

JULY TO DECEMBER 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 communications and engagement activities undertaken by the Western Renewables Link (WRL) team from July until December 2025 and includes engagement sessions, 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 the Environment Effects Statement (EES) public exhibition period and commencement of the Inquiry and Advisory Committee (IAC) hearing.

## What happened between July – December 2025?

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

A major milestone for the project was the WRL EES formal exhibition period which commenced on 30 June 2025, marking the start of its 41 business-day public exhibition, running until 25 August 2025.

The WRL Benefit Sharing Program was announced in October 2025. The program aims to deliver enduring benefits and sustainable outcomes for communities across the six local government areas where the WRL project is proposed to be built, creating meaningful impact and a lasting legacy.

Engagement between July and December 2025 focused on:

- Delivering a comprehensive engagement program to support the community navigate EES documents and the public exhibition period;
- Delivering community benefit projects;
- Ongoing landholder engagement; and,
- Ongoing community engagement activities including meetings, letters, phone calls and emails to stakeholders.

In December, AusNet communicated with landholders that it had appointed a joint venture between ACCIONA and Genus to undertake construction works for the project.

This appointment enables the project team to continue important preparation work so that construction can move ahead if the project receives the necessary planning approvals.

ACCIONA Genus Joint Venture (AGJV) was selected as the preferred construction contractor due to both organisations' impressive technical and construction management expertise, commitment to local and social procurement, current experience in renewable energy and transmission networks in Australia and a proven track record of major project delivery.

## Keeping the community informed

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

A variety of new project materials were produced to support conversations with community members during engagement activities from July to December 2025. Advertising in local and regional newspapers and social media posts on LinkedIn and Facebook were used to promote the EES exhibition information sessions and informal pop-up sessions. Project newsletters complemented broader engagement activities throughout this period.



## Environment Effect Statement (EES) – helping the community navigate the EES

### Engagement during the public exhibition period

The project team and technical specialists engaged with communities along the proposed route during the public exhibition period from 30 June to 25 August 2025. During the eight-week exhibition period, nine information sessions were held along the length of the project's proposed route in Ballan, Coghills Creek, Melton, Joel Joel, Darley, Lexton, Elmhurst, Brown Hill, and Creswick, helping landholders and community members access exhibition materials and speak directly with the project team.

Technical specialists and project team members were available to speak about topics such as undergrounding, biodiversity, bushfire and planning matters. There were also opportunities to use virtual reality technology to view the likely scale of the proposed infrastructure from key locations along the route.

There were also six informal pop-up sessions at shopping centres, libraries and community hubs in Beaufort, Hillside, Bacchus Marsh, Melton, Creswick and Stawell.

The full EES and draft PSA, along with a summary report and printed fact sheets were also available to be viewed at 11 locations along the project's proposed route in Ballan, Beaufort, Creswick, Daylesford, Bacchus Marsh, Melton, the State Library of Victoria (Melbourne), Stawell and Ballarat. Additional display locations at Clunes and Lexton were arranged based on feedback from community members. USBs containing the full EES and draft PSA were also made available for collection at each location and a variety of hard copy chapters and maps were provided to those who requested.

A dedicated EES webpage and virtual engagement room supported public access to key information, alongside updated FAQs, the project timeline, and other relevant project information. A variety of fact sheets were prepared that cover EES impact assessments to help the community access the information that matters most to them. They included insights into the impacts and risks that were identified, the assessment findings and the ways in which the project proposes to avoid or minimise impacts.

To further help the community stay informed and navigate the EES process, we created a series of videos, including [navigating the EES](#) and an updated [project overview](#).

Additional information relevant to the WRL EES and the project was published in September 2025 outlining revised EES impact assessments based on the updated November 2029 construction timeline.

The project website recorded more than 12,000 visits and more than 7,500 document downloads during the public exhibition period.

**Table 1 – Summary of EES engagement events**

Type of Event	Pop-Up Sessions
Number of Events	6
Conversations held with Community Members	75+
Type of Event	Information Sessions
Number of Events	9
Conversations held with Community Members	140+

### Next steps in the planning process

The EES public exhibition period closed at 11.59pm on Monday 25 August, marking a significant milestone in the planning and approvals process.

In August 2025, the Minister for Planning appointed a joint Inquiry and Advisory Committee (IAC), made up of an independent group of experts, to advise on the environmental effects of the proposed WRL Project. The IAC held a directions hearing on Monday 15 September 2025, which included:

- discussing arrangements for the hearing, including the dates and format;
- directions about how the hearing will be conducted and how information will be shared before the hearing, including expert reports;
- discussing site inspections; and
- consideration of procedural issues.

The IAC public hearing commenced on Monday 27 October 2025 and extends into 2026 following a break for the Christmas and New Year period. The IAC is considering the exhibited EES and draft Planning Scheme Amendment (PSA), all submissions and evidence, the views of Traditional Owners and Registered Aboriginal Parties and any other relevant information. The hearing also allows members of the public who have lodged submissions to speak to their written submission and ask questions of expert witnesses and other parties.

Detailed information about the public hearing and timetable can be found on the Engage Victoria website [engage.vic.gov.au/Western-Renewables-Link-IAC](https://engage.vic.gov.au/Western-Renewables-Link-IAC).

While the public EES exhibition period has ended, the EES and draft PSA remain available online for reference on the [project website](#).



## WRL Benefit Sharing Program launch

The WRL Benefit Sharing Program is a commitment to delivering sustainable and meaningful benefits to communities along the proposed route, reflecting priorities identified through local engagement. The communities that host this vital infrastructure are at the heart of making it possible and the WRL Benefit Sharing Program will support the delivery of new investment, funding and job opportunities for communities as part of this once-in-a-generation change.

The WRL Benefit Sharing Program was developed through engagement with landowners, Traditional Owners, communities and key stakeholders. It is designed to directly respond to the challenges of those most affected by the project. The program will support local projects, improve public infrastructure, recognise landowners and near neighbours and invest in Traditional Owner partnerships. Delivering meaningful impact and a sustainable legacy, the program will focus on outcomes that are feasible and viable.

The program has committed \$55 million in funding to support community partnerships, investment initiatives and a co-designed Community Benefit Fund.

Responding to community feedback calling for earlier benefits, \$15 million of the funding has been allocated to the development phase, guaranteed regardless of whether the project proceeds. The remaining \$40 million will be delivered if the project is approved and proceeds to construction.

More information about the WRL Benefit Sharing Program can be found on the [project website](#).



# Strategy



Contribute to the resilience and prosperity of communities along the proposed alignment



Partner with Traditional Owners



Facilitate economic growth and development



Back community-led progress toward a net zero future

# Delivery



Project development and approvals

Construction and beyond\*



Community

**\$15 million**  
Community Partnerships and Investment

**\$15 million**  
Community Partnerships and Investment

**\$25 million**  
co-designed Community Benefit Fund



Landowners and Neighbouring Landowners

**\$46,000** per hectare of easement for landowners who opt in to the Voluntary Hosting Benefit\*\*

**\$20,000 or \$40,000**  
Near Neighbour Benefit Program payment depending on vicinity and proximity



Traditional Owners

Traditional Owner Benefit Sharing underpinned by principles of self-determination



Industry

Projected **\$170 million** hyper-local spend

\*Benefits in this phase will be delivered if the project is approved and proceeds to construction

\*\*For those who sign a Land Access Consent and Option for Easement agreement early and voluntarily. The VHB is in addition to the \$8,000 per kilometre per year for 25 years (indexed to CPI) transmission line hosting payment announced by the Victorian Government in 2023



## Key engagement activities and materials published between July – December 2025

- **Meeting 27 Community Consultation Group Minutes**, 10 June 2025, published July 2025 ([Meeting-27-Community-Consultation-Group-10-June-2025-Minutes.pdf](#))
  - July 2025 [EES on Public Exhibition](#)
  - August 2025 [EES Public Exhibition progress](#)
  - October 2025 [WRL Benefit Sharing Program](#)
- **Meeting 27 Community Consultation Group Presentations**, 10 June 2025, published July 2025
  - Presentation 1 ([Meeting-27-Community-Consultation-Group-10-June-2025-Presentation-1.pdf](#))
  - Presentation 2 ([Meeting-27-Community-Consultation-Group-10-June-2025-Presentation-2.pdf](#))
- **Draft Planning Scheme Amendment**, published August 2025 ([Draft-planning-scheme-amendment.pdf](#))
- **Community Engagement Summary Report**, January to June 2025, published September 2025 ([Community-Engagement-Summary-Report-January-to-June-2025.pdf](#))
- **Western Renewables Link Benefit Sharing Program Guide**, published to project website, October 2025 ([WRL-Benefit-Sharing-Program-Guide.pdf](#))
- **3 AusNet survey updates published on the project website, including:**
  - July 2025 [AusNet roadside surveys](#)
  - August 2025 [AusNet to conduct flyover inspections - BATS to BETS and BATS to BGTS lines](#)
  - October 2025 [Ausnet to conduct flyover inspections- BATs to HOTS](#)
- **3 special edition EES project update newsletters** sent to subscribers and published on the project website:

## Media Announcements (July – December 2025)

- New mobile towers to fix blackspots in western Victoria (<https://www.ausnetservices.com.au/news/new-mobile-towers-to-fix-blackspots-in-western-victoria>)
- Western Renewables Link invests \$200,000 to help regional community build new playground (<https://www.ausnetservices.com.au/news/western-renewables-link-invests-200000-to-help-regional-community-build-new-playground>)
- \$55 million to benefit local communities in western Victoria (<https://www.ausnetservices.com.au/news/55-million-to-benefit-local-communities-in-western-victoria>)
- Western Renewables Link construction contractor appointed (<https://www.ausnetservices.com.au/news/western-renewables-link-construction-contractor-appointed>)



## Fast Facts for July to December 2025



**86** emails to project inbox



**42** phone calls to WRL hotline



**25,641** visits to the project website



**33** key stakeholder meetings



**82** meetings with landholders



**394** phone calls and **190** text messages to landholders



**1,589** emails and **204** letters to landholders



**12,730** website visitors



**8,494** document downloads

### Project statistics to date



**1,380+** individual meetings with landholders



**3,060+** phone calls to landholders



**190,506** visits to project website



**10,100+** emails to landholders



## Working with the community – sharing benefits during development

The WRL Benefit Sharing Program has been expanded to provide funding during the development phase which means a range of initiatives are being realised now, regardless of whether the project is approved.

More information on community benefits is found on the [project website](#). Detail on some of the projects that have been progressed over this period are shared below.

### New playground on the way at Waubra

Families will soon be able to enjoy a safe and modern new playground at Waubra thanks to the drive and energy of a passionate group of local mums. The playground will feature climbing structures, swings, slides designed for toddlers to pre-teens, safety fencing, a BBQ area, and picnic tables. The WRL project has partnered with local groups to identify, plan and deliver the community-led project, with the \$200,000 funding part of the WRL Community Benefits Program.

WRL's funding will complement \$27,000 raised by the local community through sheep sales, bingo and trivia nights, and \$100,000 from the Victorian Government's Tiny Towns Fund and the Waubra Wind Farm Community Fund. The playground project was also backed by local groups including Waubra Kindergarten, Primary School, CWA, Football and Netball Clubs, Mount Bolton Lions Club, Community Hub, and Mothers' Group.

### New mobile towers to target blackspots

More than \$3 million will be invested to build new mobile towers at Lexton, Smeaton and Coimadai to address mobile phone network blackspots, providing benefits to residents and businesses and supporting emergency response. Funded as part of the WRL's development phase Community Benefits Program, the planned installation of the new mobile base stations will provide improved 4G and 5G coverage and follows initial feasibility work undertaken by Telstra, which recognised the need for mobile service improvement in these locations. Further mobile towers will be considered along the WRL route if the project receives planning approval. AusNet, which has been contracted to plan and build WRL, is working closely with Telstra to identify additional sites that would support communities with poor mobile coverage.

### Landholder update

All directly affected landholders along the proposed route have been presented with Option for Easement proposals for their consideration and negotiation. Throughout the second half of 2025 our dedicated Land Liaison Officers continued to actively work with landholders to share information about the enhanced benefits announced earlier in the year, manage voluntary access to properties for survey activities and negotiate Options for Easement agreements.

Landholders continue to utilise the \$10,000 Landholder Professional Fees payment to enable seeking 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.

Further information on the additional support that has been offered to landholders is available here [Enhanced-Support-for-Landholders-More-Certainty-More-Flexibility-April-2025.pdf](#)



## Western Renewables Link

[www.westernrenewableslink.com.au](http://www.westernrenewableslink.com.au)  
 1800 WRL WRL (975 975)  
[info@westernrenewableslink.com.au](mailto: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](http://www.westernrenewableslink.com.au).

## Feedback

You can provide feedback on this document via our website [www.westernrenewableslink.com.au](http://www.westernrenewableslink.com.au) or by calling 1800 WRL WRL (975 975) or by emailing [info@westernrenewableslink.com.au](mailto: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](http://www.westernrenewableslink.com.au).

Or you can let us know by:

1800 WRL WRL (975 975)  
[info@westernrenewableslink.com.au](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto: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](http://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](http://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](http://www.ewov.com.au)) including information about complaints and dispute resolution.

## Energy Safe Victoria

([www.esv.vic.gov.au](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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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## More information

Visit the project website [westernrenewableslink.com.au](http://westernrenewableslink.com.au) for the latest project information.

## Contact us

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