

JANUARY TO JUNE 2023

Community Engagement Summary Report



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Introduction

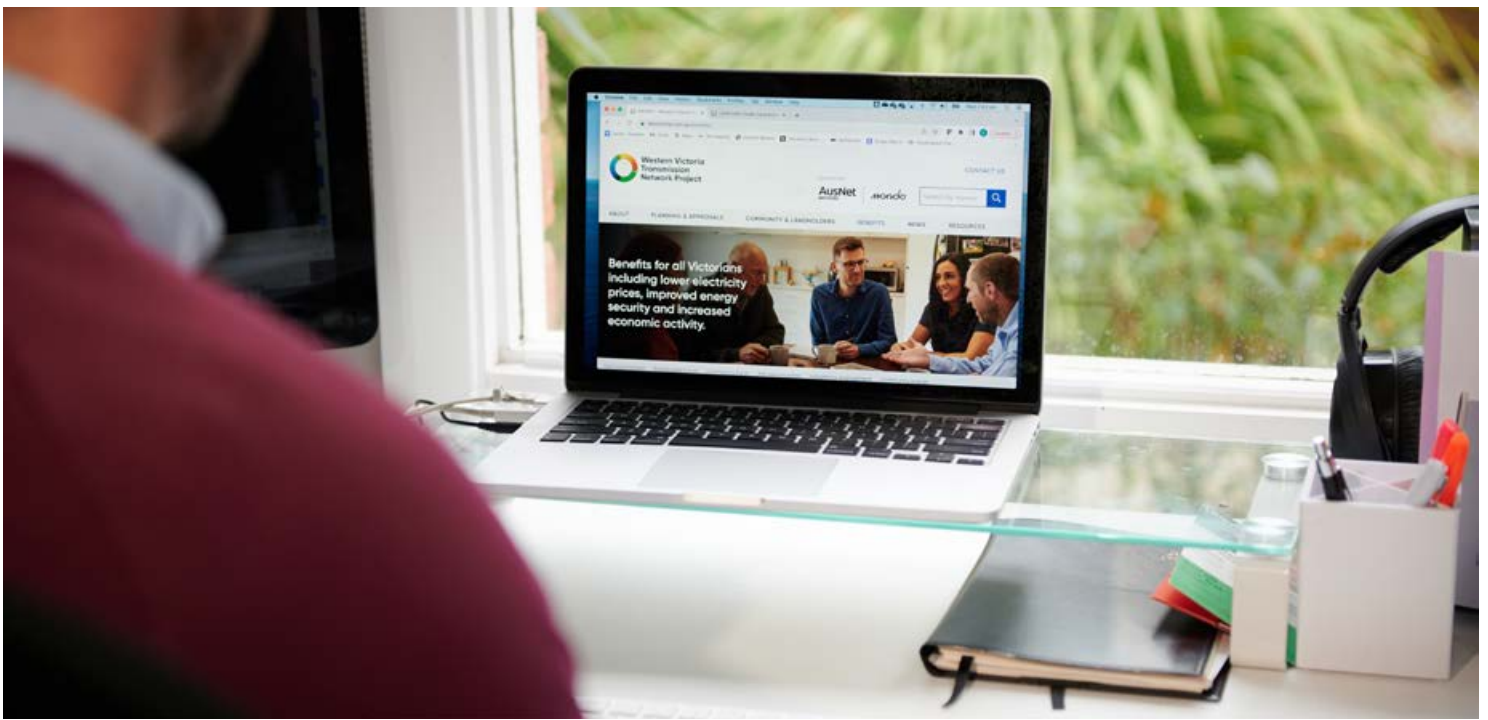
The Western Renewables Link is a critical upgrade of Victoria's transmission network. It will support Victoria's transition from coal-generated electricity to sustainable, affordable and reliable renewable energy.

The project features a proposed new 190-kilometre transmission line running from Bulgana, near Stawell in Victoria's west, to Sydenham in Melbourne's north-west. The project will connect renewable energy generated in western Victoria to the National Electricity Market and increase the Victorian transmission network capacity.

Purpose of this report

This report covers the period from January 2023 to June 2023 and includes details of the community engagement undertaken by the Western Renewables Link team including pop-up information sessions and field day attendances. The report also details the various project announcements made during the period.

The Western Renewables Link team considers all feedback and encourages anyone interested or affected to contact the project team on 1300 360 795 or info@westernrenewableslink.com.au with any comments or information they wish to share.



What happened between January and June 2023?

From January to June 2023 consultation with community and landholders in the Western Renewables Link project area continued with particular focus placed on the Australian Energy Market Operator's (AEMO) investigation into options to connect the Victoria to New South Wales Interconnector West (VNI West) to the Western Renewables Link at a location further west than the project's original proposed terminal station location to the north of Ballarat.

Following the release of a Consultation Report by AEMO, in February 2023, the Western Renewables Link project team continued to engage with landholders between Bulgana and north of Ballarat to discuss the implications of a changed terminal station site and uprate to 500kV from Bulgana to north of Ballarat. This includes landholders who may be impacted by a change in the proposed route to the north of Waubra.

AEMO Victorian Planning (AVP) concluded in the VNI West Project Assessment Conclusions Report (PACR) in May 2023 that these proposed transmission lines should connect at Bulgana, near Stawell, instead of north of Ballarat. This means the Western Renewables Link terminal station planned for north of Ballarat would no longer be required. Instead, a new terminal station would be planned near Bulgana to connect VNI West and the Western Renewables Link. The capacity of the Western Renewables Link from north of Ballarat to Bulgana would also be increased from 220kV to 500kV. AusNet are currently considering the implications of these proposed changes for the Western Renewables Link project.

Key engagement activities between January and June 2023

Key engagement activities:

- New Landholder Guide: Option for Easement process and compensation published
- Published fact sheets including Transmission Line Construction fact sheet and Biosecurity fact sheet
- Continued meetings with landholders (both in person and virtually)
- Regular eUpdates were issued
- A second visit to the region by CEOs of AEMO and AusNet
- Staff attendance at the Wimmera Field Days in March
- 8 pop-up sessions held at Bacchus Marsh, Wendouree, Melton and Taylors Lakes shopping centres
- Government and industry meetings continued
- Council Advisory Group meetings continued
- Community Consultation Group meetings continued

Fast facts for January to June 2023



More than **328** emails to project inbox



10 phone calls to project hotline



2 Community Consultation Group meetings



More than **8,990** visits to the project website



More than **360** key stakeholder meetings



AEMO release of the consultation report on options for VNI West

AVP and Transgrid published a Consultation Report on the further analysis undertaken for the VNI West project on 23 February 2023. The report outlined a new proposed preferred option for the VNI West connection to Western Renewables Link, near Bulgana, and invited stakeholder submissions throughout March and April during a six-week consultation period.

To inform landholders and surrounding landholders of the release of the Consultation Report, the Western Renewables Link project team sent letters to letterboxes 2km either side of the proposed route between Bulgana and Dean. This letter invited recipients to engage directly with AEMO on the VNI West connection point. The team also emailed those landholders and surrounding landholders for whom we had contact details.

Wimmera Field Days

Project staff attended the Wimmera Field Days from 7 – 9 March 2023 where approximately 175 people engaged with the Western Renewables Link project stand.

The project stand included maps of the updated proposed route and fact sheets, and project staff were available throughout the three days to answer questions about the project.

Themes commonly raised at the field days included:

- What is the project?
- Why is it needed?
- Farming equipment and transmission lines
- Undergrounding
- Route selection
- Other transmission projects planned for the area
- The feasibility of nuclear energy generation
- The need for transmission line infrastructure such as Western Renewables Link

Participation in the Wimmera Field Days provided an opportunity to engage with people who had little or no prior knowledge of the project. It was observed that communities outside the project area understood the need for the infrastructure and were generally supportive.

CEO regional visit

In March 2023, AusNet's CEO, Tony Narvaez and Daniel Westerman, CEO of the Australian Energy Market Operator met invited community representatives, including landholders, councils, renewable energy stakeholders and regional business owners to discuss transmission development and visited one of the largest wind farms in Australia. This visit was a follow-up to a visit to the Ballarat region in August 2022.

During a scheduled meeting at Dean Recreation Reserve, a crowd of 60-80 farmers and residents protested against the Western Renewables Link demonstrating their concerns about the project.

Pop-up stalls

In late-April and May 2023, the Western Renewables Link project team held 8 pop-up stalls in shopping centres along the project area including Bacchus Marsh, Wendouree, Taylors Lakes and Melton.

Holding stalls in high foot-traffic areas along the project route enabled community members unfamiliar with the project to learn more about it directly from project team members.

The stalls were advertised in the local newspapers, online and on the Western Renewables Link project website.

The following key themes were identified at each session.



Pop-up event	Date and time	Number of engagements	Key themes
The Village Shopping Centre - Bacchus Marsh	28 April 9-5.30pm	67	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undergrounding • History of project and the area of interest • Route selection • Bushfire risk • Visual impact
	29 April 9-4pm		
Stockland - Wendouree (Ballarat)	5 May 9-8pm	81	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undergrounding • Consultation • Route selection
	6 May 9-5pm		
Watergardens Shopping Centre - Taylors Lakes	10 May 9-5pm	63	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General questions • Undergrounding • Location • Cost
	11 May 9-9pm		
Woodgrove Shopping Centre - Melton	17 May 9-5.30pm	55	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General questions • Undergrounding • Route selection • Human health / EMF
	18 May 9-9pm		



Release of VNI West Project Assessment Conclusions Report (PACR)

As a result of community feedback, the Australian Energy Market Operator Victorian Planning (AVP) investigated moving the connection point between the new Victoria to New South Wales Interconnector West (VNI West) transmission line and the new Western Renewables Link transmission line. AVP concluded in the VNI West Project Assessment Conclusions Report (PACR) in May 2023 that these proposed transmission lines should connect at Bulgana, near Stawell, instead of north of Ballarat.

This means the Western Renewables Link terminal station planned for north of Ballarat would no longer be required. Instead, a new terminal station would be planned near Bulgana to connect VNI West and the Western Renewables Link. The capacity of the Western Renewables Link from north of Ballarat to Bulgana would also be increased from 220kV to 500kV. We expect the majority of the proposed route for the Western Renewables Link to remain unchanged as a result of this proposal, except to the north of Waubra. AusNet will continue working with landholders and communities to confirm what this proposal means for them.

More information about this decision is available in the VNI West PACR, which you can view here: <https://aemo.com.au/en/initiatives/major-programs/vni-west>.

Release of Option for Easement and compensation information for landholders

In March 2023 the new Landholder Guide: Option for Easement process and compensation was published on the project website. Copies were also mailed in hard copy or emailed to some landholders. This guide was designed for landholders with property on the current proposed route for the Western Renewables Link. The document expands on the information about the easement acquisition and compensation process provided in the previously published Landholder Guide: Land access, easements and compensation, which is available on the project website, resources page.

The project team delivered a presentation on the Option for Easement and compensation process to local councils along the route as well as to the Community Consultation Group at the June meeting. A webinar is planned to inform the broader community of the Option for Easement and compensation process and the project's land team is available to talk directly to landholders proposed to host an easement for the Western Renewables Link.

Industry night

An industry night was held for organisational landholders and interested parties along the proposed route to learn about the Option for Easement and compensation process which is underway with landholders who have a proposed easement on their property.



Ongoing consultation with landholders on the proposed route

We are committed to working closely with landholders throughout the planning, construction and operation of the Western Renewables Link. Landholders are key stakeholders in delivering this significant energy transmission project for all Victorians. Each landholder on the proposed route has a designated Land Liaison Officer who is their primary contact person for all project matters during the planning and construction phases.

In December 2022, we shared with all landholders on the proposed route a consultation map of the proposed route and proposed tower locations on their property. Since then, the Land Liaison Officers have worked with landholders to gather specific information about impacts to their properties and operations, and discuss options for changes to tower locations that may reduce impacts. We have also continued to undertake field surveys and investigations to inform the project design and construction planning. Once compensation valuations have been undertaken, Option for Easement proposals will be provided to all landholders proposed to host an easement for the Western Renewables Link.

Community involvement

The EES process provides an opportunity for ongoing, transparent community consultation, and is documented in the Western Renewables Link [EES Consultation Plan](#).

The latest updated version can be found on the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) website and on the project website.

Ongoing consultation helps us identify issues of concern and potential impacts of the project; it also informs the technical studies for the EES. The EES will be publicly exhibited for at least 30 days, during which time the public can review the EES and provide written submissions on the project to Planning Panels Victoria. An EES and Planning Scheme Amendment Inquiry and Advisory Committee (IAC) Hearing is then held, where submissions can be heard, and recommendations are then made by the Inquiry to the Minister for Planning. The timing of the directions and panel hearing is determined by Planning Panels Victoria.

Further information about the EES is outlined in the Environmental Assessment and Key Project Approvals fact sheet and available on the [project website](#) in the resources section.

Thank you for your input




The Western Renewables Link team would like to thank everyone who has participated by attending a face-to-face session, meeting, sent an email or engaged with our project team.

Stay involved

For further information about the project, please call 1300 360 795 or email info@westernrenewableslink.com.au. To register for updates, visit www.westernrenewableslink.com.au



Western Renewables Link

 www.westernrenewableslink.com.au
 1300 360 795
 info@westernrenewableslink.com.au

Ballarat PO Box
PO Box 638, Ballarat VIC 3353

Information straight to your inbox

Sign up for information straight to your inbox at the project website www.westernrenewableslink.com.au.

Feedback

You can provide feedback on this document via our website www.westernrenewableslink.com.au or by calling 1300 360 795 or by emailing info@westernrenewableslink.com.au.

Translation and interpretation services



If you need an interpreter, please call 13 14 50.

If you are deaf and/or find hearing or speaking with people on the phone difficult, please contact the National Relay Service on voice relay number 1300 555 727, TTY number 133 677 or SMS relay number 0423 677 767.

Complaints

If you have a query, a compliment or a complaint, you can let us know by using the online enquiry form on www.westernrenewableslink.com.au. Or you can let us know by:

 1300 360 795
 info@westernrenewableslink.com.au
 PO Box 638, Ballarat VIC 3353

You can also lodge a complaint or provide feedback directly to your Land Liaison Officer.

Complaint handling steps:

1. You can lodge a complaint with AusNet as outlined above.
2. We will acknowledge receipt of a complaint within two working days.
3. We aim to resolve the complaint within ten working days.
4. Where we cannot reach a resolution within ten working days, we will keep you informed of the progress being made with handling the complaint and provide a revised timeframe for resolving the complaint.
5. At any time, you may request to have your complaint escalated to the project senior management team.

If your complaint or question relates to the RIT-T process, you can raise it with AEMO by emailing WestVicRITT@aemo.com.au.

If your complaint or question relates to the Environment Effects Statement process, you can raise it with the Department of Transport and Planning by emailing environment.assessment@delwp.vic.gov.au.

If your complaint cannot be resolved, you can escalate your complaint to the Energy and Water Ombudsman Victoria.

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/environmental-assessments/environmental-assessment-guides/ministerial-guidelines-for-assessment-of-environmental-effects/understanding-the-ees-process) including information about the environment assessment process managed by the Department of Transport and Planning.

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.

Valuer General of Victoria

(www.land.vic.gov.au/valuations/first-time-here/about-valuer-general-victoria) including general information about how land is valued in Victoria.

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