

JUNE TO DECEMBER 2021

Community Engagement Summary Report



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Introduction

The Western Victoria Transmission Network Project (WVTNP) is a critical upgrade of the state's transmission network. It will help ensure Victoria's successful transition from coal-generated electricity to sustainable, affordable and reliable renewable energy. The project will connect large scale wind and solar in the west into the grid to power more than half a million homes across Victoria.

The project includes a new transmission line starting at Bulgana, near Stawell in Victoria's west, covering approximately 190km to Sydenham in Melbourne's north-west. The project will enable the connection of new renewable energy generated in Western Victoria into the National Electricity Market and increase the Victorian transmission network capacity.

Purpose of this report

An important part of the WVTNP is ongoing engagement with communities and landholders. Community input is critical to all major projects to ensure that all potential impacts and opportunities are considered in the planning, approvals, and design phases.

This report covers the period from June – December 2021 and includes details of the engagement undertaken by our team including the series of webinars, online one-on-one sessions, and face-to-face sessions held in the later part of 2021.

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

We are actively considering all feedback, and encourage you to contact the project team on 1300 360 795 or email info@westvictnp.com.au if you have further feedback you would like us to consider.



Community Consultation Group

The Community Consultation Group (CCG) is an additional opportunity to share project information with the community and encourage constructive two-way discussion and feedback in a forum run by an independent chair.

The CCG has a wide range of representatives from across the community and has provided valuable input. It will continue to play a vital role in providing feedback and posing important questions on the project.

In the second half of 2021 the CCG was rejuvenated with new members from across the project area. Invitations of expressions of interest were asked of project opposition groups, local industry bodies (including the CFA and tourism groups) and individuals to consider joining the revitalised group.

Between June and December of 2021 there were seven CCG meetings. Topics discussed included: route selection, bushfire risk, undergrounding and land access, among others. Presentations and meeting minutes can be found on the project website (www.westvictnp.com.au) under Resources.

We would like to thank members for their contributions in 2021 and look forward to working together in 2022.



What happened between June and December 2021?

After many months of community consultation and site investigations, the proposed single corridor was announced in June 2021. Information about the corridor, including a detailed map and updated fact sheets, was made available on the project website. Communications included 603 letters, 188 emails and 568 text messages sent to landholders within the preferred single corridor.

Environmental and technical specialists presented their findings to date at eight online webinars held in September, as well as answering questions about existing conditions. The key specialist topics were agriculture, landscape and visual, biodiversity, bushfire, electric and magnetic fields (EMF), compensation and valuation, and the single corridor selection process.

Following these webinars, community members were invited to speak one-on-one with technical specialists via an online meeting link; a total of 54 one-on-one meetings were booked.

Following rigorous technical investigations and further consultation with stakeholders – including the community and landholders within the proposed single corridor – a proposed route was identified and announced in November 2021. After the proposed route announcement, Community Information Sessions were held in December at five locations across the project area and were attended by 67 people.

Between June and December 2021, the project hotline and email continued to be a source of community feedback and insight. More than 130 phone calls and 700 emails were received from the community between June and December 2021.

Key engagement activities between June and December 2021 included:

June – December 2021

- Announcement of proposed single corridor
- Project fact sheets updated
- Regular eUpdates continued to be issued
- Government and industry meetings continued
- Technical Reference Group meetings continued
- Community Consultation Group meetings continued
- Eight online webinars hosted in September
- 54 online one-on-one meetings booked in October, 40 meetings held*
- Proposed route identified and announced in November
- Two webinars for the proposed route held in late November, early December
- New project website launched
- Five Community Information Sessions held in December
- Fact sheets updated and available on project website, including Landholder Guide, Proposed Route, Bushfire and Underground Construction
- EES Existing Condition Information Sheets published on nine topics

*Only 40 one-on-one meetings were held in October 2021, as some meetings were cancelled or not attended



Existing conditions webinar series – September 2021

In September 2021, the WVTNP team hosted eight webinars where environmental and technical specialists presented their findings to date and answered questions about existing conditions. The webinars provided a COVID-safe way for community members to get the information they need.

There were a total of 312 dial-ins across the eight webinars. The specialist topics included:

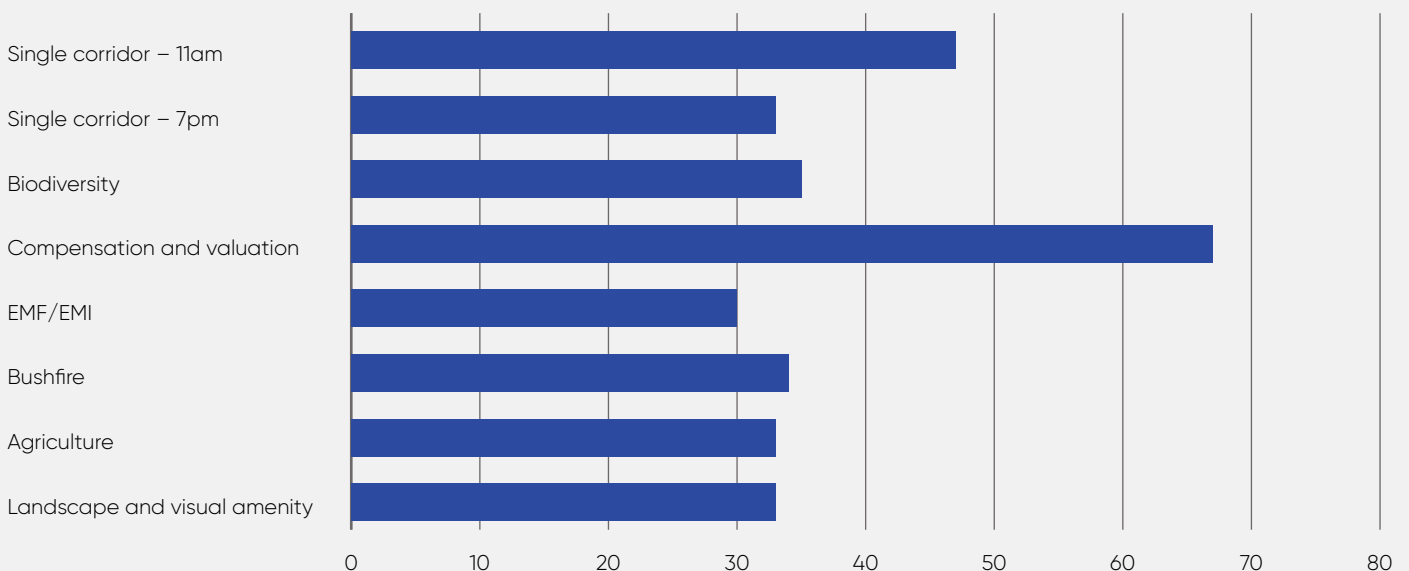
- Single corridor selection process (2 x webinars)
- Agriculture
- Landscape and visual
- Biodiversity
- Bushfire
- Electric and magnetic fields (EMF)
- Compensation and valuation

Attendees were invited to ask questions in the online chat function and facilitators answered approximately 150 questions across the eight webinars. Some questions could not be answered in the time available and were subsequently used to inform and update the Frequently Asked Questions on our website.

Recordings of these webinars are available on the project website.

The following key themes and concerns were raised by attendees at each webinar:

September webinar series – Attendance



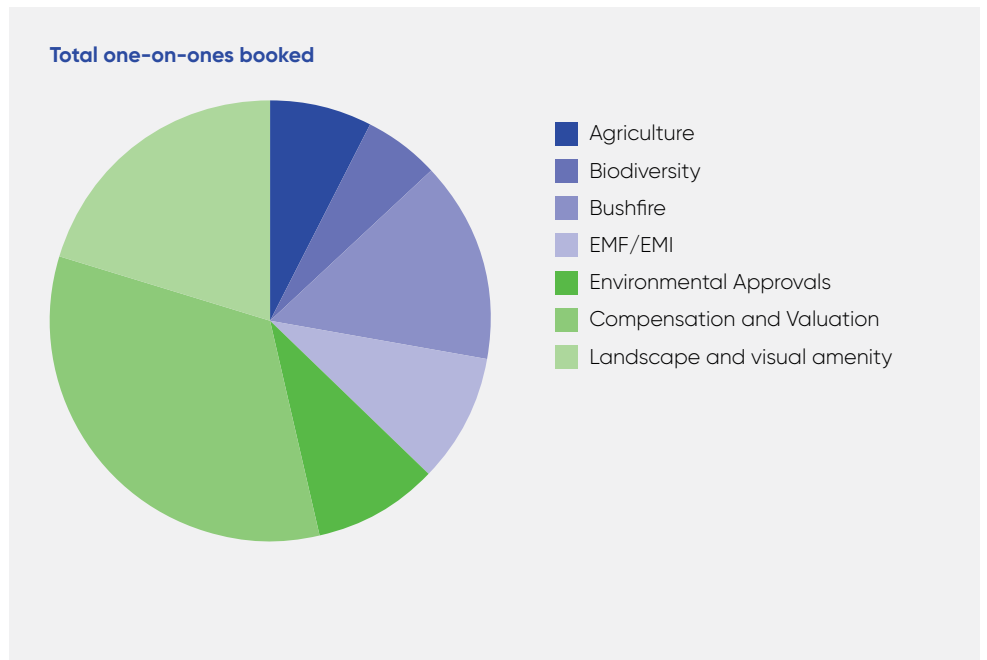
Webinar	Date and time	Key themes
Single corridor selection process	Thursday 17th September 11am and 7pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alternative routes and undergrounding • The use of existing easements and freeways • Minimum clearances and setbacks from dwellings, ' • Implication on future land use and farming practices • The difference between HVDC and HVAC, with reference to undergrounding • Bushfire, biodiversity and safety considerations in route selection
Biodiversity	Tuesday 21st September 7:30pm-8:30pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The use of existing easements and freeways • The importance of bio-links • The effect that finding endangered species would have on the proposed route • The importance of Lerderderg State Park, Wombat State Forest and Long Forest • Whether specific species were included in investigations
Compensation and valuation	Wednesday 22nd September 7:30pm-8:30pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compensation for neighbours • Land devaluation • How compensation is calculated • Opportunities for independent advice for landholders • Valuation and acquisition process
Electric and magnetic fields	Thursday 23rd September 7:30pm-8:30pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setback distances from dwellings, schools and businesses • Effects on internet, phone and television reception, health devices and GPS • Effects on bird life • Prudent avoidance policies • Undergrounding
Bushfire	Tuesday 28th September 7:30pm-8:30pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aerial fire fighting • Inclusion of historic fires in the assessment • Effects of easements on fires and firefighting • Undergrounding
Agriculture	Wednesday 29th September 7:30pm-8:30pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easements and the potential for wind and erosion • Importance of Pykes Creek and Lake Merrimu to irrigation • Removal of trees • Impact on horse studs • Multi-generational farming properties
Landscape and visual amenity	Thursday 30th September 7:30pm-8:30pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impacts on tourism and local businesses • Local heritage sites • Volcanic cones • Pamela Court, Darley • Potential mitigation measures • Visual impact from private properties • The impact of visual amenity on the route selection process

One-on-one meetings with technical specialists – October 2021

In October 2021, one-on-one meetings with specialists were offered to community members and landholders. These meetings were held online, in accordance with the COVID-19 restrictions at the time. Bookings were made via the project website, with participants choosing a 30-minute timeslot to speak with a technical specialist based on their topic of interest.

A total of 54 one-on-one meetings were booked, with 40 attended. Compensation and valuation was the most popular topic, with 18 meetings booked.

The one-on-one format allowed participants to ask questions that related specifically to their topic of interest and particular land use.



Webinars on proposed route – November–December 2021

Two webinars were held following 26 November announcement of the proposed route, with 63 people attending the two sessions. The recordings and accompanying transcripts can be found on the project website (www.westvictnp.com.au) under Resources.

Attendees were invited to ask questions using the chat function in Zoom. The following key themes and concerns were raised by attendees at each webinar:

Webinar	Date and time	Key themes
Proposed route	Tuesday 30th November 7pm–8.30pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proximity of the proposed route to dwellings • Route selection in the Bolwarrah area • Undergrounding • Landscape and visual amenity • Living and working with transmission lines • Tower heights
Proposed route	Thursday 2nd December 7pm–8.30pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proximity of the proposed route to dwellings • Lack of communication with those outside of the proposed route • Tower heights • Cultural heritage assessments • Route selection in the Bolwarrah and Gordon areas • Undergrounding

Webinars



30 November 2021
41 dial ins



2 December 2021
22 dial ins



Community Information Sessions – December 2021

In December 2021, the WVTNP held five Community Information Sessions across the project area. Sessions were held at Waubra, Miners Rest, Darley, Melton and again at Miners Rest between 6 and 12 December, with 67 people attending the sessions.

Project team members and technical specialists were available to talk to a range of topics, including route selection, undergrounding, compensation and valuation, agriculture, bushfire, landscape and visual amenity, design and environmental approvals.

Session:	No. of people	No. of meetings
Waubra December 6, 1pm – 7pm, Waubra FNC, 2091 Sunraysia Hwy, Waubra	12	10
Miners Rest December 7, 1pm – 7pm, Miners Rest Community Hall, 2 Market St, Miners Rest	4	4
Darley December 10, 2pm – 7pm, Darley Hub Pavilion, 3340/182 Hallett’s Way, Darley	17	13
Melton December 11, 10am – 4pm, Kurunjang Community Hub, 35 Mowbray Crescent, Kurunjang/Melton	19	9
Miners Rest December 12, 10am – 4pm, Miners Rest Community Hall, 2 Market St, Miners Rest	15	10

Ongoing landholder engagement

All landholders in the proposed route have been allocated a dedicated Land Liaison Officer. The Land Liaison Officer’s role is to work with landholders in the proposed route to address any concerns or questions they may have about matters such as the voluntary land access consent form for field surveys (where required) and land access protocols to minimise impact to the landholder’s property, lifestyle, operations, biosecurity and livestock.

The Land Liaison Officers are also currently working with landholders on the proposed route to understand and document their specific land use, property features, infrastructure and existing practices and requirements related to their property. This work will continue over the coming months and will inform the preferred route and easement location, project design and tower siting.

AusNet Services has employed a team of 12 Land Liaison Officers, and associated support staff.

What we've heard:

Between June and December 2021, we collected valuable information and feedback. This information has been critical in helping us understand the potential impacts and opportunities in the planning, approvals and design phases of the WVTNP. By sending an email, completing a feedback form, or attending an information session or webinar, the community has helped us to understand

how people use their land and roads, and what view they see from their homes. Feedback has also reinforced the importance of Aboriginal cultural heritage and historic heritage sites that exist within the project area.

Here is a summary of what we heard during the second half of 2021.

Key themes

Single corridor + proposed route selection process

- Alternate routes and process
- Feasibility of undergrounding
- The use of existing easements and freeways
- Minimum clearances and setbacks from dwellings
- Bushfire consideration in route selection
- Impact assessment and effects
- Implication on future land use and farming practices

Biodiversity

- The use of existing easements and freeways
- The importance of bio-links
- The effect of finding endangered species on the proposed route
- The importance of Lerderderg State Park, Wombat State Forest and Long Forest
- Whether specific species were included in investigations

Compensation and valuation

- Neighbours receiving compensation
- Land devaluation
- Opportunities for independent advice for landholders
- Valuation, compensation and the easement acquisition process

Electric and magnetic fields

- Setback distances from dwellings, schools and businesses
- Effects on internet, phone and television reception, health devices and GPS
- Effects on bird life
- Prudent avoidance policies
- Impact on livestock

Bushfire

- Aerial and ground firefighting access
- Inclusion of historic fires in investigations
- Effect of easements on fires and firefighting
- Processes to create and maintain a safe and reliable WVTNP

Agriculture

- Impact on agriculture, crops (in particular potato) and animal product quality
- Impact on existing operations (including irrigation)
- Multi-generational farming properties
- Impact on horse studs
- Removal of trees
- Importance of Pykes Creek and Lake Merrimu for irrigation
- Easements and the potential for wind and erosion

Key themes

Landscape and visual amenity

- Impacts on tourism and local businesses
- Local heritage sites
- Volcanic cones
- Significant views (for example Pamela Court, Darley)
- Potential mitigation measures
- Visual impact on private properties
- Impact of visual amenity on the route selection process

Undergrounding v overhead

- Undergrounding all or part of the transmission line
- Undergrounding versus overhead and the impact on farming capabilities
- Living and working near transmission lines
- Height of machinery and clearances
- The difference between HVDC and HVAC with reference to undergrounding

Environment Effects Statement

- Land access to conduct surveys, studies and investigations
- What studies are included in the EES process
- How the community can have their say
- Submission process

Community engagement

- Transparency and genuineness of the engagement process
- Lack of consultation
- The decision-making process to determine a proposed route
- Lack of contact with impacted landholders
- How feedback has contributed to the process of selecting the proposed route
- Community Benefit Fund and how the community will benefit
- Response to community and stakeholder questions

Living and working around transmission lines

- Health and mental health impacts
- Farming under an overhead transmission line
- Road access in and out of local townships and properties during bushfires
- Community and environmental benefits



Community involvement

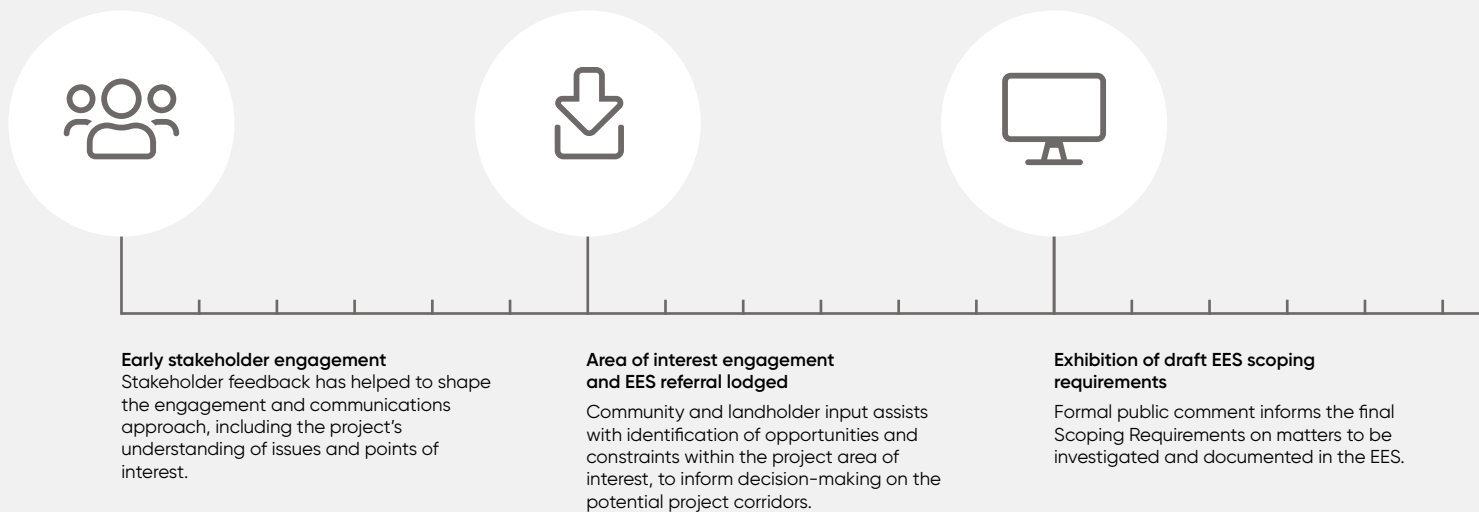
The EES process provides an opportunity for ongoing, transparent community consultation, and is documented in the WVTNP Environment Effects Statement Consultation Plan.

The plan was published in February 2021 on the DELWP website - https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0018/513531/WVTNP_EES_Consultation-Plan.pdf

Ongoing consultation will help us to identify issues of concern and potential impacts of the project and will inform the technical studies and 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. These submissions will inform the panel in making a recommendation 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 published in June 2021 and available on the project website under Resources.

Environment Effects Statement engagement phases



Thank you for your input

We would like to extend a sincere thank you to everyone who has participated by attending a webinar or a one-on-one meeting, sent an email or called our project team.

We look forward to engaging with the community and continuing to build on feedback and valuable information from interested members of the public.



EES preparation and specialist studies

Ongoing community feedback will assist in the:

- Identification of existing values and matters to be considered in environmental, cultural and social studies.
- Development of appropriate and effective measures to avoid and minimise impact and risks.
- Identification of opportunities to maximise benefits.
- Development of a design.



Public exhibition and panel hearing

Draft EES document and supporting technical reports submitted to DELWP for review.

The EES will be exhibited for at least 30 days for public comment, allowing the public to review the EES and provide written submissions on the project to Planning Panels Victoria.




The submissions will inform the panel in making its recommendations to the Minister for Planning.



Ongoing landholder, community and stakeholder engagement



WVTNP information

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Information straight to your inbox

Sign up for information straight to your inbox at the WVTNP website www.westvictnp.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.westvictnp.com.au. Or you can let us know by:

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Feedback

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

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.

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 DELWP.

Energy Safe Victoria

(www.esv.vic.gov.au) including information about the safe design and operation of high voltage transmission networks in Victoria.

Essential Services Commission

(www.esc.vic.gov.au) including information about the regulation of transmission licenses 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.



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