

JULY TO DECEMBER 2022

Community Engagement Summary Report



Delivered by

AusNet

Introduction

The Western Renewables Link (WRL) 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.

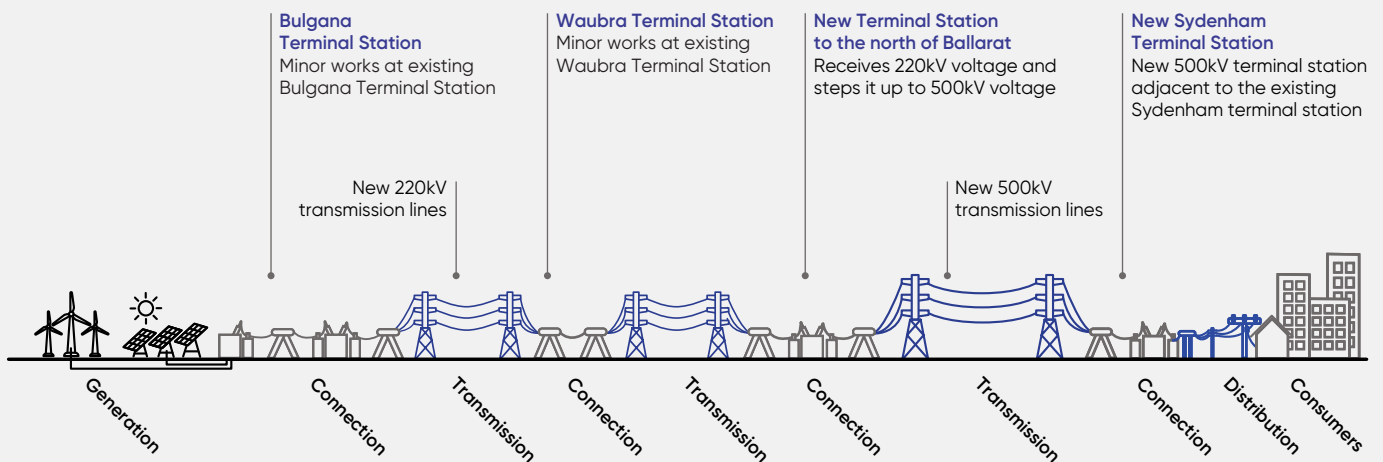
Purpose of this report

This report covers the period from July 2022 until December 2022 and includes details of the engagement undertaken by the WRL team including community drop-in sessions, community discussion dinners, webinars, and meetings with landholders.

The WRL team is continuing to consider 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 may wish to share.

The project is going through an Environment Effects Statement (EES) – the most comprehensive environmental impact assessment in Victoria – and has not yet been approved for construction.

Western Renewables Link



New overhead double circuit 220kV transmission line between the existing Bulgana Terminal Station, connecting to the existing Waubra Terminal Station and a new terminal station to the north of Ballarat.

From there, a new overhead double circuit 500kV transmission line connecting to a new terminal station at Sydenham.

For illustrative purposes only



What happened between July and December 2022?

From June 2022 to August 2022, stakeholders and landholders in the following areas were informed of an update to the proposed route for the WRL in their area. These landholders and stakeholders were informed prior to the information being made available more broadly.

- Waubra to Glendonald
- Bolwarrah
- Mt Steiglitz to Korjamnunnip Creek
- Myrningong
- Darley military camp area
- Merrimu Reservoir

Following the contact with landholders and stakeholders and release of the updates to the proposed route on the project's website and online map, a series of community engagement events were held. These included traditional drop-in style events as well as community discussion dinners. A webinar was held at the conclusion of the events to recap what was heard and to answer any outstanding questions.

Key engagement activities between July and December 2022 included:

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- New 'Landholder Guide: Land access for field surveys and investigations' published.
- Published fact sheets including Project Overview (updated) and Updated Proposed Route Overview.
- Landscape and visual impact assessment site visits with surrounding landholders.
- Continued meetings with landholders (both in person and virtually).
- Regular eUpdates were issued.
- Visit to the region by CEOs of AEMO and AusNet.
- Three community drop-in sessions were held at Brown Hill, Toolern Vale and Joel Joel.
- Seven community discussion dinners were held at Waubra, Joel Joel, Myrningong, Bacchus Marsh, Creswick and Melton (two sessions).
- One community afternoon event held at Coghills Creek.
- A webinar was hosted in September to report back on the community drop-ins and discussion dinners with 32 attendees recorded.
- Government and industry meetings continued.
- Technical Reference Group meetings continued.
- Community Consultation Group meetings continued.
- Letters sent to landholders with tower locations and further information about compensation.

Fast facts for July to December 2022



More than **150** emails to project inbox



Eight phone calls to project hotline



Three Community Consultation Group meetings



More than **12,000** visits to the project website



One webinar with 32 dial-ins



More than **80** key stakeholder meetings

Proposed route update announcement – August 2022

In August 2022, the proposed route was updated to reflect feedback from landholders and stakeholders. While our aim was to contact all landholders and surrounding landholders impacted by the updates prior to this information being shared publicly, in some cases this was not possible, and we acknowledge the additional uncertainty and concern this caused some landholders.

The online interactive map was updated to reflect the updates, and a new fact sheet and e-update were published.

CEO Regional Visit

In August 2022, the CEOs of Australian Energy Market Operator (AEMO) and AusNet visited the region to meet with stakeholders and landholders along the proposed route. The visit comprised of two events; the first being a renewable energy transition forum moderated by Stuart Benjamin, Chair of the Grampians New Energy Task Force, which focused on the implications and opportunities for western Victoria in the energy transition.

The second event was a meeting with representatives from Stop AusNet Towers. The meeting provided an opportunity to hear directly from Stop AusNet Towers members about their concerns. The CEOs acknowledged the significant frustration caused to landholders due to them being asked to shoulder the burden of construction impacts and hosting the infrastructure.

Community Drop-in sessions

In August 2022, three drop-in style events were held across the project area; community members were notified about the events via a letterbox drop, direct email, social media posts and print and radio advertisements. Locals were encouraged to attend the sessions to ask questions of project specialists and to hear more information about the updates to the proposed route. Maps of the updates to the proposed route were on display, and hard copies of the fact sheet titled Updated Proposed Route Overview were also available to take home.

Specialists were available to talk on a range of topics including agriculture, landscape and visual amenity, biodiversity, electric and magnetic fields (EMF), and route selection.

The events were held at Brown Hill (Ballarat), Toolern Vale (Melton) and Joel Joel. A total of 40 people attended the three sessions.

The following key themes were identified at each session.

Drop-in Event	Date and time	Number of attendees	Key themes
Brown Hill (Ballarat)	Friday 19 August 2 pm – 6 pm	16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desire for undergrounding • VNI West and its connection to WRL and other future projects • Terminal station location • Route updates and how these were decided • Intergenerational farming • Impacts on property value
Toolern Vale (Melton)	Saturday 20 August 2 pm – 6 pm	15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recent route updates • Impacts during construction • Property values • Land access for emergency services during operation • Visual impacts • Local flora and fauna impacts
Joel Joel	Tuesday 23 August 1 pm – 5 pm	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment opportunities (approval and construction) • Future wind farm expansion opportunities • Easement option plans, compensation, valuation

Community Discussion Dinners

In August and September 2022, eight community discussion events were held. Initially, six community discussion dinners were advertised as an opportunity to hear about project updates directly from the team, as well as the opportunity to discuss the key issues for that particular area. In response to community demand, the project team organised another dinner at Melton on 6 September 2022, and an afternoon session at Coghills Creek on 10 September 2022.

The format of these events included a short presentation, followed by a question-and-answer session in both group and individual sessions. The presentation included the following topics:

- A recap of the project.
- Why the project is being proposed as an overhead transmission line.
- Land access and why it is needed for the project.
- The Essential Services Commission's Statement of Expectations.
- The Environment Effects Statement process.
- Landholder compensation.
- Proposed route updates.

Across the events, dinner was provided by local caterers including the Bacchus Marsh Country Women's Association (CWA). The WRL team would like to thank the CWA for their hard work and assistance in catering for these events.

The following key themes were identified.

Community Discussion Dinner	Date and time	Number of attendees	Key themes from discussion
Waubra	Monday 22 August 6 pm	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undergrounding and route alternatives • Firefighting around transmission infrastructure • Social impact • Battery farms and new technologies • EES process and its various studies • Electromagnetic fields (EMF) and interference with GPS, TV signals, mobile phones etc. • Flora and fauna impacts • 500kV uprate • Farming on and around underground and overhead lines as well as general agriculture impacts
Joel Joel	Tuesday 23 August 6 pm	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 500kV uprate • Existing line and proximity to new alignment • EES process and various studies • Future wind farm developments • Undergrounding and EMF • Farming on and around underground and overhead lines • General agriculture impacts • Compensation and valuation
Myrniong* * Following no registrations for dinner, this was run as a drop-in session.	Monday 29 August 6 pm	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tower size and types • Undergrounding and terminal station location • Aviation and flight restrictions

Community Discussion Dinner	Date and time	Number of attendees	Key themes from discussion
Bacchus Marsh	Tuesday 30 August 6 pm	16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EES: reports/documents, size and accessibility during exhibition • Undergrounding: full and partial (including consideration of Merrimu) • Fire risk • Impacts on tourism • Flora and fauna in the Darley area • Social impact • CCG and the benefits of participation • Landscape and visual impact, and specialist visits • Need for more community information on undergrounding • Terrain and construction challenges (overhead versus underground) • Tower types and sizes, and span between towers • Cost of project
Creswick	Wednesday 31 August 6 pm	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land acquisition • Section 93, landholder rights and land access • Undergrounding: full and partial, proposed partial sections, release of partial undergrounding report and the need for more public information • Costs of the project and what these include • Timing and value of public information • The role of AEMO • The RIT-T framework • Fire fighting around transmission infrastructure • Surrounding landholders and the community benefit program
Melton	Thursday 1 September 6 pm	14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undergrounding: – why is it being done for other projects and not WRL? • Overhead construction, timelines, impact on land use and disruption • Compensation and valuation • Impacts on aviation, the aerodrome and users of the Pony Club • Quality of consultation and engagement to date • EES process and various studies • AEMO and the overall process
Melton	Tuesday 6 September 6 pm	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compensation and valuation • Impacts on aviation, the aerodrome and users of the Pony Club • EES process and various studies
Coghills Creek	Saturday 10 September 2 pm	20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact on bushfire management and fire fighting • Why is undergrounding not being considered? • Quality of consultation and engagement to date • Route selection and project rationale • AEMO and the network planning process • EES process and various studies • Impacts on groundwater • Visual impacts for surrounding landholders • Risk and frequency of lightning strikes in the area



Community webinar – September 8 2022

The Western Renewables Link hosted a community webinar that:

- Reported back on the community information sessions.
- Featured a presentation on the construction of overhead transmission infrastructure.
- Provided a forum for a general question and answer session with key project and technical staff members.

There was a total of 32* dial-ins to the webinar. The following themes and concerns were raised by attendees.

Webinar	Date and time	Key themes
Community Webinar	Thursday 8 September 7 pm – 8:30 pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undergrounding • Engagement with landholders • Impact on groundwater • Visual impact • Construction impact • Farming on or around transmission infrastructure

*A dial-in can indicate either individuals or small groups watching the webinar from that dial-in point.

Elmore Field Days – October 4 to 6 2022

Project staff attended the Elmore Field Days from 4 October 2022 to 6 October 2022 where approximately 240 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

The Elmore Field Days provided an opportunity to engage with people who reside outside the project area. It was observed that these people and communities understand the need for the infrastructure.

AEMO decision to explore other terminal station locations for Western Renewables Link

AusNet has been commissioned by AEMO to plan and build the transmission infrastructure for the Western Renewables Link. During the engagement process we have received feedback from landholders and the community about the proposed location for the terminal station north of Ballarat.

On 1 December 2022, AEMO announced that it is investigating 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. AEMO is undertaking this work as a result of feedback from governments, industry and communities received via submissions to the Project Assessment Draft Report for VNI West.

To inform landholders and surrounding landholders of the investigation, phone calls were made in early December 2022. Where phone calls were not answered, we contacted the landholder by text and/or email as well as hard copy letters. An e-update was issued on 9 December 2022 providing information to those interested in the WRL project about this potential change.

AusNet is supporting AEMO as it investigates alternate locations for the VNI West connection.

Landholder engagement

Following the release of the proposed route in November 2021, further consultation with landholders, surrounding landholders and other stakeholders was undertaken in order to refine the proposed route; this occurred throughout 2022. We are continuing to consult with landholders about the proposed route, impacts on their land use and operations, tower locations and micro-siting, and the easement compensation valuation process.

This consultation with landholders, as well as key stakeholders, informed updates to the proposed route. Updates in response to landholder and stakeholder feedback has occurred in the following locations:

- Waubra to Glendonald
- Bolwarrah
- Mt Steiglitz to Korjamnunnip Creek
- Myrning
- Darley military camp area
- Merrimu Reservoir
- Melton – MacPherson Park

The impact on landholders, potential agriculture and land use, Aboriginal cultural heritage and native flora and fauna for the Hepburn Lagoon north and south alternatives released in November 2021 are still being investigated by technical specialists and the Registered Aboriginal Party.

The following themes and concerns have emerged through consultation with landholders:

- Impact on lifestyle
- Route selection and tower placement
- Implication on future land use and farming practices
- Landscape and visual amenity



Commencement of compensation negotiations:

In December 2022, landholders with property on the proposed route were provided with property specific information including:

- Landholder consultation plan showing tower locations, indicative easement areas, access tracks and indicative temporary constructions areas.
- Information about the Landholder Participation Fee available for landholders.
- Property Specific Details Form which is used to document important information to inform construction planning and compensation including production, fencing, infrastructure, vegetation and water courses.

- Land Access Consent Template which is used to consent to field survey activities and outline arrangements and protocols to be followed by us.
- Additional information about the Option for Easement process and compensation.

As part of project design and planning, the designated Land Liaison Officer will work with each landholder to document land use and activities, how the infrastructure will impact the property, discuss the easement requirements and towers, and provide information about compensation.

Surrounding landholder engagement

Surrounding landholders are people (including an entity e.g. company or trust) who own, live or work on land near the proposed route and may be impacted by the project, but will not have an easement on their property. This includes properties from which the proposed transmission line may be visible.

There are dedicated resources within the WRL Stakeholder and Community Engagement Team available to surrounding landholders throughout the development of the project. Surrounding landholders have access to the project team via the project email address and hotline.

During the second half of 2022, consultation with surrounding landholders focused on landscape and visual assessments. The Stakeholder and Community Engagement Team has visited the properties of several surrounding landholders with the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment Team.

The purpose of the field visits was to assess the potential visibility and visual impact of the proposed infrastructure as well as consider mitigation measures that may help reduce the visual impact of the project from sensitive viewing locations. It is important for us to understand the landscape and visual impacts of the project and for those impacts to be included in the EES. Decision-makers, such as ministers and statutory authorities, will use the information in the EES to determine whether approvals for the WRL should be granted and what conditions should apply.

The following key themes and concerns have emerged through consultation with surrounding landholders:

- Compensation for surrounding landholders
- Property devaluation
- Landscape and visual amenity
- Setback distances from dwellings

Community involvement

The EES process provides an opportunity for ongoing, transparent community consultation, and is documented in the WRL EES Consultation Plan.

The latest updated version (May 2022) can be found on the [DELWP 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 in 2023 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 WRL team would like to thank everyone who has participated by attending a face-to-face session, webinar or 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 [westernrenewableslink.com.au](https://www.westernrenewableslink.com.au).



Western Renewables Link information

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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.

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:

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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/environment-assessment/what-is-the-ees-process-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 Statement of Expectations.