b. address other environmental matters identified in Clause 8b at a high level, having regard to the relative significance of the likely effects; and
 - c. include information and depth of analysis proportionate to the significance of the environmental effects.
32. The report must include:
 - a. a list of all recommendations, including cross-references to relevant discussions in the report;
 - b. a description of the inquiry conducted by the IAC, and a list of parties heard or consulted;
 - c. a list of the documents tabled during the proceedings; and
 - d. a list of all submissions collected by PPV on the exhibited EES, including the draft PSA.
33. Any matters that the IAC determines have minor or negligible impact and can be readily addressed through standard and proven environmental management techniques do not need to be examined by the IAC. Simple recording of these matters in the report will be sufficient.



Timing

- 34. The IAC will hold a directions hearing no later than 15 business days from the final date of the exhibition period.
- 35. The IAC will commence the public hearing no later than 30 business days from the final date of exhibition period. Unless this falls over the Christmas-New Year period, in which case 60 business days will apply.
- 36. The IAC must submit its report in writing to the Minister for Planning within 40 business days from the last sitting day of the public hearing, or as otherwise directed by the Minister for Planning.
- 37. The DTP's Impact Assessment Unit must liaise with PPV and the proponent to agree on dates for the directions hearing, and the inquiry.

Administration

Fee

- 38. IAC member fees are to be set under the P&E Act.
- 39. All IAC costs must be met by the proponent.

Miscellaneous

- 40. The IAC may apply to the Minister (or their delegate) to request variation to these terms of reference in writing. Reasons for the request must be included in the request.
- 41. The IAC may retain specialist expert advice, additional technical support, or legal counsel to assist if considered necessary.
- 42. PPV is to provide any necessary administrative support to the IAC. The proponent is to provide any necessary administrative or technical support to the IAC in relation to the conduct of the inquiry.
- 43. PPV will notify submitters of the release of the Minister's assessment and the IAC report.



Adam Henson

Executive Director, State Planning Major Projects

Date: 29/09/2026



The following information does not form part the Terms of Reference.

Project Management

For matters regarding the IAC process, please contact Planning Panels Victoria, by email on office@planningpanels.vic.gov.au.

For matters regarding the EES process, please contact the Impact Assessment Unit in DTP by phone (03) 8572 7980 or email environment.assessment@transport.vic.gov.au.



Appendix 1 - Background

Project outline

44. The project proponent is VicGrid VNI West (the proponent), which is responsible for preparing technical studies, consulting with the public and stakeholders and completing preparation of its EES.
45. The proposed project is to provide a link in the electricity transmission system between the Murray River and Renewable Energy Zones (REZs) in both Victoria and New South Wales (NSW) and load centres in those jurisdictions to strengthen the connection between power grids in NSW and Victoria.
46. The proposed project for assessment in the EES comprises the Victorian component of the VNI West. This includes the construction of a new 500kV double circuit electricity transmission line with associated infrastructure situated within Victoria. The transmission line is proposed to be located in the area between the proposed Western Renewables Link (WRL) switchyard (terminal station) in Bulgana (the terminal station is not part of the VNI West scope) and the Murray River north of Kerang (at the Victorian and NSW border), to connect to the NSW portion of VNI West.
47. The proposed project comprises:
 - a. Development, construction and operation of approximately 240km of new 500kV double circuit overhead transmission line with steel lattice towers of between 60m to 80m in height;
 - b. Construction of a terminal station at Tragowel (Tragowel Terminal Station), including both 500kV and 220kV equipment;
 - c. Modification of the existing 200kV transmission line (AusNet Asset) at the proposed Tragowel Terminal Station;
 - d. Construction of a small number of 220kV towers, including single circuit and double circuit configurations, required to cut into the existing AusNet 220kV transmission line;
 - e. Construction of two sets of 500kV shunt reactors at Bulgana (a reactor station) inside or adjacent to the proposed new WRL Bulgana terminal station; and
 - f. Options for workforce accommodation facilities and construction laydown areas.

EES assessment process

48. In response to a referral under the EE Act from the proponent, the Minister for Planning determined on 13 April 2024 that an EES was required for the project. A decision with procedures and requirements for the proponent's preparation of the EES was issued as specified in Appendix 2.
49. The EES was prepared by the proponent in response to the EES scoping requirements issued by the Minister for Planning in February 2025.
50. The EES will be placed on public exhibition for 30 business days. This public comment process is in accordance with the procedures and requirements issued for this EES by the Minister.

Commonwealth assessment process

51. Because of its likely significant impacts on matters of national environmental significance, the project was determined to be a controlled action requiring assessment and approval under the EPBC Act on 13 June 2024. The relevant controlling provisions under the EPBC Act are Ramsar wetlands (sections 16 and 17B), listed threatened species and communities (sections 18 & 18A), listed migratory species (sections 20 & 20A).
52. The EES process is being undertaken as an accredited state assessment process under the EPBC Act Bilateral (Assessment) Agreement with Victoria, to assess impacts on MNES, removing duplication and enabling a single process to examine the project's likely impacts.

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53. The Commonwealth Minister or delegate will decide whether the project is approved, approved with conditions or refused under the EPBC Act, after having considered the Minister for Planning's assessment under the Environment Effects Act.

Planning approval process

54. The proposed works require approval under the P&E Act. The proponent has prepared a draft Amendment GC316 to the Gannawarra, Buloke, Loddon and Northern Grampians Planning Schemes (draft PSA) to provide for this, which will be exhibited as part of the EES package.

Other approvals

55. The project also requires the following key statutory approvals and/or consents, as outlined in the EES:
- a. Approved cultural heritage management plans under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*;
 - b. A permit to 'take' listed flora and fauna from public land under the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988*;
 - c. A permit for works on waterways under the *Water Act 1989*;
 - d. Permission to undertake proposed works in, on, under or over a road under the *Road Management Act 2004*; and
 - e. Authorisation to handle, relocate or care for wildlife under the *Wildlife Act 1978*.



Appendix 2

Procedures and requirements issued under section 8B(5) of the *Environment Effects Act 1978*

Procedures and requirements applying to this EES process, in accordance with both section 8B(5) of the Act and the *Ministerial guidelines for assessment of environmental effects* under the *Environment Effects Act 1978* (Ministerial Guidelines) were issued when the Minister decided an EES was required. This included the following:

The EES is to document investigations of potential environmental effects of the proposed project, including the feasibility of associated environmental mitigation and management measures, including:

- a. alternative corridors, alignments, site locations, designs or other options for the planning, construction or operation of the project;
- b. potential effects on biodiversity and ecological values, including loss, degradation or fragmentation of native vegetation and habitat;
- c. potential effects on Aboriginal and historic cultural heritage values;
- d. potential effects on visual and landscape values;
- e. potential effects on water environments including waterways, wetlands and groundwater; and
- f. potential effects on agriculture, other land uses and communities.