

JANUARY TO JUNE 2025



Community Engagement Summary Report



Delivered by

AusNet

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 is a proposed 190km 500kV double circuit overhead electricity transmission line from near Bulgana in western Victoria to Sydenham in Melbourne's north-west. The project will connect renewable energy generated in western Victoria to the homes and businesses across the state and into the National Electricity Market.

Purpose of report

This report covers the period from January 2025 until June 2025 and includes details of communications and engagement activities undertaken by the Western Renewables Link team including engagement sessions, field day attendance, new project information released and meetings with landholders. The report also details the project announcements and updates made during this period including the significant project milestone of early notice period and commencement of the Environment Effects Statement (EES) public exhibition.

What happened between January – June 2025?

As the proposed Western Renewables Link continues to evolve, we have been able to provide landholders and the community with more information to support their knowledge of the project.

The early notice period for the WRL EES commenced on 16 June 2025, two weeks ahead of the formal exhibition period beginning 30 June 2025, which marked the start of its 40-business-day public exhibition, running until 22 August 2025.

Engagement between January and June focused on;

- Attending the Wimmera Field Days to connect with community members and share project information
- Preparing for the EES exhibition period and providing early notice to affected stakeholders
- Delivering community benefit programs
- Releasing enhanced support for landholders and communities
- Ongoing landholder engagement

Ongoing community engagement activities also included meetings, letters, phone calls and emails to stakeholders.

Keeping the community informed

Engagement activities and project updates were communicated through a range of channels including mail, email, phone calls, eUpdates and newsletters.

A range of new project materials were produced to support conversations with community members during engagement activities from January to June 2025. Advertising in local and regional newspapers, social media posts via LinkedIn and Facebook were used to promote the early notice period of the EES exhibition, while project newsletters supported broader engagement activities throughout the reporting period.



Key engagement activities and materials published between January – June 2025

- Meeting 26 Community Consultation Group Minutes, 20 November 2024, published February 2025 ([Meeting-26-Community-Consultation-Group-20-November-2024-Minutes.pdf](#))
 - Community Engagement Summary Report, July to December 2024, published February 2025 ([Community-Engagement-Summary-Report-July-to-December-2024.pdf](#))
 - Landholder Guide: Land access for field surveys and investigations, updated March 2025 ([Landholder-Guide-Land-access-for-field-surveys-and-investigations.pdf](#))
 - Enhanced Support for Landholders: More Certainty, More Flexibility, published April 2025 ([Enhanced-Support-for-Landholders-More-Certainty-More-Flexibility-April-2025.pdf](#))
 - Landholder Guide- Option for Easement process, compensation and benefits, published May 2025 ([Landholder-Guide-Option-for-Easement-process-and-compensation.pdf](#))
 - Draft Planning Scheme Amendment fact sheet, published June 2025 ([Draft-planning-scheme-amendment.pdf](#))
 - EES Consultation Plan, published June 2025 ([EES-Consultation-Plan-June-2025.pdf](#))
- 9 updates published on the project website, including:**
- 6 AusNet survey updates
 - June 2025 [AusNet roadside surveys - June 2025](#) - Western Renewables Link
 - March- April 2025 [AusNet roadside surveys March - April 2025](#) - Western Renewables Link
 - February 2025 [AusNet roadside surveys February 2025](#) - Western Renewables Link
 - February 2025 [AusNet roadside surveys February 2025 - R Charleson Road, Creswick](#) - Western Renewables Link
 - February 2025 [AusNet helicopter flyover today](#) - Western Renewables Link
 - January 2025 [AusNet State Park and roadside field surveys in January 2025](#) - Western Renewables Link
 - 2 project update newsletters and 1 special edition EES early notice period newsletter sent to subscribers and published on our website:
 - June 2025 ([www.westernrenewableslink.com.au/assets/resources/project-update-june-2025.pdf](#))
 - June 2025 ([www.westernrenewableslink.com.au/assets/project-update-june-2025.pdf](#))
 - April 2025 ([www.westernrenewableslink.com.au/assets/Project-update-April-2025.pdf](#))
 - Launch of EES project webpage and redeveloped virtual engagement room, both featuring the full suite of EES documents, technical reports, attachments, guidance materials such as fact sheets and an interactive EES map
 - Display of hard copy EES documents, USBs and guidance materials at 9 locations across the proposed project route as part of the EES exhibition period from 30 June - 22 August 2025
 - Ongoing stakeholder engagement:
 - Regular meetings with landholders and neighbouring landholders
 - Continued Government and industry meetings
 - Council Advisory Group meetings
 - 1 Community Consultation group meeting held during the reporting period

Media announcements (January – June 2025)

- Community submissions now open for WRL EES ([www.ausnetservices.com.au/news/western-renewables-link-environment-effects-statement-community-submissions-now-open](#))
- Neighbouring landholders to receive financial benefits from new WRL program ([www.ausnetservices.com.au/news/neighbouring-landholders-to-receive-financial-benefits-from-new-wrl-program](#))
- WRL EES set for public exhibition ([www.ausnetservices.com.au/news/wrl-environment-effects-statement-set-for-public-exhibition](#))
- WRL invests \$500,000 in energy efficiency upgrades ([www.ausnetservices.com.au/news/western-renewables-link-invests-500000-in-energy-efficiency-upgrades](#))
- Backing bright futures: Ballarat students awarded study scholarships ([www.ausnetservices.com.au/news/backing-bright-futures-ballarat-students-awarded-study-scholarships](#))



Fast Facts for January to June 2025



73 emails to project information inbox



27 phone calls



14,277 visits to the project website



46 key stakeholder meetings



4 Council Advisory Group Meetings



1 Community Consultation Group meeting



162 meetings with landholders



540 phone calls and 474 text messages to landholders



1,598 emails and 887 letters to landholders

Project statistics to date



1,300+ individual meetings with landholders



2,670+ phone calls to landholders



164,865 visits to project website



8,520+ emails to landholders

Working with the community

We continue to work with local community groups, councils, local business and industry within the proposed project area to help them realise their renewable energy ambitions. We are doing this by assisting with engineering feasibility assessments, developing roadmaps and delivering a variety of technology solutions such as solar, battery energy storage solutions, energy efficiency upgrades, microgrids and energy trading solutions.

Sharing benefits with the community during development

In response to community feedback, the WRL Community Benefit Sharing Program has been expanded to provide funding during the development phase. This means a range of initiatives are able to be realised now, regardless of whether the project is approved.

The WRL Community Benefit Sharing Program recognises that communities hosting infrastructure are central to enabling a clean energy future for all. It is designed to deliver sustainable outcomes and lasting benefits for regions along the proposed route - creating meaningful impact by addressing local priorities such as limited digital access, improved health services, affordable and reliable energy, and greater access to jobs and training.

If the Western Renewables Link is approved, further funding will be unlocked and include a co-designed Community Benefit Fund, ensuring that future initiatives are shaped by what communities identify as most meaningful for them.

Energy efficiency upgrades for community facilities at Pyrenees Shire

The Western Renewables Link project has partnered with Pyrenees Shire Council to identify, plan and deliver local energy efficiency projects, supported by \$500,000 in funding through the project's Community Benefits Program.

The three projects are:

- Lexton Recreation Reserve- installing solar panels at the Lexton Community Hub,
- Waubra Recreation Reserve- upgrading power and installing solar panels and batteries, plus
- Beaufort Council offices- installing solar and batteries to support a backup power system.

The funding is part of a broader effort to respond to community priorities and deliver local benefits during the project's development phase. Works at Council's Beaufort office and the Beeripmo Centre will also help support these venues at times of an emergency response when extended power outages occur.

Solar energy for Ballarat Community Health

New rooftop solar panels at five Ballarat Community Health (BCH) sites will help the health and wellbeing provider to reduce long-term power expenses, allowing more resources to be directed to local health and wellbeing services.

The installations follow a detailed energy review across all BCH locations to identify which solutions would have the greatest energy-saving impact. We have engaged local contractors to carry out the installations, supporting local jobs and local investment in the greater Ballarat region.

This collaboration reflects the project's ongoing focus on working with local organisations to deliver practical improvements that support community outcomes now and into the future.

Engaging with the broader community

Wimmera Field Days

Project team members attended Wimmera Field Days from March 4 to 6, 2025 with more than 130+ people stopping to talk with staff members on the project stand. The booth displayed the updated proposed route, field survey findings information sheets and key fact sheets about the project and the EES process. The project team was available throughout the three days to answer questions and address any concerns.

Common discussion themes included:

- Updated proposed route
- EES process and timelines
- Route development and undergrounding
- Impacts and benefits for landholders and neighbours
- General project updates
- Broader energy transition across Victoria and Australia.

Near Neighbour Benefit Program

In May, AusNet announced the Near Neighbour Benefit Program for residents living close to the proposed project route, reflecting a strong commitment to community feedback and fair recognition of local communities.

Under the program, eligible landholders with a place of residence within one kilometre of the proposed project easement may receive a one-off payment of \$20,000 or \$40,000, depending on proximity to the easement. The program aligns with the draft VicGrid policy and will be updated to reflect the final version expected later in 2025.

The program recognises that neighbouring landholders often have similar experiences to those hosting infrastructure directly on their land but have not traditionally received benefits. This program aims to address that gap by extending financial recognition to those living close to the proposed transmission line.

Payments will be made if the project is approved and when construction begins.





Environment Effect Statement (EES)

Helping the community navigate the EES

From January to June, preparations progressed steadily for the public exhibition period of the EES. The exhibition dates were confirmed, and shared with landholders, community members and affected stakeholders. We informed people that the EES would be available for public comment for 40 business days from the week commencing Monday 30 June 2025 and the draft Planning Scheme Amendment (PSA) was to be published with the exhibited EES.

A key focus was ensuring the exhibition would be as accessible and inclusive as possible. This included planning for hard copies of the EES documents to be made available at locations across the project area throughout the exhibition period.

In addition, a series of pop-up events and information sessions were organised and scheduled to be held in July and August, providing community members with opportunities to access the materials and talk directly with technical specialists and members of the project team. Dates and locations of pop-up and information sessions was informed by meetings and advice received from key stakeholders.

A comprehensive program of advertising, using local and regional newspapers and radio, and social media was planned to be delivered to ensure people living in the project area were aware of the EES dates and how to make a submission.

Furthermore, community members, landholders and project neighbours were notified of EES exhibition with a series of letters, meetings, eUpdates, and phone calls from mid-June 2025.

To learn more about the EES, draft PSA and community events visit the [project website](#).





Landholder update

As of 30 June 2025, all landholders along the proposed route have been presented with Option for Easement proposals. In addition, in response to landholder feedback, throughout April, May and June, AusNet shared details of enhanced benefits, including a new Voluntary Hosting Benefit (further details below). We also increased payments for land access and made the Option for Easement negotiation process more flexible to better reflect landholder needs.

Our dedicated Land Liaison Officers are actively working with all landholders to negotiate and provide further clarity on the Option for Easement, as well as the new Voluntary Hosting Benefit.

Additionally, AusNet offers a \$10,000 Landholder Professional Fees payment to enable landholders to seek their own professional advice on the Option for Easement proposals, including legal and valuation advice. This payment is available to assist landholders in the process of reviewing and negotiating the Option for Easement or Voluntary Hosting Benefit Deed and is not dependent on signing either document.

New Voluntary Hosting Benefit

The Voluntary Hosting Benefit is intended to directly recognise the vital role that landholders play in delivering the project and ensuring a secure energy future for Victoria.

As of June 30, the majority of Voluntary Hosting Benefit offers have been issued. We'd like to thank landholders for their feedback, time and openness throughout this process.

This new payment is separate from compensation under the Option for Easement process and from the Victorian Government's landholder payments announced in February 2023.

For more information, we've developed a **new fact sheet** outlining the Voluntary Hosting Benefit and how landholders can access the different types of increased support.




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 1800 WRL WRL (975 975) or email info@westernrenewableslink.com.au. To register for updates, visit www.westernrenewableslink.com.au

Western Renewables Link

 www.westernrenewableslink.com.au
 1800 WRL WRL (975 975)
 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 1800 WRL WRL (975 975) or by emailing info@westernrenewableslink.com.au.



Western Renewables Link

 www.westernrenewableslink.com.au
 1800 WRL WRL (975 975)
 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 1800 WRL WRL (975 975) 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:

 1800 WRL WRL (975 975)
 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 in writing and will provide a unique complaint reference number 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 by providing regular updates on the investigation and a revised timeframe for resolving the complaint.
5. At any time, you may request to have your complaint escalated to the senior management team by sending an email to GeneralManager@westernrenewableslink.com.au

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 you are not satisfied with the outcome after you have made a complaint to the project team, you may pursue dispute resolution through the Energy and Water Ombudsman Victoria if the complaint relates to access or proposed access to private land under section 93 (1) of the *Electricity Industry Act 2000* (Vic), and/or compliance with the Land Access Code of Practice.

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/environment-effects-statements-in-victoria) 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 Code of Practice.




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.

The information in this document is for reference only – it is not designed to be, nor should it be regarded, as professional or legal advice. You should seek appropriate independent professional and/or legal advice where appropriate and before making any decisions based on material in this document. The information is an overview (in summary form) and does not purport to be complete. This document, and the information in this document, will not form the basis of any contract or commitment. AusNet Services does not guarantee or warrant the accuracy, completeness, or currency of the information provided and AusNet Services, its directors, officers, employees, agents and advisers disclaim all liability and responsibility (including for negligence) for any direct or indirect loss or damage which may be suffered by any recipient through use or reliance on anything contained in or omitted from this document.

More information

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

Contact us

 westernrenewableslink.com.au
 1800 WRL WRL (975 975)
 info@westernrenewableslink.com.au

Delivered by

AusNet