

Environment Effects Statement

The purpose of this document is to provide landholders, the community and stakeholders (including councils, agencies, businesses and First Nations peoples) with information about the Environment Effects Statement process for the proposed Western Renewables Link project. It also provides links to further information on planning processes in Victoria.

What is an Environment Effects Statement?

An Environment Effects Statement (EES) analyses a project's potential environmental impacts and outlines the proposed measures for avoiding, minimising and managing adverse effects. The EES process is governed by the *Environment Effects Act 1978* (Vic) and includes public exhibition of the completed EES, which provides an information resource for interested parties, who may decide to lodge formal submissions. More information about the EES process is available at <https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/environmental-assessments/environmental-assessment-guides/ministerial-guidelines-for-assessment-of-environmental-effects/understanding-the-assessment-process>.

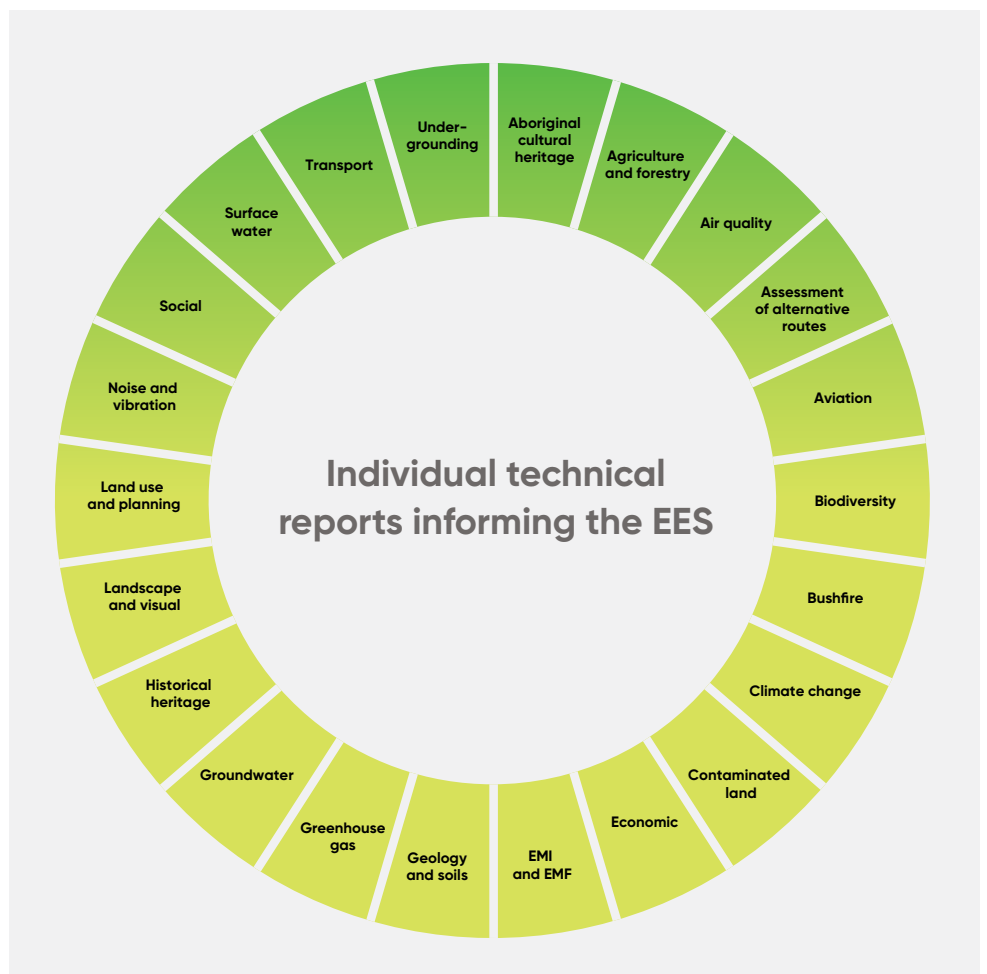
When was the Western Renewables Link EES referral?

In August 2020, the Victorian Minister for Planning determined that the Western Renewables Link project required an EES under the assessment requirements of the *Environment Effects Act 1978* (Vic). In August 2023, as a result of proposed changes to the project, AusNet referred the project to the Minister for Planning for a new decision on the assessment requirements. The Minister accepted the new referral in August 2023, confirming that an EES will be required for the project, in its changed form. More information about the project's referrals, the Minister's decisions and the Minister's scoping requirements for the EES is available at <https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/environmental-assessments/browse-projects/western-renewables-link>.

What will the Western Renewables Link EES look like?

The EES will comprise a main report that describes the proposed project and its expected environmental effects, and explains the process of developing the project and what AusNet commits to do to mitigate or manage environmental effects. The specialist technical reports that inform the main report will be published as appendices.

The EES package will include a variety of attachments, including the draft planning scheme amendment, a map book, and additional reports such as the Community and Stakeholder Engagement Report. There will also be an EES summary brochure that will briefly explain the project, how to examine the EES and the process for making a submission.



Where will the Western Renewables Link EES be published?

The EES will be published on the Western Renewables Link website and will be freely available on USB or similar media.

When will the Western Renewables Link EES be submitted?

When AusNet believes that it has completed an EES package that adequately addresses the Minister's scoping requirements and comments provided progressively through the technical reference group, it will submit the package to the Minister seeking authorisation to exhibit. AusNet is working toward submission of the EES in the second half of 2024.

What does the public review process of the EES involve?

The public review process for the Western Renewables Link EES will include:

- public notice of the EES;
- exhibition of the EES for a specified period;
- receipt of public submissions; and
- public inquiry.

EES phase and indicative timeline		Impact of community input
Early 2020	Early stakeholder engagement	Stakeholder feedback helped to shape the engagement and communications approach including the project team's understanding of issues and points of interest.
Mid 2020	Area of Interest engagement and EES referral lodged	Community and landholder input assisted with identification of opportunities and constraints within the project Area of Interest to inform decision-making about identifying a project corridor.
Late 2020	Commencement of EES	The EES draft scoping requirements were placed on public exhibition in November 2020, with interested parties able to provide submissions during this period. All submissions received were considered by the Department of Transport and Planning (DTP) during the finalisation of the scoping requirements, which set out the matters to be addressed in the EES.
Early 2021 to 2024 (ongoing)	EES preparation, project design and community engagement, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single corridor (June 2021) • Proposed route (November 2021) • Updated proposed route (August 2022) • New EES referral (August 2023) 	Feedback has informed the: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of existing local values and matters to be considered in EES studies and in project design. • Identification of opportunities to maximise community benefits. • Development of a proposed route and proposed project design.
	EES submission	DTP reviews the EES submission to ensure the draft EES adequately addresses the scoping requirements before it is released.
2024-2025	EES public exhibition	The EES and draft Planning Scheme Amendment (PSA) will be exhibited for public comment for at least 40 business days to allow members of the public to review the EES and provide written submissions on the project.
	EES and Planning Scheme Amendment Inquiry and Advisory Committee public hearing	The Minister for Planning will appoint an independent inquiry and advisory committee to review public submissions and hold a public hearing. After the hearing, the inquiry and advisory committee will deliver a written report to the Minister with conclusions and recommendations to inform the Minister's Assessment.
2025	Minister's Assessment	DTP will publish the independent inquiry and advisory committee's report when it publishes the Minister's Assessment on its website. This will occur once the Minister's Assessment has been provided to the proponent and decision-makers.

When can the community comment on the EES?

There will be opportunities for the community to submit feedback during the public review of the EES and the subsequent public inquiry and advisory committee process. Details about how to make a submission will be advertised before the exhibition period.

The Western Renewables Link EES will be on public exhibition for at least 40 business days.

What is an EES public inquiry?

The inquiry and advisory committee is appointed by the Minister for Planning to review public submissions received during the public exhibition of the EES. After the exhibition period, a public inquiry will be held, giving parties that have made written submissions an opportunity to be heard. At the conclusion of the public inquiry, the inquiry and advisory committee will deliver a written report to the Minister with conclusions and recommendations to inform the Minister's Assessment.

What is the outcome of the EES process?

The Minister will assess the project's social, environmental and economic impacts. The Minister's assessment may conclude that:

- a project would have an acceptable level of environmental effects, with regard to overall project outcomes;
- a project would have an unacceptable level of environmental effects; or
- a project would need major modifications and/or further investigations to establish that an acceptable level of environmental outcomes would be achieved. In this situation, a further assessment process may be required.

The Western Renewables Link EES is also accredited for the assessment purposes of the *Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*, under which the project has been determined to be a controlled action. The Commonwealth Minister for the Environment will consider the Victorian Minister's assessment before deciding whether to approve the project and, if so, under what conditions.

How can I get involved now?

AusNet is continuing to engage with stakeholders and gather information during preparation of the EES. Information about community engagement sessions, webinars and other opportunities to provide feedback can be found on the [Western Renewables Link](#) website.



More information about the EES, including timing and public exhibition dates when available, will be available on the project website, www.westernrenewableslink.com.au

Western Renewables Link EES information: <https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/environmental-assessments/browse-projects/western-renewables-link>

More information

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

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