Western Renewables Link

Community and Land Use

The Environment Effects Statement (EES) and the draft Planning Scheme Amendment for the Western Renewables Link are now available for public comment. Community and land use are key topics covered in the EES.

This fact sheet has been developed to help you navigate the Western Renewables Link EES and connect you with the information that matters to you.

It provides details on how potential impacts on **community and land use** have been considered and where to find more information in the EES.

Planning and approvals

The EES includes information on how the project could affect the environment during construction, operation and decommissioning, and how any adverse impacts could be managed. It helps decision-makers determine whether the project should be approved under Commonwealth and Victorian laws and what conditions should apply.

The EES for the Western Renewables Link has involved extensive technical studies including field surveys and investigations, along with Traditional Owner, landholder, community and stakeholder consultation. It includes 20 technical reports on the topics listed on the final page of this fact sheet.

The EES and the draft Planning Scheme Amendment, which allows for the project land use and development to proceed, can be viewed in full on the WRL website at westernrenewableslink.com.au/ees

The Western Renewables Link will unlock Victoria's renewable energy generation potential and play a key role in facilitating access to clean, reliable, and affordable energy.

The Western Renewables Link is a proposed high-voltage, double-circuit overhead electricity transmission line, extending over 190 kilometres from Bulgana in western Victoria to Sydenham in Melbourne's north-west. The project will connect significant renewable energy developments within the Western Victoria Renewable Energy Zone to the grid and establish a direct link between the New South Wales and Victorian electricity networks.

Delivered by

AusNet

Land Use and Planning

The Western Renewables Link spans six local government areas: Northern Grampians, Pyrenees, Ballarat, Hepburn, Moorabool, and Melton. These regions have a diverse mix of land uses, including farmland, residential neighbourhoods, industrial zones, and natural areas such as parks and conservation reserves.

Each local government area also has its own planning rules and policies that guide how land can be used and developed. The project has been assessed against both local and state planning policies and aligns with Victoria's broader goals to support renewable energy development and the expansion of transmission infrastructure.

What was investigated?

Land use and planning specialists assessed potential impacts of the project on land use and measures to avoid, minimise or manage impacts through all stages of the project.

Investigations included:

- identifying existing and planned land uses and development in the area local to the project
- reviewing state, regional and local planning policy framework, strategic land use plans, planning permits and land titles
- reviewing a range of other technical studies including air quality, noise, landscape and visual inputs to evaluate potential effects on land use
- assessing the potential changes to land use resulting from the project and identification of mitigations.

Managing potential impacts

As the project progresses, there may be temporary or permanent changes to how some land is accessed or used. For example, during construction, land will be needed for workforce accommodation facilities, work areas, and the creation of access tracks. These impacts are expected to be short-term and mostly limited to the construction phase.

Long-term impacts on land use are expected to be minimal, although the presence of transmission infrastructure will alter the visual landscape in some areas. The change in views will not change the underlying use of the land.

AusNet has included a draft Planning Scheme Amendment (PSA) with the EES. The PSA is the primary planning approval for the project and proposes to amend the Northern Grampians, Pyrenees, Ballarat, Hepburn, Moorabool, and Melton planning schemes to allow for the construction and operation of the project.

The draft PSA includes a proposed Incorporated Document. The Incorporated Document contains key conditions that guide development and construction of the project including working within an Environmental Management Framework approved by the Minister for Planning.

This fact sheet outlines potential EES topics you may wish to explore further, but submissions should not be based on this information. Please refer to the more detailed information on Land Use and Planning in **EES Chapter 12**, in **Technical Report E** and **Attachment III: Draft Planning Scheme Amendment**, and base submissions on the material provided there.

Social

The Western Renewables Link spans six local government areas; from farming communities in the west to more urban areas in the east. Each area has its own unique mix of social, economic, and land use characteristics.

The social impacts of the project will vary. Landholders directly affected by the project will experience the greatest potential impact, while for nearby neighbours and the broader community, the effects are expected to be less significant. Impacts may include reduced enjoyment of, and disconnection with, the local area and properties.

Investigations included:

The Social Impact Assessment was informed by:

- Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data and other secondary data sources
- the findings of other technical studies undertaken for the project, including the landscape and visual impact assessment, and the economic impact assessment
- consultation with the Council Advisory Group established by AusNet for the project, comprised of representatives of local governments traversed by the project
- consultation with the Community Consultative Group established by AusNet for the project, comprised of landholders, residents, community groups, government entities, and industry and market participants
- feedback and input from stakeholder and community engagement sessions, meetings and interviews
- a 'pinpoint' spatial data set compiled by AusNet, comprised of map-based feedback from community members on important destinations, sites, and features in their local area.

Managing potential impacts

Potential social impacts were assessed considering the magnitude of effects, taking account of the intensity, scale and duration of the change, and the sensitivity of affected individuals or groups, including directly affected landholders, surrounding landholders, the broader community, and tourism businesses.

This fact sheet outlines potential EES topics you may wish to explore further, but submissions should not be based on this information. Please refer to the more detailed information on Social in **EES Chapter 21** and **Technical Report F**, and base submissions on the material provided there.

Examples of how we plan to manage potential impacts:

Providing workforce accommodation facilities at Lexton and Ballan and developing a workforce Code of Conduct with local councils to reduce impacts on nearby communities

Timing construction to avoid sensitive periods, using quieter equipment, and installing noise barriers where needed

Developing traffic plans and controls to help reduce disruptions and keep local roads safe

Consulting landholders and land managers to find ways to reduce visual changes on private and public land

Prioritising local workers and businesses for employment and purchasing opportunities

Agriculture and Forestry

Most of the land along the Western Renewables Link is used for farming. People run different kinds of farming and land-based businesses on their properties, including grazing, broadacre cropping, horticulture, and plantation forestry.

What was investigated?

Impacts of the project on agriculture and plantation forestry were assessed and measures to avoid, minimise or manage potential impacts have been identified. To develop an understanding of individual properties aerial imagery was used to review visual conditions, assets and activities, together with information provided directly from landholders where available. The assessment included identifying and assessing the potential impacts associated with the reduction of usable agricultural land, disturbance of livestock, restrictions on the use and development of agricultural assets and infrastructure, and biosecurity risks.

Investigations included:

- a desktop assessment to determine existing conditions including land production potential and regional production value
- review of spatial data including a digital terrain model and statistical data from the Australian Bureau of statistics to understand the regional values
- field investigations including ground-truthing from public areas
- preparation of case studies with direct input from landholders and farmers around Australia to explore the range of issues associated with overhead transmission lines for different agricultural enterprises and landscapes

Managing potential impacts

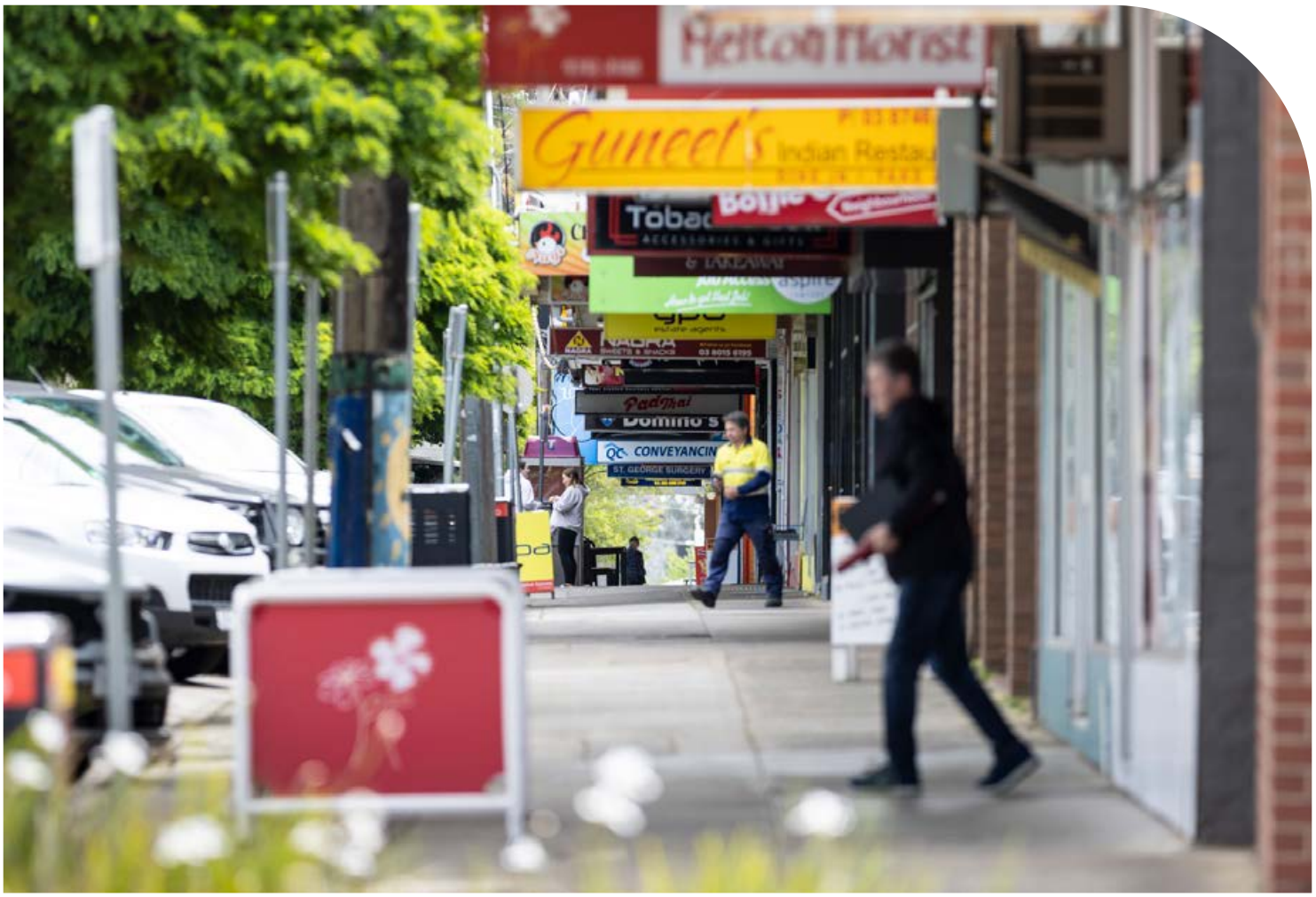
Construction and operation of the project is likely to cause disruptions to land use. This could mean some land is temporarily unable to be used for farming during construction, or there may be longer-term changes to how the land can be used under the transmission line. Using some large machinery may require a safety check or permit to ensure safe clearances are maintained.

The level of impact will vary depending on the type of farm, property size, and how the land is managed. Steps will be taken to reduce disruption wherever possible. Financial compensation will be provided to landholders for any lost production, extra costs, or damage due to the project.

This fact sheet outlines potential EES topics you may wish to explore further, but submissions should not be based on this information. Please refer to the more detailed information on Agriculture and Forestry in **EES Chapter 15** and **Technical Report H**, and base submissions on the material provided there.

Examples of how we plan to manage potential impacts:

- Working directly with landholders to understand individual needs and develop tailored management plans
- Minimising land disturbance by carefully planning construction activities
- Providing clear guidance on what activities can continue safely within the easement
- Restoring land after construction where possible to support ongoing farming use



Economic

The Western Renewables Link passes through regions with a wide range of economic conditions, including differences in population, jobs, income, industries, and tourism. The main job sectors in these areas are health care, farming, construction, education, and retail.

What was investigated?

The economic assessment modelled the economic effect of the project at local, regional and national scales, using computable general equilibrium (CGE) modelling, to assess the direct and flow-on macroeconomic impacts of the project, including employment and industry impacts. This type of modelling is widely recognised across all levels of government in Australia and is often used to estimate macroeconomic impacts (both positive and negative) of large, multi-year projects. The model predicted that by 2050 the project is expected to deliver major economic benefits.

The economic impact assessment also included a qualitative analysis of the potential economic impacts of the project on businesses operating in the areas near where the project is proposed to be constructed, at an industry-level. This analysis was informed by Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data on the number and size (by employee count) of businesses operating near the project.

The economic assessment modelled the economic effect of the project at local, regional and national scales. The model predicted that by 2050 the project is expected to deliver major economic benefits.

$4.5b
Increase in Australia's Gross Domestic Product

$0.9b
Boost to the Gross Regional Product in the study area

$2b
Rise in Victorian investment (partially offset across the rest of Australia)

$3.7b
Increase in private consumption in Australia

$1.4b
Rise in government consumption in Australia

$4.7b
Net improvement in national living standards

The qualitative analysis identified that the local manufacturing sector may benefit from increased demand for materials and services for construction of the project, and that, while most local businesses are expected to be largely unaffected, some accommodation and food, and arts and recreation businesses within 2km of the project may experience short-term disruptions during construction, and some may be potentially affected in the longer-term during project operation.

New employment generated by the project is expected to peak in 2028, with up to 346 new jobs in the area where the project will be built. More jobs are also anticipated to be created indirectly through investment in renewable energy. The local manufacturing sector may benefit from increased demand for materials and services for construction of the project.

This fact sheet outlines potential EES topics you may wish to explore further, but submissions should not be based on this information. Please refer to the more detailed information on Economics in **EES Chapter 14** and **Technical Report G**, and base submissions on the material provided there.

Examples of how we plan to manage potential impacts:

Tailoring support for directly affected businesses to reduce and manage disruption and operational impacts

Supporting tourism businesses within 2km of the project to manage local landscape and business changes

Buying from local suppliers to boost local businesses and jobs

Making a submission

Planning Panels Victoria (PPV) manages the EES public exhibition process.

Submissions must be made in writing and received by the exhibition closing date via the Engage Victoria website – the Victorian Government's centralised online consultation platform engage.vic.gov.au/Western-Renewables-Link-IAC. Submissions will be considered by the independent Inquiry and Advisory Committee (IAC) and the Minister for Planning.

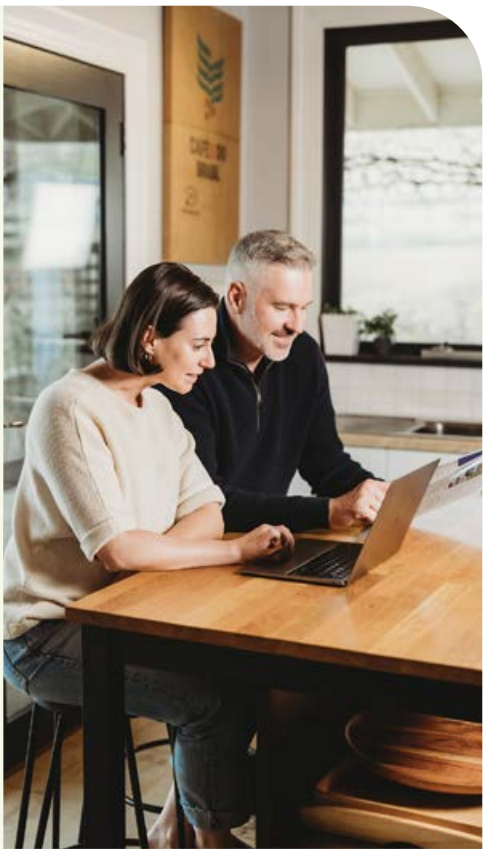
Only one submission is needed to address all your views about the project, its effects, and the relevant documents.

If you do not have internet access and are unable to lodge a submission online via the Engage Victoria website, please contact PPV through the Customer Call Centre on 136 186 (select option 6) and request a hard copy submission coversheet. Each hard copy submission must be accompanied by a completed coversheet issued by PPV.

All submissions must state the name and address of the person making the submission. Submissions will be treated as public documents and will be published on the Engage Victoria website. Do not include personal information in the body of your submission (such as your email address or phone number or photos of people, particularly children).

If you would like to present your submission in person to the IAC, you will need to make a submission and mark on the submission form that you would like to be heard.

For more information about the EES submission process or any enquiries regarding the IAC process, contact PPV on 136 186 (select option 6) or email planning.panels@transport.vic.gov.au



Key topics in the EES

Amenity and Safety	Biodiversity and Environment	Community and Land Use	Heritage	Land and Water	Landscape and Visual	Transport and Aviation
Air Quality	Biodiversity	Agriculture and Forestry	Aboriginal Cultural Heritage	Contaminated Land	Landscape and Visual	Aviation
Bushfire	Climate Change	Economic	Historical Heritage	Geology and Soils		Transport
EMI and EMF	Greenhouse Gas	Land Use and Planning		Groundwater		
Noise and Vibration		Social		Surface Water		

More information

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

Contact us

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Delivered by

AusNet