PROJECT UPDATE

Western Renewables Link

Welcome to this Western Renewables Link (WRL) project update. In this edition, we share what's next for the project following approval of the WRL Planning Scheme Amendment (PSA), along with the latest updates on the Local Grants Fund and support for local businesses.

A significant milestone for WRL

The Victorian Minister for Planning has approved the Planning Scheme Amendment (PSA) for the Western Renewables Link (WRL), marking a significant milestone for the project. This follows the recent release of the Minister's assessment of the project's Environment Effects Statement (EES) under the *Environment Effects Act 1978*.

The Minister's assessment completed the public review and assessment phase of the EES process and will inform subsequent planning and approval decisions for the project. The approval of the PSA establishes the planning controls that would govern the project's design, construction and operation.

We appreciate that these processes have been lengthy and challenging for the local community. The completion of the EES process and approval of the PSA provide greater certainty about how the project may progress and the requirements that must be met as it moves through the remaining approvals process.

We thank and acknowledge the landholders, community members, technical experts and many stakeholders for their valuable contributions and engagement throughout the thorough EES process, particularly those who took part in the public hearing.

View the full EES assessment

View the PSA gazettal

What this means

The Minister found that the environmental impacts of the project are acceptable on balance, with implementation of the environmental management framework, environmental performance requirements and recommendations within the assessment.

This includes doing further work recommended in the Darley area to investigate possible opportunities to reduce impacts of the project in the area, particularly those relating to landscape and local views, biodiversity, social and bushfire concerns.

The approval of the PSA enables certain preparatory activities to proceed. However, construction remains subject to the remaining State and Federal environmental approvals.

We will now work through the recommendations and seek the necessary approvals.

What happens next for the project

The planning controls that will govern the project's construction and operation are informed by an amendment to the Northern Grampians, Pyrenees, Ballarat, Hepburn, Moorabool and Melton local government planning schemes.

Approval of the PSA is a key planning milestone but further approvals are required before construction can commence, including:

- Approval under the Commonwealth *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*
- Cultural heritage approvals
- Permits and consents to manage impacts on waterways, flora and fauna

Once the required approvals are achieved, the project can move into construction.

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Premier of Victoria's cost assessment

You may have seen that the Premier of Victoria has announced an independent assessment into the costs of WRL, with the assessment to be completed by the end of the year.

AusNet acknowledges the Victorian Premier's announcement and will support the review. Our focus is on delivering value for money for Victorian electricity customers as the State transitions away from coal-fired power, while making sure landholders and communities share in the benefits of the project.

Update to Voluntary Hosting Benefit

Our absolute priority remains reaching voluntary agreements with landholders, helping them understand their options and supporting them through the process. As part of our commitment to voluntary agreements and with the approval of the PSA providing more certainty about the next steps for the project, we have extended eligibility for the Voluntary Hosting Benefit (VHB) until **Friday 11 December 2026**. Landholders with any questions about the VHB are encouraged to speak with their Land Liaison Officer.

Local Grants Fund applicants notified

Almost 200 community groups and local volunteer-led organisations across western Victoria applied for the $4 million Local Grants Fund, which closed at the end of June.

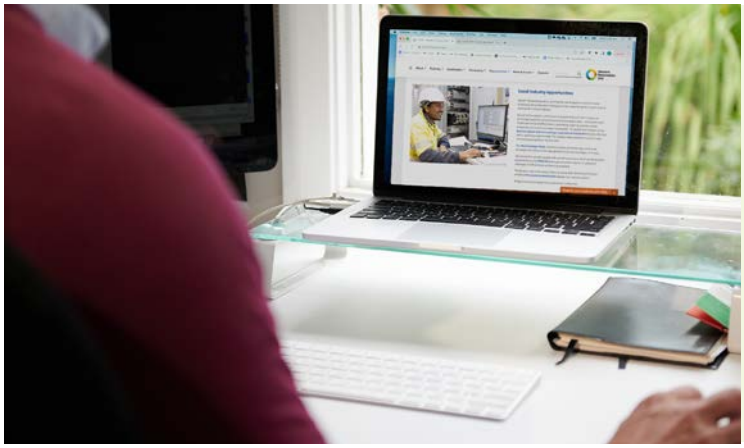
Almost 200 applications totalling close to $22 million for the $4 million fund were made by community groups. Many exciting ideas were put forward, from solar panels and battery projects to community gardens and support for emergency services. The Independent Local Grants Review Panel, made up of community members, has now completed its assessment and all applicants are being notified of the outcome. A list of funded projects is anticipated to be published in early 2027.

Applying for or receiving funding from WRL does not indicate support for WRL or affect anyone's right to oppose the project.

New mobile base stations for western Victoria

Residents, businesses and visitors in Smeaton and Lexton can now access connectivity from two new mobile base stations, made possible as part of a $3 million investment from the WRL Benefit Sharing Program.

The new infrastructure is intended to improve 4G and 5G coverage and deliver more reliable service, supporting local enterprise, digital accessibility and emergency response efforts across the region.



New WRL Local Business Support

To help local businesses along the project route prepare for upcoming opportunities on WRL, the new **WRL Local Business Support Program** is now open for applications. Delivered in partnership with Commerce Ballarat, the free program provides up to four hours of business mentoring and practical support to help local suppliers become procurement-ready and compete for project work.

Businesses interested in future opportunities are encouraged to join the WRL Business Register and receive more information about the WRL Local Business Support Program at www.westernrenewableslink.com.au/businesses

Elmore Field Days

The WRL team was out and about at Elmore Field Days over 6-8 October. The team was on hand to discuss the latest project updates and answer questions about the Planning Minister's assessment of the WRL EES, upcoming approvals and what's next for the project, opportunities for local industry and the new WRL Local Business Support Program. Thank you to everyone who stopped by to chat with us.

About the project

The Western Renewables Link is a proposed electricity transmission line that will carry renewable energy from western Victoria to homes and businesses across the state and into the National Electricity Market. The project is critical infrastructure required to unlock the renewable energy potential of western Victoria as a key Renewable Energy Zone and will help to deliver clean and affordable energy to all Victorians.

Want to speak with a member of our team?

You can contact the team on our dedicated number 1800 975 975 or email us at info@westernrenewableslink.com.au.

More information

Visit the project website westernrenewableslink.com.au for the latest project information.

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