

JANUARY TO JUNE 2026

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 homes and businesses across the state and into the National Electricity Market.

Purpose of report

This report covers the communications and engagement activities undertaken by the Western Renewables Link (WRL) team from January until June 2026 and includes engagement sessions, project updates and meetings with landholders. The report also details the project announcements and updates made during this period.

What happened between January – June 2026?

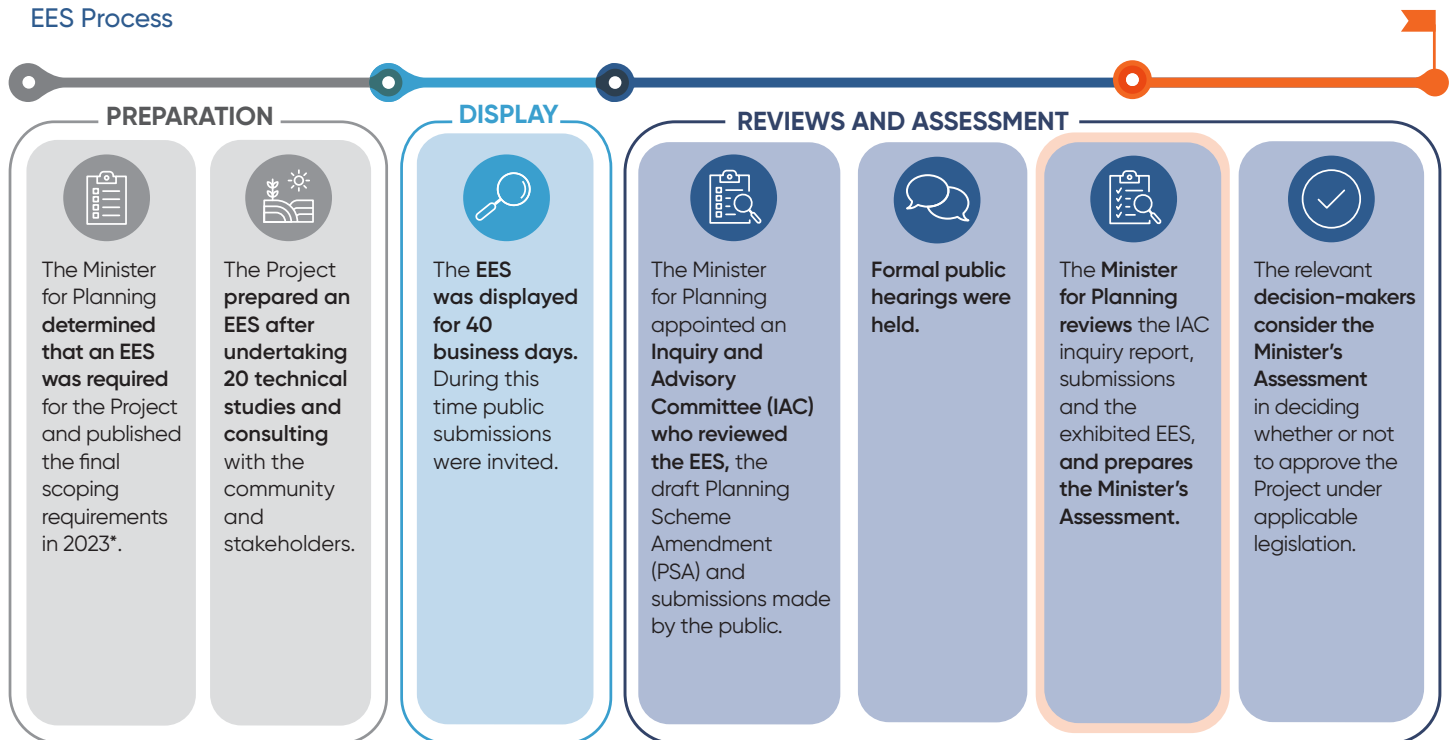
- The project's Environment Effects Statement (EES) and draft Planning Scheme Amendment (PSA) were examined by the Inquiry and Advisory Committee (IAC) during a 15-week hearing that concluded on 3 March 2026. The IAC prepared its report for the Minister for Planning, who is currently assessing the environmental impacts of the project.
- The WRL team attended the Wimmera Machinery Field Days from 3 to 5 March, providing project updates, information about community benefit sharing programs, and opportunities for local industry and employment.
- Our \$4 million Local Grants Fund launched on 31 March. Together with our Sponsorship Program and Community Brigades Support Initiative, we're investing in locally-led projects that strengthen communities and deliver meaningful benefits during the project's development phase.
- In March, AusNet wrote to landholders about legislative changes to the Electricity Industry Act 2000 which passed in March. We wrote again in May outlining AusNet's application for compulsory acquisition powers.
- Engagement between January and June 2026 focused on:
 - supporting participation in the IAC's hearing to assess and improve the environmental impacts of the WRL
 - launching our Local Grants Fund, Sponsorship Program and Community Brigades Support Initiative
 - holding independent grant-writing workshops in person and online to support community members in applying for WRL and other industry or government grants
 - three on-Country workshops with the five Traditional Owner groups impacted by the project
 - ongoing landholder engagement
 - ongoing community engagement activities including meetings, workshops, events, pop-ups, letters, phone calls and emails to stakeholders.



Environment Effect Statement (EES) – next steps

The EES process is designed to make sure the community's voice is heard and that all environmental impacts have been considered as the project strives to improve energy generation for Victorians, now and into the future.

EES Process



Following the public exhibition of WRL's EES, an Inquiry and Advisory Committee (IAC) panel hearing was held which concluded on 3 March 2026 after several months. The IAC then prepared a report on the significance and acceptability of the environmental effects of the project and submitted it to the Minister for Planning on 8 May 2026. The report is being considered by the Minister and will inform the Minister's assessment on the EES. Timing and release of the report is at the discretion of the Minister for Planning.

Electricity Industry Act changes

On 6 March 2026, the project communicated with landholders and stakeholders to advise them of legislative changes to the Electricity Industry Act 2000. This was followed by communication with landowners in May advising that AusNet had applied to the Victorian Government for powers to compulsorily acquire easements required for the project. We provided information about both voluntary and compulsory acquisition pathways, making it clear that this does not mean the compulsory acquisition of easements process will take place immediately.

Our communication reinforced that our focus remains on working with landowners to reach voluntary easement agreements where possible and there is time for landowners to consider their options. We emphasised that engaging now through the voluntary OFE process gives landholders the opportunity to secure financial certainty, shape agreements to suit their needs and take as much time as possible to consider their preferences and specific needs as the project develops.

If compulsory acquisition powers are granted, easements will be compulsorily acquired for properties that do not have a voluntary Option for Easement (OFE) agreement in place at the time a Notice of Acquisition is gazetted.

Sharing community benefits



Local Grants Fund

Our \$4m **Local Grants Fund** supports locally-led community projects across the seven local government areas along the proposed WRL route. The round opened on 31 March 2026 and closed at 11.59pm on Tuesday 30 June 2026.

The fund is intentionally flexible and accessible, supporting a wide range of community groups, focusing on grassroots organisations and volunteer-led groups, to deliver projects shaped by local priorities. The program seeks to fund projects that will make a real difference for local communities. Funding was available across five categories, each with their own objectives and eligibility criteria:



Community infrastructure



Environment



New energy initiatives



Community connection and participation



Emergency services

Funding will be delivered regardless of whether the project proceeds.

Grant-writing workshops were held in person and online in March to support community members in researching, writing and submitting grant applications that could bring their ideas to life. Free and independently facilitated, the workshops were designed to provide practical support to community members so they could confidently apply for WRL's Local Grants Fund as well as any future industry or government grants. More than 65 people participated in an in-person or online session.

Grant application support was provided by phone, email and in person. The WRL team fielded over 150 enquiries and met with applicants at central community locations when face-to-face guidance was preferred. A series of community pop-ups were also held in May and June, offering in-person support ahead of applications closing on 30 June.

Grant applications are now being assessed with the support of an Independent Local Grants Review Panel, made up of community representatives from across the proposed project area who applied to be part of the process. The panel will provide local insight and make recommendations so that funding decisions reflect community priorities.

While Local Grants Fund applications are now closed, **sponsorship** applications remain open.



Sponsorship Program

The WRL Sponsorship Program provides \$1 million over four years, with \$250,000 available upfront, regardless of whether the WRL project proceeds. The remaining funding becomes available if the project is approved.

We've received applications from local sports clubs and community organisations to provide foundation, momentum and legacy funding for events, activities and partnerships that build connection in the community.



Community Brigades Support Initiative

Launching on 31 March and running through to 30 June, our \$300,000 Community Brigades Support Initiative (CBSI) was developed in alignment with CFA grants and funding policies to provide funding for equipment and amenity upgrades that strengthen volunteer efforts and enhance emergency response capabilities. The round was open to the 36 brigades located within 10km of the proposed project route. Applications are currently being assessed.

Applying for or receiving funding does not indicate support for the project and does not affect anyone's right to oppose it. With the exception of sponsorship funding, there are no obligations for groups who receive a grant to promote their involvement with the WRL.

Wimmera Field Days

For the fourth year in a row, the WRL team attended the Wimmera Field Days in March. One of the largest agricultural field days in the state, the event's focus on agricultural equipment and innovations, rural and regional industries, lifestyles and business opportunities provided an opportunity to share information with communities about the project and its progress.

While the first day was cancelled due to inclement weather, project team members were involved in about 50 genuine conversations across the remaining two days. As well as sharing information about the EES process, Local Grants Fund and Sponsorship Program, our virtual reality tool gave people an opportunity to visualise the proposed project route. The event was a meaningful opportunity to have on-the-ground conversations with farmers and landholders in the community alongside our VicGrid colleagues.



Look ahead

In the second half of 2026, WRL engagement will include:



Awarding funding to successful applicants from our \$4 million Local Grants Fund, supporting projects designed by and for the community.



Continuing to provide sponsorship funding for events, activities and partnerships in local communities.



Delivering four Meet the Builder events to connect with regional businesses and promote the opportunity for hyper-local business participation.



Continuing to support operational readiness and improve capacity for CFA volunteers and brigades along the proposed project route.



Continuing to consult with key stakeholders, including landholders, local governments and regulatory authorities, on matters relating to the project's Environmental Performance Requirements (EPRs), which set out the measures and commitments required to manage the project's impacts and delivery obligations.



Continuing to work with Traditional Owner groups on the delivery of the project.



Continuing to communicate with individuals, communities and organisations along the proposed project route through our dedicated WRL hotline, e-updates, website and in-person events. **Subscribe** to receive project updates and find out where we'll be next.

To speak with a WRL team member:



1800 975 975



info@westernrenewableslink.com.au

Engagement material published 1 January to 30 June 2026

Resources

Date	Resource	Link
28 May	Guide	Landholder Guide: Option for easement process, compensation and benefits
7 May	Guide	Landholder Guide: Easement safety and permitted activities May 2026
6 May	Guide	Landowner Guide: Understanding your options: Voluntary OFE and compulsory acquisition pathways
28 April	Fact sheet	Transmission line construction April 2026
27 April	Flyer	Local Grants Fund flyer
27 April	Guidelines	Local Grants Fund program guidelines
27 April	Toolkit	Local Grants Fund toolkit
27 April	Guidelines	Independent Local Grants Review Panel guidelines
27 April	Guide	Grant or sponsorship guide
27 April	Guidelines	Community Brigades Support Initiative program guidelines
2 March	Fact sheet	Project overview
9 February	Report	Community Engagement Summary Report July to December 2025

Media announcements

Date	Link
11 June	Waubra welcomes new community playground backed by \$200,000 WRL investment
31 March	Local Grants Fund to back community initiatives across western Victoria

E-updates and newsletters

Date	Resource	Link
11 June	Newsletter	Special edition: Waubra Playground opening
4 June	E-update	AusNet cultural heritage roadside field surveys in Waubra extended to 19 June 2026
18 May	E-update	AusNet cultural heritage roadside field surveys in Waubra commencing 25 May 2026
1 May	E-update	AusNet cultural heritage roadside surveys in Waubra commencing 4 May 2026
17 April	E-update	AusNet to conduct aerial inspections – BAT to HOTS and BATS to BETS – Western Renewables Link
13 April	E-update	Attend our free grant application writing workshops
7 April	E-update	AusNet cadastral roadside field survey week commencing 27 April 2026
3 March	Newsletter	Special edition: Local Grants Fund now open



Western Renewables Link

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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 VicGrid by emailing enquiries@vicgrid.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@transport.vic.gov.au.

The Office of the Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner (AEIC) supports community members who have concerns about new major transmission projects. For information on how the AEIC can assist, or to lodge a complaint, visit aeic.gov.au or call 1800 656 395.

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.

Energy and Water Ombudsman Victoria (www.ewov.com.au) including information about complaints and dispute resolution related to land access.

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.

VicGrid

(www.vicgrid.com.au) including information on the Regulatory Investment Test for Transmission (RIT-T) process for this project.

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More information

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

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