

Biodiversity and Environment

The Environment Effects Statement (EES) and the draft Planning Scheme Amendment for the Western Renewables Link are now available for public comment. Biodiversity, greenhouse gas and climate change are key topics covered in the EES.

This fact sheet has been developed to help you navigate the Western Renewables Link EES and connect you with the information that matters to you.

It provides details on how potential impacts on **biodiversity and the environment** have been considered and where to find more information in the EES.

Planning and approvals

The EES includes information on how the project could affect the environment during construction, operation and decommissioning, and how any adverse impacts could be managed. It helps decision-makers determine whether the project should be approved under Commonwealth and Victorian laws and what conditions should apply.

The EES for the Western Renewables Link has involved extensive technical studies including field surveys and investigations, along with Traditional Owner, landholder, community and stakeholder consultation. It includes 20 technical reports on the topics listed on the final page of this fact sheet.

The EES and the draft Planning Scheme Amendment, which allows for the project land use and development to proceed, can be viewed in full on the WRL website at westernrenewableslink.com.au/ees



The Western Renewables Link will unlock Victoria's renewable energy generation potential and play a key role in facilitating access to clean, reliable, and affordable energy.

The Western Renewables Link is a proposed high-voltage, double-circuit overhead electricity transmission line, extending over 190 kilometres from Bulgana in western Victoria to Sydenham in Melbourne's north-west. The project will connect significant renewable energy developments within the Western Victoria Renewable Energy Zone to the grid and establish a direct link between the New South Wales and Victorian electricity networks.

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Biodiversity

The Western Renewables Link will pass through areas that include native vegetation and important habitats. While the route has been carefully planned to avoid sensitive areas, as far as possible, some biodiversity impacts are unavoidable due to the project's size and the need to clear vegetation for the new infrastructure.

What was investigated?

Biodiversity specialists assessed impacts of the project on biodiversity and habitat and measures to avoid, minimise or manage impacts through all phases of the project. A combination of desktop analysis and field surveys was used to determine the existing biodiversity and habitat conditions including the presence and extent of native vegetation, threatened ecological communities (TECs), and threatened flora and fauna in the area. Where survey was not possible, the specialists relied on desktop information and modelled data as a conservative worst-case assessment of impacts that is expected to be reduced through establishment of no-go zones, design refinement and further survey.

Investigations included:

- desktop review and analysis of modelled data, mapping and public databases
- habitat assessments, general field surveys and targeted surveys for threatened species and communities
- assessment of landscape values including conservation reserves and linkage corridors
- bird and bat collision risk assessment; and
- offset availability.

Route selection to avoid and minimise biodiversity impacts

Despite extensive vegetation loss due to agriculture, urban development, and other land uses, western Victoria still supports a range of important native plant and animal species. To minimise impacts as far as possible, the route was designed to avoid national parks, state forests, and their associated biodiversity values.

As a result, major conservation areas such as Wombat State Forest, Werribee Gorge State Park, Creswick Regional Park, Lerderderg State Park, and the Long Forest Nature Conservation Reserve have been excluded from the proposed route. It also bypasses smaller reserves such as Mt Beckworth Scenic Reserve and Ben More Bushland Reserve and protects a high-quality grassland area near Kingston Road by designating it a no-go zone.

Further refinements were made to protect biodiversity values around Merrimu and Hayden's Hill, including areas home to the Southern Greater Glider and rare plant species. In some sections, the project follows existing infrastructure—such as an existing 200kV transmission line in Lexton Bushland Reserve—to limit additional disturbance. Tower and access track locations have also been planned to avoid wetlands, native grasslands, and known nesting trees, as far as possible.

Managing potential impacts

Most biodiversity impacts will occur when vegetation is cleared during construction, and due to ongoing vegetation management during operation. This clearing will affect several threatened plant and animal species. Not all vegetation within the transmission line easement will be removed, however the project has taken a cautious approach by assuming it could be when assessing potential impacts.

To minimise impacts, including to threatened plants and animals, before construction work begins, detailed surveys will confirm what's on the ground, helping to refine the design. Nogo zones will be set up to protect any native vegetation that doesn't need to be removed, helping to reduce impacts. The surveys will also inform what environmental offsets are needed– actions taken in other areas to make up for any biodiversity loss. A draft Offset Management Strategy has already been prepared to outline how these requirements will be met.



This fact sheet outlines potential EES topics you may wish to explore further, but submissions should not be based on this information. Please refer to the more detailed information on Biodiversity in EES Chapters 8 and 27 and in Technical Report A, and base submissions on the material provided there.



Examples of how we plan to manage potential impacts to biodiversity:



Undertaking surveys to confirm the presence of native vegetation and threatened species before any clearing begins



Clearing only the areas needed



Offsetting any unavoidable clearing in line with state and federal guidelines



Putting plans in place to protect threatened plants and animals, including having ecologists on site during habitat clearing



Implementing erosion control, stormwater and run-off management to manage impacts to wetlands



Using visibility markers and other tools to reduce the risk of birds and bats colliding with transmission lines

Greenhouse Gas and Climate Change

Climate change is caused by a build-up of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. This has led to rising temperatures and changes to the Earth's climate systems and processes, including in some cases more extreme weather events. Comprehensive assessments were carried out to understand the risks of climate change to the project and to estimate the greenhouse gas emissions generated by construction and operation of the project.

The climate change assessment characterised the current and predicted future climate of the area in which the project is proposed to be built, and provided an overview of key potential impacts of climate change on electricity transmission networks.

Investigations included:

- characterisation of the current climate using daily meteorological observations from Ararat, Ballarat and Melbourne Airport Bureau of Meteorology monitoring stations
- mapping the spatial variability in rainfall and temperature using data from the SimCLIM climate data tool
- using historical climate data to calculate baseline fire weather conditions, based on the Forest Fire Danger Index and Grassland Fire Danger Index
- developing projected climate change conditions for 2030, 2050, 2070 and 2090 from the Climate Insights tool for the Ararat, Ballarat and Melbourne Airport Bureau of Meteorology monitoring stations, and developing changes in fire weather conditions for the same year.

The climate change assessment considered how future climate and weather extremes might affect the proposed infrastructure.

The greenhouse gas impact assessment adopted reported greenhouse gas data from Australia's National Greenhouse Accounts as the baseline greenhouse gas emissions for comparison with project emissions. These provide a detailed database of state and national greenhouse gas emissions, including a breakdown by year and by state. The emissions data for the most recent available year (2022) were used as a benchmark, and the reported data from the last ten years of reporting (2012 – 2022) were compiled to determine current emissions and emission trends.

The project's greenhouse gas emissions were determined by developing a greenhouse gas inventory for the project, in accordance with the Greenhouse Gas Protocol issued by the World Business Council for Sustainable Development and the World Resources Institute, and ISO 14064-1:2006, which is an international standard for quantifying and reporting greenhouse gas emissions. Emissions were categorised into three different scopes in accordance with the Greenhouse Gas Protocol, being Scope 1 emissions (generated by the project's own activities, such as fuel use), Scope 2 emissions (which come from the electricity and energy the project buys) and Scope 3 emissions (other emissions from sources not owned or operated by AusNet, such as embedded emissions in raw materials used in construction).

Building the project will produce greenhouse gas emissions, mostly from making construction materials like cement and steel, clearing vegetation, and fuel use.

Managing potential impacts

During the detailed design stage, a climate change risk assessment will be prepared and updated every five years to monitor the resilience and reliability of the project as the climate changes.

The project is expected to help reduce long-term climate impacts by making it easier to get renewable energy–such as wind and solar–into the electricity grid. This supports the Commonwealth Government's commitment to reducing Australia's greenhouse gas emissions by 43% by 2030 and to net zero by 2050, established under the *Climate Change Act 2022*.



This fact sheet outlines potential EES topics you may wish to explore further, but submissions should not be based on this information. Please refer to the more detailed information on Greenhouse Gas in **EES Chapter 26** and **Technical Report M**, and on Climate Change in **Chapter 28** and in **Technical Report N**, and base submissions on the material provided there.





Greenhouse Gas Clir

Climate Change

Examples of how we plan to manage potential impacts to greenhouse gas and climate change:



Monitoring and reporting emissions during construction, as required by the National Greenhouse and Energy Reporting Act 2007



Updating the climate risk assessment every five years using the latest science



Using lower-emission materials such as low-carbon cement and recycled steel where practical



Designing infrastructure to be climate-resilient



Including emission reduction strategies in the Sustainability Management Plan



Supporting renewable energy access, helping reduce Australia's overall greenhouse gas emissions



Completing a climate risk assessment during the design stage



Making a submission

Planning Panels Victoria (PPV) manages the EES public exhibition process.

Submissions must be made in writing and received by the exhibition closing date via the Engage Victoria website – the Victorian Government's centralised online consultation platform <u>engage.vic.gov.au/Western-</u> <u>Renewables-Link-IAC</u>. Submissions will be considered by the independent Inquiry and Advisory Committee (IAC) and the Minister for Planning.

Only one submission is needed to address all your views about the project, its effects, and the relevant documents.

If you do not have internet access and are unable to lodge a submission online via the Engage Victoria website, please contact PPV through the Customer Call Centre on 136 186 (select option 6) and request a hard copy submission coversheet. Each hard copy submission must be accompanied by a completed coversheet issued by PPV. All submissions must state the name and address of the person making the submission. Submissions will be treated as public documents and will be published on the Engage Victoria website. Do not include personal information in the body of your submission (such as your email address or phone number or photos of people, particularly children).

If you would like to present your submission in person to the IAC, you will need to make a submission and mark on the submission form that you would like to be heard.

For more information about the EES submission process or any enquiries regarding the IAC process, contact PPV on 136 186 (select option 6) or email **planning.panels@transport.vic.gov.au**



Key topics in the EES



More information

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

Contact us

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