

Preliminary EES Information Sheet for Existing Conditions

Landscape and Visual Amenity

Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide a summary of the existing conditions identified for landscape and visual amenity within the Western Renewables Link area of interest (AOI). Identifying the existing landscape and visual amenity values within the AOI is an important step towards understanding the potential impacts, interactions and considerations for the project.



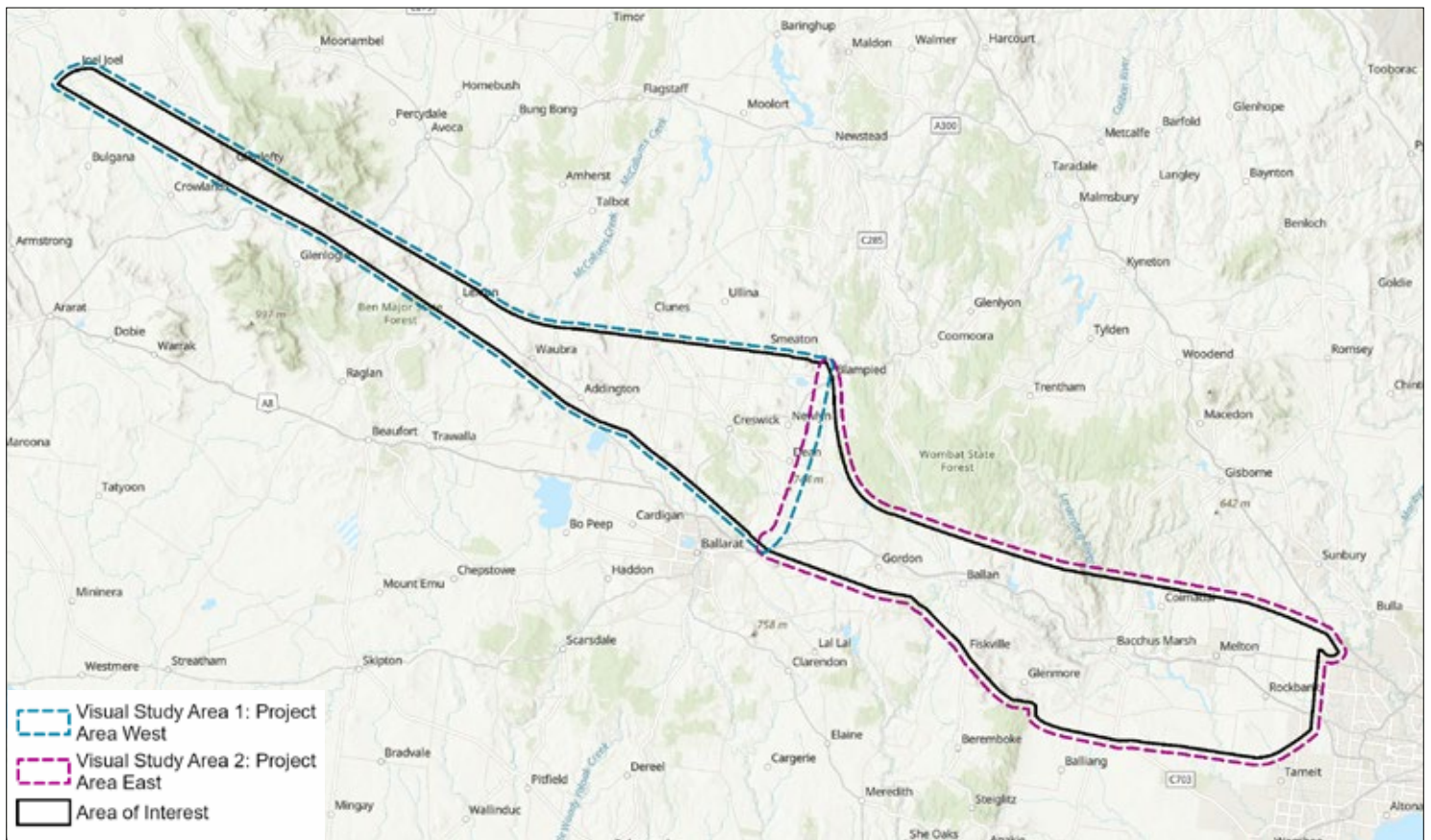
The existing conditions have been identified by qualified, independent technical specialists and include landscape features, sensitive areas and land uses. A review of land use, planning zones, overlays, topography and vegetation information, together with community consultation data, was used to identify and define significant or valued landscapes and features within the AOI. Relevant legislation, policy and guidelines were also considered, including strategic documents such as the South West Landscape Assessment Study. The study area for the landscape and visual amenity existing conditions assessment extends approximately 900m beyond the AOI in all directions. The study area may be further expanded beyond the project corridor in the landscape and visual amenity impact assessment for the Environment Effects Statement (EES). Field surveys and investigations will be undertaken within the project corridor to gather more information, where required, about existing conditions and potential project impacts. The findings will be updated and included in the landscape and visual amenity impact assessment for the EES.

Community and stakeholder feedback

The community has provided important input about existing conditions including:

- Significant landscapes.
- Views and landscapes around Darley.
- Importance of volcanic cones and other significant features in the landscape.
- Views from existing and proposed tourist localities.
- Importance of visual amenity from homes, farms and tourist routes.

Concerns have also been raised about the impacts of lighting from infrastructure to viewing the night sky.



Visual Study Area (Data source: Jacobs, 2021)

Land use

The primary land-use within the AOI and much of the surrounding area is farming and agriculture. Other uses include National Parks, State Forests, conservation reserves, townships, rural living zones, industrial and extractive sites. Large areas of native forest are in the area to the north of Ballarat, near Creswick, Lerderberg State Park to the north of Darley and Brisbane Ranges National Park, south of the Parwan Valley and Werribee Gorge.

Sensitive areas and uses include townships, residential areas, conservation areas including National Parks, State Forests, volcanic cones and the many lakes, reservoirs and waterbodies. These features are valued as much for their ecology, scenery, and sense of naturalness as their recreational values.

Landscape character and landscape sensitivity

Landscape character units and landscape sensitivity ratings are used to assess the visual impact of project infrastructure. Landscape character units are determined based on physical and natural attributes including geology, topography, vegetation and drainage patterns as well as modifications and the use of land. Landscape sensitivity is based on the use of the area and the degree to which the landscape can accommodate further visual change. Homes will always be classed as highly sensitive locations and disturbances to residents' views have the highest degree of sensitivity. Impacts on representative residential views from residential properties will be assessed as part of the landscape and visual impact assessment.

Landscape character unit	Landscape sensitivity
Industrial/ Mining and Quarrying	Low
Plantation	Low
Cleared Flat Farmland	Low
Cleared Undulating Farmland	Low to moderate
Urban and Townships	Moderate
Rural Residential	Moderate to high. Natural-appearing or rural landscape. Recognised by specific zoning distinct from townships and rural areas.
Waterbodies and Waterways	Moderate to high. Scenic qualities, contemplative aspects, intrinsic values, and recreational uses.
National Parks, State Parks and Forests	High. Natural values, scenic qualities and recreational uses.
Volcanic Landscapes	High. Geological significance and landmark landforms. Recognised in overlays and strategic studies.
Valleys and Gorges	High. Geological significance and landmark landforms. Recognised in overlays and strategic studies. Many valleys and gorges are publicly accessible either through public roads or as parks and reserves.



View from Mount Blackwood



View from Telford Park, across Darley towards the Lerderberg Ranges

Viewing locations

Key public viewing locations across the AOI include:

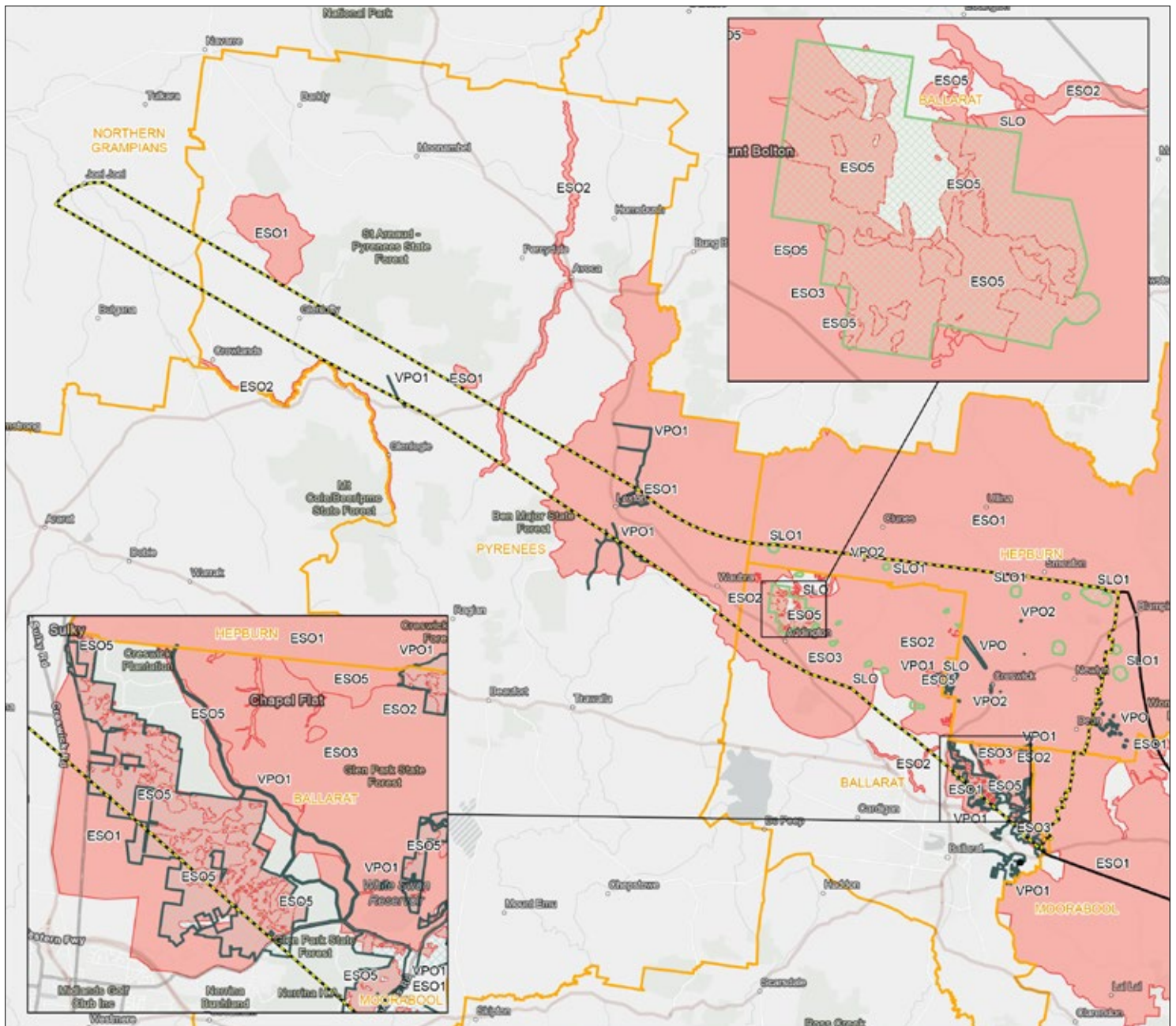
- Major roads: Western Freeway, Midland Highway, Sunraysia Highway and connecting roads between townships and settlements.
- Public areas within townships, particularly areas within the road network, local parks, and other points of interest.
- Public parks and recreation areas, including state-managed parks and reserves, reservoirs, waterways, forests, trails, and other landscapes that are publicly accessible.
- Identified significant landscapes and significant views, as identified by the South West Landscape Assessment Study and overlays recognising scenic amenity.
- Residential areas.

Aboriginal cultural heritage values and landscape

Sites, structures or groups of structures and unique natural features that embody cultural values such as lakes, ponds, outcrops, rocks and waterfalls may hold important Aboriginal cultural heritage values. The Aboriginal cultural heritage impact assessment, developed with the technical advice, knowledge and contributions of Traditional Owners, will form the basis of this aspect of the landscape and visual impact assessment.

Western section of AOI - Bulgana to North Ballarat

The following landscape and visual features and areas of sensitivity and significance that may be impacted by the project have been identified in the western section of the AOI.



Environmental and Landscape Overlays – Western section of AOI (Data source: VICMAP_PLANNING, DELWP, 2021)

Significant Landscapes

- Hepburn Gold Mines and Volcanic District (State Significance).
- Island Uplands (Regional Significance).

Significant Views

- Berry Deep Lead Gold Mine (Regional Significance).
- Mount Buninyong and Mount Warrenheip (Regional Significance).

Significant Landscape Overlays (SLO)

- Ballarat Planning Scheme: volcanic formations known as the Bald Hills, including Mount Rowan, Mount Hollowback, Mount Cavern, Coghills Hill, and other unnamed formations; Mount Bolton and associated granite outcrops; and Lake Learmonth.
- Hepburn Planning Scheme: Volcanic Peaks Landscape Area, Ridges and Escarpments Area and Sites of Geological Significance.

Vegetation

Vegetation is varied throughout the AOI including natural forested areas, roadside vegetation, plantation vegetation, windbreak/buffer planting within farm areas, and garden planting around residences. Shelterbelts and windbreak plantings are relatively common northwest of Waubra but uncommon in the agricultural plains south of Newlyn.

Vegetation Protection Overlays (VPO)

- Ballarat Planning Scheme: significant native vegetation occurring extensively north of Ballarat, near the Glen Park State Forest and Nerrina Historic Area.
- Hepburn Planning Scheme: remnant vegetation and significant exotic and native vegetation occurring at several locations.

Parks and reserves

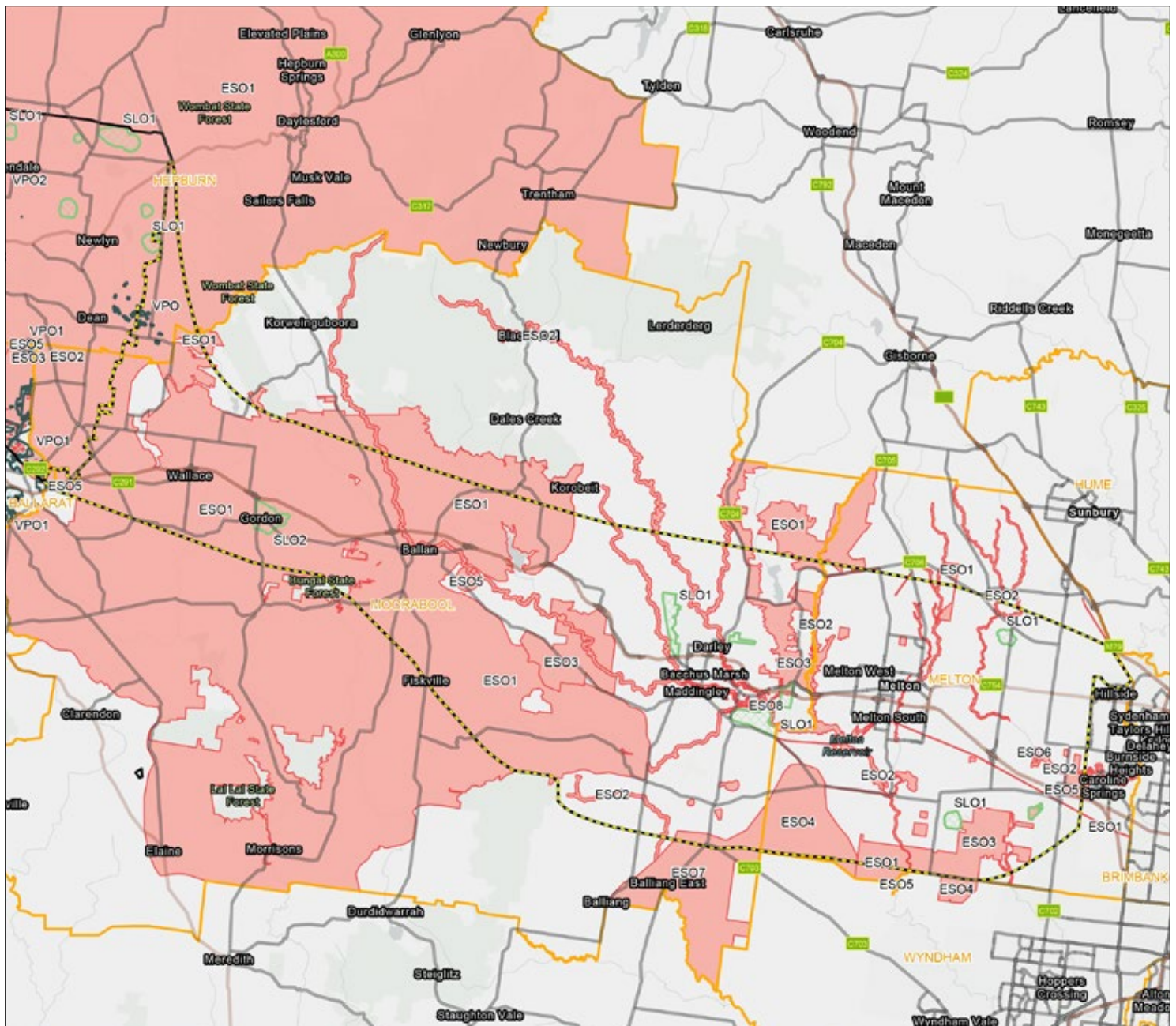
The larger areas of National Parks, State Forests and State Parks are recognised and protected for their outstanding natural features, ecological and recreational values. Bushland Reserves, Flora Reserves, Flora and Fauna Reserves, Streamside Reserves, Lake Reserves, and Nature Conservation Reserves are areas noted and protected for their biodiversity, ecosystems, and flora and fauna. These areas are often smaller and more orientated toward conservation than public use and recreation. Several historic gold mining sites in the area to the north of Creswick have been proposed for nomination for UNESCO World Heritage listing.

Lakes and waterways

Newlyn Reservoir, Hepburn Lagoon, St Georges Lake, Russells Reservoir, Cosgrove Reservoir, Wilson Reservoir, Lake Learmonth. Lake Learmonth is valued as a recreational feature and asset to the local community.

Eastern section of AOI - Ballarat to North Sydenham

The following landscape and visual features and areas of sensitivity and significance that may be impacted by the project have been identified in the eastern section of the AOI.



Environmental and Landscape Overlays – Eastern section of AOI (Data source: VICMAP_PLANNING, DELWP, 2021)

Significant Landscapes

- Hepburn Gold Mines and Volcanic District (State Significance).
- Mount Buninyong and Mount Warrenheip (Regional Significance).
- Lerderderg Gorge and State Park (State Significance) including the viewing location at Mount Blackwood (State Significance).
- Werribee Gorge (State Significance).
- Bacchus Marsh agricultural valley (Regional Significance).
- Parwan Valley (State Significance).
- Brisbane Ranges and Rowsley Scarp (State Significance).

Significant Views

- Mount Buninyong and Mount Warrenheip (Regional Significance).
- Mount Blackwood (special interest).

Significant Landscape Overlays (SLO)

- Melton Planning Scheme: volcanic hills and cones at Mount Cottrell, Mount Atkinson, and Mount Kororoit.
- Moorabool Planning Scheme: hilltops and ridge lines encircling the township of Bacchus Marsh, and the township of Gordon and surrounds.

Environmental Significance Overlays (ESO)

- Moorabool Planning Scheme: Long Forest Nature Reserve and the Werribee Gorge.
- Brimbank Planning Scheme: sections of the Maribyrnong River.
- Hume Planning Scheme: rural waterways and surrounding landscapes within Hume, such as the Maribyrnong River, Deep Creek and Jacksons Creek.

Vegetation

Areas of intact native vegetation are generally found within State Parks, forests, conservation reserves, and areas of steeper topography unsuitable for agriculture. The vegetated rises of the Lerderderg State Park and Wombat State Forest are a prominent feature in views within the AOI and frame the horizon views to the north. Corridors of vegetation are present within shelterbelts, road reserves, and along waterways. Most reservoirs within the AOI are bordered by vegetation to some extent.

Parks and reserves

Long Forest and Werribee Gorge are recognised for the scenic value of the vegetation within the reserve. Werribee Gorge State Park and Mount Blackwood (near the Lerderderg State Park) have been identified as having formal lookout locations that take in views across the study area.

Lakes and waterways

Merrimu Reservoir, Djerrimah Reservoir, Pykes Creek Reservoir, Bostock Reservoir, Korweinguboora Reservoir, Bolwarrah Weir, Wilsons Reservoir and Moorabool Reservoir. Several reservoirs, including Merrimu, Moorabool, and Pykes Creek include picnic areas, amenities, areas for viewing the reservoirs, and other attractions.

Considerations for the project

A range of considerations have been identified for further investigation and management which will be addressed in the landscape and visual impact assessment including:

- Potential disruption of residential views across the landscape to notable features, across farmland, or from dwellings at the edges of townships.
- Potential disruption of views from and to landscape features and areas recognised as being of state or regional significance including scenic areas and lookouts.
- Potential interference with landscapes identified as significant or valued by the Significant Landscape Overlay or Environmental Significance Overlay, such as ridgelines, escarpments, volcanic features, or valued areas of vegetation.
- Cumulative visual impacts through co-location and proximity to existing infrastructure, e.g., windfarms, existing transmission lines, and sub-stations.

Next steps

- Engage with landholders to undertake field surveys and investigations on properties in areas identified based on the findings to date.
- Undertake an assessment of the potential landscape and visual effects of the project through site visits, aerial and land-based surveys, and computer-based theoretical viewshed mapping and seen area analysis to model potential visibility of the infrastructure from identified locations.
- Develop photomontages of project infrastructure in the landscape.
- Further landholder, community and stakeholder consultation.
- Prepare a landscape and visual impact assessment based on the project corridor, including proposed mitigation measures to manage any potential impacts. The impact assessment will inform the proposed route and be published as part of the EES. The EES will be an important source of information about potential project impacts for the community, landholders, decision-makers and as part of the approvals process.



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