Western Renewables Link

TECHNICAL REPORT

F Social Impact Assessment

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Executive Summary

Overview

The Western Renewables Link (the Project) proposes a new transmission line starting at Bulgana, near Stawell in Victoria's west, and extending approximately 190km to Sydenham in Melbourne's north-west. The Project will enable the connection of new renewable electricity generated in western Victoria into the National Electricity Market and increase the Victorian transmission network capacity. The Project is being delivered by AusNet Transmission Group Pty Ltd (AusNet).

This Social Impact Assessment forms part of the Environment Effects Statement (EES) prepared for the Project in accordance with the *Environment Effects Act 1978*. This report and the methodology applied in preparing this report, responds to the requirements set out in the EES scoping requirements, with a view to assessing the Project's potential social impacts.

Existing environment

The Project would traverse land from near Bulgana in the west to the Sydenham Terminal Station in the east, a distance of approximately 190 kilometres. As at the last Census in 2021, there were over 300,000 people living within 9.2 kilometres of the Project (the area where the Project may be visible, and for that reason adopted as the study area for the Social Impact Assessment), with over 90% located in urbanised areas at the Project's eastern end, near and within Metropolitan Melbourne.

Population density increases gradually from west to east along the Proposed Route, along with other changes in the physical environment, land use pattern and demography. Put in the broadest terms, the Project moves from areas in the west where the social, economic and land use context is rooted in agricultural production, to the east where it is increasingly influenced by the presence of Metropolitan Melbourne. Reflecting this, and to assist in the description of existing conditions and assessment of social impacts, the study area was broken into four Sections, with distinctive social characteristics, namely:

- **Section 1 - Bulgana to Waubra:** comprises land within Northern Grampians Shire, Pyrenees Shire and the Rural City of Ararat. There are no large urban centres in Section 1, with Elmhurst, Amphitheatre, Lexton and Waubra (population of 139, 57, 183, 159 respectively) being the largest settlements. Agricultural production in Section 1 is focussed on grazing and cereal cropping, and to a lesser extent, viticulture and forestry activity.

  The population of Section 1 comprises a rural community which is ageing in place. For example, the median age of residents was 52 as at 2021 and 17.6% of residents were aged 70 or more, while 75.9% of residents lived at the same address as they did five years prior to the Census. Families with dependent children comprised a relatively small proportion of all households, consistent with the presence of a large contingent of empty nesters. Section 1 is located beyond commuting distance from the Melbourne CBD (130km to 200km) and some distance from Ballarat (30km to 100km), limiting access to professional employment. Relatedly, the population of Section 1 tends to be less affluent than other Sections and Victoria as a whole, with more than a third of households having weekly income of $650 or less. Agriculture is major source of employment in Section 1, with 25.4% of employed persons working in this sector.

  Community facilities and social focal points in Section 1 which may be affected by the Project include the Pyrenees State Forest, Ben Major State Park and Mount Cole State Forest, which are used by locals and visitors to the district for outdoor recreation. Moreover, views of the Pyrenees Ranges from locations throughout Section 1 are valued by the community.

- **Section 2 - Waubra to Springbank:** comprises land in the City of Ballarat, Hepburn Shire and Moorabool Shire. There are two larger urban centres in Section 2, Clunes and Creswick, along with a cluster of small settlements (Allendale, Broomfield, Kingston, Newland North and Smeaton) all located to the north east of Creswick. Creswick and Clunes are former gold-mining towns, established during the 1850s gold rush. Since the cessation of mining these townships have reinvented themselves as service centres for the surrounding agricultural community and are also popular tourist destinations. The smaller settlements function as social focal points for the surrounding farming communities, with each settlement having its own unique character and identity. For higher order services, including hospitals, secondary schooling, retail and entertainment, residents of Section 2 typically travel south to Ballarat (approximately 25 kilometres south of the Project).

  In parts of Section 2, soil conditions support horticultural production, with potato growing being a common land use. Reflecting this, rural allotments are considerably smaller than observed in Section 1 and population density in the rural parts of Section 2 is also higher. Like Section 1, a large proportion of residents in the rural parts of Section 2 work in agriculture (19.6%).

  Community facilities and social focal points in Section 2 which may be affected by the Project include Mount Beckworth Scenic Reserve which is used by bird watchers, walkers and hikers and offers expansive views of the district, as well has Hepburn Lagoon and Newlyn Reservoir which are used for passive recreation and fishing. Moreover, views towards Mount Beckworth Scenic Reserve and the various volcanic cones in the landscape, are also valued by the community.

- **Section 3 - Gordon to Myrniong:** comprises land in Moorabool Shire. There are four notable urban settlements in Section 3; Ballan with a population of 2,617, and the smaller townships of Gordon (609), Myrniong (227) and Wallace (157). Ballan is the major service centre for the surrounding district and is connected to Ballarat and Melbourne via rail. Ballan accommodates Shire Offices, as well as local medical services, a primary school and sporting facilities.

  In Section 3, rural properties are smaller on average than observed elsewhere in the study area with grazing being the most common land use, although rural living and equine properties are also common. Relatively few rural residents find employment in agriculture (6% work). Relatedly, some rural areas and townships in Section 3 are within commuting distance of Metropolitan Melbourne, and almost a quarter of residents travel to Melbourne for work. That is, while rural communities built around agriculture are present in Section 3, many living in Section 3 are seeking a rural residential setting while maintaining access to economic and social opportunities available within Melbourne and urban centres such as Bacchus Marsh and Ballarat. In this context, towns such as Myrniong have experienced a recent influx of new residents due to the ‘tree change’ phenomenon.

  Community facilities and social focal points in Section 3 which may be affected by the Project include Moorabool Reservoir which is used for passive recreation and Pykes Creek Reservoir which is used for kayaking, fishing, swimming and picnics. Moreover, the area’s largely ‘unspoiled’ rural landscapes are valued by the local community and are described as contributing to the creation of a beautiful, clean and peaceful setting in which to live.

- **Section 4 - Darley to Sydenham:** comprises land in Moorabool Shire and City of Melton. In this Section, the Project passes in close proximity to well established urban areas such as the Bacchus Marsh conurbation (comprising the suburbs of Bacchus Marsh, Darley and Maddingley), Melton, Sunbury and the western edge of Metropolitan Melbourne (terminating immediately to the north of Hillside).

  The non-urban part of Section 4 comprises an eclectic mix of land uses, including farming uses such as grazing, as well as extractive industry, equine and lifestyle properties, an airfield, religious, cultural and sporting facilities, and infrastructure including major roads and substations.

The population of Melton and Hillside is generally younger than elsewhere in the study area and more ethnically diverse, with these areas popular among migrant families seeking affordable accommodation. The Bacchus Marsh conurbation, likewise is popular among family households, with Darley in particular attracting younger, upwardly mobile families, (in part) due to its undulating topography, which affords pleasant views of the Lerderderg State Park to the north. While agriculture is a relatively important source of employment for the rural residents of Section 4 (6% work in agriculture), the majority of workers residing in Section 4 find employment in nearby urban centres and within Melbourne.

Community facilities and social focal points in Section 4 which may be affected by the Project include MacPherson Park, which is the City of Melton's principal recreational facility, Lerderderg State Park, which is used for a variety of outdoor recreational pursuits and the Bald Hill Activation Area, which is a 'Destination Regional Park' currently in development near Darley. In addition, elevated views of Lerderderg State Park from within the Darley suburban area are highly valued.

Impact assessment

Workforce and Social Profile

The peak construction workforce would be large (700+ workers in total) and would be working in areas that are relatively sparsely populated. In this context, to avoid potentially severe social impacts relating to the availability of housing and community services, the Proponent proposes to construct two temporary worker accommodation facilities, one in Lexton the other near Ballan. The facilities would be essentially self-contained and workers would have little if any contact with existing communities. As a result, the construction workforce would not generate additional demand for housing and/or community facilities and services in the study area and would have little to no influence on social dynamics in existing settlements.

During operation, limited personnel would be required as the transmission system (including the terminal stations) would be operated remotely and as a result associated social impacts would be negligible.

Land Use and Amenity

The Project would occupy land, limit the use of land and alter the visual appearance of the landscape. Associated impacts for members of existing communities would vary depending on their exposure to these effects and the way that they use land in the affected areas. Given the length of the Proposed Route and the diversity of social conditions along its length, potential impacts are reported for four geographic areas or 'Sections' and for three broad classes of social receptors: Directly Affected Landholders; Surrounding Landholders and the Broader Community.

- **Directly Affected Landholders** - The majority of affected land holdings currently support some form of agricultural production and where this is the case, the construction stage may result in lower productivity and financial losses for landholders. It is expected that, once construction is complete, grazing activity could resume within the easement limiting the effect of the Project on the farming practices of graziers. However, in relation to cropping and horticultural land uses, once construction is complete, restrictions on the use of machinery to prepare the soil, seed, harvest, spray and irrigate may have ongoing implications for existing farming.
  - **Section 1** (74 properties directly affected, 31 with a dwelling, 9 of which are within 300m): At the level of the individual property/landholder, outcomes would vary and there may be instances where the Project has substantial implications for affected landholders. However, due to a predominance of grazing properties and lower dwelling density in Section 1, this is unlikely to precipitate broader social impacts such as material changes to the composition of the community, reductions in social cohesion, etc. Moreover, AusNet sentiment data indicate that 58.1% of directly affected landholders are supportive of the Project in Section 1 and only 17.6% are opposed, with the opportunity to generate additional farm income being a common driver of support, along with a recognition of the need for transmission infrastructure.

- **Section 2** (58 properties directly affected, 29 with a dwelling, 8 of which are within 300m): land holdings in Section 2 are smaller on average and many accommodate horticultural land uses. As a result, the Project would be more likely to necessitate long term changes to the way farming occurs on individual land holdings in Section 2. In addition, approximately 50% of affected land holdings accommodate a dwelling, with owner occupancy being common among horticultural business operators. Impacts for landholders in Section 2 would be felt by individuals and families living and working in a concentrated area, who form part of an integrated rural community, and therefore may lead to broader impacts such as changes to the composition of the community, reductions in community cohesion, etc.
- **Section 3** (55 properties directly affected, 34 with a dwelling, 11 of which are within 300m): Approximately three quarters of landholders oppose the Project in Section 3. This apparent lack of tolerance for the Project can be understood in light of the prevailing land use (lifestyle property/home, with agricultural production being secondary) and values associated with the affected land holdings (property offers opportunity to live in a beautiful rural landscape setting, sentimental attachment, etc.). In this context, it is noted that 62% of affected properties accommodate a dwelling in Section 3. In Section 3, it would be common for affected landholders to consider that the Project undermines an aspirational lifestyle and disrupts intergenerational connections to their properties.
- **Section 4** (35 properties directly affected, 21 with a dwelling, 18 of which are within 300m): the way affected land holdings are used varies substantially in Section 4, with potential impacts for landholders likewise varying considerably. For example, smaller lifestyle and equine properties make up a relatively large proportion of the affected holdings, and sensitivity to the Project's presence on these holdings is high among landholders. However, other land holdings, particularly toward the eastern end of Section 4, are held by land speculators. The concerns of these landholders relate to the development potential of their land, and financial compensation would be more likely to be effective in addressing these concerns

- **Surrounding Landholders** - the Project would alter the character and amenity of locations within the study area by inserting structures into the landscape. The potential visibility of the transmission infrastructure would decrease with distance from a location, with the infrastructure being 'usually visually dominant' within 2km. Project induced changes to the landscape would typically be viewed as detracting substantially from the amenity of affected dwellings. Reflecting this, the Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner recommends a setback objective of 300 metres.
  - **Section 1** (173 dwellings within 2km, 3 being within 300m)[1]. Almost half the dwellings within 2km are located within the townships of Elmhurst and Lexton where views of the Project are typically screened. Direct views of the Project would be more common from rural dwellings and the attractiveness of affected dwellings and properties as a place to live and/or conduct a business may be reduced in some cases. Changes to the visual setting of dwellings/properties may not be readily accepted, and have the potential to result in frustration and emotional strain for residents.
  - **Section 2** (436 dwellings within 2km, 4 being within 300m). Almost half the nearby dwellings are located within existing townships where views would typically be screened. Direct views of the Project would be available from some rural dwellings and would affect views of landscape features such as Mount Beckworth and Mount Bolton, volcanic cones and mountain ranges to the north east, which are highly valued. Such alternations may not be readily accepted and may result an enduring sense of loss and powerlessness. Alterations to the amenity of nearby dwellings in Section 2 and consequent impacts for occupants, may

[1] Dwelling counts relate only to dwellings located on properties not directly affected by the Project. For more detail see Tables 8-3.

compound impacts on the capacity and cohesiveness of the community resulting from impacts to directly affected landholders.

- **Section 3** (255 dwellings within 2km, 9 being within 300m). A substantial proportion of the nearby dwellings are clustered in one of four rural living areas. Such dwellings are commonly constructed by the owner and/or purchased to facilitate connection with rural and natural landscapes. In this context, for current owners, the Project may disrupt an aspirational lifestyle, and may not be readily accepted. The remainder of Section 3 comprises rural areas, which residents describe as 'beautiful, clean and peaceful'. Feedback on the Project from existing residents placed a strong emphasis on existing connections to, and benefits derived from, the area's scenic rural landscape. In this context, the Project may challenge a shared sense of identity among rural residents built on appreciation of the area's scenic qualities and peaceful rural lifestyle.
- **Section 4** (6,223 dwellings within 2km, 53 being within 300m). The majority of these dwellings are located within the urban areas of Hillside and Melton within conventional residential subdivisions. The development pattern in these areas, in most instances, does not provide for visibility between homes and public areas and non-urban areas to the north. Moreover, in the case of Hillside, existing transmission infrastructure is located immediately to the north, and as a result the marginal effect of the Project on visual amenity in this area would be minimal.

  A substantial number of the nearby dwellings are located in Darley. Darley consists of a series of undulating rises which provide expansive views to the north, towards the Project. Many of the dwellings located near the project in Darley have been designed to take advantage of this natural aspect and community feedback on the Project indicates that northward views contribute significantly to the amenity of dwellings and the suburb in general. In this context, the Project may disrupt an aspirational lifestyle, for a relatively large proportion of the Darley community.

  Similarly, the Project has the potential to disrupt an aspirational lifestyle for current residents of a cluster of dwellings (20) located in the rural conservation zone in Merrimu to the east of Darley. This may also be the case for rural homes which are zoned for farming/green wedge, but are used as lifestyle properties by current occupants, such as those on Swans Road, along Lerderderg Gorge Road and Camerons Road in Darley, and properties located near MacPherson Park to the east of Darley. In some cases, the level of change to the amenity of these properties would be high and may compromise the attractiveness of the dwelling as a place to live, potentially leading to ongoing frustration and resentment, and a desire to relocate.

- **The Broader Community** - The broader community's direct experience of the Project would be limited to visual encounters as they travel through the rural landscape or their township/urban area, and/or when they visit particular locations to engage in recreation. These individuals may also experience the Project indirectly as part of their interactions with members of their community who are experiencing more acute impacts. In addition to various local roads, the following are locations where the Project may have a material influence on amenity:
  - Section 2: Newlyn Reservoir, Hepburn Lagoon, Mount Beckworth Scenic Reserve and the Turello Avenue of Honour.
  - Section 3: Moorabool Reservoir, Pykes Creek Reservoir, Bolwarrah Weir.
  - Section 4: Locations within the Darley urban area, including the Bacchus Marsh Golf Club and various walking tracks, the Bald Hill Activation Area, Merrimu Reservoir, Coimadai Memorial Park and Avenue of Honour, and MacPherson Park.

In all instances, the Project would not directly prevent the broader community from accessing locations or using existing community facilities. However, the influence of the Project on amenity of the affected locations may be sufficient to deter visitation in some cases.

Conclusion

Changes to land use and amenity brought about by the Project would be both unpopular and potentially impactful for various individuals and social groups who live, work and/or recreate in the study area. While the Project would, in most instances, not prevent existing social and cultural activities (potential limitations on farming operations being a notable exception), it does have substantial potential to undermine the value that people attribute to these activities and/or require individuals and groups to actively engage with the Project, in order to minimise the Project's consequences. In turn, the Project may to varying degrees, reduce satisfaction obtained from particular land uses, including residential occupation, recreation, etc. and any associated sense of connection to the various places and communities which exist in the study area. In some parts of the study area, impacts would be of sufficient magnitude and extent to precipitate reductions in community capacity and cohesion in the short to medium term.

Over time, the population of the study area would adapt, grow and change, and a new equilibrium would evolve. As is well understood, many individuals and social groups live, work and recreate in proximity to transmission infrastructure throughout Victoria.

Nevertheless, if the Project proceeds, some members of existing communities within the study area who live through the change process, may never be comfortable with the Project. Moreover, for those who strongly resist the Project in an attempt to preserve the integrity of their property and/or business and the prevailing amenity and character of their homes and local area, its approval may leave an enduring sense of loss and powerlessness.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The Western Renewables Link (the Project) proposes a new transmission line starting at Bulgana, near Stawell in Victoria's west, extending approximately 190km to Sydenham in Melbourne's north-west. The Project will enable the connection of new renewable electricity generated in western Victoria into the National Electricity Market (NEM) and increase the Victorian transmission capacity. The Project is being delivered by AusNet Transmission Group Pty Ltd (AusNet).

The Project was originally referred to the former Minister for Planning under the *Environment Effects Act 1978* (Environment Effects Act) on 9 June 2020 by AusNet and it was determined that an Environment Effects Statement (EES) was required. On 22 August 2023, the Minister for Planning determined that the Project has the potential to cause significant environmental effects and that an EES was required to inform decision-makers in the granting of key approvals for the Project. In summary the key changes in the new proposed Project scope are:

- The urgent Sydenham Terminal Station Rebuild will be assessed and approved separately. A connection into the Sydenham Terminal Station forms part of Western Renewables Link scope
- The 220kV portion of the transmission line is proposed to be uprated to 500kV
- The new terminal station north of Ballarat will no longer be required
- A new 500kV terminal station near Bulgana will be required, including a new 220kV connection to the existing Bulgana Terminal Station.

The Commonwealth Government's Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment (DAWE) — now Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW) — has also confirmed that the Project is a 'controlled action' and will require assessment and approval under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act 1999 (EPBC Act). The Commonwealth has determined that it will use the bilateral assessment agreement and rely on the Victorian Government's assessment process (EES) to inform an approval decision under the EPBC Act.

1.2 Purpose of this report

The purpose of this report is to assess the potential social impacts associated with the Project, and to define any Environmental Performance Requirements (EPRs) necessary to determine the environmental outcomes that the Project must meet, to be achieved through the implementation of mitigation measures during construction, operation and decommissioning, and address the EES evaluation objectives.

The specific objectives of the Social Impact Assessment (SIA) are to assess the potential social impacts associated with the Project in the context of the scoping requirements for the Project.

2 Project description

2.1 Project overview

The Project comprises the construction and operation of a new approximately 190km overhead double circuit 500kV transmission line from near Bulgana in Victoria's west to Sydenham in Melbourne's north-west. To support the connection of the new transmission line, the following works are proposed:

- construction and operation of a new 500kV terminal station near Bulgana, and a 220kV transmission line connection to the existing Bulgana Terminal Station.
- expansion of the existing Bulgana Terminal Station.
- connection works at the Sydenham Terminal Station including the modification of a bay and a bay extension with associated infrastructure.
- upgrade of the existing Elaine Terminal Station, through the diversion of an existing line.
- protection system upgrades at connected terminal stations.

The Project's main features are illustrated in Figure 2-1 and the location is shown in Figure 3-1.

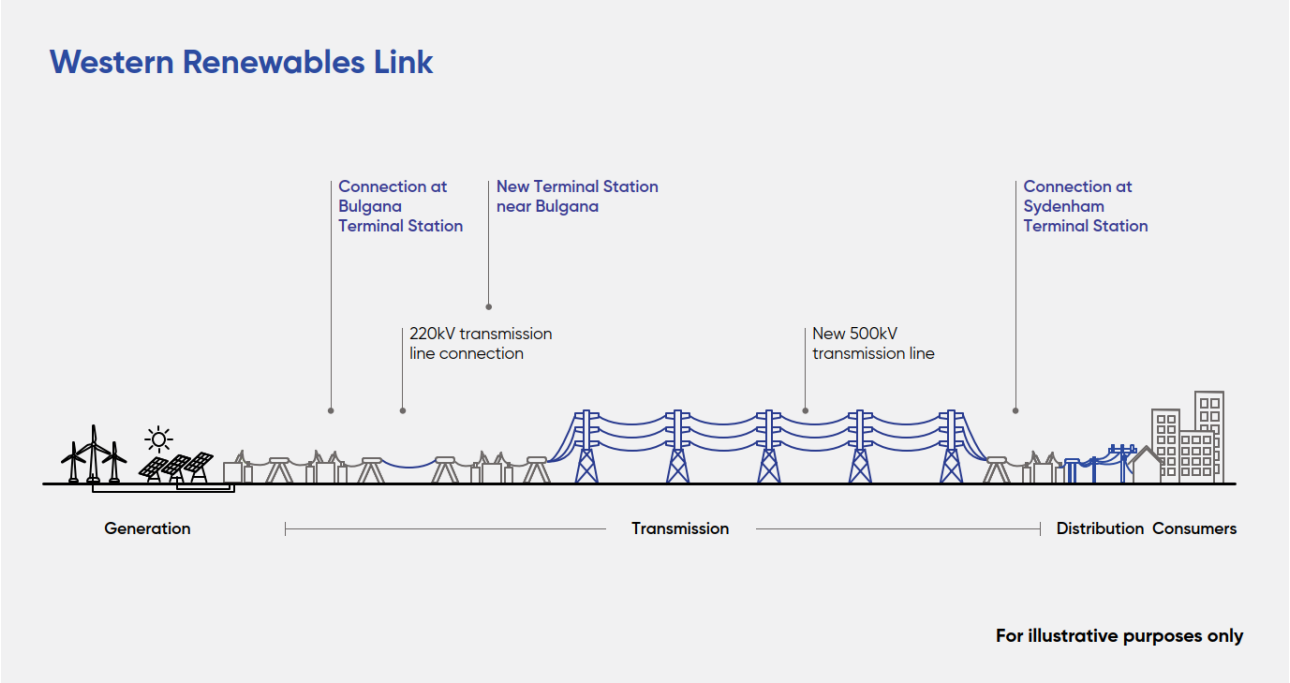

Figure 2-1: Western Renewables Link (AusNet 2023).

The Project can be described by the following key terms:

- Project Land: The Project Land encompasses all land parcels that could be used for the purpose of temporary Project construction and permanent operational components.
- Project Area: The Project Area is contained within the Project Land and encompasses all areas that would be used to support the construction and operation of the Project.
- Proposed Route (see Figure 3-1): The Proposed Route is approximately 100 to 170m wide and encompasses the nominal future easement for the proposed new transmission line (including a buffer either side), and the terminal station areas. The Proposed Route is located within the Project Area.

The Proposed Route (see Figure 3-1) commences at the existing Bulgana Terminal Station with a 220kV transmission line connection to the new 500kV terminal station approximately 2.3km to the north-east. The Proposed Route then runs from the new 500kV terminal station to the north of the existing Ballarat to Horsham transmission line, where it runs parallel to the existing transmission line for approximately 60km. East of Lexton, the Proposed Route deviates from the Ballarat to Horsham transmission line, passing through the northern section of the Waubra Wind Farm between Mount Bolton and Mount Beckworth. Continuing east, the Proposed Route passes south of the Berry Deep Lead gold mining precinct and north of Allendale and Kingston. North of Kingston the Proposed Route turns south-east to Mount Prospect. From Mount Prospect to near Dean, the Proposed Route is adjacent to the existing Ballarat to Bendigo transmission line. Near Dean, the Proposed Route deviates from the existing transmission line to run south, then east through Bolwarrah, Bunding and Myrniong to Darley. The Proposed Route then continues eastward crossing Merrimu Reservoir north of Long Forest and along the northern boundary of MacPherson Park at Melton, connecting to the existing electricity network at the Sydenham Terminal Station.

The Project crosses six local government areas (LGAs), namely:

- Shire of Northern Grampians
- Shire of Pyrenees
- City of Ballarat
- Shire of Hepburn
- Shire of Moorabool
- City of Melton.

2.2 Project infrastructure

The Project includes the construction of infrastructure listed in Table 2-1. Further detail is provided in EES Chapter 6: Project description.

Table 2-1 Project infrastructure key components*

Category	Description
Double circuit lattice towers	418 double circuit towers
Single circuit lattice towers	36 single circuit towers (18 sets of two side-by-side)
Approximate length of 500kV transmission line route	Approximately 190km, between near Bulgana in Victoria's west to Sydenham in Melbourne's north-west
Approximate length of 220kV transmission line route	Approximately 2.5km, between the existing Bulgana Terminal Station to the new terminal station
Supporting works	▪ A new 500kV terminal station and associated infrastructure near Bulgana to be connected to the existing Bulgana Terminal Station via a 220kV connection. ▪ Expansion of the existing Bulgana Terminal Station to support connection of the new 500kV terminal station near Bulgana. ▪ A connection to the Sydenham Terminal Station, including the modification of a 500kV bay and a new 500kV bay extension with associated infrastructure ▪ Relocation and diversion of existing 220kV transmission lines at Elaine Terminal Station.

** These figures are approximate and subject to final detailed design, which will consider further landholder consultation and geotechnical, site and other investigations.*

For the safe and reliable operation of the transmission line, an easement is needed for the operation of the transmission line, and other related infrastructure, to protect public safety and to provide access for maintenance and repair purposes. The transmission line easements will be typically between 70 and 100m wide for the Project.

The transmission line design requirements are specified by the Australian standard AS/NZS 7000:2016 Overhead Line Design and AusNet's Electricity Safety Management Scheme. Key assumptions and considerations of the transmission towers that will form part of the Project and have been used as the basis of this report are described below.

- Transmission towers (towers) support the overhead conductors (wires or lines) at the required height above the ground to meet regulations and safety requirements. The preferred tower configuration will be a galvanised steel lattice structure similar to those found elsewhere across Victoria and within the national network. The typical tower height for the Project is between 60 to 80m.
- Each tower has four footings which will typically be 1.8m in diameter and 9m deep. The four footings base width will be between 10m to 17m wide. During construction, ground disturbance around each tower will typically be no greater than 50 by 70m.
- The spacing or span length between each tower is determined by the height from the ground that the conductors need to be in order to achieve the required ground clearance in the middle of the span. Typical span length is between 450 to 550m for the transmission line. Longer span lengths are possible over sensitive areas or to avoid impacts, however longer spans require taller towers to provide safe ground clearances and wider easements to allow for greater sway of the conductors. Similarly, where it is difficult to achieve the required ground clearance in the middle of the span, due to topography or obstacles, the tower span may be reduced.
- Each span comprises 26 conductors, made up of 13 conductors on each side of the tower cross arms. Each conductor is approximately 35mm thick and made of aluminium wire strands with a steel core.

As part of the Project, the existing Bulgana Terminal Station will be expanded to support the connection of the new 500kV terminal station into the existing 220kV switchyard. The new 500kV terminal station will support the connection of the Project transmission line and future connections. The new terminal station will require additional land to the north-east of the existing Bulgana Terminal Station.

Upgrades required at Elaine Terminal Station will involve the relocation of existing 220kV transmission lines and diversion of an existing 220kV line into the terminal station. The footprint of the terminal station will not change, and all new equipment will be approximately the same height and scale as existing structures and equipment at the Elaine Terminal Station.

Connection works are proposed at Sydenham Terminal Station. The existing Sydenham Terminal Station will be re-built through the Sydenham Terminal Station Rebuild Project, prior to the Project works. The Project will connect into Sydenham through the modification of a 500kV bay and new 500kV bay extension.

During construction there will be additional work areas, including vehicle access tracks, temporary tower stringing pads, distribution line crossover points, potential hurdle locations, temporary laydown areas and workforce accommodation facilities.

Temporary laydown areas associated with the terminal stations and the transmission line will be used to sort materials, pre-assemble Project components and store equipment, vehicles and other supplies that support construction activities. Temporary fencing, gates, security systems and lighting will also be installed at the laydown areas. The Project will establish five laydown areas; two of which will be located at existing terminal station sites (Bulgana and Sydenham), one at the new 500kV terminal station near Bulgana, and an additional two sites at intermediate locations between the stations south-east of Lexton and south-east of Ballan. The two intermediate laydown areas are required for the construction of the transmission line. The size of each site (including workforce accommodation facilities) will vary

depending on storage requirements. The site south-east of Lexton will be up to approximately 12ha and the site south-east of Ballan will be up to approximately 24ha.

AusNet proposes to utilise temporary construction workforce accommodation facilities to accommodate construction workforce personnel. Two facilities are proposed; one in each of the western and eastern portions of the Project, co-located with each of the intermediate laydown areas. Each facility will have capacity for up to 350 personnel and will provide individual accommodation units, a communal kitchen and meals area, laundry, gym facilities, mobile and Wi-Fi boosters, and serviced cleaning. The layouts of the proposed accommodation facilities will be determined by the Principal Contractor.

2.3 Summary of key Project activities

2.3.1 Construction

Construction of the Project would include preparatory activities (e.g., site investigations, establishment of laydown areas etc,), establishment of temporary infrastructure (such as water and wastewater infrastructure, power supplies), construction of towers and transmission line stringing works; construction works at terminal stations; site rehabilitation works; and pre-commissioning activities.

The overall construction duration of the Project is approximately two years. This schedule is dependent on adjustments required to deliver the Project and the granting of approvals within certain timeframes. Work crews will move through sections of the Project, with specialist work crews following one another. Construction may occur at multiple towers at any one point in time and the construction steps may occur across an extended time period for each tower. Once foundations are complete, work may cease for several months until crews return to assemble and erect the transmission towers. Work may then cease again for several months until crews return for stringing of the overhead conductors. From initial works to final works, the cumulative duration of construction work at each tower will be approximately 9 to 22 weeks over the two-year construction stage. Once construction is complete, site rehabilitation will occur and commissioning activities would include final inspections and other safety and pre-operational checks. Construction of the Project is anticipated to commence in late 2026 and be completed by late 2028.

Key activities associated with the construction of towers include:

- site preparations, including necessary vegetation clearing
- construction of vehicle access tracks and minor upgrades to existing roads and tracks
- tower foundation works
- tower structure assembly and erection
- transmission line stringing works
- commissioning
- site rehabilitation.

The works proposed at the new 500kV terminal station near Bulgana, the existing Bulgana Terminal Station and Sydenham Terminal Station will be constructed over a period of approximately 20 months, with key activities including:

- site preparations, access and necessary vegetation clearing
- earthworks
- construction of footings, foundations and drainage systems
- installation of structures and equipment

- commissioning
- landscaping and rehabilitation.

2.3.2 Operations

The operation and maintenance of transmission lines are subject to stringent regulatory controls to ensure public safety and the uninterrupted supply of electricity. All transmission line operators are required to comply with these controls and provide regular reports to the relevant authorities, including Energy Safe Victoria.

The key operational stage activities for the transmission line include:

- scheduled inspections of the transmission line and easement (either by vehicle patrols or LiDAR/aerial surveys)
- ongoing vegetation management to maintain safety clearances under the transmission line
- tower maintenance inspections
- repairs and maintenance to address issues found in above inspections.

While the terminal stations are operated remotely, staff are present at stations for inspections or maintenance. Routine inspections would occur every two months, with personnel checking the overall condition of the terminal station's assets.

2.3.3 Decommissioning

The Project's transmission line is designed for a service life of 80 years, while the terminal station works have been designed for a minimum life of 45 years. The terminal station works would be maintained and upgraded to enable the terminal stations to remain operational for the service life of the transmission line. At the end of the service life of the transmission line, the infrastructure will either be decommissioned or upgraded to extend its service life to maintain the security and reliability of the transmission network as determined by the network planner at that time. In the event of decommissioning, the key activities may involve:

- lowering the overhead transmission line and ground wires to the ground and cutting them into manageable lengths to roll onto drums or reels for disposal as scrap metal
- removing insulators and line hardware from structures at the site and disposal at an approved waste facility
- dismantling towers in manageable sections, removing from the site and selling steel as scrap
- excavation of footings below finish surface level
- decommissioning and removal of terminal stations
- easement restoration and rehabilitation, where required.

2.3.4 Community Benefit Fund

AusNet intends to implement a Community Benefit Fund, which would be co-designed in partnership with the community and key stakeholders. Under the fund, it is expected that grants will be provided to projects or initiatives that make a positive contribution to the local community, with preference given to those that create ongoing benefits.

The fund framework and assessment criteria would be determined through a co-design process, involving Traditional Owners, Indigenous people and young people (17 to 25 years), as well as the CCG and CAG. Opportunities to partner with Commonwealth and State Government funding programs, and with identified local government expenditure, would be explored to deliver maximum benefit to the community.

2.4 Evaluation framework

2.4.1 Scoping requirements

The Scoping Requirements – Western Renewables Link Environment Effects Statement (Department of Transport and Planning, 2023) for the Project set out the matters the Project to be investigated, assessed and documented in the EES for the Project and are referred to in this report as the EES scoping requirements.

The EES scoping requirements specify evaluation objectives which provide a framework to guide an integrated assessment of environmental effects of the Project, in accordance with the Ministerial guidelines for assessment of environmental effects under the *Environment Effects Act 1978*, Eighth edition, 2023. The evaluation objectives identify desired outcomes in the context of key legislative and statutory policies, as well as the principles and objectives of ecologically sustainable development and environmental protection, including net community benefit.

The following evaluation objective is relevant to the Social Impact Assessment:

> *Avoid, or minimise where avoidance is not possible, adverse effects on land use, social fabric of the community, businesses including farming and tourism, local and state infrastructure, aviation safety and to affected and neighbouring landowners during construction and operation of the project.*

Elements of the scoping requirements relevant to the above evaluation objective are shown in Table 2-2, which also indicates where the scoping requirements are addressed in the SIA. [2]

Table 2-2 Scoping requirements pertinent to the Social Impact Assessment

Aspect	Scoping requirement	Section
Key issues	Potential significant disruption to existing and/or proposed land uses, with associated economic and social effects.	Section 8
	Potential adverse economic and social effects, both direct and indirect	Section 7, 8, 9
Priorities for characterising the existing environment	Describe the project area of interest and its environs in terms of land use (existing and proposed), land classification and suitability for specific purposes, development, urban areas, townships, residences, farming and other economic activities, forestry, tourism and conservation reserves.	Section 4
	Identify relevant local regional and state policies.	Section 2
	Describe the community and social setting of the project area of interest.	Section 4
	Characterise recreational usage within the project area of interest and its surroundings, including water bodies, national parks and reserves.	Section 4
	Identify locations, values and prescribed management priorities for public land and council land in or adjacent to the project area of interest.	Section 4
Approach to manage performance	Outline measures to avoid or minimise potential adverse effects of the project and enhance benefits to the community and businesses in or near the project area of interest Outline measures to monitor the success of commitments to mitigate or manage effects on land use and socioeconomic values during all phases of the project. Describe and evaluate proposed measures to monitor potential residual social, land use and economic impacts and describe contingency measures for responding to unexpected impacts.	Section 7, 8, 10, 11

[2] The reader should note that other technical reports prepared as part of the EES also provide information and assessment which may be relevant in the context of the scoping requirements set out in Table 2-2, including those listed in Section 3.6.

Aspect	Scoping requirement	Section
Assessment of likely effects	Identify potential social impacts arising from the project.	Section 7, 8, 9
	Identify potential impact on tourism and tourist attractions and recreation within and around the project area of interest.	Section 8
Cumulative Impacts	The cumulative effect of the project in combination with other activities in the broader area/region needs to be assessed for all significant adverse effects.	Section 10

To facilitate assessment of the Project in line with the scoping requirements, this report characterises existing social conditions in the study area, recommends appropriate measures to avoid, mitigate or manage potential social impacts and assesses the Project's residual social impacts.

2.4.2 Policy and guidelines

Table 2-3 sets out policies and guidelines of broad relevance to the SIA. Various other local strategies and plans also contain useful information regarding existing conditions and/or future plans for particular locations/facilities. These are referenced as required in later sections of this report.

The State level policies and guidelines set out in Table 2-3, make it clear that social impacts arising from disruption of the use and enjoyment of community resources and/or alterations to the social profile of a community are relevant consideration in the context of an EES. Moreover, the local government plans indicate that a broad range of natural, social and economic resources underpin the way of life and social and economic wellbeing of communities living in proximity to the Project, suggesting a broad scope for the SIA is appropriate.

Table 2-3: Policy and guidelines relevant to the Social Impact Assessment

Document title	Summary	Relevance to the SIA
Victorian government		
Ministerial guidelines for assessment of environmental effects under the Environment Effects Act 1978 (2023)	Defines the environment broadly as including physical, biological, heritage, cultural, social, health, safety and economic aspects.	Social impacts arising from disruption of the use and enjoyment of community resources and/or alterations to the social profile of a community must be addressed as part of the EES.
Planning and Environment Act (1987)	The key approval pathway for the Project is via an amendment to the relevant planning schemes.	In considering whether to prepare an amendment, as per S.60 (1) of the Act, the Minister for Planning must consider any significant social effects the Project may have.
Victoria's Climate Change Strategy (2021)	Outlines Victorian Government's commitment to 'tackling climate change' and a commitment to a net-zero emissions economy.	Plan includes a 'pledge' to accelerate Victoria's transition to a clean and efficient energy future to be achieved in part by increasing the proportion of the state's energy produced via renewal methods.
Local government		
Northern Grampians Shire - Council Plan (2021-2025)	Sets out four goals for the Shire, namely: Goal 1 - Boost Economic Growth; Goal 2- Enhance Lifestyle and Community by Protecting the Natural Environment; Goal 3 – Provide Sustainable Infrastructure; and Goal 4 – Improve Organisational Effectiveness.	Plan seeks to enhance tourist visitation and quality of life for residents, by protecting and enhancing the Shire's natural and cultural environment.
Pyrenees Shire - Council Plan (2021-2025)	Sets out the Council's priorities relating to People, Place, the Environment and Economy.	Plan seeks to enhance the health and wellbeing of the Shire's communities and sustain and enhance the unique character of built and natural places within the Shire. Includes a commitment to support tourism including ecotourism, and protecting agricultural sustainability.
City of Ballarat - Council Plan (2021-2025)	Sets out goals for the City including: An environmentally sustainable future; A healthy, connected and inclusive community; A city that fosters sustainable growth; A city that conserves and enhances our natural and built assets; A strong and innovative economy and city.	The Plan seeks to strike a balance between using resources while preserving the health of the environment and ensuring community members enjoy good physical and mental health, feel safe, enjoy connection with others. Includes comment to play a stewardship role with respect to natural assets such as open space and wetlands.
Hepburn Shire - Council Plan (2021-2025)	Sets out a vision for the Shire, which includes: a resilient, sustainable and protected environment; a healthy supported, and empowered community; and diverse economy and opportunities.	Various priorities are outlined including: to protect and regenerate the natural resources of the Shire including soils, water and ecological systems; support local and regional tourism campaigns; and improve mental wellbeing within the community.
Moorabool Shire - Council and Wellbeing Plan (2021-2025)	Sets out goals for the Shire, including: Healthy, inclusive and connected Neighbourhoods; and Liveable and thriving Environments.	Indicators of success with respect to the goals include: health status of the community and community perceptions of the liveability of the Shire.
City of Melton Council Plan	Sets out six strategic directions for the City including: a safe City that is socially and culturally connected; a vibrant and healthy natural and built environment; a City that promotes greater education and employment.	Indicators of success that would be used by Melton in the context of the Council Plan include: people feel proud to live in Melton; people agree there are opportunities to participate in recreational and leisure activities and community satisfaction with public spaces.

3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The following section outlines the method for the social impact assessment, including the assessment framework employed and data collection tasks completed.

3.2 Social impact assessment

Social impact assessment is a research process to identify the potential social effects of planned interventions and to assess the likely impact of these on individuals and social groups. Fundamental to SIA practice is the distinction between effects and impacts, as follows:

- Social effect: an objectively verifiable change to the social profile of a community or the resources it relies on.
- Social impacts: the experience (positive or negative) of a social effect by individuals or groups (the social receptors).

Social impacts are distinct from social effects as different individuals and groups experience change differently depending on their circumstances (Van Schooten et al., 2003).

The SIA characterises the social effects associated with the Project and the potential impacts for social receptors in Sections 6 to 9. The SIA describes and assesses the residual social impacts of the Project following application of mitigation embedded in the Project's design, including any alterations to the Project developed via the SIA process. In instances where residual impacts warrant mitigation, Environmental Performance Requirements (EPRs) have been suggested.

This SIA was compiled following the well-established procedural steps of SIA (listed below)[3] and makes use of data collected using a variety of research methods to establish existing conditions and assess potential social effects and impacts. The report is structured to present the information as indicated below:

- Scoping – Define the scope of the study and develop an SIA methodology (Section 3).
- Profiling - Outline the existing social conditions and policy context. Identify the key social receptors and community resources and the issues and concerns held by community members with respect to the Project (Section 4-5).
- Prediction and Evaluation - Assess likely social effects associated with the proposal and evaluate the impact of the predicted changes for relevant social receptors (Sections 5 to 9).
- Mitigation - Propose measures to mitigate identified impacts (Sections 6 to 9).

[3] Also see NSW Department of Planning and Environment (2021), QLD Co-Ordinator General (2018).

3.4 Scoping the SIA

The scope of the SIA was determined following:

- A review of the scoping requirements for the Project (see Table 2-2).
- A review of the document, Western Renewables Link EES – Final Scoping Requirements FAQs, November 2023.
- Initial Workshop - prior to commencement of the SIA, a workshop was undertaken with the proponent (AusNet) to determine the nature of the Project and its potential effects, and to begin to identify the individuals and groups that may be affected (the social receptors). Communication with the proponent regarding social receptors continued throughout the SIA process.
- Council Advisory Group (CAG) – AusNet has established a Council Advisory Group for the Project, comprised of representatives of local governments traversed by the Project. CAG members were consulted to gather their views regarding issues which the SIA should address.
- Community Consultative Group (CCG) - AusNet has established a Community Consultative Group (CCG) comprised of landholders, residents, community groups, government entities, industry and market participants, etc. Feedback collected from the group prior to commencement of the SIA was relayed to the author. In addition, the author interviewed four CCG members including the chair, to further inform the scoping of the SIA.

The sources and activities listed above were used to identify potential social effects of relevance to the SIA, the spatial range over which social effects may be experienced and in turn a geographic focus for the SIA (see Table 3-1). The scoping phase also contributed to the identification of community resources and social receptors. Notwithstanding, the scope of the SIA remained open to review throughout the SIA process, to ensure that no relevant potential social effects or impacts were overlooked.

Table 3-1: Scoping the SIA[4]

Impact Pathway	Relevant social effect	Relevant Receptors	Stage
Workforce and Social Profile	▪ Employment and training opportunities created by the Project contribute to socio-economic sustainability in the study area. ▪ Influx of workers creates additional demand for community facilities and services	▪ Existing communities ▪ Users of community facilities and services & housing market participants.	▪ Construction, Operation and Decommissioning
Land Use and Amenity	▪ Occupation of land displaces current land use	▪ Owners and occupiers of directly affected land.	▪ Construction, Operation and Decommissioning
	▪ Limits on use of land and air space, interferes with business activities, including agricultural activities.	▪ Owners and occupiers of directly affected and nearby land.	
	▪ Alterations to the amenity and character of locations in proximity to the proposed transmission route.	▪ Occupants of nearby dwellings. ▪ Residents of surrounding areas ▪ Users of nearby community facilities and open spaces.	

[4] The reader should note that Indigenous people form part of the community that resides within the study area. They may have unique values associated with their connection to Country, and these are described in the Cultural Values Assessments completed as part of **Technical Report B: Aboriginal Cultural Heritage**, along with existing conditions and potential impacts pertaining to Indigenous cultural heritage. These existing conditions and potential impacts are not addressed within the SIA.

Impact Pathway	Relevant social effect	Relevant Receptors	Stage
		▪ Operators/employees of Tourism Businesses	

3.5 Study area

As indicated by Table 3-1, the social effects of the Project would be concentrated in locations traversed by and/or in relatively close proximity to, the Proposed Route. Technical Report D: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) indicates that the Project would be potentially visible from locations within 9.2 kilometres, and thus a study area corresponding with a 9.2km buffer from the Project was adopted for the purpose of the SIA (See Figure 3-1). The LVIA also nominates areas located within 2 kilometres of the Proposed Route as areas where the Project would 'usually be visually dominant' and as a result, this area is a particular focus for the SIA.

In some cases, community resources potentially affected by the Project are used by people who live beyond the study area and the impacts for affected individuals and social groups are also assessed as part of the SIA.

The Project covers a distance of 190 kilometres, traversing six LGAs and areas with varying physical and socio-economic characteristics. To assist in the description of existing conditions and assessment of social impacts, the study area was broken into four Sections, with distinctive social characteristics. Each Section is profiled in detail in Section 4.

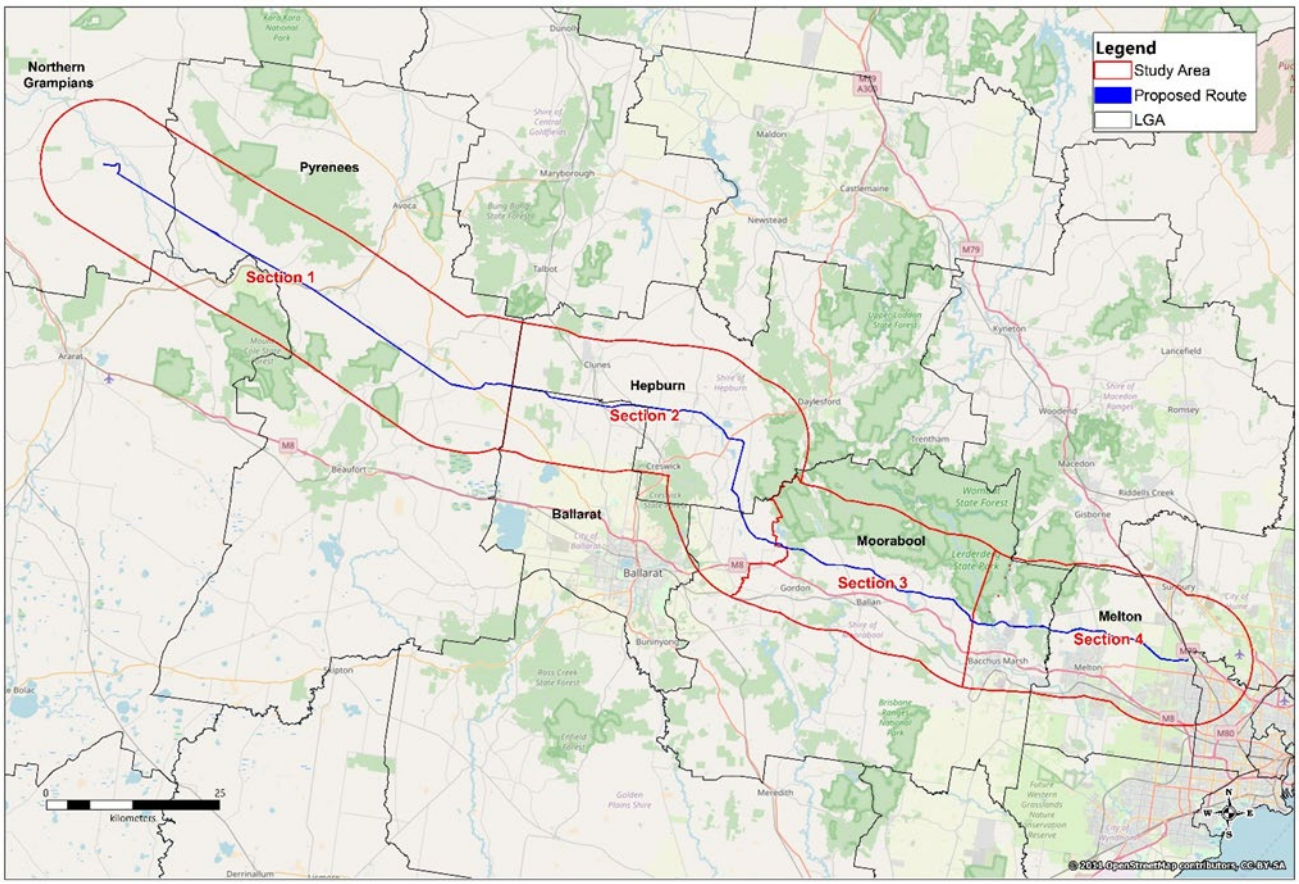

Figure 3-1: Study area for the SIA

3.6 Data collection

Data to support the SIA were compiled using the following sources:

- Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) statistics and other relevant secondary data sources (referenced as required throughout the report).
- Technical reports prepared for the EES, namely:
  - Technical Report D: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment.
  - Technical Report E: Land Use and Planning Impact Assessment.
  - Technical Report G: Economic Impact Assessment.
  - Technical Report H: Agriculture and Forestry Impact Assessment.
  - Technical Report J: Aviation Impact Assessment.
  - Technical Report O: Noise and Vibration Impact Assessment.
  - Technical Report P: Transport Impact Assessment.
  - Technical Report I: Air Quality Impact Assessment.
  - Technical Report K: Bushfire Impact Assessment.
  - Technical Report L: Electromagnetic Interference (EMI) and Electric and Magnetic Fields (EMF) Impact Assessment.
- The author of this report attended a site visit of the Proposed Route, including townships and recreational facilities near the route (October 2023).
- The author attended two community engagement pop-up sessions in September 2024 (Bacchus Marsh and Creswick).
- Spatial data provided by AusNet showing the extent of directly affected landholdings, current land use and sentiment of the landholder with respect to the Project (current as at October 2024). Sentiment data were compiled using the framework set out in Appendix 1.
- The author of this report conducted two interviews with the proponent's Land Access Team which covered the sentiment of landholders with regard to the Project and challenges facing landholders (October 2023 and September 2024).
- The author interviewed one neighbouring landholder (Section 1) at their property, to explore their views regarding the Project's impacts on their property and lifestyle.
- The author attended a community meeting with Coimadai War Memorial committee and Council, at the War Memorial facility to discuss the Project's potential impacts and how these may be mitigated (September 2024).
- The author of this report conducted multiple meetings with the author of the LVIA to discuss the content of this study and the LVIA author's interactions with members of the communities of the study area (September 2023 to May 2024).
- The author inspected survey data collected via an online survey administered by AusNet (November 2024).

- Council Advisory Group (CAG)
  - The author of this report conducted a workshop with CAG members to establish the character and amenity of locations within the study area and potential impacts for existing communities (October 2023).
  - The author of this report conducted follow-up meetings with CAG representatives from Pyrenees Shire, Hepburn Shire, Moorabool Shire and City of Melton, to further explore the character and amenity of locations within the study area and potential impacts for existing communities (October to December 2023).
- Community Consultation Group (CCG)[5]
  - The CCG was established by AusNet to involve community members in the planning of the Project. Members of the group were recruited via a request for nomination process. At the time of writing, the CCG comprised six community members, including residents, businesses owners including local traders, landholders, emergency services representatives, and local interest groups such as the Moorabool and Central Highlands Power Alliance, Daylesford Macedon Tourism, Friends of Werribee Gorge and other local environment groups. The CCG also includes representatives from each LGA traversed by the Project.
  - The author of this report conducted separate one-on-one interviews with four members of the CCG, three of whom are residents of the study area (Clarkes Hill in Section 2, Bacchus Marsh in Section 4 and Darley in Section 4), and one being a key member of the Moorabool and Central Highlands Power Alliance, to discuss potential impacts of the Project within their local community (throughout 2024).
- The author of this report inspected the 'Pinpoint' spatial data set – This data set was compiled by AusNet, and comprises spatially georeferenced verbatim feedback from community members. To generate the data, AusNet established an interactive online mapping tool to obtain feedback from the community on important destinations, sites, and features in their local area. The tool allowed people to drop a pin on a specific location and make a comment. The map was open from 16 June 2020 to 09 November 2020 and then again from 15 March 2021 to 02 May 2021. More than 3,400 pins were dropped on the map identifying important destinations, sites, and features during the first round and a further 1,700 pins dropped on the map during the second round.[6]
- Data generated through the stakeholder and community engagement conducted by AusNet as part of the preparation of the EES, as set out in the report:
  - EES Attachment IV: Stakeholder and Community Engagement Consultation Report.

[5] Further detail regarding the CCG can be found in EES Attachment IV: Stakeholder and Community Engagement Consultation Report.

[6] During the first period, the mapping system was used by AusNet to gather information from the community on important destinations, sites, and features to inform AusNet's understanding of the 'Area of Interest' (AOI) (a broad area which was studied by AusNet in terms of its potential to accommodate the Proposed Route). The second mapping period occurred in conjunction with the release of multiple options for the Proposed Route.

3.7 Assessing significance

The significance of social impacts was assessed considering the magnitude of effects likely to generate impacts and the sensitivity of social receptors to these effects.

- Magnitude of social effects, taking account of: intensity of change (i.e., how large is the change relative to existing conditions); scale (number of people affected); and duration of the change.
- Sensitivity of affected receptors to the predicted effects, taking account of: the compatibility of predicted effects with use and enjoyment of a community resource; the value attributed to an affected community resource by the receptor(s); and the adaptive capacity of relevant receptors, or rather their ability to adjust in order to cope with a predicted effect.

The links between these factors are illustrated in Figure 3-2, noting that it is well accepted in SIA practice that as magnitude and sensitivity increase, so does significance.[7] However, it is also acknowledged that the links between these factors and severity ratings are inherently subjective and contextual. As a result, a replicable and valid quantitative link between the factors and significance ratings is yet to be established within SIA practice and may not be achievable. In this context, significance ratings presented in this SIA represent professional judgements, made in light of the attributes of a predicted impact and available knowledge of receptors, as opposed to objective measurements.

Further to the above, the significance ratings provided in the SIA reflect the overall level of disruption caused by different aspects of the Project. However, the way that different individuals experience change varies and the ratings do not imply that the experience of all affected individuals would be equivalent. In this context, the ratings are provided to give the reader a sense of the relative importance of impacts and draw attention to those which require mitigation.

[7] For example, see Rowan (2009).

Rating	Recommendation		Factors Relevant to a Significance Assessment					
			Sensitivity			Magnitude of Environmental Change		
	Importance	Mitigation (if negative)	Compatibility	Importance to Receptors	Adaptive Capacity	Intensity	Duration	Extent
Severe	Impact is intolerable/ essential	Significant investment in mitigation and/or project redesign is required	Change is highly disruptive/ necessary	Resource is essential	Receptors have little to no capacity to cope	Very large change relative to baseline	Greater than 10 years	Affects many people across a wider area.
Major	Impact is significant in the context of the net benefit assessment	Additional mitigation measures would be highly beneficial	Change causes considerable/ disruption benefit	Resource is very important	Receptors have limited capacity to cope	Large change relative to baseline	3-10 years	Affects many people across a wider district
Moderate	Impact is material but can be tolerated/forgone	Additional mitigation measures should be considered *in particular circumstances*	Change is disruptive/ beneficial.	Resource of considerable importance	Receptors have some capacity to cope	Considerable change relative to baseline	1 to 3 years	Affects many within a local community.
Minor	Impact is of minor importance	Impact can be tolerated, but mitigation encouraged where practicable.	Change is somewhat disruptive/desirable	Resource is of minor importance	Receptors have capacity to cope	Noticeable change relative to baseline	3 months to 1 year	Affects discrete sections of a local community
Negligible	Impact is not material	N/A	Minimal implications	Resource is not valued	Receptors are unaffected.	Little to no change relative to baseline	Less than 3 months	Affects a small number of individuals.

Figure 3-2: Assessing the significance of social impacts: The Figure shows the rating scale (black) for the SIA and illustrates the concept that an increase in magnitude and/or sensitivity is associated with increasing significance (green gradient). Ratings are formulated taking into account the factors which influence severity, but are not a computational output of the matrix. The descriptors in the matrix are indicative only.

3.8 Limitations, uncertainties and assumptions

The SIA relies on estimates of the nature and magnitude of physical changes to the environment that would arise as a consequence of the Project, as outlined in other Technical Reports produced as part of the EES process. The reliability of the SIA is contingent on the reliability of these studies.

The SIA is based primarily on a desktop review of publicly available data and information generated by AusNet led community engagement activities. Most of this activity occurred prior to the engagement of the author (September 2023), and in the case of pinpoint data, no data were gathered from Section 1 (noting that in Section 1 it was originally proposed to construct and operate a 220kV transmission line, whereas now a 500kV transmission line is proposed).

However, the author has undertaken targeted consultation with the CAG and the CCG to complement these sources, as described in section 3.6 above.

There have been relatively few high voltage transmission line projects in Victoria in recent decades, and as a result, empirical data on the way that individuals and communities have adapted to the development of such infrastructure are difficult to obtain. The author made enquiries regarding impacts associated with the Bass Link Project, in the form of interviews with local councillors and members of a community advisory group who oversaw the Project and who had connections into the community at the time the Project was being planned and implemented. The information generated was not sufficient to inform development of a detailed case study, but nevertheless informed the author’s thinking with respect to the SIA.

4 Existing Conditions

4.1 Introduction

The Project would traverse land from near Bulgana in the west to Sydenham Terminal Station in the east, a distance of approximately 190 kilometres. As at the last Census in 2021, there were over 300,000 people living within 9.2 kilometres of the Project (the study area), with over 90% located in the urbanised areas within Section 4 of the study area (see Table 4-1 and Table 4-2).

Population density increases gradually from west to east along the Proposed Route, along with other changes in the physical environment, land use pattern and demographic makeup of the population. Put in the broadest terms, the Project moves from areas in the west where the social, economic and land use context is rooted in agricultural production, to the east where it is increasingly influenced by the presence of Metropolitan Melbourne (see Figures 4-1 and 4-2).

Details regarding the existing social conditions in each Section are highlighted in more detail below, with reference to the data presented in Table 4-1, Table 4-2 and Table 4-3.

Table 4-1: Population and Development by Section of the study area

			Section 1	Section 2	Section 3	Section 4
Length, km			68	54	30	25
Area, sq.km			1,395	945	619	720
Total Section	Population		1,610	8,839	7,801	299,836
	Dwellings		905	4,266	3,255	107,267
	Population Density (per sq km)		1.2	9.4	12.6	416.4
	Dwelling Density (per sq km)		0.6	4.5	5.3	148.9
Rural Only	Population		1,072	4,478	3,862	4,312
	Dwellings		591	2,029	1,544	1,631
	Population Density (per sq km)		0.8	4.9	3.5	9.8
	Dwelling Density (per sq km)		0.4	2.2	1.4	3.7
Directly Affected Properties (Private)	Average Size of property (Ha)		230	134	82	105
	Predominant Land Use[8]	Horticulture	0.0%	39.7%	9.1%	2.9%
		Grazing	64.9%	12.1%	40.0%	54.3%
		Cropping	31.1%	48.3%	36.4%	20.0%
		Equine	2.7%	0.0%	5.5%	2.9%
		Rural Living	0.0%	0.0%	9.1%	14.3%
		Forestry	1.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
		Mining	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	5.7%

Source: ABS Census 2021; AusNet 2024.

[8] Land use data were compiled based on the subjective judgment of AusNet staff rather than self-reported values from landholders. Many of the affected properties currently support a mix of horticulture, cropping and grazing uses. In such cases, properties were classified in terms of whether they support any horticulture (Horticulture), then any cropping uses but no horticulture (Cropping), and finally any grazing but no horticulture or cropping (Grazing).

Table 4-2: Population of the study area

Section	Location	2011		2021	
		Dwellings	Population	Dwellings	Population
1	Amphitheatre	41	51	39	57
	Elmhurst	85	150	94	139
	Waubra	63	137	80	159
	Lexton	90	185	101	183
	Rural Balance	543	1,018	591	1,072
	Total	822	1,541	905	1,610
2	Broomfield	38	93	38	89
	Kingston	59	107	57	103
	Smeaton	55	102	70	125
	Allendale	60	116	60	144
	Newland North	53	118	82	195
	Clunes	493	810	553	887
	Creswick*	1,128	2,489	1,292	2,661
	Rural Balance	1,840	4,067	2,114	4,635
	Total	3,726	7,902	4,266	8,839
3	Wallace	59	158	59	157
	Myrniong	76	225	86	227
	Dales Creek	161	411	161	391
	Mount Egerton	11	22	19	28
	Gordon	173	380	242	609
	Ballan	896	2,041	1,184	2,617
	Rural Balance	1,252	3,058	1,504	3,772
	Total	2,628	6,295	3,255	7,801
4	Bulla	133	355	125	361
	Hopetoun Park	172	561	279	921
	Maddingley	820	2,126	1,927	5,106
	Diggers Rest	695	1,643	2,312	5,944
	Bacchus Marsh	2,631	5,768	3,486	7,540
	Darley	2,517	7,022	3,327	9,025
	Hillside (SSC)	5,182	16,315	5,692	17,347
	Sunbury	6,490	14,899	7,363	17,828
	Melton	17,418	44,854	26,493	72,917
	Greater Melbourne*	43,798	128,777	54,592	158,445
	Rural Balance	1,832	4,870	1,671	4,402
	Total	81,688	227,190	107,267	299,836
Total		88,864	242,928	115,693	318,086

*Source: ABS Census 2021 and 2011 (*Part of settlement located outside the study area)*

Table 4-3: Demographic Indicators for selected areas and settlements (shaded from yellow, lowest value to green, highest value)

Section	Location	Median Age	Aged <18 or less	Aged 70+	Ave. HH Size	Family with Children	Couple	Lone Persons	Median Weekley HH Income	HH Income less than $650	Rented	Work in Ag	Unemployed	Speaks other Langauge	Poor English	Same Address 5 Years Ago
1	Total	52	15.8%	17.6%	2.2	30.7%	36.7%	30.5%	$1,161	35.8%	7.6%	25.4%	2.8%	2.7%	0.1%	75.9%
2	Clunes	54	14.3%	21.2%	2.0	28.0%	30.0%	39.1%	$1,038	36.8%	17.8%	4.2%	8.6%	3.0%	0.0%	57.9%
	Creswick	51	18.1%	22.8%	2.1	30.8%	31.4%	36.2%	$1,053	39.0%	20.6%	3.3%	5.2%	3.6%	0.2%	62.6%
	Balance	47	21.0%	13.2%	2.5	38.4%	35.5%	24.8%	$1,488	23.9%	8.8%	19.6%	2.5%	3.6%	0.4%	73.4%
3	Gordon	37	28.8%	8.9%	2.7	46.9%	32.0%	21.1%	$2,008	17.1%	10.6%	2.1%	2.9%	5.6%	0.0%	50.6%
	Dales Creek	40	24.6%	7.7%	2.7	52.8%	25.7%	21.5%	$1,966	14.7%	0.0%	1.5%	1.4%	1.8%	0.0%	77.2%
	Myrniong	42	17.8%	9.8%	2.8	55.6%	29.4%	15.0%	$2,125	13.3%	4.4%	3.2%	4.0%	2.9%	0.0%	73.5%
	Ballan	42	21.5%	16.0%	2.3	39.2%	29.6%	29.5%	$1,459	27.3%	20.5%	1.1%	3.7%	4.6%	0.7%	54.0%
	Rural Balance	44	22.8%	10.2%	2.7	46.6%	34.1%	18.1%	$2,096	18.0%	7.3%	6.0%	3.4%	4.9%	0.3%	67.3%
4	Diggers Rest	32	24.5%	3.9%	2.6	48.2%	28.1%	21.1%	$2,012	13.5%	21.1%	0.3%	3.9%	24.9%	2.2%	34.8%
	Sunbury	38	22.5%	11.1%	2.5	46.6%	24.8%	26.4%	$1,761	21.3%	24.4%	0.5%	4.6%	10.7%	1.0%	59.6%
	Melton	32	29.0%	6.7%	2.9	55.2%	21.5%	20.7%	$1,529	22.6%	30.0%	0.6%	7.8%	35.2%	4.8%	48.6%
	Darley	36	25.4%	8.5%	2.8	53.5%	27.0%	18.0%	$1,944	18.3%	17.7%	1.2%	4.1%	7.9%	0.8%	61.4%
	Bacchus Marsh	40	21.1%	16.4%	2.3	38.5%	28.3%	31.7%	$1,503	27.6%	26.0%	1.6%	4.8%	8.7%	0.9%	53.8%
	Hillside	36	24.6%	6.0%	3.2	65.2%	21.0%	12.9%	$2,190	14.6%	14.9%	0.2%	5.4%	36.5%	3.8%	74.1%
	Rural Balance	43	21.3%	13.5%	2.9	50.2%	31.0%	17.4%	$1,908	20.1%	13.2%	6.1%	4.3%	17.6%	1.8%	72.2%
Victoria		38	21.4%	11.9%	2.5	43.8%	26.3%	25.9%	$1,759	22.3%	28.9%	2.2%	5.0%	29.3%	4.6%	57.6%

Source: ABS Census 2021

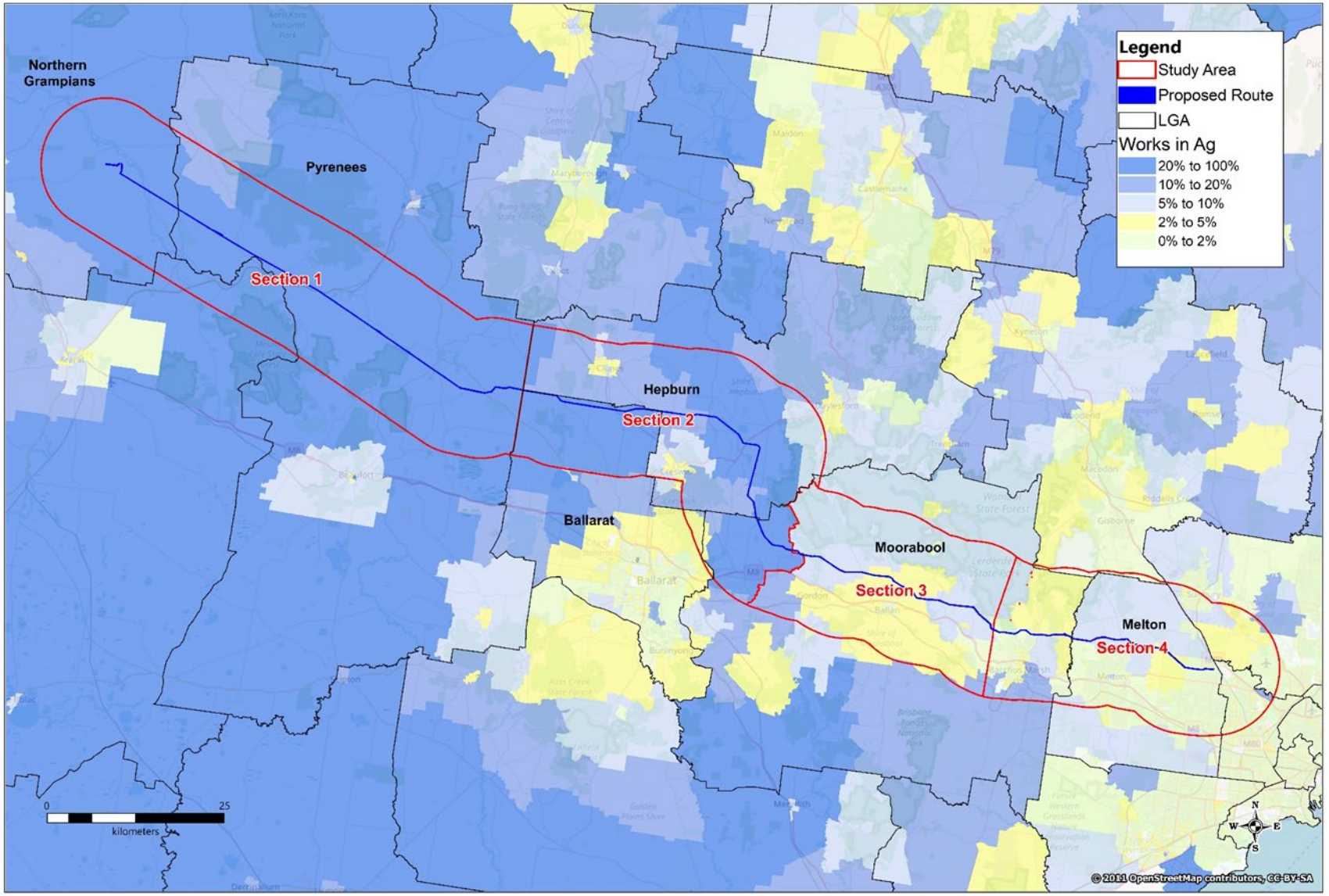

Figure 4-1 Proportion working in Agriculture

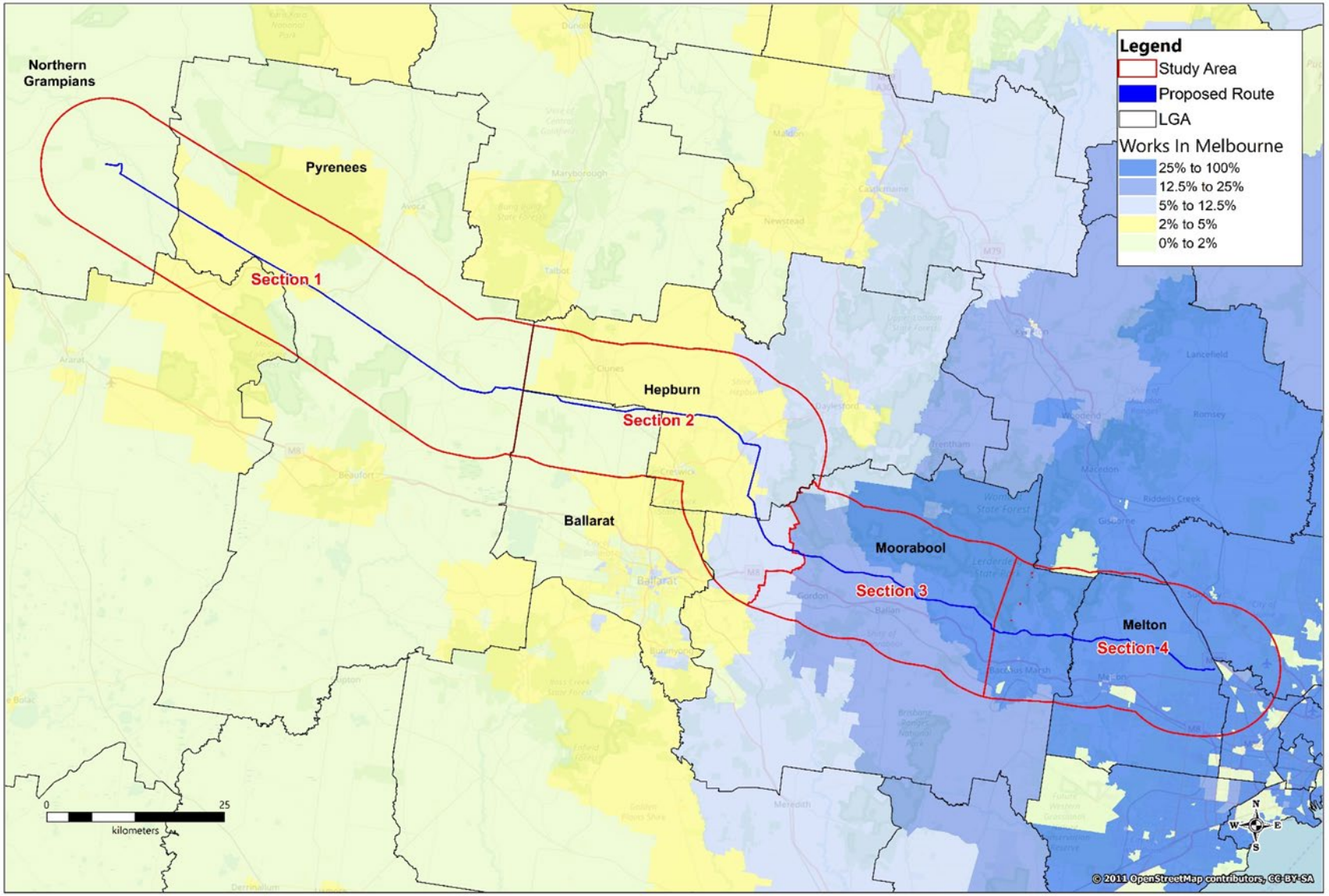

Figure 4-2: Proportion working in Greater Melbourne

4.2 Section 1

4.2.1 Population and Settlement

In Section 1, the study area covers land within Northern Grampians Shire, Pyrenees Shire and the Rural City of Ararat. There are no large urban centres in Section 1, with Elmhurst, Amphitheatre, Lexton and Waubra (population of 139, 57, 183, 159 respectively) being the largest settlements. These towns were established as service centres for the surrounding farming district from 1850s onwards and the area's farming families, *retain strong links with the townships as a focal point for social, sporting and community activity.*[9] Notwithstanding, the population of the townships peaked in the early to mid-1900s and has declined by up to half in the intervening years, alongside changes to the scale of agricultural production in the region and associated reductions in population density. The population of Section 1, inclusive of rural areas and settlements, grew only marginally between 2011 and 2021.

In the present day, the towns in Section 1 incorporate basic facilities and services, including locally oriented sporting facilities, hotels, post offices and general stores, and in the case of Waubra and Amphitheatre, a small Primary School. Elmhurst currently hosts a 'Bush Nursing Service', although for higher order medical services, secondary schooling and supermarket shopping, residents must travel to surrounding urban centres such as Stawell, Ararat, Avoca and Beaufort. Each township offers a visual connection to the surrounding rural landscapes (including the Pyrenees Ranges) which is valued by residents and visitors, and contributes to the community's sense of identity and wellbeing.

Rural parts of Section 1 are sparsely populated with private land comprising primarily larger farming properties. Agricultural production is focussed on grazing and cereal cropping, and to a lesser extent, viticulture and forestry activity. Agriculture is a large source and employment and driver of economic activity in Section 1.

4.2.2 Demography

In Section 1, ABS reporting boundaries do not allow demographic data for rural areas and settlements to be presented separately (due to the small population of the existing settlements). Notwithstanding, Census data (see Table 4-2) are consistent with the presence of a rural community which is ageing in place. To illustrate, the median age of residents of Section 1 as at 2021 was 52 (17.6% of residents were aged 70 or more), while 75.9% of residents lived at the same address as they did five years prior to the Census. Families with dependent children comprised a relatively small proportion of all households, consistent with the presence of a large contingent of empty nesters.

Section 1 is located beyond commuting distance from the Melbourne CBD (130km to 200km) and some distance from Ballarat (30km to 100km), limiting access to professional employment. Relatedly, the population of Section 1 tends to be less affluent than other Sections and Victoria as a whole, with more than a third of households having weekly income of $650 or less. Agriculture is major source of employment in Section 1, with 25.4% of employed persons working in this sector.

[9] Pyrenees Futures' Project, at www.pyrenees.vic.gov.au.

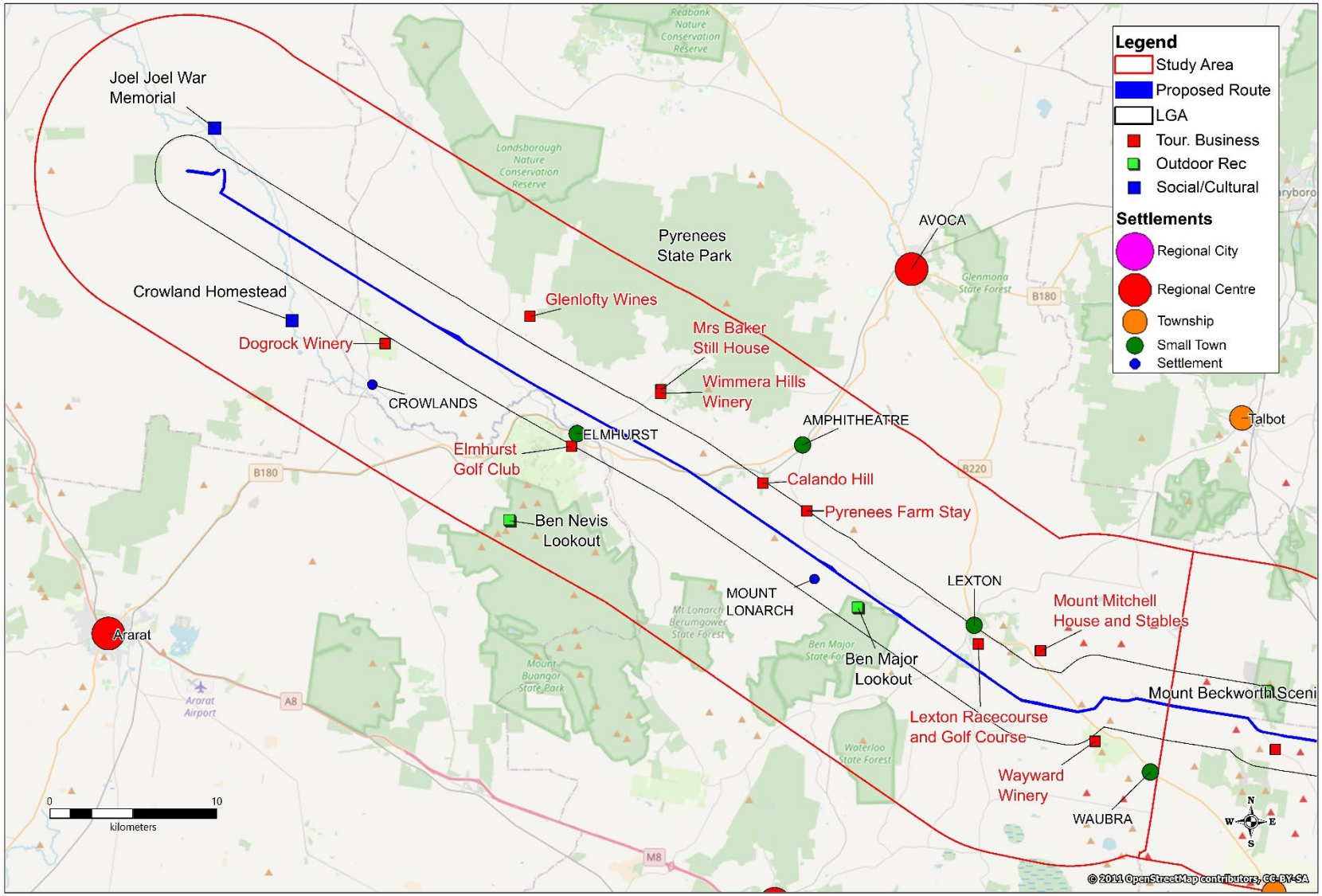

Figure 4-3: Section 1

4.2.3 Landscape Qualities

The landscape in Section 1 is described in Technical Report D: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment under the heading 'Vegetated Hills and Farming' and comprises 'cleared flat farming land' as well as 'cleared hilly farmland' with native vegetation forming the backdrop. The landscape in Section 1 also includes an existing 220kV transmission line and several wind farms.

Throughout the EES process, community members identified views of the Pyrenees Ranges as contributing to the area's landscape character and appeal, with 'dramatic views of the Pyrenees Ranges' also identified in the Pyrenees Shire Plan as an important feature of Section 1.

4.2.4 Community Facilities and Open Space

Townships

The majority of community facilities and social focal points in Section 1 are located within the area's settlements and the Project would not be visible from these locations.[10]

Rural

Outside the townships, the key sites of social and cultural importance (see Figure 4-3) are:

- Social and Cultural – Joel Joel War Memorial (grey granite obelisk) and Joel Joel Public Hall (2 to 3 km from the Project), Crowlands Homestead (*Italianate country mansion*) (4km from the Project).
- Outdoor Recreation – There are several large State Forests and Parks in proximity to the Project, namely the Pyrenees State Forest (to the north) and Ben Major State Park (including Ben Major Lookout) and Mount Cole State Forest (including Ben Neis Lookout) (to the south). The parks include trails suitable for walking, mountain bike riding and four-wheel driving as well as camping areas, and are popular with locals and visitors to the district. Each includes elevated sections which offer expansive views. Data on usage are not available for these open space assets. However, anecdotal information presented in the *Pyrenees Tourism Strategy (2016)* indicates that visitation to Mount Cole State Forest for guided bush walking, bike riding and abseiling tours is at least 5,900 visits per annum.

4.2.5 Tourism

The natural parks in proximity to the Project are a source of nature-based tourist visitation to Section 1, a potential growth area identified in the *Pyrenees Tourism Strategy (2016).* The Pyrenees is also recognised as an official wine region of Australia and wine and food production are important to the character and identity of the region. Several wine and food-based businesses are located in Section 1, namely: the Dog Rock, Glenlofty and Wimmera Hills wineries and the Mount Barker Still house. These venues accept visitors for tastings and take part in events including 'Pyrenees Unearthed Food and Wine Festival' and 'Rotundone Road Wine & Music Festival'.

In addition, Mount Mitchell House and Stables (near Lexton) offers high end accommodation and a wedding reception service, and there are a handful of bed and breakfast and farm stay accommodation providers in the study area (a full list of Tourism Business located within 2km of the Proposed Route is provided in Appendix 2).

[10] As outlined and in the LVIA and confirmed via LVIA *pers.com*. 2024.

4.3 Section 2

4.3.1 Population and Settlement

In Section 2, the study area covers land in the City of Ballarat, Hepburn Shire and Moorabool Shire. There are two larger urban centres in Section 2, Clunes and Creswick, along with a cluster of small settlements (Allendale, Broomfield, Kingston, Newland North and Smeaton) all located to the north east of Creswick. Creswick and Clunes are former gold-mining towns, established during the 1850s gold rush. Since the cessation of mining these townships have reinvented themselves as service centres for the surrounding agricultural community and are also popular tourist destinations (Clunes being well known for its status as a 'book town'). The towns incorporate a range of community facilities and services including kindergartens, childcare centres and primary schools, open space and sporting facilities, supermarket shopping and local medical services.

The smaller settlements to the north east of Creswick comprise residential dwellings, and variously a hotel (Kingston, Smeaton), local sporting/open space facilities (Allendale, Kingston, Smeaton, Newlyn North) and heritage buildings (such as Andersons Mill, Smeaton). These settlements, like Clunes and Creswick, have their roots in the Victorian Gold Rush era. However, as mining ceased their populations declined and they now function as social focal points for the surrounding farming communities, with each settlement having its own unique character and identity. To illustrate, an annual agricultural show has been running at the Kingston Show Grounds for over 150 years, which is a popular event and source of identity and pride for local community members.

There are also several named localities within Section 2, where facilities such as churches, community halls, Country Fire Authority (CFA) infrastructure, etc. are situated along with small clusters of dwellings[11] (such as Coghill's Creek, Dean and Mollongghip). One notable example is Blampied, which comprises a small housing cluster, the Swiss Mountain Hotel, Overwrought Garden Art (a sculpture garden and gallery specialising in metal artwork), and other heritage structures. Similarly, the locality of Dean is the site of the Bank House Brewery. Each of the locations has a rich history and continues to play a role in the social and economic life of the district, with some, such as Blampied and Dean, being popular among tourists. For higher order services, including hospitals, secondary schooling, retail and entertainment, residents of Section 2 typically travel south to Ballarat (approximately 25 kilometres south of the Project).

Clunes and Creswick are located further than 2 kilometres from the Proposed Route, minimising the number of dwellings located in areas where the Project would 'usually be visually dominant'. However, Newlyn North, and parts of Allandale, Kingston and Smeaton are located within 2km of the Proposed Route.

In parts of Section 2, soil conditions support horticultural production, with potato growing being a common land use. To illustrate, approximately 120,000 hectares of land is devoted to potato growing within the 11, ABS Statistical Area Level 2 (SA2) areas traversed by the Proposed Route, which comprises approximately 42.3% of Victoria's total potato production.[12] Reflecting this, rural allotments are considerably smaller than observed in Section 1 and population density in the rural parts of Section 2 is also higher.

[11] The population of these localities does not meet the ABS requirement (size or density) for the creation of a mesh block, the smallest spatial area for which the ABS reports population data.

[12] Technical report H: Agriculture and Forestry Impact Assessment.

4.3.2 Demography

Like Section 1, a large proportion of residents in the rural parts of Section 2 work in agriculture (19.6%). However, the rural population of Section 2 is younger than observed in Section 1 and households comprise a higher proportion of families with children. In contrast, Creswick and Clunes generally accommodate an older, less affluent population, and relatively few residents of these townships are employed in agriculture. The observed contrast between the urban and rural parts of Section 2 is common throughout Regional Victoria, with townships typically accommodating a broader cross section of society, including those who are retired, single parent families, unemployed persons, etc.

The population of Section 2 grew by 1.3% per annum between 2011 and 2021, with notable growth occurring in the northern part of Creswick, Newland North and within the rural parts of Section 2.

4.3.3 Landscape Qualities

The landscape in Section 2 consists of areas within the 'Plains and Volcanic Cones', (to the north and west of Newlyn) and the 'Rolling Farmland and Water Bodies' landscape character sections (see LVIA). The Plains and Volcanic Cones character section comprises clear open plains providing long range views across cleared grassy plains, punctuated by volcanic cones (a number of volcanic cones being covered by a Significant Landscape Overlay in the local planning scheme). Vegetation patterns are highly modified and dominated by large areas of cleared farming land, while the settlements in the area are demarcated by planted windbreaks and shelter belts established along property boundaries. In contrast, areas within the Rolling Farmland and Water Bodies character area are characterised by rolling hills intersected by waterways, planted hedgerows and shelter belts, with native or remnant vegetation largely confined to elevated hillsides, road reserves and water courses.

An existing 220kV transmission line traverses Section 2 from north to south, east of Newlyn and runs adjacent the Project for approximately 7 kilometres.

Feedback from residents of Section 2 collected via AusNet's consultation program for the EES emphasised the importance of the landscape to those who live in the area, who variously describe the appearance of their local area as beautiful, unspoiled and calming. Views of the volcanic cones, to and from Mount Beckworth and Mount Bolton as well as from roads linking Clunes and Creswick with Daylesford were commonly identified as being of particular importance. To illustrate:

> *A place of beauty, nature and landscape at its best (pinpoint near Hepburn Lagoon)*
>
> *The volcanic plain landscape which the corridor intersects is highly sensitive to change, the flat nature of the plain offers long range views and thus creates a landscape on which there is 'nowhere to hide' (pinpoint near Newlyn North).*
>
> *Classic views across the land (are) seen on the Daylesford Clunes Road, with two of the volcanoes of the great Volcanic Plains of Victoria (pinpoint near Smeaton).*

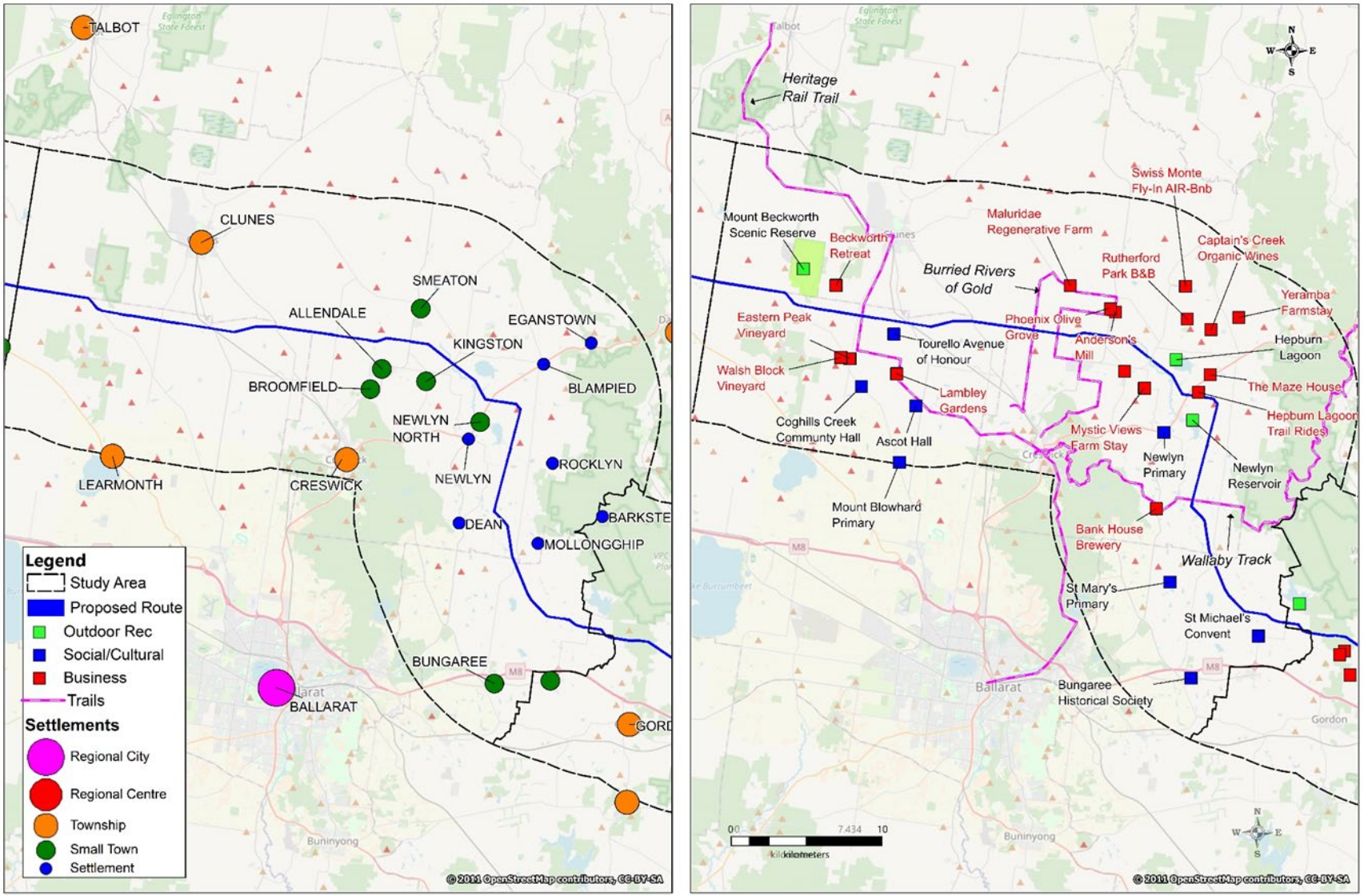

Figure 4-4: Section 2, Distribution of Settlements (Left) and Community Facilities, Open Spaces and Tourism Based Businesses (Right)

4.3.4 Community Facilities and Open Space

Townships

The majority of the community facilities and social focal points in Section 2 are located within the area's settlements and the Project would not be visible from these locations. Exceptions are:

- Kingston Show Grounds – comprises a grassed arena, heritage grandstand (constructed in 1902 at the nearby Smeaton Showgrounds and moved to Kingston in 1922[13]), horse yards, club rooms and shedding, toilets, etc. The Show Grounds hosts various events including the Annual Kingston Agricultural Show and the Kingston Food and Wine Festival

Figure 4-5: Kinston Showgrounds – Grandstand.

Rural

Outside the townships there are also several sites of social and cultural importance, the amenity of which may be affected by the Project (see Figure 4-4), namely:

- Community facilities
  - There are three small primary schools located outside the main settlements in Section 2, St Marys Primary School, a small catholic school near Clarkes Hill (approx. 20 students), Newlyn Primary School near Newlyn (approx. 15 students) and Mount Blowhard Primary, located alongside a cluster of housing at Ascot.
  - Avenues of Honour are located at Newlyn and Turello and to the south of the Kingston township.
  - There are several small churches and community halls in Section 2, namely: Ascot Hall, Coghill's Creek Community Hall and Micheals Convent.

[13] Listed on the Victorian Heritage Register due to its *historical and social importance for its long associations with the Kingston Agricultural Show,* amongst other things *(see* ww.kingstonagsociety.org.au).

- Outdoor Recreation
  - **Mount Beckworth Scenic Reserve** is a Parks Victoria asset located near Clunes. The reserve covers approximately 610 hectares and includes several picnic and camping areas and walking trails (see Figure 4-6). The reserve is used by bird watchers, walkers and hikers and offers expansive views of the district, including from the Mount Beckworth summit. At the summit is a large Monterey Pine tree, known as the 'lollipop tree'. The tree was planted in 1918, and is a well-known landmark in the district which can be seen from most directions for up to 50km. The tree was voted the 2018 Victorian Tree of the Year, by the National Trust of Australia. The Reserve is valued within the local community and by visitors as a habitat for flora and fauna and as a location to undertake moderately challenging walks and hikes in a beautiful location. To illustrate:

    Mt Beckworth is a beautiful scenic reserve used by many people. The Mount and the lollipop tree can be seen for miles (pinpoint near Mount Beckworth).

    Every day, people bushwalk in the Mt Beckworth Scenic Reserve to absorb its natural beauty. This is an area of cultural heritage and has strong landscape values and visual amenity (pinpoint near Mount Beckworth).

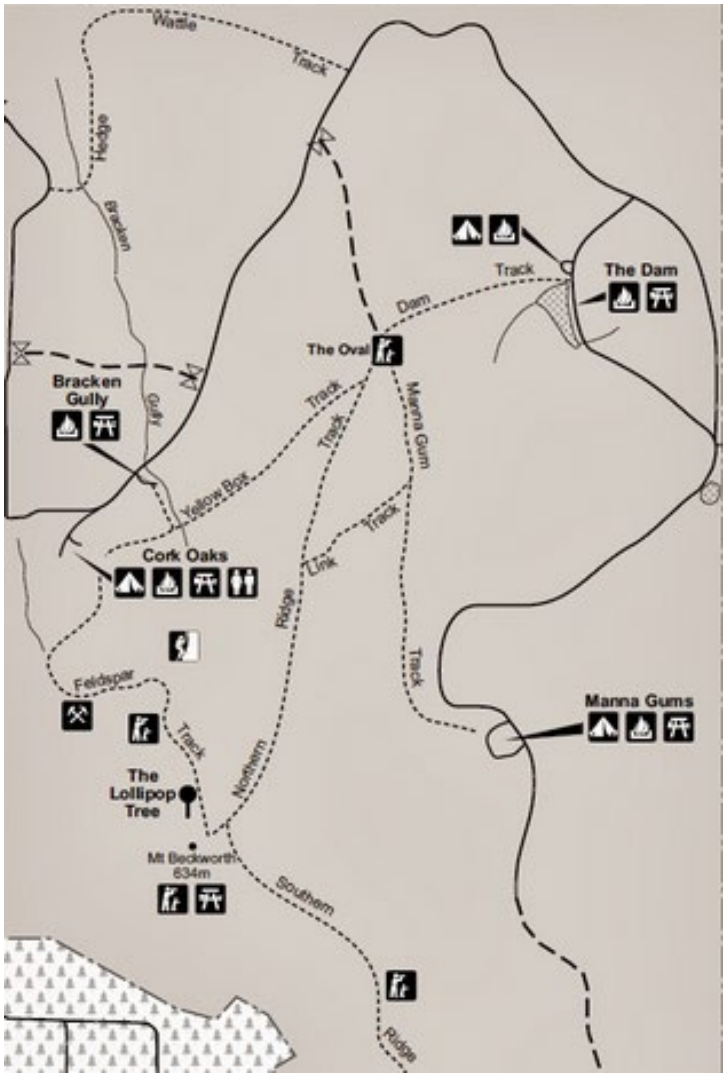

Figure 4-6: Walking Tracks and Camp Sites within Mount Beckworth Scenic Reserve (Source: parks.vic.gov.au)

- **Hepburn Lagoon** is a man-made lake originally constructed in the 1800s and expanded in 1960s. The lake is a popular spot for fishing, brown trout, rainbow trout and redfin being common target species. In 2019, the lake was opened for use by kayaks and non-powered vessels. Public access to the lagoon is via Charleson Lane with visitors accessing the lake on foot. There are no recreational facilities, boat launching facilities or amenities available at Hepburn Lagoon and swimming and camping are not permitted. Moreover, access is via a long walk across fields which likely limits use to local community members and fishing enthusiasts.

  Hepburn Lagoon is covered by a Heritage Overlay in the local planning scheme and valued within the local community for its beauty and peaceful ambience. To illustrate:

  > *The Hepburn Lagoon is an amazing place to be surrounded by nature. Family and friends for generations have enjoyed time together at this lagoon (pinpoint near Hepburn Lagoon)*
  >
  > *A place of spectacular beauty and relaxation for all the people who live in this area. The changing light of the skies on the water and the birdlife is inspiring (pinpoint near Hepburn Lagoon).*

- **Newlyn Reservoir** is a manmade water body constructed in the 1870s and expanded in 1961 and is a popular fishing spot. Newlyn Reservoir is located in the Public Conservation and Resource Zone (PCRZ), which explicitly supports goals relating to conservation and outdoor recreation, and has been developed to support public visitation and use. On the reservoir's north western corner there is a car park, grassed area with BBQs, picnic tables and toilets, making the location suitable for social gatherings.

Figure 4-7: Newlyn Reservoir

4.3.5 Tourism

The area near Creswick and Clunes is popular among tourists who visit to explore the area's historic sites and sample the local lifestyle, food and wine offering, while being situated within a beautiful rural setting. The settlements in the area include heritage structures, pubs and restaurants and accommodation, while historic mining sites, trail ride businesses, bed and breakfasts and wineries are distributed throughout the rural landscape (see Figure 4-4) (a full list of Tourism Business located within 2km of the Proposed Route is provided in Appendix 2). Visitors typically spend time at towns throughout the study area and on its periphery as part of their visit, including Daylesford and Ballarat using roads such as the Creswick-Lawrence Road, Daylesford-Clunes Road, Werona-Kingston Road and the Midland Highway, to access the townships and take in beautiful views of the district. Areas near Smeaton and Hepburn Lagoon are used for hot air ballooning, whereas areas near Mount Beckworth are used for paragliding launches. In addition, there are several driving and cycling routes in Section 2 which have been formalised and are promoted to tourists, namely (see Figure 4-4 and Appendix 3):

- The Buried Rivers of Gold self-guided driving tour is a 31km self-guided tour route. The tour starts at the New Australasian No.2 mine site and comprises five site-stops at historic mining sites.
- Ballarat to Maryborough Heritage Rail Trail - a cycle touring route connecting the major townships of Maryborough and Ballarat via smaller settlements and other points of interest along the route. The route is designed for a country cycle on quiet, sealed and unsealed roads that take in some of the most attractive towns in the Goldfields region including Clunes and Creswick. The route progresses through scenic, relatively flat (gentle gradient) country with views of rolling hills and farmland on existing public roads, or off-road paths.
- The Great Dividing Trail Network is a pathway for walkers, mountain bikers and trail runners which passes through central Victoria. The Section which traverses the study area is known as Wallaby Track and covers a distance of 52km linking Daylesford and Creswick.

4.4 Section 3

4.4.1 Population and Settlement

In Section 3, the study area covers land in Moorabool Shire. There are four notable urban settlements in Section 3; Ballan with a population of 2,617, and the smaller townships of Gordon (609), Myrniong (227) and Wallace (157). All four settlements are located further than 2 kilometres from the Project (the area where the Project would usually be visually dominant) and in the case of Gordon, Wallace and Ballan are separated from the Project by the Western Freeway. Ballan is the major service centre for the surrounding district and is connected to Ballarat and Melbourne via rail. Ballan accommodates Shire Offices, as well as local medical services, a primary school and sporting facilities.

Myrniong was established during the gold rush of the 1850s to support the local wheat farming community. Several bluestone buildings remain in the town, one of which has been repurposed to accommodate the Plough Hotel. The town also includes a well patronised primary school (170 enrolments) recreation reserve, community hall, and fire station. Myrniong hosts an annual 'Historic Car Sprint' in April each year. The sprint occurs on a closed public road and covers an 850-metre course, being popular with classic car enthusiasts. Like Myrniong, Gordon's population grew during the gold rush period, declining thereafter. However, in more recent times, Gordon has experienced a revival due to the 'tree change' phenomenon, attracting new residents seeking out large semi-rural blocks, a quiet rural aspect, proximity to Ballan and Ballarat and rail access to Melbourne. There are also several named localities within Section 3, where facilities such as churches, hotels, community halls, CFA infrastructure, convenience stores, etc. are situated along with small clusters of dwellings[14] (such as Greendale and Korobeit).

In Section 3, rural properties are smaller on average than observed elsewhere in the study area (average size of 30ha), with grazing being the most common land use, although rural living and equine properties are also common land uses in this Section. The population of Section 3, inclusive of rural areas and settlements, grew from 6,295 to 7,801 between 2011 and 2021, with notable growth occurring in the settlements of Ballan and Gordon and also in rural areas.

4.4.2 Demography

The population of Section 3 is generally younger and more affluent than both Section 2 and Section 1, with families with children being the predominant household type. In the rural part of Section 3, agriculture is an important source of employment (6% work in agriculture) although less so than in Section 1 and 2. In the urban sections of Section 3, the proportion of people working in agriculture is similar to that observed for Victoria as a whole.

Rural areas and townships in Section 3 are within commuting distance of Metropolitan Melbourne, and almost a quarter of residents travel to Melbourne for work. This is reflected in household incomes in Section 3 which are notably higher than Section 1 and 2. That is, while rural communities built around agriculture are present in Section 3, many living in Section 3 are seeking a rural residential setting while maintaining access to economic and social opportunities available within Melbourne and urban centres such as Bacchus Marsh and Ballarat.

[14] The population of these localities does not meet the ABS requirement (size or density) for the creation of a mesh block.

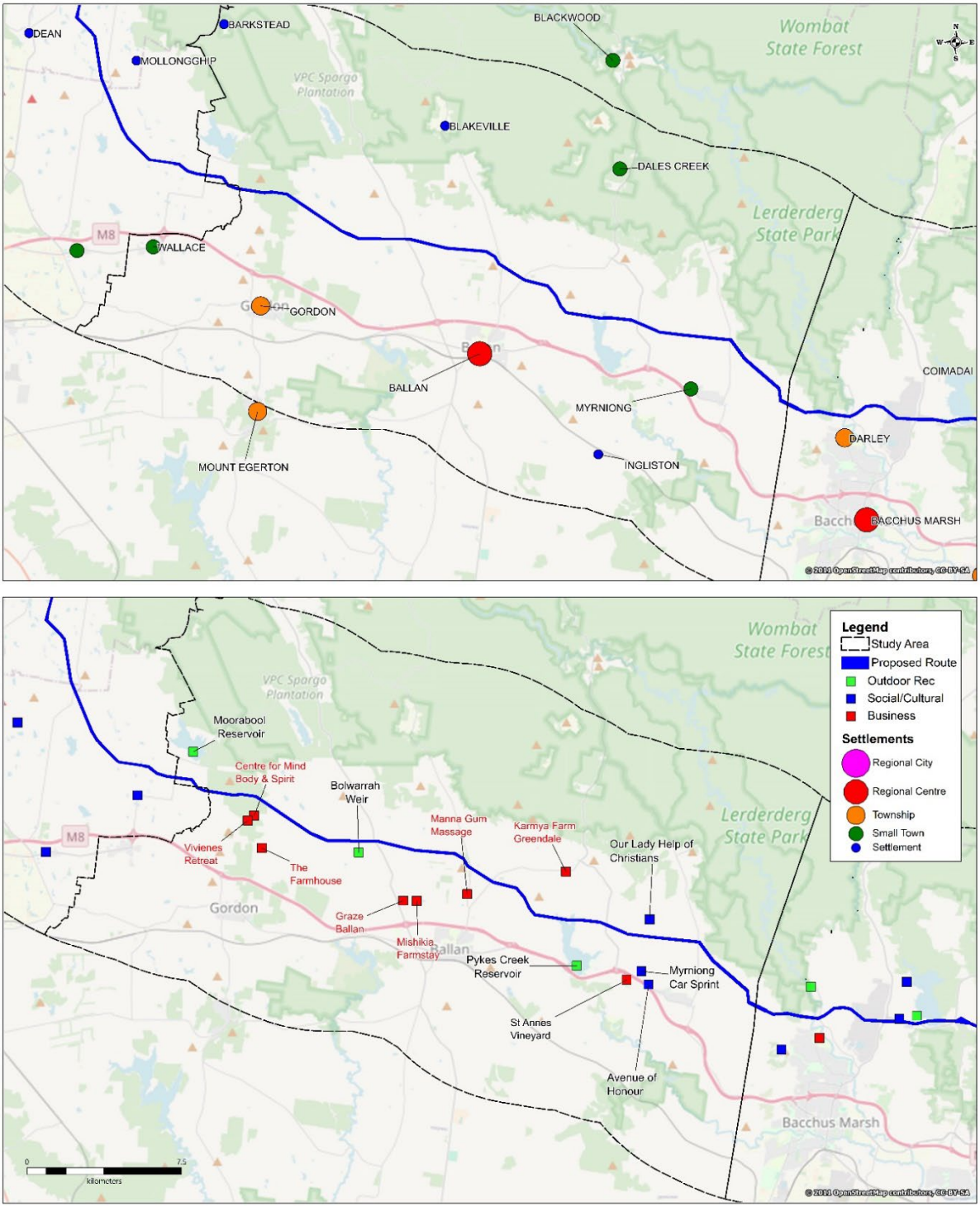

Figure 4-8: Section 3 - Distribution of Settlements (top) and Community Facilities, Open Spaces and Tourism Based Businesses (bottom)

4.4.3 Landscape Qualities

The landscape in Section 3, like the eastern part of Section 2, is described in Technical Report D: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment under the heading 'Rolling Farmland and Water Bodies'. As outlined in the LVIA, in Section 3 views are typically limited to the near or middle ground, with longer views available from elevated roads and vegetation.

The LVIA notes that, beyond the boundaries of state parks, there are few landscape features or areas recognised or protected by policy in Section 3. Notwithstanding, the area's largely 'unspoiled' rural landscapes are valued by the local community and contribute to the creation of a beautiful, clean and peaceful setting in which to live. To illustrate:

> *My own piece of paradise. Beautiful unspoilt country side. Clean air. Amazing birdlife* (pinpoint near Ballan)
>
> *Clean air, beautiful views. Perfect* (pinpoint near Ballan)
>
> *Beautiful unabated rolling hills* (pinpoint near Myrniong)

There are also several publicly accessible water bodies in Section 3 including Moorabool Reservoir and Pykes Creek Reservoir, which provide scenic locations for social and recreational activity (see below).

4.4.4 Community Facilities and Open Space

Townships

The majority of the community facilities and social focal points in Section 3 are located within the area's settlements and the Project would not be visible from these locations. Exceptions are:

- Myrniong – The Project would be potentially visible from several locations within the township of Myrniong, albeit at a distance (approximately 2 to 3 kilometres). These include various locations along Hardy Street, such as residential homes and the Myrniong Primary School, as well as the Myrniong Recreation Reserve, a local playing field located on Shuter Street. The reserve includes a cricket pitch, outdoor gym and tennis courts. The reserve is Myrniong's only active open space facility and hosts sporting matches and music-based events, etc.

Rural

Outside the townships there are also several sites of social and cultural importance, the amenity of which may be affected by the Project (see Figure 4-8), namely:

- Outdoor Recreation
  - Moorabool Reservoir is a Central Highland Water asset supplying water to Daylesford and surrounds. Overlooking the reservoir is a publicly accessible park and ornamental garden which provides a pleasant location for social activity and passive recreation and is well used and valued within the local community. The park is fitted with toilets, picnic tables, BBQs, and rotundas. Pleasant views of the reservoir are available within the park and in particular from the Bolwarrah Viewing Point and Lookout. Selection of relevant pinpoints comments are outlined below:

    Moorabool Reservoir has become one of our favourite picnic, birthday party and recreational spots since moving here from Melbourne (pinpoint near Moorabool Reservoir).

    Favourite recreation spot for my family - walking, picnics, fishing (pinpoint near Moorabool Reservoir).

Figure 4-9: Moorabool Reservoir and Park (source: www.chw.net.au).

- **Pykes Creek Reservoir** is a Southern Rural Water asset which provides water in the Bacchus Marsh and Werribee Irrigation Districts. The Reservoir is open to the public and is used for boating, kayaking, fishing, swimming and picnicking. At the southern end of the Reservoir there are various facilities including BBQ areas, toilets, picnic tables and a playground.

Figure 4-10: Pykes Creek Reservoir

- **Bolwarrah Weir** is a small Barwon Water asset located on the East Moorabool River, which provides a pleasant location for passive recreation including walking, picnicking and bird watching. Fishing is also a permitted activity at the weir. The grounds of the weir include a gravel area used for parking and picnic tables. Water sports, including swimming, boating, canoeing and kayaking are not permitted on the water body. The basic facilities and secluded location of the weir are consistent with a local usage catchment. A selection of relevant pinpoints comments is provided below:

  Beautiful little reservoir on the Moorabool east river. Bird habitat as well as native mammals & reptiles (pinpoint near Bolwarrah Weir).

  Walk the property on a daily basis and watch the wildlife on Bolwarrah Weir. Also frequent the weir for fishing (pinpoint near Bolwarrah Weir).

4.4.5 Tourism

The tourism sector in Section 3 is in its infancy[15], with current visitation focussing on day trips to the area's natural features. In this context, the Moorabool Shire Visitor Economy Strategy 2023-27 seeks to build awareness of the Shire's attractions and *grow the visitor economy, leveraging an abundance of nature, quality produce, and quaint towns to fulfill (our) potential.*

A full list of Tourism Business located within 2km of the Proposed Route is provided in Appendix 2 and includes a small number of health and wellbeing focused businesses and accommodation providers located in rural areas (see Figure 4-8). Other tourism events and/or attractions of note in the context of the SIA are:

- **Myrniong Historic Car Sprint** – an annual event held in April on a closed public road. The sprint course covers 850m running north along Korbiet Road from a starting point just north of the Old Western Highway. The event is popular with classic car enthusiasts (see Appendix 3).

[15] See Moorabool Shire Visitor Economy Strategy 2023-27.

4.5 Section 4

4.5.1 Population and Settlement

In Section 4, the study area primarily covers land in Moorabool Shire and City of Melton, with some areas also located in Macedon Ranges Shire and the Cities of Hume and Brimbank. In this Section, the Project passes in close proximity to well established urban areas such as the Bacchus Marsh conurbation (comprising the suburbs of Bacchus Marsh, Darley and Maddingley), Melton, Sunbury and the western edge of Metropolitan Melbourne (terminating immediately to the north of Hillside). As a result, there are large numbers of dwellings (5,760, see Table 8-3) located within 2 kilometres of the Project (the area where the Project would usually be visually dominant) in Section 4.

The non-urban part of Section 4 comprises an eclectic mix of land uses, including farming uses such as grazing, as well as extractive industry, equine and lifestyle properties, an airfield, religious, cultural and sporting facilities, and infrastructure including major roads and substations. Much of the land located near the urban growth boundary is held by speculative investors. There is one rural settlement located in Section 4, Toolern Vale (population 87) which remains physically separated from existing urban areas.

4.5.2 Demography

The population of Melton and Hillside is generally younger than elsewhere in the study area and more ethnically diverse, with these areas popular among migrant families seeking affordable accommodation. The Bacchus Marsh conurbation, likewise is popular among family households, with Darley in particular attracting younger, upwardly mobile families, (in part) due to its undulating topography, which affords pleasant views of the Lerderderg State Park to the north.

Like Section 3, agriculture is a relatively important source of employment for the rural residents of Section 4 (6% work in Agriculture). However, the majority of workers residing in Section 4 find employment in nearby urban centres and within Melbourne.

4.5.3 Landscape Qualities

The landscape in Section 4 is described in Technical Report D: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment under the heading ‘Peri-urban and townships’. As outlined in the LVIA, Section 4 comprises open areas used for farming within the Green Wedge Zone, as well as the vegetated hills of the Lerderderg State Park, which form a dramatic backdrop from locations to the south, including the suburban area of Darley. The presence of the Bacchus Marsh Quarry also influences the aesthetic quality of the landscape in the Darley area.

The landscape toward the eastern end of Section 4 is highly modified and includes urban and peri-urban areas which contain buildings, telecommunications infrastructure, sports fields, transmission lines, the Sydenham Terminal Station, electrified rail, and the Calder Park Raceway.

Landscape features noted in Technical Report D: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment include the Lerderderg State Park, Long Forest Reserve, Lerderderg River and Gorge, the Bald Hill Activation Area (see below), the Pentlands Hills to the west of Darley and Mount Kororoit near Leakes Road in Melton (the latter two being covered by a Significant Landscape Overlay (SLO)). These landscape features were also nominated by members of the community as aspects of their local area which they value and which contribute to their sense of identity and well-being. Expansive views of the landscape from various vantage points in the vicinity of Darley,

including suburban homes in ‘northern Darley’, homes along Swans Road and locations along the Lerderderg River, were a particular focus. To illustrate:

The Northern Darley precinct is unique in providing uninterrupted views of the Lerderderg State Park and surrounding plains. This area of Bacchus Marsh contains properties where visual amenity has extremely high importance (pinpoint near Darley).

> *I moved into this area recently, specifically for the amenity and amazing views. My wife and I cherish our views and, amongst other benefits (pinpoint near Darley).*
>
> *Views over Melbourne, unique to the west and not possible from other parts of western Victoria. Stunning views out to Port Phillip Bay, Melbourne City Lights and through to the Dandenong Ranges and north to Mt Macedon (pinpoint near Darley).*

The uninterrupted views of farm land and the Lerdederg State Park including the Lerdederg river is what attracted us to this area (pinpoint near Darley).

Mount Kororoit was also nominated as a landscape feature which contributes to residents’ sense of identity and place and is a welcome sight in the landscape and orientating feature for those travelling along the road network.

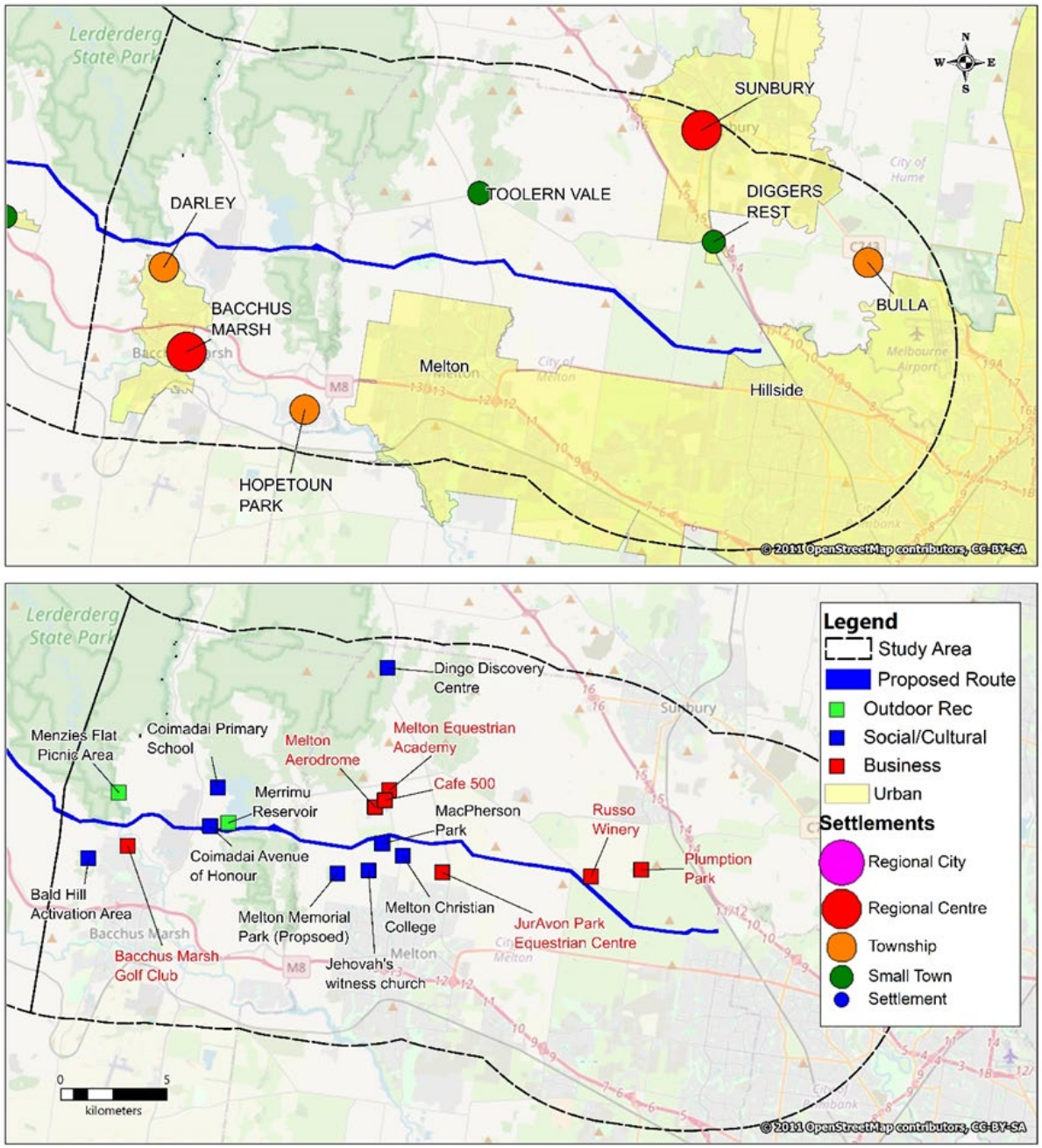

Figure 4-11: Section 4 - Distribution of Settlements (top) and Community Facilities, Open Spaces and Tourism Based Businesses (bottom).

4.5.4 Community Facilities and Open Space

Townships

The majority of the community facilities and social focal points in Section 4 are located within the area's settlements and urban areas and the Project would not be visible from these locations. Exceptions are:

- Darley – due to Darley's undulating topography, there are several social and recreational focal points within the urban area from which the Project may be visible:
  - Bacchus Marsh Golf Course - an 18-hole course set along the Lerderderg River with views of the Wombat State Forest. The course also serves meals from its bistro which offers pleasant views across the course.
  - Walking trails extend along the western side of the Lerderderg River from Gisborne Road to Robertsons Road (Lerderderg Walking Track) around the eastern and northern side of the Bacchus Marsh Golf Course (Golf Club Walking Trail). These connected trails offer a peaceful setting in which to walk and connect with the river and are popular among the local community. To illustrate:

    The Links walking track is a very popular and unique environmental space located behind the golf course. The track provides a safe and peaceful area for recreation to locals (pinpoint near Darley).

    Popular walking track with beautiful views of the Lerderderg Gorge. Transmission towers will ruin the peace, serenity and appeal of this area (pinpoint near Darley).

    We walk along this river everyday, friends and family often get together along the river here (pinpoint near Darley).

    Very active walking track along the Lerderderg river. Great views of the gorge, seasonal flowing river, place for kids to explore mild bushland. Perfect mental health respite (pinpoint near Darley).

  - **Bald Hill Activation Area** is a 120-ha council reserve on the western edge of the Darley urban area. Moorabool Shire has developed a Concept Plan (2019) to facilitate development of the site as a 'Destination Regional Park', incorporating a mountain bike park; all abilities walking trail; events space; commercial food and beverage use; conferencing facilities; fitness loop; as well as a destination walking trail (the '1001 steps'). As the Plan states, *Bald Hill will become a Destination Regional Park, which provides organised and active recreation uses servicing the local community of Moorabool Shire and attracting visitors from the Melbourne, regional Victoria and interstate*.

    At the time of writing, Moorabool Shire had constructed Stage 1 and Stage 2 of the Plan, the 1001 steps destination walking trail, and an all-abilities sculpture trail, with funding support from the State Government.

    The third stage of the Concept Plan would see the development of a new entrance from Swans Road to the northwest, a mountain bike park and a sculpture trail located along the northern faces of Bald Hill (see Figure 4-13). Council indicates that, once completed, the Bald Hill Activation Area would deliver a multifaceted recreation/eco-tourism experience which would attract approximately 350,000 visitors annually, almost 200,000 of whom would live outside the immediate residential catchment.

Figure 4-12: 1001 Steps Walking Trail.

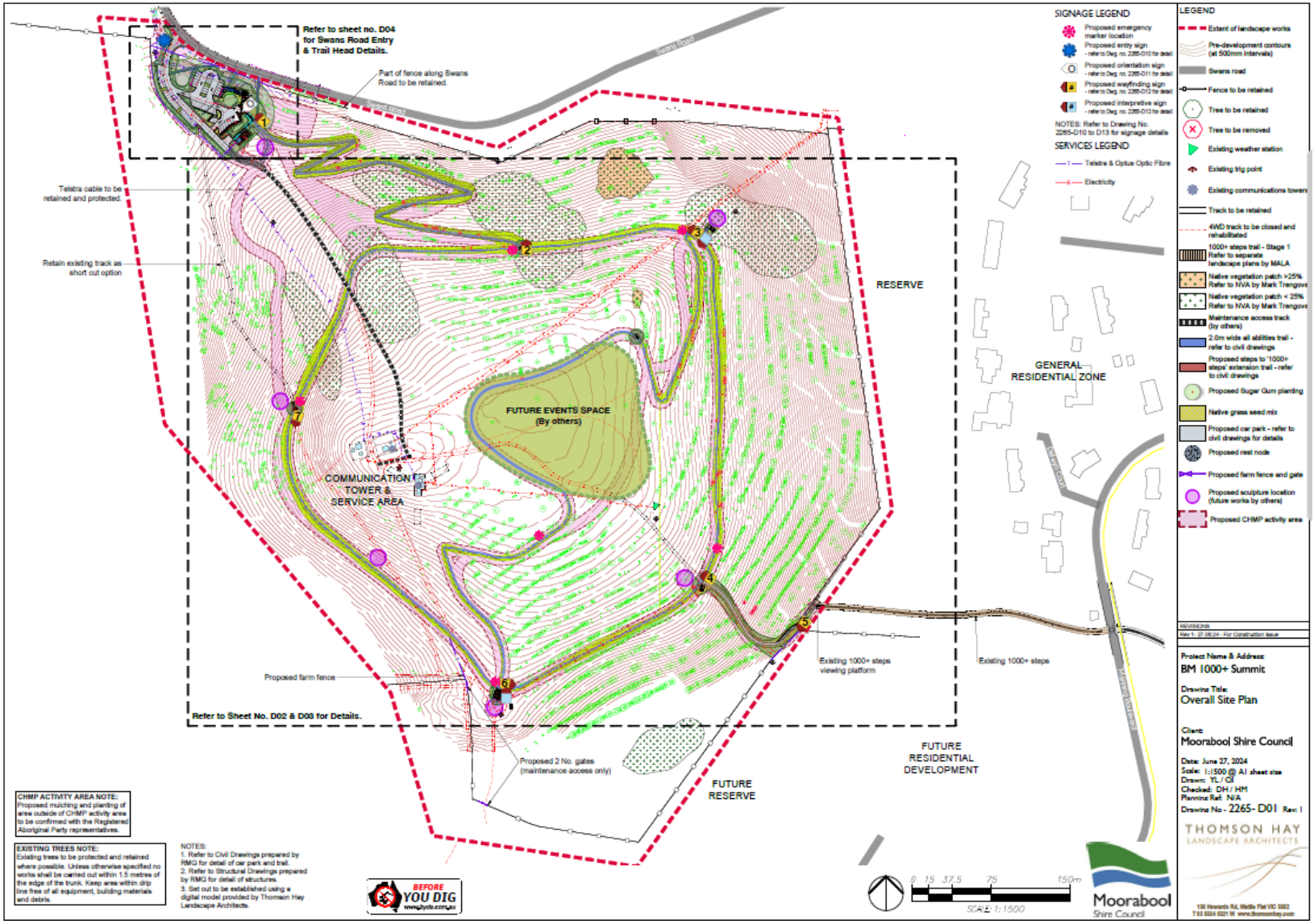

Figure 4-13: Bald Hill Stage 3 Overall Site Plan (Source: Thompson Hay Landscape Architects June 27, 2024)

Rural

Outside the townships and urban areas within Section 4, there are a number of sites of social and cultural importance of relevance to the SIA (see Figure 4-11), namely:

- Community Facilities
  - **MacPherson Park** - is City of Melton's principal recreational facility. Established in the 1970s, the facility services clubs and teams from the local and broader region. The reserve is 98 hectares in size and is located approximately 6 kilometres to the north of the Melton Township, on Coburns Road, Toolern Vale. The site is located outside of the Melbourne Urban Growth Boundary and is surrounded by rural development, with the closest residential development located almost two kilometres to the south. The recreational complex comprises an extensive range of playing fields/courts, practice facilities (such as cricket nets) and pavilions (see Figure 4-14).

    Sporting groups currently in residence are: Melton Football Netball Club (AFL / Netball); Melton Junior Football Netball Club (AFL / Netball); Riddell Umpires (AFL umpiring); Melton Cricket Club (Cricket); Melton Greyhound Racing Club (Council's sole facility for greyhound racing); Melton & District Adult Riding Club ; Melton & District Pony Club; Melton Rugby League Club (Council's sole rugby league club); Melton Racing Pigeon Club (Council's sole pigeon club); Melton Phoenix Soccer Club; Melton Wolves Gridiron Club (Council's sole gridiron club); North West Titans Baseball Club (Council's sole baseball club).

    MacPherson Park is very well utilised, with City of Melton estimating 6,300 people use the park each week (excludes casual users such as dog walkers) (a typical week includes: 56 training sessions; 43 social events; 950 people participating in sport; 5,500 spectators). Moreover, approximately 27,000 people attend finals / major events at MacPherson Park each year. Some existing tenants such as Melton Football Club, have been residents of the Park since its early beginnings, while others such as the Melton Rugby League Club (since 2013) are newly arrived. The site has also acted as a short-term home to groups that have transited to alternate recreation reserves within the municipality.

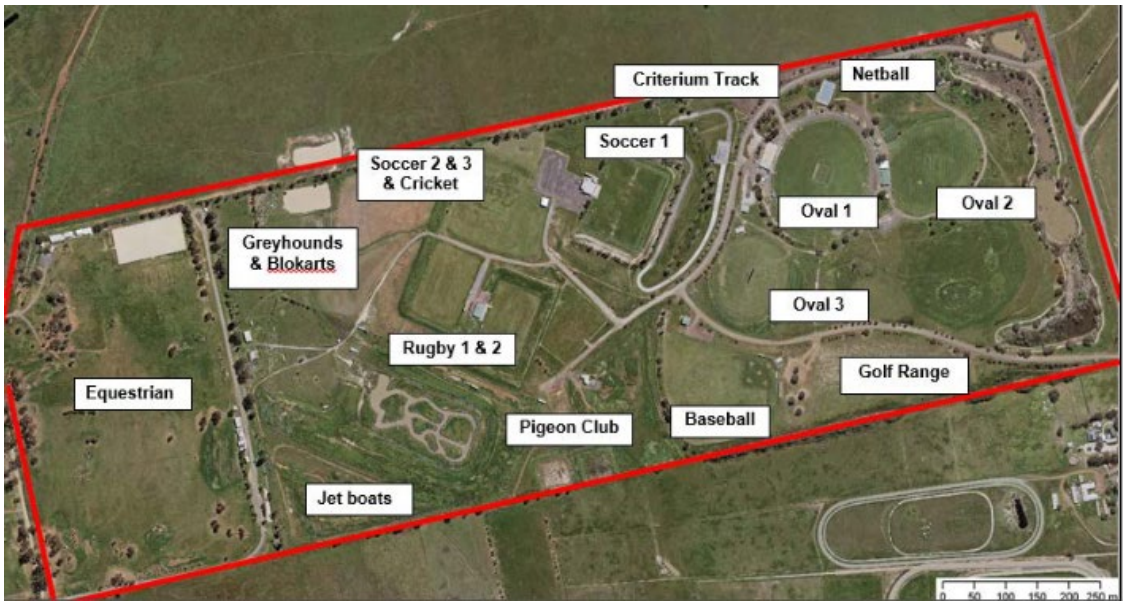

Figure 4-14: Existing Layout of MacPherson Park (MacPherson Park Recreation Reserve - Future Directions Paper 2017).

The Melton Equestrian Park is located at the western end of MacPherson Park. The equestrian park is owned by Melton Council and leased by three equestrian groups – Melton & District Pony Club, which has operated at the site since 1996, Friends of Melton Equestrian Park, and Melton & District Adult Riding Club, which has operated at the site since 1985. The equestrian park is used each weekend for rider training, rallies, events and horse trials, while major rally days are held in January and July. Consultation with representatives of the pony clubs undertaken by AusNet indicated that members highly value the activities which the facility supports and that there is a high level of sentimental attachment to the site amongst members.

A Future Directions Paper and updated Master Plan for MacPherson Park was prepared in 2017 which identifies high, medium, and low priorities for the staged future development and investment in the site. The Future Directions Paper and updated Master Plan was endorsed by Melton City Council on 18 December 2017. Of note in the context of the SIA, the Master Plan (see Figure 4-15), indicates that the main entrance to the park would be moved to the south west corner of the site, with the existing entrance being downgraded to a secondary entrance.

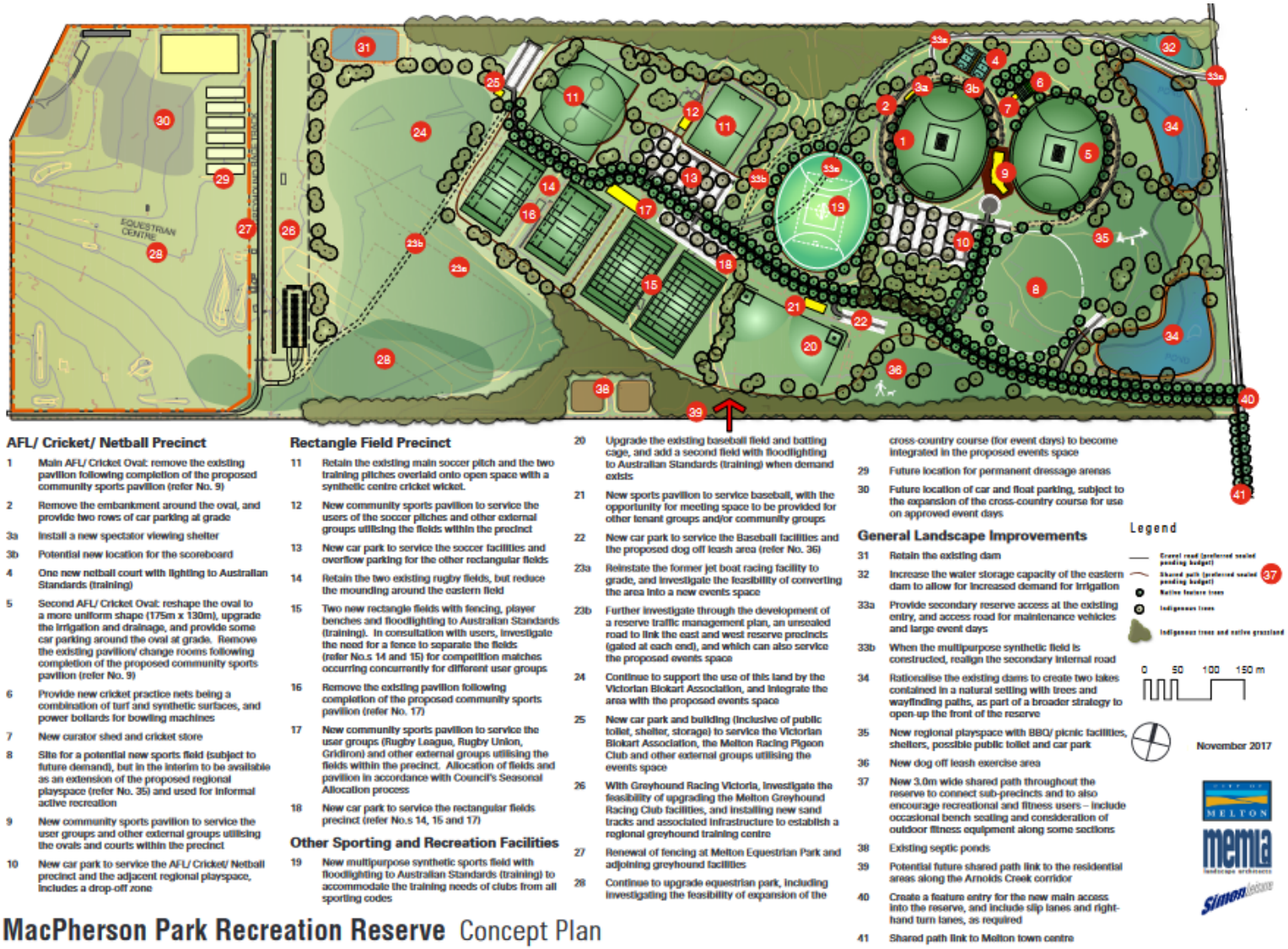

Figure 4-15: MacPherson Park Recreation Reserve: Concept Plan (source: City of Melton 2017)

- **Others** - To the south of Macpherson Park in the Green Wedge Zone there are a handful of community facilities, namely,
  - The Assembly Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses, a large facility which facilitates assemblies and conventions of Jehovah's Witnesses.
  - Melton West Memorial Park - A planned cemetery facility (Harkness Development) located at Minns Road and east of Harkness Road. A master plan for the cemetery has been developed which includes a 'cultural spine walkway' which runs north/south through the site and is intended to direct visitors' gaze northward towards Mount Sugarloaf.
  - Melton Christian College – newly developed campus offers education from Prep to Year 12
- Outdoor recreation
  - **Lerderderg State Park** is 20,000-hectare bushland area managed by Parks Victoria, which centres on a gorge cut by the Lerderderg River. The park is home to a wide variety of habitats and wildlife, and includes some goldmining relics. The park is used for a variety of outdoor recreational pursuits, including hiking, four-wheel driving, trail bike riding, bike riding, swimming, fishing, picnicking, and camping. Parks Victoria maintains six designated walks within the park, which range in length from 1 hour's walk to an overnight walk linking O'Briens Crossing to Mackenzies Flat (20 km) (see Appendix 3).

    The park can be accessed via Lerderderg Gorge Road in the south and O'Brien's Road in the north. Swans Road was also identified through consultation for the Project as providing access to Lerderderg State Park for bushwalkers, cyclists, and horse riders.

    The Mackenzies Flat Picnic Area is located in the south of the park and is a popular picnic spot. It includes barbeques, picnic tables, open lawned areas and access to the Lerderderg River. Grahams Dam is located about 1.6km kilometres from Mackenzies Flat and is a popular swimming hole on Lerderderg River. The Lerderderg Gorge Walk connects Mackenzies Flat Picnic Area to Grahams Dam, and also extends beyond Grahams Dam, linking to other walking trails.

    Several other picnic facilities and campgrounds are located in the northern part of the Lerderderg State Park, including O'Briens Crossing Picnic Area, Lerderderg Campground, Ambler Lane Campground, and Shaws Lake Picnic Area. These facilities are typically accessed via the township of Blackwood and the Bacchus Mark Gisborne Road.

    Community consultation for the EES highlighted Lerderderg State Park and the Mackenzies Flat Picnic Area as valued and well used community resources which attract people from the local area and beyond. To illustrate:

    The Lerderderg State Park is a beautiful nature spot that feels remote and wild even though it is very close and accessible to Melbourne (pinpoint near Lerderderg State Park).

    When I visit the Lerderderg State Park I feel immersed in nature with no man-made structures (pinpoint near Lerderderg State Park).

    Beautiful picnic area and the start of a gorgeous walking track through the Lerderderg Park (pinpoint near McKenzie's Flat).

    The Lerderderg State Park is used extensively by thousands of nature lovers, and bush walkers (pinpoint near Lerderderg State Park).

Figure 4-16: Lerderderg State Park: Mackenzies Flat Picnic Area

- **Merrimu Reservoir** is a Southern Rural Water asset which provides drinking water to local towns and irrigation water to the Werribee Irrigation District. The property includes a small public access area known as the Merrimu Picnic Area which comprises two shelters with seating, a BBQ and children's playground, as well as a car park and public toilet. The Merrimu Picnic Area offers a pleasant view across the reservoir (north-east). Access to the reservoir for any purpose including water sports is not permitted. Consultation undertaken for the EES indicates that community members consider the reservoir a visually beautiful location to socialise and relax. To illustrate:

  Views across lake Merrimu and a feeling of wellbeing (pinpoint near Merrimu Reservoir).

  A great recreational place to stop and picnic and enjoy the views (pinpoint near Merrimu Reservoir).

Figure 4-17: Merrimu Reservoir Picnic Area

- **Coimadai Memorial Park and Avenue of Honor -** Coimadai Memorial Park is located adjacent to the Merrimu Reservoir picnic area and includes a memorial garden, small pavilion and information boards commemorating the 129 volunteer service men and women from Coimadai who served in the World War I. ANZAC day services are held at the Memorial Park. Coimadai Avenue of Honour is located along Diggers Rest-Coimadai Road at the entrance to the memorial park and commemorates people from the district who served in World War I. The Avenue was replanted by community members in 2015 to replace the original Avenue that was lost under Merrimu Reservoir in 1967, with the current plantings comprising eucalypts. The Avenue extends from east of the Coimadai Memorial Park to Gisborne Road. Consultation with the Coimadai Avenue of Honour committee by AusNet and landscape and visual impact specialist (including the meeting attended by the author) indicated a desire to expand the Avenue of Honour.
- **Long Forest** is a 600-hectare protected woodland reserve, managed by Parks Victoria. The reserve contains a wide range of flora and fauna including 400 native plant species and 160 bird species including the only Bull Mallee south of the Great Dividing Range. Dogs are not permitted in the reserve, in order to protect an *important conservation space and its flora and fauna*.[16] There are no campgrounds, drinking water or toilets in the reserve, but visitors can enjoy a picnic at the Happy Valley Trailhead. There are also a number of Grade 3 walking tracks through the reserve which offer a *rewarding hike for well-prepared and self-sufficient walkers*. Community feedback collected through the EES process identified Long Forest as an area valued for its ecological diversity and as a beautiful location to connect with nature. To illustrate:

  Area of outstanding beauty with views from Steep Track back towards Lerderderg Gorge (pinpoint near Long Forest Reserve).

  Lovely views towards Bacchus Marsh with an incredibly varied terrain and wonderful and unique native plants (pinpoint near Long Forest Reserve).

[16] https://www.parks.vic.gov.au/

4.5.5 Tourism

Community submissions collected via the pinpoint tool, indicate that the scenic beauty of parts of Section 4, including natural reserves such as Lerderderg State Park, Long Forest and Mount Kororoit, and elevated views from locations in the vicinity of these natural areas, are notable drivers of tourist visitation. In line with this feedback, there are a number of bed and breakfast and farm stay style accommodation providers in Section 4, situated to capitalise on the area's scenic qualities (see Figure 4-11).

A full list of Tourism Business located in within 2km of the Proposed Route is provided in Appendix 2. Other tourism events and/or attractions of note in the context of the SIA are:

- Bald Hill Activation Area - In addition to providing recreational opportunities for the communities of Moorabool Shire and in particular, Darley and Bacchus Marsh, the Bald Hill Activation Area, is expected to be a substantial driver of tourist visitation. To illustrate, an assessment of the economic and social benefits of the Concept Plan[17] estimates that almost 200,000 people would visit the completed Regional Park from outside the immediate residential catchment, with walking being the most common reason for visiting (80,000 visits per annum). The study estimates that the benefit for the local economy would be approximately $3.3 million per annum, which would occur alongside benefits for locals and visitors to the area associated with social activity and exercise.
- Dingo Discovery Sanctuary and Research Centre – is a conservation facility specialising in Dingoes, set on 40 acres approximately 5 km north of Toolern Vale. The facility is home to 40 dingoes, and includes an Interpretative and Education Centre. The aims of the Centre include to educate the public on the Dingo's place in Australian ecosystems, and reverse the misconceptions surrounding the dingo. To this end the Centre offers private tours of the facility on request.
- Melton Airservices – operates from Melton Aerodrome and provides a variety of services including flight training, aircraft maintenance, refuelling, aircraft parking and hangarage services, Melton Airservices also provides charter flights, scenic tours/pleasure flights, and thus contributes to the tourism economy of the region (for further information refer to Technical Report J: Aviation Impact Assessment).

[17] Urban Enterprise (2019) Bald Hill Activation Plan – Final Report

5 Reactions to the Project

5.1 Introduction

This Section summarises the major issues and concerns raised by the community in relation to the Project, and informs the assessment of the Project's potential social impacts presented in Sections 7 and 8.

5.2 Land and Agriculture

The Project passes through non-urban areas and many of the properties directly affected[18] by the Project are used for agricultural production. As discussed above, agriculture is a significant source of employment and economic activity in Sections 1 and 2, and to lesser extent Sections 3 and 4. The proponent has been consulting with directly affected landholders since 2020, to determine the prevailing land use, discuss issues associated with hosting the proposed infrastructure, and gauge landholder sentiment with respect to the Project. Sentiment data[19] collected by AusNet were provided for 207 of the 222 directly affected private properties (current as at October 2024), along with other information relating to each property such as property size and land use. While the data have limitations, they provide insight into the level of Project support and opposition among affected landholders and the drivers of concern (see Table 5-1).

Table 5-1: Project Sentiment Among Directly Affected Landholders by Section, Size and Land Use

	Opposed	Undecided/Unknown	Supportive
Total	51.6%	19.3%	29.1%
Section			
Section 1	17.6%	24.3%	58.1%
Section 2	75.9%	10.3%	13.8%
Section 3	76.8%	16.1%	7.1%
Section 4	42.9%	28.6%	28.6%
Proportion of Affected Property Covered by Proposed Easement			
Coverage <2%	30.2%	32.6%	37.2%
Coverage 2% to 6%	53.3%	15.2%	31.5%
Coverage >6%	60.2%	17.0%	22.7%
Dwelling on Property			
Dwelling	54.8%	23.5%	21.7%
No Dwelling	48.1%	14.8%	37.0%
Predominant Agricultural Land Use			
Horticulture	93.1%	3.4%	3.4%
Cropping	60.3%	12.8%	26.9%
Grazing	33.3%	27.1%	39.6%
Equine	30.0%	40.0%	30.0%
Rural Living	50.0%	33.3%	16.7%

Source: AusNet 2024

[18] Directly affected properties are those which would accommodate Project infrastructure and/or the proposed easement.

[19] Sentiment and land use data were compiled based on the subjective judgment of AusNet Officers rather than self-reported values from landholders (See Appendix 1 for further detail). The sentiment data reflect sentiment at the time the data were compiled (October 2024) and the sentiment of individual landholders has the potential to vary through time. Reflecting these limitations, response categories in the source data set; "strongly opposed" and "opposed", as well as "strongly supportive" and "supportive", where combined.

As Table 5-1 shows, 51.6% of landholders were assessed by AusNet as being opposed to the Project, whereas only 29.1% were assessed as being supportive. The level of opposition/support varied substantially by study area Section, with only 17.6% of landholders in Section 1 being assessed as opposed compared with 75.9 and 76.8% in Sections 2 and 3, respectively. The data also show that landholders who practice horticulture and/or whose property accommodates a dwelling are more likely to oppose the Project. Similarly, where the proposed easement covers a higher proportion of the affected property, the landholder is more likely to oppose the Project.

Qualitative feedback collected through the AusNet Land Team, community consultation for the EES and SIA interviews along with the sentiment data, elicit a number of drivers of landholder sentiment along the Proposed Route.

- **Section 1** – rural landholders in Section 1 have faced considerable challenges in recent years in the face of natural disasters including flood and fire. These, along with the constant pressures associated with running agricultural enterprises in an environment of fluctuating commodity prices, rainfall, etc. have placed the community and particular individuals under considerable pressure. Notwithstanding, many rural landholders in Section 1 live and work alongside existing energy infrastructure, including windfarms and transmission lines and have to some extent developed a familiarity with, and tolerance of, this infrastructure. In addition, in Section 1 properties are typically larger, and grazing and cropping operations predominate. These factors combined underpin a lower level of opposition to the Project in Section 1 compared with other Sections.
- **Section 2** – horticultural enterprises relying on irrigation, such as potato farming businesses, are common in Section 2. These businesses operate on relatively small allotments, which produce a high financial yield per hectare. Reflecting this, farmers in Section 2 have developed highly specialised farming practices aimed at maximising the productivity of their land, including tailored irrigation and cropping machinery and techniques, crop rotations, ariel spraying, etc. Some farmers in Section 2 market their product under a collective banner to large corporate buyers, such as McCains, and provide each other with social and technical support. In this context, the Project, is seen as putting at risk particular enterprises and also the collective strength of an industry and community, which has been built by successive generations.
- **Section 3 –** The average size of directly affected properties in Section 3 is smaller than in other sections forming the study area, with grazing and lifestyle properties comprising almost 50% of properties directly affected by the Project. Reflecting this context, concerns raised by landholders in Section 3 commonly relate to a perceived threat to the integrity of their property and the beauty of their rural district. In some cases, landholders indicated that their property had been passed through their family for generations and/or holds great sentimental value, along-side concerns relating to lost agricultural productivity.
- **Section 4** – Land use in Section 4 is ‘eclectic’, and includes a number of specialised equine properties, rural lifestyle as well as grazing and cropping properties and an airfield. As such, concerns raised by landholders varied considerably, with only a minority concerned about lost agricultural productivity. In some cases properties are held by land speculators, whose concerns focussed on implications of the Project for the development potential of their land. Nevertheless, a wide variety of circumstances exist in Section 4, including landholders who rely on farm income for their financial wellbeing and/or have intergenerational/sentimental ties to their property.

In addition to the concerns prevalent in each study area Section, along the entire route, landholders whose business depends on breeding high quality horses and/or cattle, raised concerns about the potential of the Project to affect the health and fertility of their stock.

5.3 Rural Character and Amenity[20]

Visual Amenity

Feedback from the communities located along the Proposed Route was consistently negative with regard to the appearance of the proposed infrastructure (typically described as ugly, an eyesore, etc) and its expected incongruence with prevailing landscape qualities. Concerns were raised in the context of valued landscape features (such as rural vistas, mountains and mountain ranges, volcanic cones and plains), the visual setting of particular homes and properties and community facilities (such as outdoor recreation areas, reservoirs and sporting complexes) as well as focal points for tourism. In many instances, feedback from the community was expressed using strong language, and suggested that the appeal of various locations would be substantially diminished by the Project, undermining benefits individuals obtain when spending time in the identified places (see Table 5-2).

Feedback received in Section 1 and the eastern part of Section 4 (Melton and Hillside), while negative in the main, was moderated by the prevailing context, which includes the presence of transmission infrastructure in Section 1, and a highly eclectic and evolving peri-urban landscape in Section 4. In contrast, voluminous and very negative feedback was received from residents of Darley and surrounds, and from throughout Sections 2 and 3.

When providing feedback regarding the Project's potential impact on visual amenity, it was common for community members to suggest that the Project should be built underground, and furthermore to suggest that, if this approach was used the majority of the Project's potential negative impacts would be ameliorated.

Health and Safety

Concerns regarding the potential effect of the Project on the health and safety of individuals who live and/or spend time in locations near the Project were commonly raised. Concerns generally related to:

- Electric and magnetic fields (EMF) - some community members indicated they fear that at close range, EMF emitted from the Project may have implications for human health and the health of livestock.
- Stress – the prospect that the Project may reduce the amenity of valued homes and locations was reported to be a source of stress by some community members, which was affecting their mental health.
- Bushfire Risk – Across the Proposed Route and in particular in the vicinity of Darley, community members reported they believe the Project will increase the risk of bush fires, inhibit movement along the road network by individuals seeking to flee bushfires, and inhibit firefighting, by placing restrictions on movement of aerial firefighting craft, their re-filling (from local water bodies), etc.

Feedback from the community with respect to potential implications of the Project for the health and safety of the community were commonly couched in the context of the peaceful, beautiful and clean environment that community members currently enjoy and their desire to maintain these qualities of their local area for themselves, their children and future generations (see Table 5-2).

[20] Data collected via the community consultation for the EES (as reported in Appendix V), SIA interviews with CAG and CCG members and direct interactions between the SIA Author and community members (landholder interviews and attendance at open house sessions) and 'pinpoint data', informed development of this Section.

5.4 Connection to Place

Feedback provided by residents living near the Project indicates a pride in and attachment to, various 'places' located near the Project. A 'place' or rather 'meaningful location', is a subjective construct, which reflects the nature of a physical setting, the activity that occurs there and the meaning attributed to this activity.[21] Various physical and social factors are associated with locations becoming 'meaningful enough' for place attachments to form, including but not limited to: distinctive physical attributes; time spent in the location and/or intergenerational occupation; home or land ownership; positive/significant life experiences; and social ties and networks among residents/users of the place.[22]

Where place attachments arise, this may have beneficial effects. For example, people with higher place attachment report greater social and political involvement in their communities, and communities comprised of highly attached people are more likely to work together to achieve a collective goal. Relatedly, the strength of emotional bonds people feel with places can contribute to their sense of identity (individually and as a member of a community), may manifest as a sense of stewardship in relation to the place, aspirations for intergenerational transmission of their way of life, etc. and may contribute to an individual's perceived quality of life, health and wellbeing.[23] Relatedly, and of relevance to this SIA, place attachment may influence a person's willingness to accept change, including that introduced by infrastructure projects.[24]

When raising concerns about the Project's potential effect on agriculture, visual amenity and health and safety, community members typically did so in term of factors associated with the experience of place attachment. For example, many indicated they/their family has lived in an area or on a particular property for generations, or recently moved to an area and bought a house, to live in a beautiful and restful setting, access a peaceful rural lifestyle, raise a family, etc. Others have indicated they are intimately connected to their land, which they have worked to improve, is their source of income, place of work and their home. To illustrate:

> *This is our home! We have loved every minute we have lived here and it is going to be destroyed by putting a power line directly out our front door. We, along with our whole rural community are heartbroken. GO UNDERGROUND (pinpoint near Myrniong)*
>
> *This is also our home. A home where we have built a house, raised children, planted an organic kitchen garden, raised livestock and embraced country life and its community (pinpoint near Springbank).*

[21] see Cresswell, T. (2004)

[22] see Lewicka (2011)

[23] See Lingard & Turner (2023)

[24] Marques et al. (2015)

Table 5-2: Selected 'Pinpoints' (direct quotes submitted via AusNet's online feedback tool) [25]

Topic	Section 2	Section 3	Section 4
Visual Amenity - Local Area	▪ Huge, ugly power pylons would do great damage to the aesthetic values of this part of Victoria. ▪ The negative impact on the economic, scenic, productive value of this region cannot easily be calculated, let alone the amenity of an area of indisputable natural beauty. The proposal to place the lines above ground will permanently affect this area. ▪ Towers will destroy views for all residences and tourists of this area. ▪ I love to visit Mount Beckworth for the natural heritage and the beautiful scenic views. A power line would really decrease the amenity of the land. I would hate to look out from the summit at a big power line. ▪ The township of Kingston enjoys uninterrupted views towards the Pyrenees. The natural beauty of the region would be significantly degraded by ugly high-transmission towers.	▪ Building powerlines through this area will create devastating visual pollution to the landscape (hill views) and adversely impact the value of this land now and for future generations. ▪ How could you destroy this view with powerlines? ▪ These massive towers will destroy the widely held view of the region as being a clean, green, healthy, semi-rural lifestyle, surrounded by pleasant landscapes and natural assets ▪ Your towers will decimate this pristine area. ▪ This entire area (Moorabool Reservoir) of beautiful natural and cultural value will be ruined with the monstrosity of the towers	▪ I have played here my whole life and don't want it to be ruined by the power lines. ▪ The amenity of the Lerderderg State Park will be destroyed by having 85m tall high voltage powerlines across this landscape ▪ We live here to raise our children surrounded by nature, not power lines!! ▪ By having the power lines running through the bush would ruin the amazing views and the area that is my home, where I play with my friends and grow with my family. ▪ The reason we moved to this area, is to the beautiful nature that we have here. Power lines are not part of mother nature design and will impact the view. ▪ Views across lake Merrimu (provide) a feeling of wellbeing. pls don't destroy this area with old tech transmission lines. ▪ The aesthetic of this area is crucial to the quality of life of those who have chosen to live here. ▪ Sporting reserve (Macpherson Park) used by multiple sports and sporting clubs. Seems absurd to have to place these on clearly marked locations of social and recreational use. Then again it seems absurd that someone would consider over ground eyesores in such a beautiful setting.

[25] While extensive feedback from the community was received via the pinpoint online mapping tool, no 'pins' were placed in Section 1.

Visual Amenity - Homes and properties	• The untarnished rural views of the approach are critical to the status of this iconic property. • Our place is surrounded by this corridor. We have built our whole life in Kingston around this view. • Our beautiful views would be destroyed if 80 m towers were near us and our property value would go down. Please don't build near our house. • Too close to house 100 YEARS OLD. Home stead been in family for generations	▪ Family Farm that is home to my children. They work the farm alongside me and this is their backyard where they can live, play and grow up surrounded by nature NOT 500KV OVERHEAD TRANSMISSION LINE ▪ Don't you dare put a TOWER in this bottom paddock in front of the house. The house has views over Melbourne, over Port Philip Bay through to the Dandenongs and Mt Macedon and the city lights sparkle. This home is situated to capture that. ▪ This is our home we have worked hard our entire lives to get such a property, we have amazing views, hundreds of birds, extensive wildlife, ancient trees - with your towers we will lose all of this and you will destroy my spirt and kill me. ▪ This is our farm and our workplace and our home. We do not want towers destroying our beautiful farm	▪ Our view is our life our home is our life. We put blood sweat and tears into our home, we love this area the birds love this area, the upset and trauma this is putting on our family stress is unbearable you must go underground. ▪ Many people choose to live in this area specifically for the amazing views. Having huge towers obscuring these views would be an extreme eyesore. ▪ Beautiful scenic views will be destroyed by these proposed towers, rendering the total area an eyesore for the hundreds of people who call this area their homes. Serenity for all will be destroyed. ▪ We moved into Darley recently, specifically for the amazing views. We paid significant real estate price to obtain the views here in Darley, Power lines coming through our "Backyard" would spoil the landscape ▪ Our house is on the top of a hill giving us 360-degree views of the natural surrounds including the nearby Lerderderg State Park. The property's name is Panorama as the view is so spectacular. If these unsightly towers are placed as proposed, we will lose everything.

Visual Amenity-Tourism	▪ Kangaroo Hills volcanic landscape. Important to the attractiveness of the area to the many tourists who come here each year. ▪ We have built a country home for our children that we also use as a source of income on the short stay holiday let market. The rural vistas of this property will be undeniably decimated if 80m towers are installed along the rear of our property ▪ The Midland Highway is a primary tourist route with significant landscape features, of which the current corridor directly intersects both physically and visually. The lattice transmission line would be a visually dominant element in the landscape	▪ Our business relies heavily on the natural environment and aesthetic outlook enjoyed by our customers and this will not be possible with the towers ▪ Views that inspire and draw customers and visitors to our property. This Melbourne view eastward will be inhibited by towers, thus hurting our business model and our lifestyle	▪ Bald Hill is the proposed site of a major funded local tourism project to construct 1001 steps to the peak of BaldHill to take in the views. This project will be significantly affected if the overhead transmission lines proceed. ▪ These massive towers will destroy the widely held view of the region as being a clean, green, healthy, semi-rural lifestyle, surrounded by pleasant landscapes and natural assets. Devaluing the 'appeal' of the region will have flow-on effects and will impact tourism ▪ Overhead transmission infrastructure will reduce the appeal for recreational tourist. This distinctive landscape is scarce within the context of the broader regional landscape, in close proximity to Melbourne. It attracts over 500,000 visitors annually.
Health and Wellbeing	▪ Family home with young children who would bear the risk of many health issues if the powerline is erected nearby. ▪ Unknown health risks to local families. ▪ Children are here, our future should not be anywhere near these giant powerlines, the health of children should come first. Too close to the school.	• These proposed towers are already having profound mental health and physiological impacts to those who may be impacted • Our farm is not only our means of support but also our ability to maintain our mental health. Your towers are already causing anxiety and depression among many people along this route. They will take away all sense of our security and peacefulness. • This is tearing the heart and soul out of the community, the amount mental health issues is not being addressed which has been introduced into our community • I am cognisant of the health impact particularly cancer from power lines. I would be concerned living so close to them. • I have a hearing sensitivity, a constant buzzing from EMF towers will deteriorate my mental health and disable me.	• I moved here for better mental health. Quiet, calm, country living. Now you want to destroy this for me? Destroying my views, destroying the landscape and destroying the rural atmosphere. I am emotionally gutted over this. • We purchased our land and built our dream home here. for the amazing views this area is known for. We want to continue to let our children grow up in our amazing location without the fear of long-term health effects • I repair analogue music and audio equipment and use sensitive test meters and analyser equipment to perform the design and repair work, these instruments are highly sensitive to [electomagnetic interference]. The high-tension power lines will cause interference.

Fire Risk	▪ This area is a high-risk bushfire zone surrounded by bush and pasture. Why would you increase the chance of bushfire in any area? ▪ This is a high-risk bushfire area with very strong winds. There are state forests and native bushland. The fire damage caused by aboveground powerlines is now well known. ▪ I would have concerns regarding fires if powerlines were erected here ▪ In the event of a fire the CFA can't fight due to the transmission lines,	• As residents and as a business this in our only access to and from the property. In the event of high winds and/or fire these towers have been know to fall (ie Cressy, Victoria) and this would trap us and make any escape not possible. • Communities north of the proposed line need this road to exit in the regular occurrence of bushfire. Don't trap these communities in the forest. An overhead transmission line will leave people in these communities feeling unacceptably unsafe and at grav • One of only two roads out of Greendale/Dales Creek in case of bushfire. High risk of bushfire in these areas.	• The northern area of Darley is currently supplied mostly by underground power. It would be ludicrous to negate these fire-risk abatement measures by installing 500kV overhead power lines on 85m towers in the area between Darley and Lerderderg State Park. • Single escape road in event of a bushfire. You cannot in your right mind put dangerous power towers over a one way in one way out single lane road. This is going to trap all Swans Road Residents past these towers in the event of a fire. ▪ Huge bushfire risk installing above ground towers and lines, especially right next to a huge state forest! Do the recommendations in the Bushfire Royal Commission mean nothing? • Private land adjoining the Lerderderg State Park and patches of forest is at extremely high risk of bushfire. The overhead powerlines will increase risk and put people lives and property in danger.

6 Impact Assessment

6.1 Introduction

Potential social impacts associated with the construction and operational stages of the Project are discussed in Sections 7 and 8 below, in terms of the impact pathways identified in the scoping phase (see Table 6-1). Impacts associated with the decommissioning stage are discussed in Section 9.

As with all infrastructure projects, discrete social impacts may occur during the Project's construction stage and/or in association with the operation and decommissioning of the proposed infrastructure. However, it is also possible that the construction stage would initiate a process of environmental and social change, with impacts for receptors being experienced holistically, over time.

For the purposes of the SIA, it is assumed that all mitigation measures proposed in other impact assessments are adopted and form part of the Project (relevant measures are reiterated where this was considered helpful). In addition, where necessary and appropriate, through the SIA process additional modifications to the Project were suggested, and where these have been adopted by the proponent, are also assumed to form part of the Project. That is, the SIA assesses residual impacts of the Project, after the application of the management measures which form part of the Project at the time of writing.

Table 6-1: Scoping the SIA

Impact Pathway	Relevant social effect	Relevant Receptors	Stage
Workforce and Social Profile	▪ Employment and training opportunities created by the Project contribute to socio-economic sustainability in the study area. ▪ Influx of workers creates additional demand for community facilities and services	▪ Existing communities ▪ Users of community facilities and services & housing market participants.	▪ Construction, Operation and Decommissioning
Land Use and Amenity	▪ Occupation of land displaces current land use	▪ Owners and occupiers of directly affected land.	▪ Construction, Operation and Decommissioning
	▪ Limits on use of land and air space, interferes with business activities, including agricultural activities.	▪ Owners and occupiers of directly affected and nearby land.	
	▪ Alterations to the amenity and character of locations in proximity to the proposed transmission route.	▪ Occupants of nearby dwellings. ▪ Residents of surrounding areas ▪ Users of nearby community facilities and open spaces. ▪ Operators/employees of Tourism Businesses	

7 Workforce and Social Profile

7.1 Introduction

This Section outlines how the Project's workforce would affect the social profile of existing communities during construction and operation and assesses potential impacts for relevant social receptors.

Throughout the SIA process, the potential effect of the Project's construction workforce on demand for housing and community services in the study area was identified as having the potential to result in severe social impacts (refer to Chapter 5, Project development). To avoid these impacts, the Project was amended to incorporate provision of two workforce accommodation facilities, one near Lexton, the other near Ballan, which would have capacity to accommodate all construction workers, as part of a broader Operational Management Plan for the workforce accommodation facilities. For the purpose of the SIA, it has been assumed that the Operational Management Plan would include the following elements:

- A commitment to develop two workforce accommodation facilities, one near Lexton, the other near Ballan (also see Section 8.2.1). The facilities would have capacity to accommodate up to 350 workers each. The facilities would include individual accommodation units, communal kitchen and meals area, laundry, gym facilities, mobile services and boosters (where feasible), internet and Wi-Fi boosters (where feasible), serviced cleaning and kitchen facilities.
- A commitment that all construction workers working on the Project who live outside the region and cannot commute to work from their current residence would be required to reside within the workforce accommodation facilities, while on a rostered shift and return to their permanent place of residence on rostered breaks, unless otherwise agreed with the relevant Local Authorities.
- Details regarding the manner in which workers would be transported from the workforce accommodation facilities to the relevant worksite, working hours, rostering and rotations.
- A protocol for managing worker access to settlements in proximity to workforce accommodation facilities. The management protocol would limit visits to essential trips, unless otherwise agreed with the relevant Local Authorities.
- A commitment to service the workforce accommodation facilities with medical services. A consulting space would be developed within the facilities for provision of the services. The nominated medical professionals would be available on-call and via programmed visits, to attend to the medical needs of workers.

Alongside the Operational Management Plan, AusNet would develop the following:

- A Code of Conduct - AusNet would develop a Code of Conduct which sets outs AusNet's expectations of staff when interacting with members of the local community. The Code of Conduct would include as a minimum, matters relating to dress standards and alcohol consumption.
- A Local Jobs First Policy and Local Industry Development Plan - the aim of which would be that AusNet recruits as many of the required employees from within local community as possible, and delivers training and upskilling, including through apprenticeships, traineeships, and cadetships.

The impact assessment below outlines residual impacts assuming the management measures outlined above form part of the Project and are implemented.

7.2 Social Effects

Workforce

During construction, the total approximate peak workforce is 700 personnel, shared across:

- Two work crews (east and west) for the line totalling 600 personnel (a portion of these workers (50) will also work on the terminal stations as listed below)
- Approximately 110 personnel for the construction stage works at the existing Bulgana Terminal Station and the new terminal station nearby
- Approximately 40 personnel for the construction of the Sydenham Terminal Station connection works.

AusNet will develop a Local Jobs First Policy and Local Industry Development Plan for the Project, the aim of which would be that employment opportunities created by the Project can be accessed by local residents, including through training and upskilling programs such as apprenticeships, traineeships, and cadetships, and it is AusNet's intention to recruit as many of the required employees from within the local community as possible. However, given the size of the local labour force and the specialised nature of some of the work, a large majority of the construction positions associated with the line and the new terminal station near the existing Bulgana Terminal Station would be filled by workers living beyond commuting distance from the worksites, and these workers would reside in the proposed workforce accommodation facilities. With regard to the workforce for the connection to the Sydenham Terminal Station, it is expected that all employees would be sourced from, or would take residence within, Melbourne, Bacchus Marsh, etc.

A relatively small workforce (peaking at up to 80 workers across the two sites) over six months, would be needed to construct the proposed worker accommodation facilities (pre-construction stage). The nature of this work (generic construction work) is such that a large proportion of workers would be expected to be sourced from nearby communities, including centres such as Ballarat (within a 45-minute commute of each of the worksites) and Ballan. It is possible that some workers may be 'imported' to the region, however the numbers would likely be small.

During operation, limited personnel would be required as the transmission system (including the terminal stations) would be operated remotely. AusNet staff would conduct tasks such as routine station inspections and visit the stations and/or the transmission line to respond to faults and complaints. However, the number of staff conducting this work would be small and these workers would not necessarily live in the study area.

Housing

During pre-construction (construction of the worker accommodation facilities), there would be a small uplift in demand for short-stay accommodation in nearby towns, within an approximately 45 minute commute of the facilities. Workers who do not live locally would find accommodation in existing hotels/motels, etc, (for example in Ballarat), and in doing so make a minor contribution to the ongoing viability of the short-stay accommodation sector in the region.

During construction of the transmission line, all workers working on the transmission line and the new terminal station near the existing Bulgana Terminal Station who are recruited from outside the local area would reside in the proposed workforce accommodation facilities. These workers would work on rotation and return to their place of residence during break periods and would not bring partners or dependent children to live in the workforce accommodation facilities. As a result, the Project would not generate any additional demand for short stay accommodation or conventional housing (rental or purchase) outside of Metropolitan Melbourne during the construction period.

During operation, the effect of the Project on demand for housing in the study area would be negligible.

Community Facilities and Services

The proposed workforce accommodation facilities would be largely self-contained and include accommodation and recreational facilities such as gym facilities, limiting the dependence of workers on community and recreational facilities located in nearby settlements.

At present there are notable shortages of medical professionals such as GPs in areas located near the proposed workforce accommodation facilities (see Table 7-1). However, the proposal to service the workforce accommodation facilities with medical services would mean that demand for primary health care generated by the construction workforce would be met onsite, and not influence the accessibility of these services for existing communities.

Table 7-1: Adequacy of Provision of GP Services, Selected Areas (Adequacy of GP Supply indicates the level of over/undersupply of GPs relative to a desired level of supply of GPs set by the Department of Health).

SIA Section	Workforce Accommodation Facility	Relevant GP Planning Catchment	Adequacy of GP Supply
Section 1	Near Lexton	Ararat	Greater than 10% less than benchmark level
		Beaufort	Between 5% and 10% less than benchmark level
		Maryborough	Between 5% and 10% less than benchmark level
Section 3	Near Ballan	Ballan	Between 1% and 5% less than benchmark level

Source: Department of Health (DoH) (2022)

In the event of a medical emergency, local services may be relied upon. Notwithstanding, any the uplift in demand for emergency medical services such as ambulance and hospital services would likely be met by existing services in Ballarat, and would be small in the context of these services which are designed to meet the needs of a large regional centre and surrounding areas.

During pre-construction and operation, the effect of the Project on demand for community facilities and services in the study area would be negligible.

Social Cohesion

The proposed workforce accommodation facilities would include a communal kitchen and meals area, laundry, gym facilities, mobile services and boosters (where feasible), internet and Wi-Fi boosters (where feasible), and serviced cleaning and kitchen facilities. Moreover, workers would spend relatively short periods within the workforce accommodation facilities, and return to their permanent place of residence on rostered breaks. In this context, in large part the recreational and social needs of workers would be provided for within the facilities, limiting the need for workers to visit nearby settlements.

Nevertheless, workers may wish to access settlements in proximity to workforce accommodation facilities during their stay. In Section 1 in particular (and to a lesser in extent in Section 3) the population of nearby settlements is small and in the case of Amphitheatre (57), Elmhurst (139), Waubra (159) and Lexton (183) substantially smaller than the projected peak population of the workforce accommodation facilities.

AusNet, as part of the proposed Operational Management Plan for the workforce accommodation facilities, intends to develop protocols to manage worker access to settlements in proximity to worker accommodation facilities, outside of working hours, which limits visits to essential visits only.

7.3 Social Impacts[26]

The proposal to accommodate construction workers in purpose-built, fully-equipped workforce accommodation facilities would reduce interactions between the existing communities of the study area and the construction workforce. Similarly, in pre-construction (construction of the worker accommodation facilities) and operation the workforce would be small and during operation workers may not live in the study area, limiting the influence of the workforce on existing social conditions. That is, assuming the Operational Management Plan for the workforce accommodation facilities is implemented as planned, the migration of workers to the study area to construct and operate the Project would not produce material social impacts due to its effect on housing markets or demand for community facilities and services.

If and when construction workers visit nearby settlements, this has the potential to generate both positive and negative impacts. For example, workers may spend money at local businesses and in this way contribute to the local economy. However, given the size of the construction workforce relative to the population of the surrounding townships and the mismatch between the likely profile of the workforce (predominately younger males) and existing communities, the construction workforce has the potential to be highly visible within existing communities, and exert a dominant influence on social dynamics within publicly accessibly locations, such as pubs and restaurants, commercial centres, etc.

A code of conduct would be developed by AusNet to manage the behaviour of construction workers when interacting with existing community members. Nevertheless, if large groups of workers visit surrounding township *en masse*, this may be unsettling and potentially intimidating for existing community members who are accustomed to life in small rural settlements. Moreover, the unpopular status of the Project within sections of the existing communities has the potential to catalyse negative interactions between workers and existing community members, amplifying any effects the presence of construction workers may have on social cohesion and perceptions of comfort and safety. In the above context, the proposal to manage worker access to nearby townships under a strict management protocol, represents a sensible approach.

[26] *The establishment and operation of the proposed workforce accommodation facilities may also have implications for the amenity of nearby locations including rural dwellings (see Section 8.5.1).*

The Project would generate a small amount of employment which may be potentially accessible to existing residents of the study area, and in this way make a minor contribution to the economic and social sustainability of existing communities.

7.4 Environmental Performance Requirements (EPR)

AusNet will construct two workforce accommodation facilities for the Project, one near Lexton, the other near Ballan. The design and construction of the workforce accommodation facilities is addressed in the Draft Incorporated Document that forms part of the Draft Planning Scheme Amendment for the Project, while the operation of the workforce accommodation facilities during the construction stage of the Project will be managed in accordance with the EPRs.

Specifically, Condition 4.13.6 of the Draft Incorporated Document is as follows:

> *4.13.6 Before use of the temporary Workforce Accommodation sites starts an Operational Management Plan (OMP) must be prepared in consultation with the relevant Council, and must be approved and endorsed by the Minister for Planning. The OMP must include:*
>
> *a) Details of staffing and management arrangements.*
>
> *b) Information about the manner in which workers will be transported from the Workforce Accommodation facilities to the relevant worksite, including working hours, rostering and rotations.*
>
> *c) A protocol for managing worker access to settlements in proximity to Workforce Accommodation facilities.*
>
> *d) Information about arrangements for medical services to be available on-call and via programmed visits, to attend to the medical needs of workers if required.*
>
> *e) Complaint management procedures.*

It is proposed that each facility has capacity to accommodate up to 350 workers and includes individual accommodation units, communal kitchen and meals area, laundry, gym facilities, mobile services and boosters (where feasible), internet and Wi-Fi boosters (where feasible), and serviced cleaning. It is also proposed that each facility includes a consulting space for provision of medical services. Through the conditions of the Draft Incorporated Document, AusNet will be required to develop and implement the EPRs and an overarching Environmental Management Framework. Together with Condition 4.13.6 of the Draft Incorporated Document, EPRs SC1, SC2 and SC3 are proposed to enable avoidance and mitigation of potential social impacts relating to alterations to the social profile of the study area (Table 7-2).

Table 7-2: Proposed EPRs - Workforce and Social Profile

EPR Ref.	Requirement	Project component	Stage
SC1	**Avoid and minimise potential negative social impacts of the Project construction workforce** 1. Subject to 2 below, each Operational Management Plan for workforce accommodation facilities required by the draft Incorporated Document condition 4.13.6 must include the following to avoid and minimise potential negative social impacts of the Project construction workforce on surrounding communities: a) A commitment that all construction workers working on the Project who cannot commute safely to work from their current residence will be required to reside within the workforce accommodation facilities while on a rostered shift and return to their permanent place of residence on rostered breaks. b) The management protocol for worker access to settlements in proximity to the workforce accommodation facilities must limit visits to essential trips. c) A commitment to service the workforce accommodation facilities with medical services and to have nominated medical professionals available on call and via programmed visits, to attend to the medical needs of workers. 2. Despite 1(a) and 1(b) above, alternative arrangements may be agreed with the relevant Local Authorities and reflected in the relevant Operational Management Plan so as to increase potential positive socioeconomic outcomes of the Project construction stage, while avoiding and minimising to the extent practicable potential negative social impacts. This includes but is not limited to measures that seek to: i. Utilise existing available accommodation in the areas surrounding the Project without resulting in negative effects on housing availability or affordability for local communities, or on the availability of tourist accommodation. ii. Allow non-essential trips to larger towns and urban centres under specific circumstances, while avoiding non-essential trips to smaller townships.	Workforce	Design, Construction
SC2	**Develop and implement a Code of Conduct to avoid and minimise potential social impacts of the construction workforce** 1. Prior to construction commencing, develop and implement a Code of Conduct for the Project workforce in consultation with local councils to avoid and minimise the potential for negative social impacts of the construction workforce on local communities. 2. The Code of Conduct must set out AusNet's expectations of staff when interacting with members of the local community. 3. The Code of Conduct must address matters relating to dress standards and alcohol consumption. 4. The Code of Conduct must stipulate the protocols for worker access to settlements as per EPR SC1. 5. Compliance with the Code of Conduct must be required of all staff and non compliances investigated and responded to in accordance with misconduct and disciplinary action protocols defined in the Code of Conduct.	Workforce	Design, Construction

EPR Ref.	Requirement	Project component	Stage
SC3	**Develop and implement initiatives to maximise employment opportunities for local communities, First Nations people and vulnerable and disadvantaged groups** 1. Prior to construction commencing, develop and implement a plan to maximise potential benefits of the Project with regard to employment opportunities for local communities, First Nations people and vulnerable and disadvantaged groups. 2. The local employment initiatives must: i. Aim to recruit as many as possible of the required employees for the Project from within local communities. ii. Include strategies focused on employment of First Nations people, apprentices, trainees, people with disability and women. iii. Support local workforce growth by hiring regional Victorian workers, particularly those under 25. 3. The plan must include a commitment to deliver training and upskilling, including through apprenticeships, traineeships, and cadetships.	Workforce	Design, Construction

7.5 Summary of Residual Impacts

Table 7-3: Summary of Residual Impacts - Workforce and Social Profile

Section	Receptor	Changes & Impacts	Construction		Operation
			Pre-EPR	Residual	Residual
Sections 1-4	Established Communities	▪ Imported workers increase demand for housing and community facilities and services within established communities leading to housing stress and limiting service accessibility.	▪ Severe Negative	▪ Negligible	▪ Negligible
Sections 1-4		▪ Minor uplift in employment opportunities and the spending of imported workers, contributes to economic and social sustainability during construction.	▪ Minor Positive	▪ Moderate - Minor Positive	▪ Negligible
Section 1 & 3		▪ The presence of workers in existing settlements is unsettling and potentially intimidating for existing community members, leading to reduced social cohesion and negatively affecting perceptions of comfort and safety.	▪ Major Negative	▪ Negligible	▪ Negligible

8 Land Use and Amenity

8.1 Introduction

This Section describes how the Project would change the way that land is used and the amenity and aesthetic quality of locations near the Project and assesses potential impacts for relevant social receptors. The following classes of receptor are relevant in this context:

- Directly Affected Landholders - who may be affected by the presence of the Project on their property.
- Surrounding Landholders - who may be affected by the presence of the Project in their immediate environs.
- The Broader Community - who may be affected by the presence of the Project within their local area/district including at locations where they gather to socialise, engage in sports, etc.
- Tourism Businesses Operators - who may be affected by the presence of the Project in their immediate environs.

The above classes are not mutually exclusive. For example, directly affected landholders may live in a residence where the effects of the Project are directly perceptible, and also form part of the broader community. Notwithstanding, the nature of the Project's effects and impacts for each the above groups is qualitatively different and thus discussed separately below.

As stated in Section 6, for the purposes of the SIA, it is assumed that all mitigation measures proposed in other impact assessments are adopted by the proponent and form part of the Project. These include but are not limited to:[27]

- EM5 – Develop and implement a Communications and Stakeholder Engagement Management Plan (inclusive of procedures to support access to independent and confidential mental health support services for landholders and surrounding landholders).
- EM10 - Develop and implement a Residential Mitigation and Support Strategy
- EC1 – Develop and implement a Business Mitigation and Support Strategy for directly affected businesses
- EC3 – Develop and implement a Business Mitigation and Support Strategy for eligible businesses within 2km
- AF1 – Develop and implement an Agriculture and Forestry Business Mitigation and Support Strategy.
- LV1 – Minimise visual impacts – Public domain
- LV2 – Minimise visual impacts – Private domain landscape screening program.
- EM2 – Develop and implement a Construction Environmental Management Plan
- NV1 – Develop and implement a Construction Noise and Vibration Management Plan. The Plan would incorporate a commitment to sequence construction to avoid impacting community facilities and events located in close proximity to the transmission route, during periods of high sensitivity and use.

The SIA also recognises that Directly Affected Landholders would receive financial compensation for the acquisition of the easement over their land, whether through voluntary agreement with the Proponent or via the provisions of the *Land Acquisition and Compensation Act 1986* (Vic). It is noted here that Act states that offers of compensation must account for any lost economic productivity of land, reasonable costs of any adaptations to enable continued use of the land, reductions in the market value of affected properties, etc. That is, the Act

[27] A full description of each EPR can be found in Chapter 29 of the EES.

provides for provision of compensation that returns the affected landholder to the same financial position 'but for' the Project.

8.2 Social Effects

8.2.1 Directly Affected Land - Private Properties

Along the length of the Proposed Route, an easement would be created ranging in width generally from 70m to 100m (and no narrower than 55m and no wider than 115m). Within the easement, at typical intervals of approximately 450 to 550 metres, transmission towers would be installed. During the construction period, existing land uses would be excluded from the easement (several weeks) and the terminal sites and laydown areas (up to two years)[28], with full rehabilitation of land taking up to one additional year. Furthermore, construction activity would be a source of noise, dust and traffic, which may affect the amenity and potentially the accessibility (through severance) of adjacent land.

The majority of affected land holdings currently support some form of agricultural production and where this is the case, the construction stage may result in lower productivity and financial losses for landholders. The extent of losses in each case would vary substantially depending on amount of land affected by the construction area and the consistency (or otherwise) of construction with prevailing farm management practices. Technical Report H: Agriculture and Forestry Impact Assessment, indicates that losses, while not significant in the context of regional output, may be potentially significant in the context of particular land holdings and businesses. During operation, the Project would continue to influence the way that land within and near the easement can be used. For example, transmission towers would exclude land uses within their footprint for the operational life of the Project and various restrictions would apply to use of land within the easement to allow for the safe operation of the Project (Table 8-1 provides some examples of particular relevance to the SIA).

Table 8-1: Examples of Proposed Land Use Restrictions within 500kV transmission line easement

Activity	Conditions
Buildings	▪ Not permitted
Crops and vegetation	▪ Mature tree and shrub growth of up to 3m in height is permitted. For vegetation above 3m in height, an AusNet safety assessment is required to maintain minimum clearances and fuel load densities. Maximum height cannot exceed 8m ▪ Planting trees and shrubs should be scattered or clumped with no more than 10% density of cover over the easement area.
Grazing of Livestock	▪ No conditions
Vehicles	▪ Vehicles up to 5m in height can operate under the lines. ▪ Vehicles between 5m and 8.6m may be able to operate under the lines subject to an AusNet safety assessment ▪ Maximum height cannot exceed 8.6m
Irrigation	▪ Centre pivot and lateral moving irrigators are permitted to operate up to 8.6m height, subject to an AusNet safety assessment. ▪ Large water spray irrigators of the gun type are not permitted to operate within the easement due to safety risks and potential damage to electricity infrastructure
Aerial crop spraying	▪ Manned aircraft and unmanned aerial vehicles are prohibited within the transmission line easement.
Dams	▪ Coverage of entire width of easement by dams is not permitted ▪ Dams cannot be located within a 30m radius of any tower centre
Fencing	▪ All fixed metallic parts must be earthed and are subject to prior approval from AusNet

[28] It is noted here that owners of the properties on which the laydown areas will be located have reached a commercial agreement with the proponent.

A quantitative assessment of lost production during operation is not provided in Technical Report H: Agriculture and Forestry Impact Assessment, as this would relate primarily to potential alterations to land management and farming practices (as opposed to the direct exclusion of the prevailing land use). However, with respect to the main agricultural activities which occur on private land affected by the Project, the report notes that:

- Grazing - Once construction is completed, grazing activity could resume within the easement limiting the effect of the Project on the farming practices of graziers.
- Cropping and horticultural land uses - once construction is complete, restrictions on the use of machinery to prepare the soil, seed, harvest, spray and irrigate may have ongoing implications for existing farming. In this context, horticultural operations are identified as being particularly reliant on irrigation and ariel spraying methods which would be restricted by the easement.

Further to the above, Technical Report H: Agriculture and Forestry Impact Assessment indicates that modifications to irrigation practices and paddock layouts may be necessary to reduce the effect of the Project on particular farming operations and that in isolated cases landholders may be forced to change their enterprise mix to maximise profitability of their land, with long-term financial implications for the farm business.

In instances where land title holders incur losses as a result of the Project, whether this be as a result of the construction and/or operational stage, they may be eligible for financial compensation through voluntary agreement with the Proponent or in accordance with the *Land Acquisition and Compensation Act 1986* (Vic) and the *Valuation of Land Act 1960* (Vic).

8.2.2 Character and Amenity

Construction activity would be a source of noise, dust and traffic, which would affect the amenity of locations near the Project, including a number of rural homes and recreational focal points. Construction activity and associated noise and to lesser extent vibration, may be a source of annoyance for residents living in close proximity to the Proposed Route. However, construction would be typically limited to normal working hours and would occur in short bursts over a period of days or weeks rather than continuously over months, limiting the severity of potential social impacts. While works would extend over a period of months at the terminal stations, noise emissions from these sites are not expected to result in noise levels at homes that are significantly higher than the existing ambient environment (see Technical Report O: Noise and Vibration Impact Assessment).

During operation, the Project would alter the character and amenity of locations within the study area by inserting structures into the landscape which may be visible across a wide area (9.2 kilometres being the theoretical viewshed). A detailed assessment of the visibility of the Project at various locations along the Proposed Route is presented in Technical Report D: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment. The LVIA proceeds on the basis that the potential visibility of the transmission infrastructure decreases with distance from the infrastructure, as follows (acknowledging that the Project may not actually be visible or may be screened at some viewpoints):

- 0 to 1km - always visually dominant in the landscape.
- 1km to 2km - usually visually dominant in the landscape.
- 2km to 4.6km - potentially visually dominant in the landscape.
- 4.6km to 9.2km- discernible in the landscape.

As discussed in Section 5, where Project elements are visible and in particular where they dominate the view, individuals and social groups may consider that the Project detracts from the appeal of the affected location.

In some sections of the Proposed Route, proposed infrastructure would be placed alongside existing 220kV transmission lines. While the existing transmission lines can affect the aesthetic quality of a particular location, existing 220kV infrastructure is not necessarily visually dominant, and in some areas is an accepted/unrecognised

element in views. As a result, given the size and potential visual dominance of the proposed infrastructure, even where existing 220kV transmission lines are present, the Project may still have a noticeable influence on the visual character of a location (see Technical Report D: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment).

In addition to altering the aesthetic quality of particular viewpoints, at very close distance, the industrial character and scale of the proposed towers, the audibility of hissing or crackling sounds (see Technical Report O: Noise and Vibration Impact Assessment) and perceived health risks from electric and magnetic field emissions (EMF) may also affect the attractiveness of a locality. Sensitivities may vary considerably depending on the reason for visitation, duration of time spent in the locality, etc. Notwithstanding, it is possible that locations in very close proximity to transmission infrastructure may be considered inhospitable, at least in some cases.

In the above context, it is noteworthy that there are no formal guidelines or standards which set out minimum or even preferred setback distances between sensitive land uses such as dwellings and transmission lines (500kV). However, in its Annual Report (2022), the Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner recommends a setback objective of 300 metres:

> *Guidelines for setback distances between a large-scale, high voltage transmission lines and say neighbouring residences, parks, schools, roads etc. currently do not exist and rely on the best efforts of the route plan to avoid conflicts where possible. A typical industry design guideline is a setback distance of 300 metres between the transmission line (500kV) and an existing residence (AEIC 2023, pg. 65).*

8.2.3 Workforce Accommodation Facilities[29]

There are two proposed workforce accommodation facilities, one near Lexton the other near Ballan:

- Sunraysia Highway, Lexton (Section 1)
- Ingliston Road, Ballan (Section 3)

Each facility would consist of single-story movable modular buildings with approximately 350 individual accommodation units, a working office, meeting rooms, first aid room and gym facilities. The peak population of the facilities would be approximately 350 workers.

The facilities would be developed to house the Project workforce, and following the Project's construction period would be dismantled. The facilities would be placed on private land in accordance with a commercial agreement with the existing landholder. Given that the landholder would consent to the facility being constructed on their land and benefit financially from this, it has been assumed that no material social impacts would arise due to displacement of an existing land use. Accordingly, this section focusses on potential changes to amenity in the immediate surrounds of the proposed facilities and associated impacts for residents and other visitors to the area.

The workforce accommodation facilities will be established prior to works on the Project with an estimated design and construction time of up to approximately 12 months. The construction process would involve the use of machinery such as bulldozers and compactors, and thus would generate noise in otherwise quiet rural settings.

While in operation, the facilities would be visible within rural landscapes, and would produce light glow at night. In addition, the facilities would generate traffic on the road network during the day, associated with workers coming to and from the facility at the commencement and cessation of shifts and as they are transported to and from construction worksites on a daily basis (by bus). Operation of the camps would also generate noise, such as that associated with the running of air-conditioners, traffic movements, etc.

[29] A map of each facility is provided in Appendix 4.

8.2.4 Bushfire Risk

As set out in Technical Report K: Bushfire Impact Assessment, firefighting tactics may need to be adapted locally in some parts of the study area to account for the presence of the Project infrastructure, although field access to fire water supplies would not be materially affected by the Project. While the impact of the Project in this respect has been assessed to be 'low', Technical Report K: Bushfire Impact Assessment acknowledges that risks cannot be eliminated at all locations across the Project Land.[30] In this context, Technical Report K: Bushfire Impact Assessment indicates that in some settings, the Project may diminish the effectiveness of firefighting responses, leading to fires within the study area having greater impact than would otherwise be the case.

In addition, Technical Report K: Bushfire Impact Assessment acknowledges that the Proposed Route crosses several key bushfire access and egress routes identified in local government Municipal Fire Management Plans, which service bushland in the Pyrenees Ranges, Wombat State Forest, and Lerderderg and Long Forest areas. Specifically, the assessment finds that emergency access to / egress from these areas could be impeded if severe wind or structural failure led to collapse of a tower or towers and / or a transmission powerline dropping to the ground (noting that application of appropriate design and asset management standards would eliminate this risk under reasonably foreseeable extreme wind conditions). Notwithstanding, the study finds that relatively safe alternative egress / access routes are available at all key locations apart from North Darley (Swans Road), where the proposed transmission route crosses dead end roads that provide access into areas which include a small number of dwellings.

Further details regarding the Project's effect on bushfire risk can be found in Technical Report K: Bushfire Impact Assessment.

[30] The Project Land encompasses all land parcels that could be used for the purpose of temporary Project construction and permanent operational components. The Project Land corresponds with the extent of the Specific Controls Overlay proposed in the draft Planning Scheme Amendment for the Project. This generally includes the entire land parcel intersected by a Project component to allow for changes generally in accordance with the proposed draft Planning Scheme Amendment.

8.3 Social Impacts

The following Sections outline social impacts for Directly Affected Landholders, Surrounding Landholders and the residents of the broader communities of the study area.

8.4 Directly Affected Landholders

The Proposed Route would traverse 222 private properties (see Table 8-2). Of these, 2 are owned by a large corporate entity, which conducts quarrying/extractive industry on the land. While the way these properties are used may be affected by the Project, the current owner is a large business, and it is expected that the business would have the resources and skills to engage with the Project and adapt to the Project's presence on their land, without material social impacts arising.

The remainder of the privately held properties (220) are rural holdings, which are typically owned and/or occupied by individuals and families who are living on the land and/or operating agricultural businesses.

Table 8-2: Private Land Affected by The Project

Section		*Horticulture*	*Grazing*	*Cropping*	*Rural Living*	*Equine*	*Forestry*	*Extractive Industry*	*Total*
1	**Total Prop**	**-**	**48**	**23**	**2**	**-**	**1**	**-**	**74**
	With Dwelling	*-*	*23*	*8*	*0*	*-*	*0*	*-*	*31*
	*Cover<2%**	*-*	*17*	*6*	*0*	*-*	*0*	*-*	*23*
2	**Total Prop**	**23**	**7**	**28**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**58**
	With Dwelling	*11*	*5*	*13*	*-*	*-*	*-*	*-*	*29*
	Cover<2%	*1*	*2*	*4*	*-*	*-*	*-*	*-*	*7*
3	**Total Prop**	**5**	**22**	**20**	**3**	**5**	**-**	**-**	**55**
	With Dwelling	*4*	*13*	*12*	*2*	*3*	*-*	*-*	*34*
	Cover<2%	*0*	*6*	*1*	*0*	*0*	*-*	*-*	*7*
4	**Total Prop**	**1**	**19**	**7**	**1**	**5**	**-**	**2**	**35**
	With Dwelling	*1*	*11*	*4*	*1*	*3*	*-*	*1*	*21*
	Cover<2%	*0*	*4*	*0*	*0*	*1*	*-*	*1*	*5*
Total	**Total Prop**	**22**	**110**	**47**	**24**	**8**	**1**	**2**	**222**
	With Dwelling	*16*	*52*	*37*	*3*	*6*	*-*	*1*	*115*
	Cover<2%	*1*	*29*	*11*	*0*	*1*	*0*	*1*	*42*

Source: AusNet 2024

** Number of directly affected properties where the proposed easement covers less than 2% of the property*

All private landholders whose property is traversed by the Project would be impacted by the Project to some degree. That is, as a minimum they would be required to engage with the Project through the construction stage and beyond to negotiate matters such as access arrangements, the precise route and location of transmission towers on their land, compensation arrangements, etc. Even in cases where the Project does not require substantial alterations to the way a property is used, the impost on the personal time and energy of landholders may be substantial.

Moreover, the Project may necessitate long term changes to the way properties are used, particularly where the current use is a cropping or horticultural enterprise. For landholders in this situation, the impost of the Project on personal time and energy would be considerably more burdensome. These landholders would be assisted to adapt to the Project being on their land and may be entitled to compensation for any associated financial losses. However, the change process may nevertheless be a source of stress and emotional strain, particularly for individuals who have long standing connections to their property and/or whose sense of purpose and identity is tied to their ability to manage their land and business. Moreover, some landholders may not be satisfied with the final outcome, particularly in instances where the Project forces change to enterprise mix and/or has long-term financial implications for a farm business.

In addition, in one case, a dwelling is located within the proposed easement and would need to be relocated outside of the easement (with compensation for associated costs to be paid to the dwelling owner by the proponent). AusNet understands that this building is used occasionally for accommodation but it is not a permanent place of residence.

Further to the above, landholders would not face the practical challenge of adapting their property and/or agricultural land use in a vacuum. As indicated in Table 5-1, over 50% of landholders oppose the Project, with concerns about potential interruptions to agricultural activity forming only part of the rationale for these objections. Other concerns, such as the effect of the Project on the integrity and aesthetic quality of affected properties and homes are also common. In this context, it is noted that approximately 50% of affected land holdings currently accommodate a dwelling and that many landholders are owner occupiers, some of whom live on the land primarily for lifestyle reasons. In this context, affected landholders may consider the Project to be an unwanted and unreasonable intrusion which threatens intangible connections to their property and a valued rural lifestyle. While over time, some individuals may become more comfortable with the presence of the Project on their land, it is not necessarily the case that concerns and fears expressed to date would fully resolve.

It is also noteworthy that directly affected landholders form part of the broader community, and would be dealing with changes to their property while also experiencing the Project's effects on the attractiveness and liveability of their local area and/or potentially navigating a social environment, where there are diverse and strong views about the Project.

Further commentary relevant to each Section is provided below.

Section 1

- The level of disruption to prevailing rural land uses caused by the Project in Section 1 would be limited by the larger size (on average) of the affected land holdings, the predominance of grazing operations and to a degree the history of co-existence with transmission infrastructure in the area. In this context, ongoing substantial alterations to farming operations are less likely to arise and/or have serious implications for business continuity in Section 1.
- Nevertheless, at the level of the individual property/landholder, outcomes would vary and there may be instances where the Project has substantial implications for affected landholders. In this context, it is noteworthy that in Section 1, the Project covers greater than 6% of 13 landholdings and traverses numerous properties which accommodate a dwelling. In any case, for some affected landholders, the Project may be viewed as an unwanted intervention with substantial consequences.
- Three directly affected properties accommodate dwellings located within 100m of the proposed easement. The first is a grazing property located north west of Elmhurst. This property accommodates two dwellings, 98m and 113m from the proposed easement, respectively. The second is a small farming property (16ha) to the south of Lexton which includes a dwelling situated approximately 30m from the proposed easement. The attractiveness of these properties and dwellings (along with others) as a place to live and/or conduct a business for the current owner/occupant may be compromised. The third is a dwelling situated on a 29ha property located between Elmhurst and Lexton. In this case, the property is located within the easement and would be relocated. AusNet understands that this building is used occasionally for accommodation but it is not a permanent place of residence. Flow on impacts may include emotional strain, the breaking of intangible connections to the affected dwelling/property and/or a desire to relocate. If relocation is not an acceptable outcome or a practical option, ongoing frustration may arise.
- Further to the above, there are 6 dwellings in Section 1 located on a directly affected property which are located 100m to 300m from the proposed easement. These dwellings (along with those within 100m) are inside the AEIC's recommended setback (2023).
- Notwithstanding, while the Project may result in negative impacts for particular landholders in Section 1, this is unlikely to precipitate broader social impacts such as material changes to the composition of the community, reductions in social cohesion, etc. Moreover, the AusNet sentiment data indicate that 58.1% of directly affected landholders are supportive of the Project in Section 1 and only approximately 17.6% are opposed, with the opportunity to generate additional farm income being a common driver of support, along with a recognition of the need for transmission infrastructure.

Section 2

- In contrast to Section 1, affected land holdings in Section 2 are smaller on average and many accommodate horticultural land uses. As a result, the Project would be more likely to necessitate long term changes to the way farming occurs in Section 2. In addition, approximately 50% of affected land holdings accommodate a dwelling, with owner occupancy being common among horticultural business operators.
- There are no dwellings located within 100m of the proposed easement in Section 2. However, there are 8 dwellings on directly affected properties located 100m to 300m from the proposed easement. These dwellings are inside the AEIC's (2023) recommended setback.
- Given the above, in Section 2 a greater proportion of affected landholders may face an onerous adaptation process, and this is reflected in relatively high levels of opposition to the Project in Section 2, and among horticulturalists in particular. Presently, many landholders in Section 2 feel connected to their property and rural district and this contributes to their sense of identity (individually and as a member of a community), and manifests as a sense of stewardship in relation to their property and farming community. The Project would

challenge this sense of connection and may lead to an enduring sense of loss and powerlessness among directly affected landholders, with potential implications for the quality of life and wellbeing of affected individuals. In some cases, affected individuals may experience a desire to relocate.

- Impacts for landholders in Section 2 would be felt by individuals and families living and working in a concentrated area, who form part of an integrated rural community. In this context, impacts on directly affected landholders (alongside impacts for Surrounding Landholders and the broader community, see below) may result in some changes to the composition of the community, and diminish the capacity and cohesiveness of the community during construction and for some time afterwards, as individual landholders adjust to altered conditions.

Section 3

- Approximately three quarters of landholders oppose the Project in Section 3. This apparent lack of tolerance for the Project can be understood in light of the prevailing land use (lifestyle property/home, with agricultural production being secondary) and values associated with the affected land holdings (property offers opportunity to live in a beautiful rural landscape setting, sentimental attachment, etc.). In this context, it is noted that 62% of affected properties accommodate a dwelling in Section 3.
- Given the above, in Section 3, it would be common for affected landholders to consider that the Project undermines an aspirational lifestyle and disrupts intergenerational connections to particular properties. Concerns of this nature would be difficult if not impossible to resolve. Moreover, intangible connections, along with personal barriers to mobility, may mean that adaptation through relocation would be impractical and/or undesirable for some landholders. As result, affected landholders may harbour ongoing frustration and resentment toward the Project, with flow on implications for their quality of life and well-being, and capacity/willingness to contribute to the social and cultural life of the district.
- Three directly affected properties in Section 3 accommodate dwellings which are located within 100m of the proposed easement. Two of the properties are located near Callaghan's Lane, on small farming properties. The other property is located on a grazing property near the western boundary of Section 2. The Project may compromise the attractiveness of these properties (and potentially others) as places to live and/or run a business for the current owner/occupier.
- Further to the above, there are 8 dwellings in Section 3 located on a directly affected property which are located 100m to 300m from the proposed easement. These dwellings (along with those within 100m) are inside the AEIC's (2023) recommended setback.

Section 4

- In Section 4, the way affected land holdings are used varies substantially, with potential impacts for landholders likewise varying considerably. For example, smaller lifestyle and equine properties make up a relatively large proportion of the affected holdings, and sensitivity to the Project's presence on these holdings is high among landholders. There is a cluster of such holdings to the north of Darley in the vicinity of Lerderderg Gorge Road and Camerons Road, set in a picturesque valley. In this Section of the Proposed Route (and at other locations where properties are essentially lifestyle homes) it is common for affected landholders to consider that the Project undermines an aspirational lifestyle.
- However, other land holdings, particularly toward the eastern end of Section 4, are held by land speculators. The concerns of these landholders relate to the development potential of their land, and financial compensation would be more likely to be effective in addressing these concerns.

- In Section 4, there are 6 directly affected landholdings which accommodate at least one dwelling which would be located within 100 metres of the Proposed Route. In each case, the Project may compromise the attractiveness of the property as a place to live and work:
  - The most westerly of these is located on Swans Road to the north of Darley and accommodates three dwellings within 100m. The property is located in the farming zone, although it is essentially a lifestyle property and home which offers expansive views to the east. The transmission route passes approximately 10m to 30m to the south of the relevant dwellings.
  - Moving east, the next property is located on Lerderderg Gorge Road and is zoned for farming. The property is relatively small (7ha), developed to accommodate equine uses, and situated in a picturesque valley.
  - One dwelling is located on a small (10ha) lifestyle property (zoned for farming), near the western boundary of the Bacchus Marsh Quarry.
  - There is one dwelling near the corner of Long Forest and Diggers Rest-Coimadai Road. The dwelling is situated on a farming property used for prime lamb and sheep production.
  - There is one dwelling located on a rural property (zoned GWZ) immediately to the west of MacPherson Park on Bulmans Road. In the case of this property, the Proposed Route crosses the property between the main entrance and the dwelling. In addition, there is a one further directly affected property in this location with a dwelling located 110m from the proposed easement. The Proposed Route also crosses this property between the main entrance and the dwelling and thus the effect of the Project on the attractiveness of the property/home would be substantial.
- Further to the above, there are 9 dwellings in Section 4 located on a directly affected property which are located 100m to 300m from the proposed easement. These dwellings (along with those within 100m) are inside the AEIC's (2023) recommended setback.

8.5 Surrounding Landholders

Table 8-3 below presents data of the number of residential dwellings located near the Proposed Route, focussing on dwellings located within 2km (acknowledging that the visual amenity of some dwellings located beyond this distance may be negatively affected). Of the dwellings located within 2km of the Proposed Route, the majority are located on properties which are not traversed by the proposed easement, and as such, owners would not necessarily be entitled to financial compensation to address the effects of the Project, nor would they be covered by EM9, which applies only to dwellings located on directly affected land.

Table 8-3 also summarises the outcome of property level assessments of visual impact, undertaken as part of the LVIA (unmitigated scenario)[31] for a small proportion of the total number of dwellings. As the Table shows, while 28 of the 38 assessed dwellings located within 1km of the proposed easement were assessed as being subject to a 'high' or 'moderate' visual impact, in some cases intervening topography and/or vegetation screen views of the Project, limiting or preventing views from the particular dwelling. Less data were available for dwellings located between 1km and 2km from the Project, although the data that are available illustrate the potential for 'high' and 'moderate' visual impacts at this distance.

Table 8-3: Dwellings Near the Proposed Easement – Visual Impact

Distance		Section 1		Section 2		Section 3		Section 4	
Directly Affected		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
<100m		3	0	0	0	3	0	8	2
100m to 300m		6	3	8	4	8	9	9	51
300m to 1km		24	24	23	90	18	85	11	1,317
1km to 2km		12	146	12	342	8	161	10	4,853
Total within 2km		**45**	**173**	**43**	**436**	**37**	**255**	**38**	**6,223**
Total within 9.2km		**48**	**861**	**45**	**4,227**	**38**	**3,256**	**38**	**107,200**
LVIA									
<1km	High	5		4		2		9	
	Moderate	-		4		-		4	
	Low	-		3		-		2	
	Neg or Nil	-		1		-		4	
	TOTAL	5		12		2		19	
1km to 2km	High	-		1		-		1	
	Moderate	1		-		-		1	
	Low	-		-		-		-	
	Neg or Nil	-		-		-		-	
	TOTAL	1		1		0		2	

Source: Adapted from AusNet Dwelling Layer, 2024; LVIA 2024; ABS Census 2021.

[31] Before application of any mitigation strategies suggested in the LVIA (such as screen plantings) are applied.

Overall, Table 8-3 indicates that the Project would result in substantial changes to the visual setting of many (but not all) nearby dwellings across the length of the Proposed Route. Moreover, in light of feedback on the Project discussed in Section 5, such changes would typically be viewed as detracting substantially from the amenity of affected dwellings, and potentially undermining the enjoyment of homes and valued lifestyles.

Further commentary relevant to each Section is provided below.

Section 1

- In Section 1, there are 218 dwellings located within 2km of the transmission route, 173 being on a property which is not directly affected. Twelve of these dwellings are located within 300m (3 being within 100m), 3 of which are located on a property which is not directly affected.
- Almost half of the dwellings within 2km are located within the settlements of Elmhurst (80) and Lexton (21), the remainder being distributed throughout the rural parts of Section 1. Views toward the Project from the majority of dwellings in Elmhurst and Lexton are heavily screened by vegetation and buildings, although filtered views of transmission infrastructure may be available from some dwellings, particularly those located on the settlements' northern (Elmhurst) and southern (Lexton) boundaries. The attractiveness of a small proportion of dwellings in these townships may be reduced marginally, although screen plantings could eliminate views of the proposed infrastructure in most if not all cases. Notwithstanding, residents will most likely view the proposed infrastructure as part of their daily lives as they move within the towns and through the rural landscape (discussed further below).
- Direct views of the Project would be more common from rural dwellings. In some cases, it may be possible to screen views of the Project using vegetation, although loss of long-range views, particularly northward views toward to the Pyrenees Ranges, may not be considered a satisfactory outcome by all residents. The attractiveness of affected dwellings and properties as a place to live and/or conduct a business may be reduced in some cases. Changes to the visual setting of dwellings/properties may not be readily accepted, and have the potential to result in frustration and emotional strain for residents.

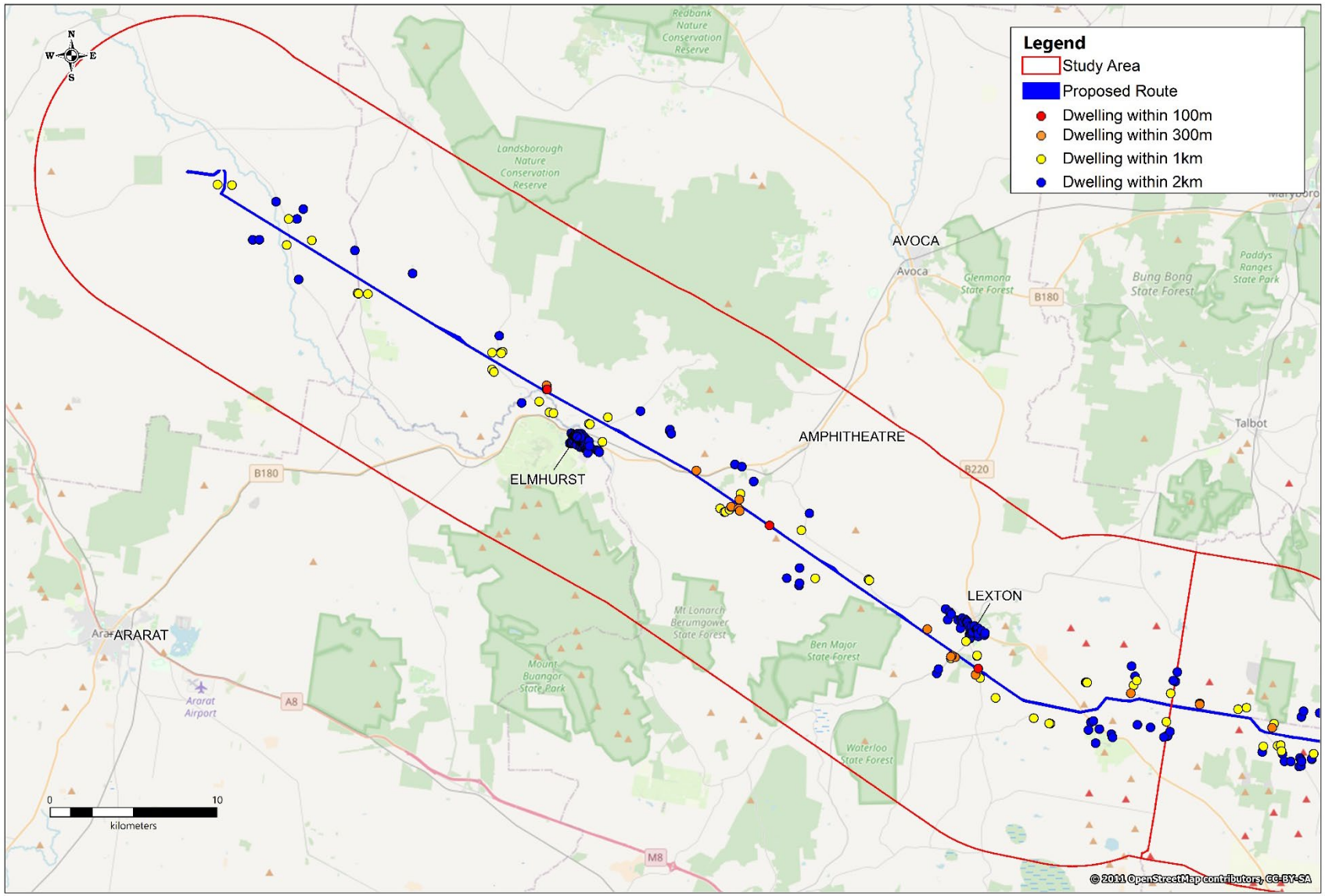

Figure 8-1: Section 1 - Distribution of Dwellings within 2km of the Project.

Section 2

- In Section 2, there are 479 dwellings located within 2km of the transmission route, 436 being on a property which is not directly affected. Twelve of the 479 dwellings are located within 300m, 4 of which are located on a property which is not directly affected.
- Approximately 45% of the dwellings within 2km are located within the settlements of Allendale (44), Kingston (46), Newlyn North (86) and Smeaton (35), with the remainder being in rural areas. Due to the layout of the townships, as well as screening vegetation and topography, views of the Project from dwellings within the settlements would be rare. Where views are available, due to the orientation of dwellings, the amenity of living spaces and/or outdoor entertaining area may not be affected (for example, dwellings to the south of West Berry Road, Allandale, and south of Church Parade, Kingston).
- Direct views of the Project would be available from rural dwellings throughout Section 2.
  - To the west of Allendale, the Project would affect rural views from dwellings including views of Mount Beckworth and Mount Bolton (covered by SLO) (such as Viewpoint B165, see Technical Report D: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment). Views toward Mount Beckworth and Mount Bolton are highly valued.
  - To the east of Newlyn North, the Project would affect rural views from dwellings including view of volcanic cones (covered by SLO).
  - As the Project route moves through Bullarook, Claretown and Springbank (south of Myers Road), the Project would affect rural views from dwellings including toward mountain ranges to the north east.
- Changes to the visual setting of rural dwellings/properties may not be readily accepted, and have the potential to result in frustration and emotional strain for those affected. In some cases, an enduring sense of loss and powerlessness may arise. Moreover, changes to the visual environment would occur alongside disruption to existing horticultural enterprises operating in Section 2 (see Section 8.3.1), and affected residents may be active members of the same integrated rural community.
- In this context, alterations to the amenity of nearby dwellings in Section 2 and consequent impacts for occupants, may further diminish the capacity and cohesiveness of the community during construction and for some time afterwards, as Directly Affected Landholders and/or Surrounding Landholders adjust to altered conditions.

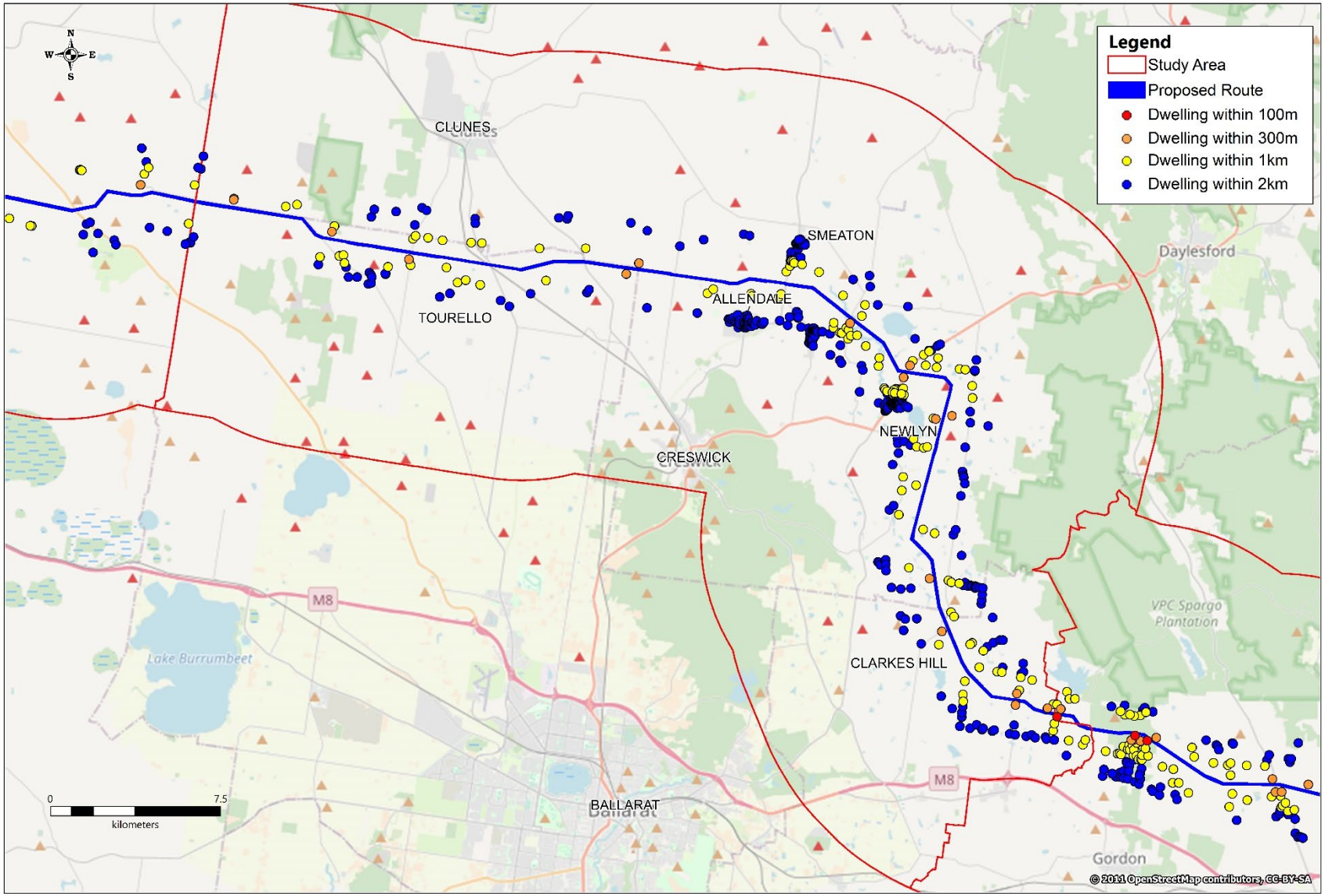

Figure 8-2: Section 2 - Distribution of Dwellings within 2km of the Project.

Section 3

- In Section 3, there are 292 dwellings located within 2km of the transmission route, 255 being on a property which is not directly affected. Twenty of the 292 dwellings are located within 300m (3 being within 100m) 9 of which are located on a property which is not directly affected.
- A substantial proportion of these dwellings are clustered in four rural living areas (see Figure 8-3).
  - The most westerly of these is a forested area to the north of Gordon around Callaghan's Lane (41 dwellings, 20 within 1km). The Project may be visible from dwellings at the northern most edge of this area, above the existing tree line, although it would be concealed from the majority of the dwellings in the rural living subdivision.
  - Moving eastward, the next rural living area is located to the north west of Ballan on the eastern side of the Ballan Daylesford Road. Only the northern most section of this rural living area (5 dwellings located on Bryant Court) is located within 2km, although these dwellings in some cases are orientated to take in views to the north.
  - The next rural living area is located to the north of Ballan, near Blakeville Road (49 dwellings, 27 of which are within 1km). The proposed easement passes through elevated, open fields to the north of this area, and in close proximity to the rural living area's northern boundary, particularly near the corner of Andrews Lane and Ballan-Greendale Road. While some screening vegetation exists within the estate and on its northern boundary, clear and filtered views of the Project would be common from residences at the northern end of the estate, including from dwellings on Blakeville Road, Andrews Lane and Connor Court.
  - The final rural living area comprises the southern portion of Greendale (24 dwellings). A combination of distance, topography and screening vegetation means that Project elements would not be visible from dwellings in this area.
- Rural living homes are commonly constructed by the owner and/or purchased to facilitate connection with rural and natural landscapes, and as such rural living residents may be highly sensitive to the Project's effect on the aesthetic quality of their dwellings, property and local environs. In this context, the Project's effects may disrupt an aspirational lifestyle, and may not be readily accepted, in particular among those living within the rural living area near Blakeville Road.
- The remainder of Section 3 comprises rural areas, which residents describe as 'a beautiful, clean and peaceful' setting in which to live. Relatively few residents of this area derive their principal income from farming and resident feedback on the Project placed a strong emphasis on existing connections to, and benefits derived from, the area's scenic rural landscape. Accordingly, in Section 3, it would be common for the sensitivities and impacts among nearby rural residents to be similar to those who occupy rural living properties. When impacts for nearby rural residents are considered alongside impacts on directly affected landholders in Section 3, the Project may challenge a shared sense of identity among rural residents built on appreciation of the area's scenic qualities and peaceful rural lifestyle.
- In the above context, an enduring sense of loss and powerlessness may arise among some Surrounding Landholders (and Directly Affected Landholders) in Section 3.

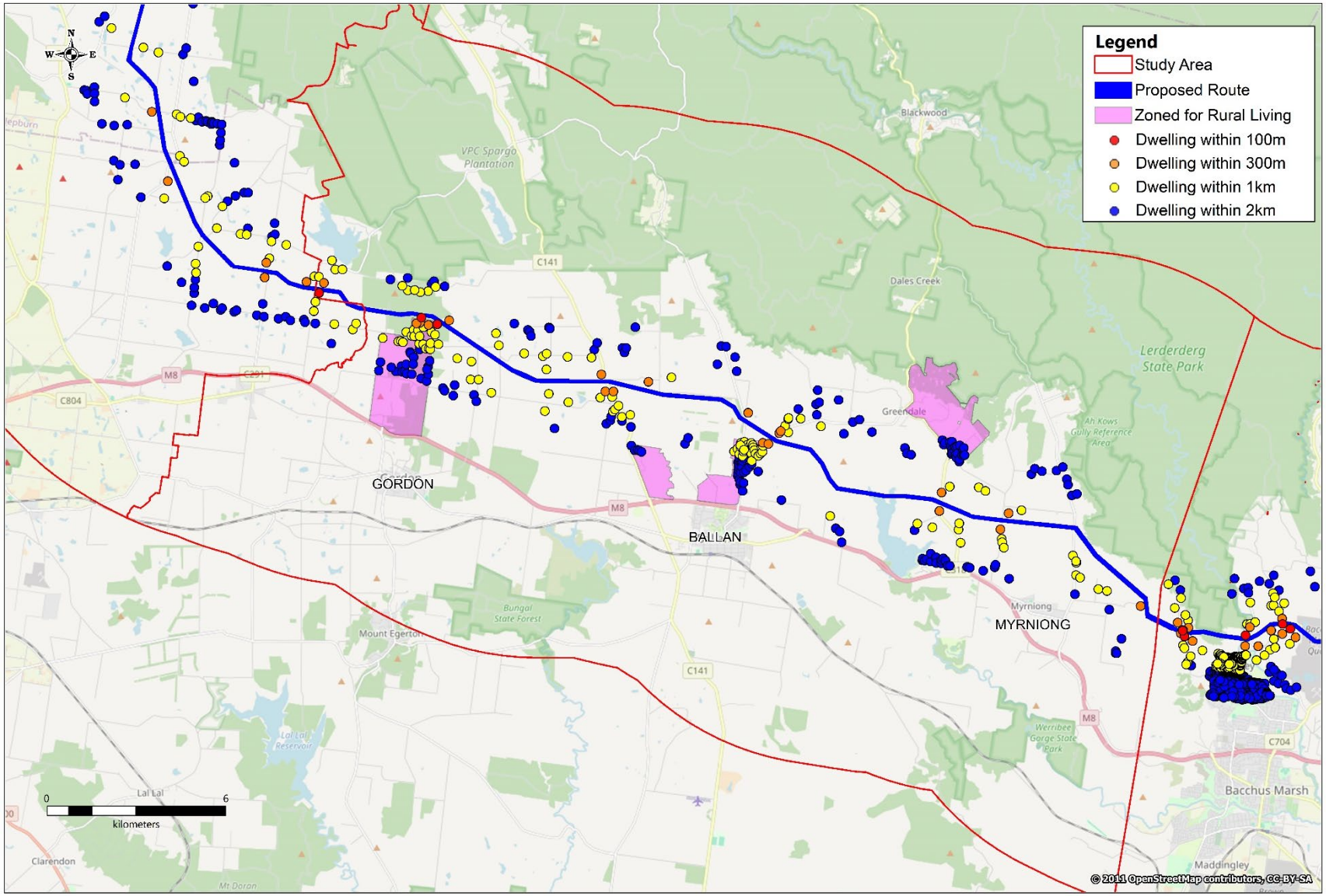

Figure 8-3: Section 3 - Distribution of Dwellings within 2km of the Project.

Section 4

- In Section 4, there are 6,261 dwellings located within 2km of the transmission route, 6,223 being on a property which is not directly affected. Seventy of the 6,262 dwellings are located within 300m (10 being within 100m). Two dwellings located within 100m are situated on property that is not directly affected by the Project.
- The majority of these dwellings are located within the Melbourne Metropolitan Area (4,735) with most of the remainder being located in northern parts of Melton (532) and Darley (696). The dwellings in Hillside and Melton are located within conventional residential subdivisions which border non-urban areas outside the urban growth boundary. Relatively little feedback on the Project has been received from these communities, despite numerous attempts to engage with the potentially affected residents, suggestive of a low level of concern regarding the Project. This outcome is consistent with the prevailing development pattern which in most instances does not provide for visual connection between homes and public areas and non-urban areas to the north. Moreover, in the case of Hillside, existing transmission infrastructure is located immediately to the north, and as a result the marginal effect of the Project on visual amenity in this area would be minimal.
- The topography of Darley consists of a series of undulating rises which provide expansive views to the north, towards the Project. Many of the dwellings located near the Project in Darley have been designed to take advantage of this natural aspect and community feedback on the Project indicates that northward views toward the Lerderderg State Park contribute significantly to the amenity of dwellings and the suburb in general. Views of the Project from dwellings in Darley would be common, including from living areas, and outdoor entertaining areas. Feedback from Darley community members indicates that many view the proposed infrastructure as a threat to their residential amenity, which is a defining feature of their lifestyle and identity. In this context, the Project's effects may disrupt an aspirational lifestyle, for a relatively large proportion of the Darley community. Adaptation through relocation would not be practical for the majority of those affected, given the uniqueness of the residential setting, as well as personal barriers to mobility (for example, children may attend a local school). As such, affected residents may harbour ongoing frustration and resentment toward the Project.
- In Section 4, there are two rural living areas located to the south of Merrimu Reservoir. The most westerly is a small subdivision in the Rural Conservation Zone (RCZ) near Bences Road (20 dwellings). The land at this location is flat and cleared, with scattered boundary plantings between dwellings. Expansive northward views are available from the rural living area, which take in Mount Sugarloaf. The Project runs east-west to the north, within approximately 150m to 500 metres of the lifestyle homes, and thus would affect the aesthetic quality of the homes in the subdivision. In this area, the Project may disrupt an aspirational lifestyle, with dwellings located close to the Project route on Bences Road being most affected.
- The second rural living area (zoned Rural Living Zone - RLZ) is located in a forested area alongside Long Forest Road. Dwellings in this area are embedded in thick bushland and as a result would not have direct views of the Project.

- The remainder of Section 4 comprises non-urban areas, the visual character and zoning of which varies. To illustrate:
  - There are rural properties located in Swans Road, 12 of which are located to the north of the proposed transmission route, along a dead-end road. The potential for structural failure of the proposed transmission towers due to extreme weather conditions to impede egress from these homes in the event of a bushfire, is acknowledged in Technical Report K: Bushfire Impact Assessment. While Technical Report K: Bushfire Impact Assessment concludes that the risk of such an event can be eliminated under all reasonably foreseeable extreme wind conditions, existing residents may consider that the risk detracts from the attractiveness of their homes and local area as a place to live.
  - There are rural properties (zoned Farming Zone - FZ) including equine proprieties, located in close proximity to the Project along Lerderderg Gorge Road and Camerons Road, set in a picturesque valley. The LVIA assessed visual impacts from a section of these and indicates the potential for 'high' and 'moderate' visual impacts in this area.
  - Further to the east there are various dwellings located to take in elevated views of Merrimu Reservoir, dwellings located on flat land near MacPherson Park in Melton (Green Wedge Zone, GWZ), which enjoy expansive views northward toward Mount Sugarloaf, and dwellings located near Leakes Road in Plumpton (GWZ), in the vicinity of Mount Kororoit. While some of these dwellings are located on operating farms, many are essentially lifestyle properties and current occupants have expressed opposition to the Project due to its potential impact on the aesthetic quality of their local environs.
- Rural dwellings to the east of Melton are situated in a highly dynamic land use context, which includes developing suburban areas, major roads and transmission infrastructure.
- In relation to dwellings within 100m in Section 4, there are two which are not located on a property which is directly affected. One of these is located on Swans Road to the north of Darley. The transmission route passes very close to this dwelling (50m), which is located within the farming zone. The property is essentially a hobby farm, offering expansive views to the east. The level of change to amenity in the case of this dwelling would be high and along with concerns relating to bushfire risk may compromise the attractiveness of the dwelling as a place to live, potentially leading to ongoing frustration and resentment, a desire to relocate, etc. The second dwelling within 100m is located on Bullman's Road to the west of MacPhersons Park. The dwelling is a relatively new construction, on a small lifestyle land holing (within the Green Wedge).

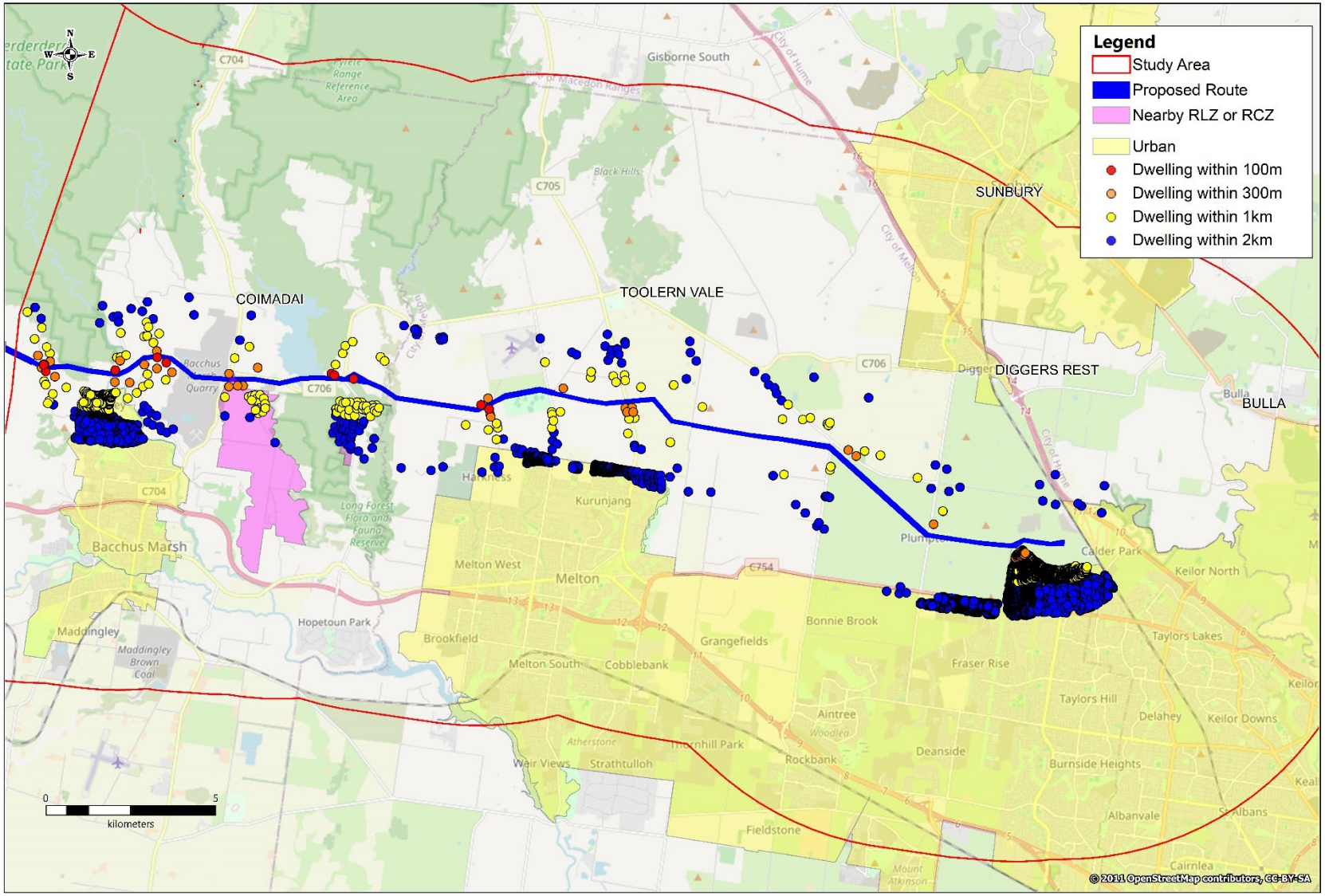

Figure 8-4: Section 4 - Distribution of Dwellings within 2km of the Project.

8.5.1 Workforce Accommodation Facilities

Lexton (Section 1)

The workforce accommodation facility near Lexton, would be accessed via the Western Freeway (M8) and then Sunraysia Highway (B220). There are no dwellings or other noise sensitive receivers located on the route between the site and the highway, and thus the impact of traffic generated by the facility for neighbours would be minimal.

Noise surveys carried out in proximity to the site as part of the Noise and Vibration Impact Assessment indicate the area surrounding the site is a quiet rural area with minimal background noise. In this context, noise associated with construction of the workforce accommodation facility has the potential to be noticeable at nearby locations. However, the nearest dwelling to the site is located more than 1.4 km south of the site and the separation distance to the nearest dwellings in other directions is over 2 km. Construction noise may be audible at times at these locations, although typically less than 45 dB LAeq[32] at neighbouring dwellings (reaching a maximum of 50 dB LAeq at the closest residence) and construction would be limited to daytime working hours (see -Technical Report O: Noise and Vibration Impact Assessment). That is, an adequate level of acoustic amenity would be preserved, in the context of a short construction period.

Noise associated with use of the workforce accommodation facility is not expected to be audible at neighbouring dwellings given the separation distance and low noise levels associated with the use. However, the facility may be visible to the local rural community from local roads and from nearby dwellings to the south including at night (due to light glow), and has the potential to be considered an eyesore, which jars with the prevailing rural character of the area. In this context, it noteworthy that Mount Mitchell Homestead (wedding venue) is located approximately 2.4km to the north of the facility and light glow from the workforce accommodation facility near Lexton would likely be visible from this business.[33]

Furthermore, the sheer presence of the facility, inclusive of its relatively large population, may be unsettling for nearby residents who are accustomed to living in a sparsely populated rural setting, and this may add to concerns and frustrations neighbours have regarding the Project. Notwithstanding, given the proposed management approach (see Section 7.1 and Section 7.4), interactions between workers residing at the facility and neighbours would be infrequent and may not occur.

Overall, the proposed worker accommodation facility would alter the prevailing rural amenity of the location, and may represent an unwanted irritation and blight on the landscape for nearby residents. However, a substantial buffer exists between the site and nearby dwellings, and the facility would be temporary, limiting its impact. In this context (and as discussed in Section 7), it is noted that that the proposed workforce accommodation facility would ameliorate potential severe impacts resulting from the Project's effect on demand for housing and community services and would limit the impact of the construction workforce on social dynamics within existing communities. That is, the proposed facility would deliver a net social benefit.

Ballan (Section 3)

The workforce accommodation facility near Ballan, would be accessed via the Western Freeway (M8) at the Old Melbourne Road (C803) interchange. Vehicles would then turn left onto Ingliston Road and bear left at the Gillespies Lane fork before arriving at the site on the right of the direction of travel along Ingliston Road. While Ingliston Road has capacity to support additional traffic generated by the facility (see Technical Report P: Transport Impact Assessment), the section between Old Melbourne Road and Gillespies Lane provides direct access to

[32] Weighted equivalent continuous sound level.

[33] Author, Landform Architects (Landscape and Visual Impact specialist), pers.com, 2024.

properties and in some cases, dwellings are located close to the road. In this context, additional traffic on the road may be a source of annoyance.

The nearest dwelling to the site is located approximately 700 metres to the north west, whereas the nearest dwellings to the south east are located 1km from the site. While noise generated during construction of the workforce accommodation facility may be audible at times at these locations, it would not exceed 45 dB LAeq at all neighbouring dwellings and construction would be limited to daytime working hours (see Technical Report O: Noise and Vibration Impact Assessment). That is, an adequate level of acoustic amenity would be preserved, in the context of a short construction period.

Noise associated with use of the workforce accommodation facility is not expected to be audible at neighbouring dwellings given the separation distance and low noise levels associated with the use. The facility may be visible from local roads and from nearby dwellings including at night (due to light glow). However, it would be situated next to an existing industrial area limiting its impact on the prevailing character of the location.

The presence of the facility, inclusive of its relatively large population, may be unsettling for nearby residents, and this may add to concerns and frustrations neighbours have regarding the Project. Notwithstanding, given the proposed management approach (see Section 7.1 and Section 7.4), interactions between workers residing at the facility and neighbours would be infrequent and may not occur.

Overall, the proposed workforce accommodation facility would only have modest implications for existing residential amenity, with traffic volumes and associated noise on Ingliston Road having the greatest potential to cause annoyance for neighbours. In this context (and as discussed in Section 7), it is noted that that the proposed workforce accommodation facility would ameliorate potential severe impacts resulting from the Project's effect on demand for housing and community services and would limit the impact of the construction workforce on social dynamics within existing communities. That is, the proposed facility would deliver a net social benefit.

8.6 The Broader Community

As discussed in Sections 8.4 and 8.5, a considerable number of existing residents of the study area would have the Proposed Route on their land, and/or the Project would be visible from their home. Nevertheless, many people living in the study area would not be affected by the Project in this way. For these residents, their direct experience of the Project would be limited to visual encounters as they travel through the rural landscape or their township/urban area, and/or when they visit particular locations to engage in recreation. These individuals may also experience the Project indirectly as part of their interactions with members of their community who are experiencing more acute impacts.

8.6.1 Local Roads

Views of the Project from roadways would be available throughout the study area, with the Project being 'usually visually dominant in the landscape' at locations within 2km. In this context, the LVIA notes that the Project would affect views of valued landscape features from the road network, such as views of Mount Beckworth and Mount Bolton, volcanic cones and heritage mining landscapes in Section 2, and the Mount Kororoit Volcanic Cone in Section 4. However, most public roads which would offer views of the Project are local roads with few road users and without roadside stopping points or formal lookouts, limiting the duration of potential views. On this basis, visual impacts from roadways were typically assessed as 'low' or 'negligible' as part of the LVIA. Notwithstanding, as the LVIA recognises, the affected local roads are used primarily by local community members. As a result, although views of the Project from public roads would typically be short in duration and the Project's route limits exposure, some local residents would view the Project frequently from roads, potentially on a daily basis. This group of residents may include Directly Affected Landholders, Surrounding Landholders, as well as the broader community.

Residents living throughout each Section have indicated that the existing character of the rural landscape in which they live contributes substantially to their quality of life, and sense of identity and place. In this context, views of the Project from local roads may add to and compound impacts for Directly Affected Landholders and Surrounding Landholders. Moreover, views of the Project from local roads may also detract from the enjoyment of a valued rural lifestyle among members of the broader community. While impacts for these community members may be less severe and more likely to resolve over time, there may nevertheless be flow on implications for community capacity and cohesion in the short to medium term, particularly in parts of the Proposed Route where negative impacts for Directly Affected Landholders and Surrounding Landholders are more common.

8.6.2 Settlements

As discussed in Section 4 of this report, there are a number of settlements located within the study area, the character and amenity of which is valued by existing residents. An assessment of the potential visibility of the Project from selected settlements is presented in the LVIA, showing that in most cases there would be little to no visibility of the Project from social focal points within the settlements, such as commercial centres, schools, recreational facilities, etc. That is, use of public amenities and commercial centres within the nearby settlements would typically not expose residents and visitors to views of the Project.

Notwithstanding, at the outskirts or entry to some townships (Elmhurst, Allendale, Kingston, Newlyn) and from some locations within townships (such as Myrniong) views may include the Project. As a result, township residents whose dwelling is near the boundary of the settlement may experience direct impacts on their residential amenity, whereas the remainder of township residents would encounter views of the Project when travelling to and from their settlements using country roads. Notable exceptions to this are:

Section 2

- Kingston Show Grounds – is the venue for events including the Annual Kingston Agricultural Show and the Kingston Food and Wine Festival. The Show Grounds are accessed via Church Parade which forms the northern boundary of Kingston and offers expansive northward views, which would be affected by the Project. Views to the north from within the Show Grounds are screened by vegetation however, and thus visitors to the events held at the Show Grounds would only view the Project when approaching the venue.

Section 3

- Myrniong Recreation Reserve - Transmission towers would be visible from the reserve as a background element at a distance of approximately 2.6km. The reserve is well used and valued by the local community. While activity supported by the reserve includes active recreation, where the focus would be on the sports field rather than the surrounding area, the reserve provides a charming location to watch sports and socialise, and also supports passive recreation.
- Myrniong Primary School - Transmission towers would be visible as a background element (2.8km) from some buildings and outdoor areas within the school which are elevated and oriented to take advantage of northward views. Views of the Project would not impede school functions, although the school is situated in a very pleasant setting, and this likely contributes to the enjoyment of the facility by the community.

Section 4

- Darley - As discussed previously (see Section 8.5), the Project would have a substantial effect on the visual amenity of residential areas located on the north-facing slopes of Darley. In addition, the visual setting of recreational assets in Darley would also be affected by the Project.
  - Bald Hill Activation Area – Over time, the Bald Hill Activation Area would provide very convenient access to a diverse range of recreational opportunities for Darley residents and would enhance the liveability and attractiveness of the suburb. The Project's effect on the attractiveness of the facility, while not fundamental to its success, may influence its appeal among some users (discussed in greater detail in Section 8.6.3).
  - Bacchus Marsh Golf Club – Views of the Project would be available from several locations within the course (visual impacts from assessed locations within the course ranged from High to Moderate). For most players, golf is both a sport and a source of relaxation/opportunity to connect with the outdoors and nature and in this context the Project may have a minor effect on the enjoyment of the course.
  - Walking Tracks - Most potential views of the Project from the Lerderderg Walking Track/Golf Club Walking Trail are either screened or filtered by existing vegetation, although sections of the Golf Club Walking Trail to the north of the golf course would be more exposed. Views of the Project would form part of the user experience, and while this would not impede use, it may influence the attractiveness of the tracks.

  Considering the above, the Project would influence the attractiveness of various locations within Darley, including focal points for recreation. While the level of change is not sufficient to compromise the useability of these locations, these effects would add to and compound social impacts experienced by members of the Darley community.

8.6.3 Community Facilities and Open Spaces

There are numerous locations of social and cultural importance located throughout rural parts of the study area. In all cases, access to and use of these locations would not be directly impeded by the Project. However, in some cases the Project would alter the aesthetic quality of the locations and thus potentially lessen the benefit obtained through visitation. Potential impacts are discussed below by Section.

Section 1

The main areas of interest in the context of the SIA in Section 1 are three State Forests which are used for recreational purposes, Mount Cole State Forest (including Ben Nevis Lookout), Ben Major State Forest and Lookout and the Pyrenees State Forest. These areas support a substantial amount of outdoor recreation among locals and visitors, and there are several businesses offering guided tours in the areas.

Walking tracks and camp grounds within the forests are set within forested areas and would provide little to no visibility of the Project. Exceptions are the Ben Major and Ben Nevis lookouts, which offer expansive views over the district and would allow visitors to see the Project from a distance. Visitors to these vantage points would see the Project within a panoramic field of view incorporating a wide variety of land uses and structures, including the 220kV Horsham to Waubra transmission line, windfarms, etc. While the visibility of the Project from the lookouts would not necessarily be welcomed by visitors, it would not detract from the visitor experience (which is multifaceted) sufficiently to materially affect visitation, as the lookouts' main 'drawcard' (they provide an elevated vantage point offering long range views), would be unaffected.

In relation to the Joel Joel War Memorial, Joel Joel Hall and Crowlands Homestead, a mix of intervening vegetation and distance prevent views of the Project from these sites and thus, their use and enjoyment would not be affected.

Section 2

Water Bodies

There are two water bodies in Section 2, Newlyn Reservoir and Hepburn Lagoon, which are open to the public and currently support passive recreation and activities such as fishing and kayaking. Newlyn Reservoir has been developed to support passive recreation and thus likely attracts a broad cross section of the community, compared with Hepburn Lagoon, which is harder to access and likely used by fewer people, including locals and fishing enthusiasts. Nevertheless, both locations are valued by members of the local community, as they provide an opportunity for social and recreational activity in a peaceful and tranquil setting.

The Project is set back from each water body (1.4km for Newlyn Reservoir and 450m from Hepburn Lagoon) and thus would not directly impede their use in construction or operation. However, at this distance construction noise may detract from amenity, albeit for a short period, and the Project would be clearly visible during operation.

An assessment of the visual impact of the Project at Newlyn Reservoir was undertaken as part of the LVIA, which finds that impacts would be of 'moderate' significance. In this context, the LVIA notes that, 'at a distance of 1.4km the Project would be highly visible, with views (of the towers) being across open water towards the Mount Bullarook volcanic cone'. No formal assessment of visual impact at Hepburn Lagoon had been undertaken at the time of writing.[34] However, the Project is substantially closer to this water body which is set in cleared and relatively flat farmland.

In each case, the presence of the Project in the landscape would be inconsistent with the aesthetic qualities of the locations identified and valued by the community. In the case of Newlyn Reservoir, the water body would retain many of the qualities which attract users to the location and it can be expected that much of the social and

[34] The LVIA cites issues relating to access to the Lagoon by way of explanation.

recreational activity supported by the reservoir would continue if the Project is approved. However, there may be a sense of disappointment among local community members who use and enjoy the site, and there is the potential that particular individuals may choose to socialise and/or recreate elsewhere, at least for a period, particularly those who are struggling to adapt to the presence of the Project in their local area (for example, due to their status as a Directly Affected Landholder, or Surrounding Landholder).

In the case of Hepburn Lagoon, given its proximity to the Project and physical setting, there is potential for the Project to substantially alter the prevailing character and amenity of the site (peaceful, difficult to access, but worth the effort), in a way which has a greater influence on its attractiveness.

Mount Beckworth Scenic Reserve

Views of the Project from Mount Beckworth Scenic Reserve would be limited primarily to locations west of the summit of Mount Beckworth and areas that are not readily accessible. Views from locations that are most frequented or accessible within the remainder of the reserve are on east-facing slopes where views are oriented away from Proposed Route, and the line of sight toward the Project is screened by the topography of Mount Beckworth itself, and vegetation within the reserve. These areas include campgrounds, walking tracks and key visitor areas which are set within forested areas.

The LVIA assessed the visual impact of the Project from a location beyond the summit within the reserve's western edge. The assessment and accompanying photomontage indicate that the impact would be 'moderate' with such impacts limited to few locations. For the affected view, the LVIA observes that 'Project towers would be visible in a highly modified landscape which includes the Waubra Wind Farm'. Notwithstanding, 'looking southwest from the lookout, Project towers would be dominant in views directly south, reducing in prominence with increasing distance and proximity to wind turbines'.

Taking account of the LVIA, and the site visit undertaken by the author, it is apparent that there will be the potential for clear views of the Project for visitors accessing areas west of the summit, and the Lollipop Tree, although the Project would not be visible from the most readily accessible locations within the reserve. Access to the summit is somewhat challenging in both distance and topography, with only seasonal vehicle (4WD) access available, limiting access to walkers, mountain bikers and horse riders. In this context, the Project would not necessarily detract from the visitor experience sufficiently to materially affect visitation to Mount Beckworth Scenic Reserve, or even to the summit in particular. However, for some members of the local community who are uncomfortable with the Project (perhaps due to their status as a Directly Affected Landholder, or Surrounding Landholder), locations such as the summit of Mount Beckworth may be avoided, or used sparingly, particularly in the short term.

Avenues of Honour

Avenues of Honour are located at Turello and Kingston. In the case of the Kingston Avenue of Honour, due to its location to the south of the township, there would be little to no visibility of the Project from this location.

In contrast, the Turello Avenue of Honour runs parallel with the Project, approximately 800m to the south, in relatively flat farming land. As such, while the visitor would typically look down the avenue alignment and away from the Project when appreciating Turello Avenue of Honour, clear views of the Project would likely form part of the visitor experience. For some who visit, they may consider the Project detracts from what is an otherwise aesthetically pleasing rural setting for the facility.

Others

The various halls, churches and schools located throughout Section 2 are set back from the Proposed Route (at least 1.5km) and as a result, concerns regarding EMF emissions have not been a focus among users. Moreover, in most cases, due to a combination of distance and screening vegetation and topography, there is little to no visibility of the Project from these facilities. An exception may be St Micheal Convent/Church in Springbank, where the

Project may be visible from Springbank Road to the front of the facility. Notwithstanding, the convent/church is essentially an indoor facility, and such users would encounter the Project when entering and exiting only.

Section 3

Water Bodies

There are three water bodies in Section 3, Moorabool Reservoir, Pykes Creek Reservoir and Bolwarrah Weir, which are open to the public and currently support passive recreation and activities such as fishing.

- **Moorabool Reservoir** is a popular place for social gatherings, birthdays parties, etc. The Project would be visible from the carpark exit of the reservoir, but not from functional areas within the reservoir. Views of the Reservoir would not be affected.
- **Pykes Creek Reservoir** provides for land based passive recreation as well as water-based activities such as boating, kayaking and swimming. Views of the Project would be available from the Reservoir's playground and picnic facility, a focal point for passive recreation. However, the Project would be 2.6km from this location and partially screened by topography and vegetation. In this context, the Project would not undermine the attractiveness of the location.

  Visitors who venture out on to the water would obtain clearer views of the Project as they move northward (the Proposed Route passes over the reservoir at its northern edge) and from these locations the effect of the Project on the Reservoir's character and appeal may be more pronounced. Nevertheless, large sections of the Reservoir would not be affected in this way, and in the case of some water-based activities/participants, enjoyment of the/their activity is not highly contingent on the water body's scenic quality. That is, the Project would not materially influence usage of and satisfaction with Pykes Creek Reservoir, for the majority of users.
- **Bolwarrah Weir** is a peaceful location which supports passive recreation, picnicking, fishing and bird watching. Due to the proximity of the Project (730m), the useability of the site during construction of the Project would be affected by construction activity and noise, albeit for a limited period. In operation, the visual impact of the Project (assessed as 'High' in the LVIA reflecting the proximity of the Project and prevailing character and usage profile of the site) would affect the appeal of the location. In this context, existing users may avoid the location if the Project proceeds, and/or resent the Project's effect on the quality of a local recreational site.

Others

In relation to the other social and cultural focal points identified, namely the Myrniong Avenue of Honour and the nearby Our Lady Help of Christians church, topography and existing screening vegetation prevent the Project from being visible for users of the facilities.

Section 4

Bald Hill Activation Area

The Bald Hill Activation Area has been designed to meet regional recreational needs of the Moorabool community and to attract visitation from outside the LGA.

The Bald Hill Activation Area will become a multifaceted facility covering a large area of undulating terrain. As such, visibility of the Project from within the Bald Hill Activation Area would vary. To illustrate, the LVIA indicates that visual impacts from northern sections of the sculptural trail and all abilities sculptural trail (Telford Park) would be 'high', and that the Project would also be visible from the entrance to the facility. However, views of the Project are screened from other locations within the Bald Hill Activation Area, such as sections of the sculptural trail located on the east and south of the Bald Hill Summit. In this context, while the Project would typically be considered an undesirable element in the field of view by users of the facility, the facility's size and the variety of spaces and attractions it provides, would assist in diluting the effect of the Project on the quality of the user experience. Nevertheless, some local residents of Darley may avoid the facility, particularly those who are highly sensitive to the Project's presence in their local area.

Merrimu Reservoir

There is one water body in Section 2, Merrimu Reservoir, which is open to the public and currently supports passive recreation. Access to the water is not available and thus the appeal of the location is grounded primarily in its peaceful ambience and expansive views. Existing picnic facilities at the location are functional, although somewhat dated and weathered.

The Proposed Route would be in close proximity to the Merrimu Picnic area (185m to the south) and as a result, the useability of the picnic area during construction would be affected by construction activity and noise, albeit for a limited period.

During operation, due to the orientation of the picnic facility, the Project would be clearly visible in views over the reservoir from the picnic area (Viewpoint W5A; see Technical Report D: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment). In response, EPR LV1 recommends consultation with the relevant landholders and/or land managers for Merrimu Reservoir once detailed designs are available, to confirm sensitive viewpoints that are significantly impacted by the Project from a landscape and visual perspective. Where required, also via EPR LV1, appropriate measures for mitigating visual impacts would be determined with a particular focus on landscape screening to filter views towards the Project when facing east from the existing barbecue and picnic facilities at Merrimu Reservoir, and the development of new public amenities to replace or replicate existing assets in a suitable location within Merrimu Reservoir, which are oriented away from the Project. Assuming the final design successfully orients user perspectives to the north and screens the transmission route from this location, then the appeal of the facility would be largely retained (particularly in light of the provision of improved picnic facilities), although views of the Project would inevitably form part of the visitor experience, and this may dissuade use by some.

Lerderderg State Park

The LVIA finds that there would be no visibility of the Project from most locations within the Lerderderg State Park, and where views are available towers would be a background element. When accessing the park, visitors would travel under the transmission line on Lerderderg Gorge Road, which passes through a picturesque valley. The drive to the park through this setting may contribute to the user experience in a minor way, for some users. However, the principal driver for visitation is the park itself, and in this context the Project would not detract materially from the park's appeal.

Coimadai Memorial Park and Avenue of Honour

The avenue of honour is located on a major road with no pedestrian infrastructure, and as a result can only be appreciated (safely) when driving along the road. In this context, the avenue functions as a gateway to the Coimadai Memorial Park as opposed to a destination in its own right. As a result, while the Project runs along Diggers Rest-Coimadai Road in close proximity to the Avenue of Honor, the effect of the Project on the user experience of the avenue of honour would be limited. Notwithstanding, the future expansion of the avenue of honour to the east, as desired by the Coimadai Avenue of Honor Restoration Association, would be limited by the Project.

In contrast, users of the Coimadai Memorial Park engage with the facility on foot, potentially over extended periods. The Project would be located in close proximity to the Memorial Park and highly visible at this location, given the layout and orientation of the facility. Existing members of the Coimadai Avenue of Honor Restoration Association have expressed concerns regarding the Project's impact on the amenity of the facility, and a strong desire to protect the facility's integrity and attractiveness.

The LVIA assessed visual impacts on the Coimadai Memorial Park prior to mitigation as 'Moderate – High' due to the sensitivity and use of this area, the orientation of key activities toward the Proposed Route. In response, the proposed EPR LV1 requires the Project to set out a process for consulting with representatives of the War Memorial, to confirm sensitive viewpoints which are significantly impacted by the Project and determine appropriate measures (if any) for mitigating visual impacts. This process has commenced and a number of suggestions have been made to the Coimadai Avenue of Honor Restoration Association including:

a) relocation of the Memorial Park within the Merrimu Reservoir picnic area - Locations toward the northern end of the picnic area are positioned away from the Project, and thus a redesigned facility located to the north of the picnic area has the potential to substantially reduce the Project's influence on visual amenity within the memorial park. Moreover, locations to the north of the picnic area are also located away from the Diggers Rest-Coimadai Road, which is a source of substantial traffic noise and would provide direct access to northward views over the reservoir (arguably the most attractive view available at the location). That is, as part of the master planned outcome for the Merrimu Reservoir picnic area, a relocated memorial facility which provides users with high amenity and overcomes some of the existing facility's shortcomings (such as a lack of a formal entry pathway), appears achievable.

b) minor adjustments to the existing facility to minimise views of the Project from within the existing facility.

While the suggestions listed above may reduce the impact of the Project on the existing facility, neither can eliminate views. As a result, even in a reconfigured and/or relocated state, the Project may detract from the appeal of the facility for some users. Moreover, it is understood that the Coimadai Avenue of Honor Restoration Association does not support relocation and/or alternations to the facility. By way of explanation, the Restoration Association has indicated that facility has been created through considerable effort on the part of the descendants of World War I volunteers from Coimadai, and is *a monument befitting the sacrifice and extraordinary display of patriotism by these volunteers*. In that context, the Association has indicated that *the residents firmly believe, the monument must not be altered or diminished.*

Given the Association's assessment that the proposed mitigation measures are not suitable, the Project would likely have a noticeable impact on the amenity of the facility, which is clearly highly valued and well used. For the Coimadai Avenue of Honor Restoration Association, this would be a very disappointing outcome, which compounds existing frustrations relating to previous disturbances to the facility associated with the development of construction of Merrimu Reservoir.

MacPherson Park

The Project would traverse land adjacent the northern boundary of Macpherson Park. Given the proximity of the Proposed Route (within 50m to 100m of playing fields located to the north to the facility), construction activity and noise has potential to interfere with use of the facility (equestrian activities being particularly sensitive), albeit for a short period.

In operation the Project would be clearly visible, and interfere with pleasant views from the facility to the north. Community members have raised concerns about the proximity of the proposed transmission infrastructure in the context of potential EMF related health effects (assessed as negligible, see Technical Report L), and also the effect of the Project on the aesthetic quality of the location.

The pleasant surrounds of MacPherson Park are undoubtably a feature which can add to the enjoyment players and spectators obtain when engaging in and/or watching sporting competition at the facility. However, the primary purpose of MacPherson Park and its principal source of community benefit is enabling active recreation, the conduct of which is not highly sensitive to the presence or absence of the proposed infrastructure. That is, the core function of MacPherson Park would not be impeded by the Project. Indeed, many successful sporting complexes throughout Victoria are located next to transmission infrastructure and/or other land uses (such as freeways), which are typically considered to detract from amenity in their immediate surrounds.

However, it is still the case the community members (including passive users) may consider that the appeal of Macpherson Park is negatively affected by Project. In this context, it is noteworthy that changes to the facility as set out in the Future Directions Paper for MacPherson Park include measures which would facilitate a more harmonious co-existence of the facility and the Project, such as the movement of the facility's primary entrance to the south west corner of the site and the installation of substantial screen plantings throughout the park. That is, while initially the Project may result in a degree of disappointment among users, over time the facility would mature in a manner that limits the Project's influence on its attractiveness.

Others

Other community facilities located in the rural parts of Section 4 are set back from the Project by at least 750 metres (limiting community concerns regarding potential health impacts) and have an indoor focus (such as Assembly Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses and Melton Christian College). In this context their use and enjoyment would not be materially affected by the Project.

8.6.4 Tourism

Businesses

Technical Report G: Economic Impact Assessment indicates that during construction of the Project, noise, traffic and visual amenity impacts, may lead to reduced visitation to locations in proximity to the Project, in particular locations within 2km, potentially leading to negative impacts for businesses operating in industry category, 'Accommodation and Food Services' and 'Arts and Recreation Services'. Such business include, golf clubs, equestrian academies, cellar doors and bed and breakfast accommodation. Technical Report G: Economic Impact Assessment also states that, during operation, businesses that rely on the amenity of the natural landscape to attract visitation to the area and/or their businesses in particular, may experience some modest negative impacts during operation, due to reduced visual amenity. While this potential is acknowledged, a detailed assessment of the Project's implications for particular businesses was not undertaken.

AusNet has undertaken a preliminary desktop assessment of businesses operating in the industry categories 'Accommodation and Food Services' and 'Arts and Recreation Services' within the study area. Specifically, AusNet sought to establish whether there is any potential for businesses in the study area to be negatively affected by the Project, considering factors such as the nature of the services offered, whether clients visit the business premises, etc. As Table 8-4 shows, Ausnet identified 37 relevant businesses, 27 of which were assessed as having some potential to be negatively impacted.

Table 8-4: 'Accommodation and Food Services' and 'Arts and Recreation Services' Businesses in the Study Area and Their Potential to be Negatively Impacted by the Project.

	Unlikely	Possible	Total
Less than 1km	1	6	7
1km to 2km	5	10	15
2km to 4.6km	4	10	14
4.6km-9.2km	0	1	1
Total	10	27	37

Source, Ausnet 2025

In rural areas in particular, existing business may be relied on heavily by the local community as a source of employment and/or particular goods and services, or may function as an important recreational focal point. In this context, the absence of a precise characterisation of business impacts, prevents an assessment of associated social impacts. However, it is noted that EPRs EC1 and EC3 (see Technical Report G: Economic) would assist in understanding and avoiding and/or mitigating such impacts. These EPRs require the development of a Business Mitigation and Support Strategy for directly affected businesses and a Business Mitigation and Support Strategy for businesses within 2km of the Project, which will define the process and requirements for consulting with business owners to understand their business and potential impacts, and to develop measures in accordance with relevant EPRs, to mitigate and manage impacts of the Project to the extent reasonably practicable.

The Project's potential impact on the Melton Aerodrome has been assessed in Technical Report J: Aviation Impact Assessment. The assessment indicates that operations at the aerodrome would continue as normal with some adjustments to descent and departure angles/profiles to allow for clearance to be maintained over the transmission line. In this context, existing charter flights/scenic tours could continue without interruption.

Attractions

The Project's effect on the amenity and character of the study area may influence the attractiveness of particular tourism attractions and events to varying degrees:

- Section 1 – None identified
- In Section 2 there are three recreational trails which cross the Proposed Route:
  - Buried Rivers of Gold Trail – is a self-drive trail constructed to facilitate the viewing of historic mining fabric. The rail crosses the Proposed Route twice and a substantial proportion of the trail is located within 2km of the Proposed Route. As such the views of the Project, would form part of the visitor experience. An assessment of the visual impact of the Project from locations on the trail conducted as part of the LVIA indicates that the Project would not impede views of relevant heritage fabric or diminish the prominence or legibility of this fabric. Given this, the Project would not undermine the principal purpose of the trail. However, motivations underpinning use would vary, and it is possible that a desire to spend time in an aesthetically pleasing rural setting drives at least some visitation and thus the Project may influence user satisfaction, and discourage some users.
  - Ballarat to Maryborough Heritage Rail Trail is a cycle route which makes use of existing country roads in the vicinity of the Project. The trail is 91km in length, and while the trail crosses the Proposed Route the attractiveness of the cycle route would only be minimally affected, due to the relatively fleeting view of the Project from the perspective of cyclists using the cycling route, and the overall length of the trail.
  - Wallaby Track is a 52km Section of the Great Dividing Trail Network linking Daylesford and Creswick. The track crosses the Proposed Route on Myers Road, Dean, at the interaction of the existing 220kV transmission line. Given the length of the track and the crossing point being adjacent the existing transmission line, the impact of the Project on the attractiveness and use of the track would be negligible.
- Section 3
  - Myrniong Car Sprint – the event occurs in a pleasant rural setting on a local road. While the activity of racing classic cars is not necessarily contingent on the event's pleasant rural setting, the setting likely enhances the experience of participants and spectators. The Project runs perpendicular to the sprint course, approximately 500m to the north of the road closure point. Given the proximity, construction activity including noise has some potential to interfere with the event, although associated impacts could be avoided through construction sequencing. Spectator areas are located on the western side of Korobeit Road between the starting line and a bend in the road between 1.3km and 1.8 km from the Project. No formal assessment of views from these areas has been undertaken, however, it is likely that views of the Project would form part of the user experience for participants and spectators. For some spectators, particularly those with a passing interest in classic cars, the Project may reduce the attractiveness of the event. However, car enthusiasts are unlikely to be deterred.
- Section 4
  - Bald Hill Activation Area – As discussed above (Section 8.6.3), the visual impact of the Project as viewed from parts of the Bald Hill Activation Area would be 'high', whereas from other parts of the facility views of the Project would be screened by topography. Where views of the Project are available these would typically be considered an undesirable element in the field of view by users of the facility. For potential users who are visiting from outside the local area, a trip to the Bald Hill Activation Area would be only one of many potential outings that the user could engage in, and at the margins any reduction in the appeal of the facility has the potential to reduce visitation. However, given the multifaceted nature of the facility and substantial variation in terms of the visibility of the Project from within the facility, visitation by non-locals would still be substantial.

- Lerderderg State Park – As discussed above, (Section 8.6.3), the effect of the Project on the amenity and character of the Lerderderg State Park would be limited to the drive into the park along Lerderderg Gorge Road. It is unlikely that this change to the user experience would result in reduced visitation by individuals who live outside the local area.

8.7 Environmental Performance Requirements (EPR)

No additional EPRs are proposed. The EPRs listed in Section 8.1 have been considered as part of the assessment presented in Section 8.8.

8.8 Summary of Residual Impacts

Table 8-5: Summary of Residual Impacts – Land Use and Amenity

Section	Receptor	Changes & Impacts	Construction	Operation
1	Directly Affected Landholders	▪ The Project would cause inconvenience for all landholders and may be viewed an unwanted intervention with substantial consequences by particular landholders. ▪ However, this is unlikely to precipitate broader social impacts such as material changes to the composition of the community, reductions in social cohesion, etc. Moreover, a substantial minority of landholders are supportive of the Project.	▪ Moderate Negative	▪ Moderate Negative
	Surrounding Landholders	▪ The attractiveness of some dwellings and properties as a place to live and/or conduct a business may be reduced during construction and operation, leading to frustration and emotional strain for residents. Exposure is limited in Section 1 by a relatively low population density compared with other parts of the Proposed Route. ▪ The placement of a proposed workforce accommodation facility near Lexton would detract from rural amenity for a small number of nearby residents, although for a limited period.	▪ Minor-Moderate Negative	▪ Moderate Negative
	Broader Community	▪ Views of the Project from local roads, the periphery of settlements and locations such as the Ben Major Lookout, may detract from the enjoyment of a valued rural lifestyle and sense of place among members of the broader community.	▪ Negligible to Minor Negative	▪ Minor Negative
	Tourism Businesses	▪ There is some potential for interference with the operation of tourism-based businesses, although the nature and severity of associated social impacts has not been determined. To the extent that there are impacts, these would add to the overall strain the Project would place on the local community.	▪ Not rated	▪ Not rated
2	Directly Affected Landholders	▪ Affected landholders may face an onerous adaptation process (horticulturalists in particular), inclusive of adjusting existing farming, coming to terms with changes to the aesthetic quality of the residences, etc. ▪ In this context, the Project may challenge landholders' sense of connection and stewardship toward their properties and farming community. ▪ Impacts for landholders would be felt by individuals and families who form part of an integrated rural community. Impacts on landholders may result in some changes to the composition of the community, and diminish the capacity and cohesiveness of the community during construction and for some time afterwards, as individual landholders adjust to altered conditions.	▪ Moderate Negative	▪ Major Negative

Section	Receptor	Changes & Impacts	Construction	Operation
	Surrounding Landholders	▪ Changes to the amenity of nearby rural dwellings located outside the main settlements may not be readily accepted, and have the potential to result in frustration and emotional strain for those affected. ▪ Changes to the visual environment would occur alongside disruption to existing horticultural enterprises operating in Section 2, and affected residents may be active members of the same integrated rural community. ▪ Impacts for Surrounding Landholders may further diminish the capacity and cohesiveness of the community during construction and for some time afterwards, as landholders and/or residents adjust to altered conditions.	▪ Minor Negative	▪ Moderate-Major Negative
	Broader Community	▪ Construction activity including noise would affect the amenity of various locations, including focal points for recreation, for a relatively short period. ▪ Views of the Project in operation from local roads, the periphery of settlements and locations such as the Newlyn Reservoir and Hepburn Lagoon in particular, may detract from local residents' sense of place and enjoyment of a valued rural lifestyle among members of the broader community, inclusive of Directly Affected Landholders and Surrounding Landholders. ▪ In some instances, changes to the scenic quality of these locations would be substantial and may not be readily accepted. ▪ These effects and associated impacts may further diminish the capacity and cohesiveness of the community during construction and for some time afterwards.	▪ Minor Negative	▪ Moderate Negative
	Tourism Businesses	▪ There is some potential for interference with the operation of tourism-based businesses, although the nature and severity of associated social impacts has not been determined. To the extent that there are impacts, these would add to the overall strain the Project would place on the local community.	▪ Not rated	▪ Not rated
3	Directly Affected Landholders	▪ Affected landholders would commonly consider that the Project undermines an aspirational lifestyle, disrupts intergenerational connections to particular properties, etc. Affected landholders may harbour ongoing frustration and resentment toward the Project. ▪ The Project may challenge a shared sense of identity among landholders (and nearby rural residents) built on appreciation of the area's scenic qualities and peaceful rural lifestyle.	▪ Moderate Negative	▪ Major Negative
	Surrounding Landholders	▪ The Project's effect on the scenic quality of nearby rural homes located outside of the main settlements may disrupt an aspirational lifestyle, and may not be readily accepted. ▪ The Project may challenge a shared sense of identity among rural residents built on appreciation of the area's scenic qualities and peaceful rural lifestyle. ▪ The placement of a proposed workforce accommodation facility near Ballan would detract from residential amenity for a small number of nearby residents, although for a limited period.	▪ Minor - Moderate Negative	▪ Moderate-Major Negative
	Broader Community	▪ Construction activity including noise would affect the amenity of various locations, including focal points for recreation, for a relatively short period, and may be a source of minor irritation. ▪ Views of the Project in operation from local roads, the periphery of settlements and locations such as Bolwarrah Weir in particular, may detract from local residents' sense of place and enjoyment of a valued rural lifestyle among members of the broader community, inclusive of Directly Affected Landholders and Surrounding Landholders.	▪ Minor Negative	▪ Minor - Moderate Negative

Section	Receptor	Changes & Impacts	Construction	Operation
	Tourism Businesses	▪ There is some potential for interference with the operation of tourism-based businesses, although the nature and severity of associated social impacts has not been determined. To the extent that there are impacts, these would add to the overall strain the Project would place on the local community.	▪ Not rated	▪ Not rated
4- Darley and Surrounds	Directly Affected Landholders	▪ Construction activity including noise would affect the amenity of various locations, including nearby dwellings for a relatively short period, and may be a source of minor irritation. ▪ Properties to the north of Darley include smaller equine properties and lifestyle properties which offer expansive views (Swans Road) and/or which are set in a picturesque valley. In some instances, the Project's effect on the attractiveness of the properties to the current owners would be substantial. Fears relating to bushfire safety may contribute to landholder concerns in this area.	▪ Moderate Negative	▪ Major - Moderate Negative
	Surrounding Landholders	▪ The undulating topography of Darley and surrounds affords pleasant views of the Lerderderg State Park to the north for suburban residents and contributes to the character and amenity of rural properties. Many homes in the area have been designed to take advantage of the prevailing views. Residents associate the area's scenic qualities with an aspirational lifestyle. The Project would affect the quality of views from many homes, disrupting this lifestyle and the sense of identity that it supports. ▪ Increased bushfire risk may affect the attractiveness of some dwellings in Darley and surrounds. ▪ Affected residents may harbour ongoing frustration and resentment toward the Project, and in some cases may experience a desire to relocate.	▪ Minor Negative	▪ Major Negative
	Broader Community	▪ Views of the Project from local roads, and locations such as the Bald Hill Activation Area, the Bacchus Marsh Golf Course and walking trails along the Lerderderg River, may detract from residents' sense of place and enjoyment of a valued lifestyle among members of the broader suburban community of Darley, including Surrounding Landholders.	▪ Minor Negative	▪ Major - Moderate Negative
	Tourism Businesses	▪ There is some potential for interference with the operation of tourism-based businesses, although the nature and severity of associated social impacts has not been determined. To the extent that there are impacts, these would add to the overall strain the Project would place on the local community.	▪ Not rated	▪ Not rated
4 – East of Darley	Directly Affected Landholders	▪ The Project would cause inconvenience for all landholders and in some cases (such as properties located to the west of Macpherson Park) may be viewed an unwanted intervention with substantial consequences by particular landholders. ▪ However, this is unlikely to precipitate broader social impacts such as material changes to the composition of the community, reductions in social cohesion, etc.	▪ Moderate Negative	▪ Moderate Negative
	Surrounding Landholders	▪ The attractiveness of some dwellings and properties (including those within rural living areas and/or in very close proximity to the Proposed Route) as a place to live and/or conduct a business may be reduced during construction and operation, leading to frustration and emotional strain for residents.	▪ Minor Negative	▪ Moderate Negative
	Broader Community	▪ Views of the Project from local roads may detract from views of valued landscape elements including Mount Koroit, which is important local landmark. Likewise, the Project may affect views from locations such as Merrimu Reservoir and MacPherson Park, and in doing so, detract from local community members' appreciation of the area's landscape qualities and the enjoyment of particular recreational facilities and ultimately their sense of place (although the Project would not impede their use).	▪ Minor Negative	▪ Moderate Negative

Section	Receptor	Changes & Impacts	Construction	Operation
	Tourism Businesses	▪ There is some potential for interference with the operation of tourism-based businesses, although the nature and severity of associated social impacts has not been determined. To the extent that there are impacts, these would add to the overall strain the Project would place on the local community.	▪ Not rated	▪ Not rated

9 Decommissioning

Decommissioning of the Project would have a similar short-term effect on amenity and social profile to that associated with its construction. Assuming appropriate mitigation is applied at this time, it would be possible to minimise related social impacts. Moreover, given that decommissioning would relieve landholders of restrictions on land use imposed by the easement and likely be perceived to have a positive effect on the amenity and character of the study area, many positive social impacts would also arise.

10 Cumulative Impacts

10.1 Introduction

This Section assesses potential 'cumulative impacts' where the effects of the Project occur simultaneously with effects generated by other major projects planned for the study area. 'Chapter 4: EES assessment framework and approach', identifies 23 'Relevant Future Projects' that are approved, pending approval or at project feasibility, which have at least some potential to generate effects which overlap temporally with the Project's effects. Of these 15 were assessed as having potential to generate cumulative social impacts.

10.2 Assessment

Table 10-1 and Figure 10-1 provide information regarding the relevant projects and their potential to generate cumulative social impacts in conjunction with the Western Renewables Link Project (WRL). Of particular note:

- The construction stage of some of the identified projects may coincide with the construction stage of WRL (see Table 10-1 below). For projects located in Sections 1 to 3 in particular, this could lead to attraction of construction workers to the area, placing a cumulative strain on existing accommodation and community facilities and services. However, the proposed WRL workforce accommodation facilities would ameliorate any potential contribution WRL may make in terms of cumulative impacts on demand for housing, etc.
- There are three projects located in Section 1 (Watta Wella Renewable Energy Project, Victoria to New South Wales Interconnector West and Navarre Green Power Hub) in addition to WRL, which involve the construction of transmission lines terminating at the Bulgana Terminal Station, and the Watta Wella Renewable Energy Project, would involve the construction of wind turbines to the west of the Bulgana Terminal Station. As a result, visual amenity in the immediate surrounds of the Bulgana Terminal Station may be affected by multiple energy projects, which collectively would alter character of the local landscape. Moreover, each of these projects may involve project representatives contacting local residents as part of the planning process to discuss issues such as land access, and some landholders may need to deal with multiple projects simultaneously. The affected area is sparsely populated, limiting exposure to these cumulative effects. Moreover, some local landholders may support, or at least benefit financially from the projects, potentially offsetting any concerns. Nevertheless, the cumulative effect of the various energy projects has the potential to reduce the appeal of the area as a place to live among local rural residents.
- The proposed Nyaninyuk Wind Farm would be located to the west of Mount Beckworth and would cover an area which bridges the proposed WRL easement, and thus WRL and the proposed wind farm would have an overlapping viewshed. The affected area is currently valued for its scenic beauty, with views toward and from Mount Beckworth being of particular value. Local community members may consider that the cumulative effect of the two projects is to 'industrialize' a scenic rural landscape, and to reduce the appeal of the area as a place to live. Notwithstanding, a large proportion of directly affected and nearby landholders in the area would have wind turbines placed on their land if the Nyaninyuk Wind Farm is developed, indicative of a level of comfort with this project's effects among those landholders.
- In Section 4, projects such as Melbourne Renewable Energy Hub, Toolern Vale Solar Farm and Outer Metropolitan Ring Road, would be placed within the green wedge to the north of Melbourne's western growth corridor. This area accommodates an eclectic and evolving land use mix, with some sections retaining a distinctly rural character, including locations in proximity to the proposed Toolern Vale Solar Farm. Existing residents may consider that the various projects further erode the non-urban and, in some cases, distinctly rural character of the green wedge, potentially reducing the appeal of parts of the green wedge as a place to live.

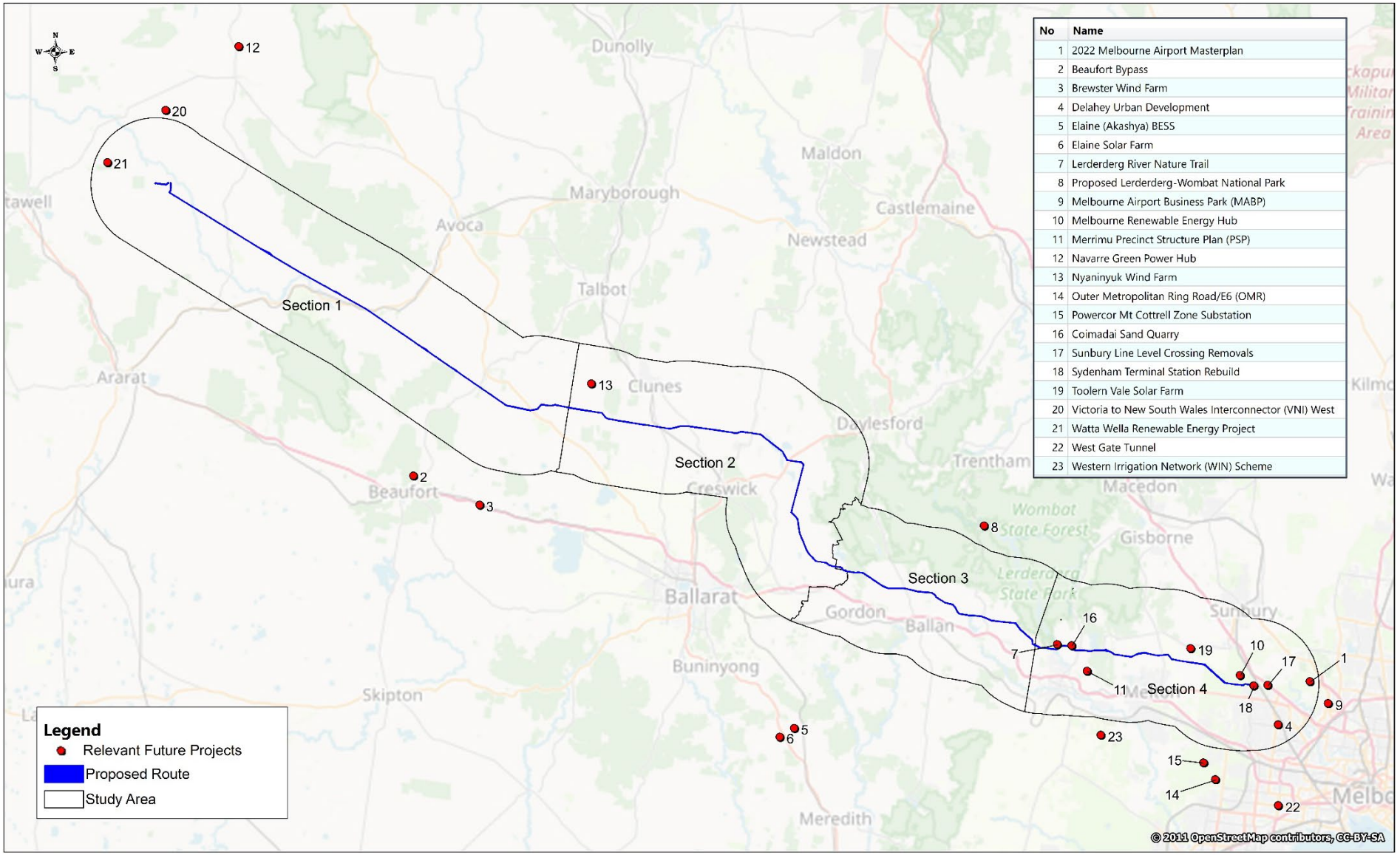

Figure 10-1: Relevant Future Projects – Cumulative Impact Assessment

Table 10-1: Cumulative Impact Assessment: Relevant future projects.

No.	Project Name	SIA Section	Description	Proximity to Proposed Route	Phase	Effects and Impacts		
						Workforce	Land Use	Amenity
20	Watta Wella Renewable Energy Project (WWREP)	Section 1	Co-located wind farm and battery energy storage facility. 47 turbines	<1 km	Not yet approved	Construction period may coincide. The WRL workforce accommodation facilities would ameliorate potential cumulative impacts.	Windfarm Project does not affect the same land. Transmission line to Bulgana Terminal Station may traverse some of the same holdings	Construction noise and traffic may overlap. WWREP located immediately west of the Project and would have a shared viewshed. There are a small number of residential dwellings in the shared viewshed area. Local community may consider that the projects (and others) 'industrialize' a rural landscape.
11	Navarre Green Power Hub	Partially within Section 1 (transmission line only)	Wind farm and battery energy storage Project with transmission line connecting to Bulgana Terminal Station.	>20km	Not yet approved	Construction unlikely to coincide as project is early in the planning phase. The WRL workforce accommodation facilities would ameliorate potential cumulative impacts in any event.	Windfarm Project does not affect the same land. Transmission line to Bulgana Terminal Station may traverse some of the same holdings, although route not determined.	Windfarm too distant to result in cumulative amenity impacts during construction. No shared viewshed. Transmission line to be constructed linking project with Bulgana Terminal Station, further industrializing the landscape near the Bulgana Terminal Station.
19	Victoria to New South Wales Interconnector (VNI) West	Partially within Section 1	A 500kV overhead transmission line planned to connect at Bulgana Terminal Station	<1km	Not yet approved	Construction may coincide. The WRL workforce accommodation facilities would ameliorate potential cumulative impacts.	Easement for VNI West may affect properties directly affected by WRL in close proximity to Bulgana Terminal Station.	Shared viewshed affects similar area to WWREP (see Project No. 20). A small number of residential dwellings in the shared viewshed area. Local community may consider that the projects (and others) 'industrialize' a rural landscape.
2	Beaufort Bypass	Outside (near Section 1)	Bypass road for the township of Beaufort.	~16km	Approved. Development subject to funding.	Construction may coincide. The WRL workforce accommodation facilities would ameliorate potential cumulative impacts.	None	None
3	Brewster Wind Farm	Outside (near Section 1)	Wind farm Project. 6 turbines	~14km	Approved	Construction may coincide. The WRL workforce accommodation facilities would ameliorate potential cumulative impacts.	None	None

No.	Project Name	SIA Section	Description	Proximity to Proposed Route	Phase	Effects and Impacts		
						Workforce	Land Use	Amenity
13	Nyaninyuk Wind Farm	Section 2	Wind farm project	<1km	Not yet approved	Construction may coincide. The WRL workforce accommodation facilities would ameliorate potential cumulative impacts.	Windfarm area bridges the WRL easement. Turbine planned for 5 properties affected by WRL easement.	There would be a shared viewshed in the vicinity of Mount Beckworth. Local community may consider that the projects 'industrialize' a rural landscape. A large proposition of directly affected and nearby landholders in this area would be hosting the wind farm project on their property.
5	Elaine Solar Farm	Outside (near Section 3)	Solar farm project	`25km	Approved	Construction may coincide. The WRL workforce accommodation facilities would ameliorate potential cumulative impacts.	None	None
6	Elaine (Akaysha) BESS	Outside (near Section 3)	Battery storage project	`25km	Approved	Construction may coincide. The WRL workforce accommodation facilities would ameliorate potential cumulative impacts.	None	None
10	Melbourne Renewable Energy Hub	Section 4	Battery and energy storage project.	<1km	Approved	Construction may coincide. Construction workforce likely to be drawn from existing urban population	One property directly affected by both projects There is one dwelling on this property.	The project along with WRL would contribute to the industrialization of the area around Plumpton Road and Holden Road. There are a number of existing rural dwellings in this location.
14	Outer Metropolitan Ring Road/E6 (OMRR)	Section 4	100-kilometre-long high-speed transport link in Melbourne's north and west.	<1km	Approved	Construction unlikely to coincide	Three properties affected by WRL are also affected by the easement for the OMRR	The amenity of a number of properties in the Plumpton area would be affected by the OMRR, as well as WRL and potentially the Melbourne Renewable Energy Hub (see Project No. 9)
17	Sunbury Line Level Crossing Removals	Section 4	Rail crossing removal project	8.5km	Approved, construction planned for 2026.	Construction may coincide. Construction workforce likely to be drawn from existing urban population	None	None

No.	Project Name	SIA Section	Description	Proximity to Proposed Route	Phase	Effects and Impacts		
						Workforce	Land Use	Amenity
18	Sydenham Terminal Station Rebuild	Section 4	Rebuild of Sydenham Terminal Station	<1km	Construction commenced, expected to conclude 2028.	Construction unlikely to coincide. Construction workforce likely to be drawn from existing urban population	None	Rebuild of existing facility in similar location (slightly to the north). Not expected to generate additional impacts to those generated by existing facility (which is an existing condition for the purpose of the SIA).
19	Toolern Vale Solar Farm	Section 4	Project comprises solar panels ~ 3m in height with landscape buffer along interfaces with nearby adjacent dwellings	600m	Approved	Construction may coincide. Construction workforce likely to be drawn from existing urban population	None	The project along with WRL would contribute to the industrialization of the area around the Digger Rest-Coimadai Road and Holden Road. There are a number of existing rural dwellings in this location.
15	Powercor Mt Cottrell Zone Substation	Outside (near Section 4)	Construction and operation of an electricity substation	12km	Not yet approved	Construction may coincide. Construction workforce likely to be drawn from existing urban population	None	None
22	West Gate Tunnel	Outside (near Section 4)	Road Tunnel Project	19km	Under construction	Construction may coincide. Construction workforce likely to be drawn from existing urban population	None	None
23	Western Irrigation Network Scheme	Outside (near Section 4)	A recycled water irrigation scheme	11km	Under construction	Construction may coincide. Construction workforce likely to be drawn from existing urban population.	None	None

11 Managing Performance

11.1 Summary of proposed EPRs

The following EPRs are proposed to enable avoidance and mitigation of the Project's potential social impacts (Table 11-1). Furthermore, the author would support further investigation by the Proponent (primarily in conjunction with the LVIA and Bushfire Impact specialist) into measures which have potential to limit the effect of the Project on the prevailing character and amenity of the study area, in particular the visual amenity of the study area.

Table 11-1: Summary of Proposed EPRs

EPR Ref.	Requirement	Project component	Stage
SC1	**Avoid and minimise potential negative social impacts of the Project construction workforce** 1. Subject to 2 below, each Operational Management Plan for workforce accommodation facilities required by the draft Incorporated Document condition 4.13.6 must include the following to avoid and minimise potential negative social impacts of the Project construction workforce on surrounding communities: a) A commitment that all construction workers working on the Project who cannot commute safely to work from their current residence will be required to reside within the workforce accommodation facilities while on a rostered shift and return to their permanent place of residence on rostered breaks. b) The management protocol for worker access to settlements in proximity to the workforce accommodation facilities must limit visits to essential trips. c) A commitment to service the workforce accommodation facilities with medical services and to have nominated medical professionals available on call and via programmed visits, to attend to the medical needs of workers. 2. Despite 1(a) and 1(b) above, alternative arrangements may be agreed with the relevant Local Authorities and reflected in the relevant Operational Management Plan so as to increase potential positive socioeconomic outcomes of the Project construction stage, while avoiding and minimising to the extent practicable potential negative social impacts. This includes but is not limited to measures that seek to: i. Utilise existing available accommodation in the areas surrounding the Project without resulting in negative effects on housing availability or affordability for local communities, or on the availability of tourist accommodation. ii. Allow non-essential trips to larger towns and urban centres under specific circumstances, while avoiding non-essential trips to smaller townships.	Workforce	Design, Construction

EPR Ref.	Requirement	Project component	Stage
SC2	**Develop and implement a Code of Conduct to avoid and minimise potential social impacts of the construction workforce** 1. Prior to construction commencing, develop and implement a Code of Conduct for the Project workforce in consultation with local councils to avoid and minimise the potential for negative social impacts of the construction workforce on local communities. 2. The Code of Conduct must set out AusNet's expectations of staff when interacting with members of the local community. 3. The Code of Conduct must address matters relating to dress standards and alcohol consumption. 4. The Code of Conduct must stipulate the protocols for worker access to settlements as per EPR SC1. 5. Compliance with the Code of Conduct must be required of all staff and non-compliances investigated and responded to in accordance with misconduct and disciplinary action protocols defined in the Code of Conduct.	Workforce	Design, Construction
SC3	**Develop and implement initiatives to maximise employment opportunities for local communities, First Nations people and vulnerable and disadvantaged groups** 1. Prior to construction commencing, develop and implement a plan to maximise potential benefits of the Project with regard to employment opportunities for local communities, First Nations people and vulnerable and disadvantaged groups. 2. The local employment initiatives must: i. Aim to recruit as many as possible of the required employees for the Project from within local communities. ii. Include strategies focused on employment of First Nations people, apprentices, trainees, people with disability and women. iii. Support local workforce growth by hiring regional Victorian workers, particularly those under 25. 3. The plan must include a commitment to deliver training and upskilling, including through apprenticeships, traineeships, and cadetships.	Workforce	Design, Construction

11.2 Monitoring and Contingency

11.2.1 Monitoring

In light of the social impacts and EPRs outlined in this report, it is suggested that the Environmental Management Framework for the Project include mechanisms to support monitoring and management of:

- Employment – A monitoring process which would allow for Project outcomes relating to the Project's workforce and the effectiveness of EPRs SC1, SC2 and SC3 to be assessed. This process should support collection and sharing of data on:
  - Employment outcomes associated with the Project, including number of workers recruited from within and outside the local area, number of workers accommodated at the proposed workforce accommodation facilities, etc.
  - Number of visits made by workers to locations outside the workforce accommodation facilities, the purpose of the visit, etc.
  - Feedback from the community relating to any interactions which occur between the existing communities and the Project's workforce, including any complaints that are made.
- Community Benefits – A record of all community benefit projects funded through the Project should be kept which includes information on the nature of each project, allocated funding, etc.
- Post delivery survey – A survey of directly affected, nearby landholders and relevant Local Governments should be undertaken within 1 to 3 years of the commencement of the Project's operation to explore the experiences of these stakeholders and in particular to determine whether there have been any unexpected impacts. The survey should explore various themes including but not limited to, level of satisfaction with compensation received, actual versus expected impacts on land use and amenity, quality of life pre and post the Project, etc.

11.2.2 Contingency

Via the EMF for the Project, AusNet and the Principal Contractor would implement contingency measures in consultation with local authorities if and when the above monitoring tasks reveal unforeseen social impacts and/or social impacts which are more severe than predicted in this assessment.

12 Concluding Remarks

Changes to land use and amenity brought about by the Project would be both unpopular and potentially impactful for various individuals and social groups who live, work and/or recreate in the study area. While the Project would, in most instances, not prevent existing social and cultural activities (potential limitations on farming operations being a notable exception), it does have substantial potential to undermine the value that people attribute to these activities and/or require individuals and groups to actively engage with the Project, in order to minimise the Project's consequences. In turn, the Project may to varying degrees, reduce satisfaction obtained from particular land uses, including residential occupation, recreation, etc. and any associated sense of connection to the various 'places' and communities which exist in the study area. In some parts of the study area, impacts would be sufficiently severe and widespread to precipitate reductions in community capacity and cohesion in the short to medium term.

Over time, the population of the study area would adapt, grow and change, and a new equilibrium would evolve. As is well understood, many individuals and social groups live, work and recreate in proximity to transmission infrastructure throughout Victoria.

Nevertheless, if the Project proceeds, some members of existing communities within the study area who live through the change process, may never be comfortable with the Project. Moreover, for those who strongly resist the Project in an attempt to preserve the integrity of their property and/or business and the prevailing amenity and character of their homes and local area, its approval may leave an enduring sense of loss and powerlessness.

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Appendix 1 – Landholder Sentiment Assessment Protocol

Landholder Sentiment Definition

Attitude toward the project 'on balance', considering all relevant factors including the Project's impact on their property.

Rating Framework

- Strongly Support or Support: Applied when landholder has explicitly indicated that they are comfortable with the Project being on their property
- Strongly Oppose or Oppose: Applied when landholder has explicitly indicated that they are not comfortable with the Project being on their property and/or when the landholder has refused to deal with the Project.
- Undecided/Uknown: Applied when landholder's level of comfortable with the Project being on their property is not known with any confidence.

Appendix 2 – Tourism and Hospitality Businesses Within 2km of Proposed Route

Business Name	Address	Category	Description
Dogrock Winery	114 Degraves Rd, Crowlands, Victoria, 3377	Tourism	Cellar door
Elmhurst Gold Club	20 Golf Course Rd, Elmhurst, Victoria, 3469	Recreation	Gold course
Calando Hill	42 Townsing Rd, Amphitheatre, Victoria, 3468	Tourism	Bed and breakfast accommodation
Pyrenees Farm Stay	359 Back Amphitheatre Rd, Amphitheatre, Victoria, 3468	Tourism	Bed and breakfast accommodation
Lexton Racecourse and Golf Course	Lexton, Victoria	Recreation	Golf course and racecourse
Mount Mitchell House and Stables	3056 Sunraysia Highway, Lexton, Victoria	Hospitality	Wedding Venue
Wayward Winery	76 Quoin Hill Rd, Waubra, Victoria, 3352	Tourism	Cellar door and restaurant
Anderson's Mill	9 Alice St, Smeaton, Victoria, 3364	Heritage site	Hertiage flour mill used for events
The Commercial Hotel	410 Kingston Rd, Kingston, Victoria, 3364	Hospitality	Restaurant, bar and accommodation
Kingston Agricultural Society Inc & Show Grounds	54 Church Pde, Kingston, Victoria, 3364	Recreation	Agricultural society
Mystic Views Country Farm Stay	140 Victoria Rd, Newlyn, Victoria, 3364	Tourism	Accommodation guest house
Pig and Earth Farm	450 Kingston-Newlyn Rd, Kingston, Victoria, 3364	Home based business (retail)	Online meat products
Hepburn Lagoon Trail Rides	60 Telegraph Rd, Newlyn North, Victoria, 3364	Recreation	Horse trail rides
Quirindi Stables	60 Telegraph Rd, Newlyn North, Victoria, 3364	Tourism	Wedding and event venue
Maze House	3155 Midland Hwy, Newlyn North, Victoria, 3364	Tourism	Maze attraction
Bank House Brewery	1360 Ballarat-Daylesford Rd, Dean, Victoria, 3363	Alcoholic beverages	Small beer brewery
The Centre for Mind Body and Spirit	167 Callaghans Lane, Gordon, Victoria, 3345	Tourism	Yoga and women's health retreat
Vivienne's Retreat	460 Moorabool West Rd, Gordon, Victoria, 3345	Tourism	Accommodation guest house
The Farmhouse	129 Calway Lane, Gordon, Victoria, 3345	Tourism	Accommodation guest house
Manna Gum Massage	73 Blakeville Rd, Ballan, Victoria, 3342	Home based business (services)	Massage therapist
Karmya Farm Greendale	776 Ballan-Greendale Rd, Greendale, Victoria, 3341	Tourism	Accommodation guest house
St. Anne's Vineyards	64 Garrards Lane, Myrniong, Victoria, 3341	Tourism	Cellar door, restaurant and wedding venue
Fara's Beauty Retreat	36 Manning Bvd, Darley, Bacchus Marsh, Victoria, 3340	Home based business (services)	Beauty salon
Absolutely Heavenly Massage	5 Bushby Ct, Darley, Bacchus Marsh, Victoria, 3340	Home based business (services)	Massage therapist
Bacchus Marsh Golf Club	Links Road, Darley, Melbourne, Victoria, 3340	Recreation	Golf club and restaurant
Melton Air Services and Flying School	995 Coburns Rd, Toolern Vale, Victoria, 3337	Services	Charter flights and flight training school
CafÃ© 500	995 Coburns Rd, Toolern Vale, Victoria, 3337	Hospitality	Cafe
Melton Equestrian Academy	Coburns Road, Melbourne, Victoria, 3337	Recreation	Equestrian school
JurAvon Park Equestrian Centre	1748 Gisborne-Melton Rd, Kurunjang, Victoria, 3337	Recreation	Equestrian facility
Luxury Domes Glamping Australia	760 Holden Rd, Diggers Rest, Victoria, 3427	Tourism	Boutique accommodation
Russo Estate Winery	760-818 Holden Rd, Diggers Rest, Victoria, 3427	Tourism	Cellar door, restaurant and wedding venue
Plumpton Park	412 Plumpton Rd, Diggers Rest, Victoria, 3427	Tourism	Accommodation guest house
Chur Thai	1 Sanctuary Rd, Unit 6, Hillside, Melbourne, Victoria, 3037	Hospitality	Thai restaurant
Patiala House Indian Restaurant	1 Sanctuary Rd, Unit 4, Hillside, Melbourne, Victoria, 3037	Hospitality	Indian restaurant
Fish Salt Hillside	Melton Highway & Sanctuary Road, Hillside, Melbourne, Victoria, 3037	Hospitality	Fish and chip shop
Pinolos Pizza & Pasta	Sanctuary Road, Hillside, Melbourne, Victoria, 3037	Hospitality	Pizza takeaway
Ollies Chicken Hillside	Melton Highway & Sanctuary Road, Hillside, Melbourne, Victoria, 3037	Hospitality	Chicken takeaway shop
The Sugar Gum Hotel	2 Gourlay Rd, Hillside, Melbourne, Victoria, 3037	Hospitality	Restaurant and bar
Baked Since 95	69 Wattle Valley Dr, Hillside, Melbourne, Victoria, 3037	Hospitality	Cafe
Funky Feast	49-69 Royal Cr, Unit 8, Hillside, Melbourne, Victoria, 3037	Hospitality	Kebab and burger takeaway shop
Hillside Pizza and Pasta	49 Royal Cr, Unit 6, Hillside, Melbourne, Victoria, 3037	Hospitality	Pizza and pasta takeaway shop
Urban Pizza Project	49-69 Royal Cr, Unit 10, Hillside, Melbourne, Victoria, 3037	Hospitality	Pizza takeaway shop
Second Street Shisha	49 Royal Cr, Unit 11, Hillside, Melbourne, Victoria, 3037	Hospitality	Hookah bar
GoodLive Holiday Home	13 Silverwood Ct, Hillside, Melbourne, Victoria, 3037	Tourism	Accommodation guest house

Appendix 3 – Facility Diagrams and Maps

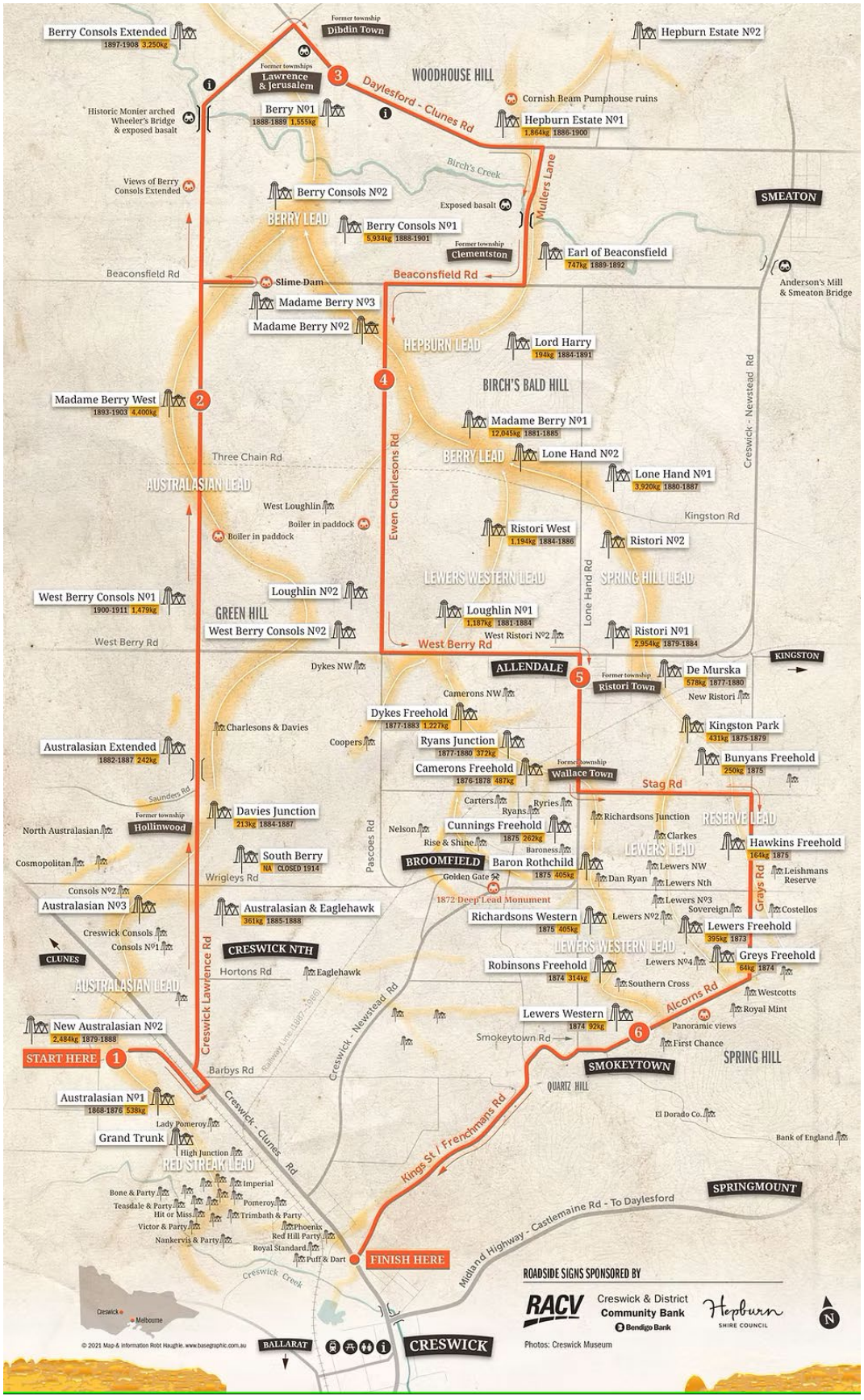

Figure A1: The Buried Rivers of Gold, Self-Guided Tour (source: buriedriversofgold.org)

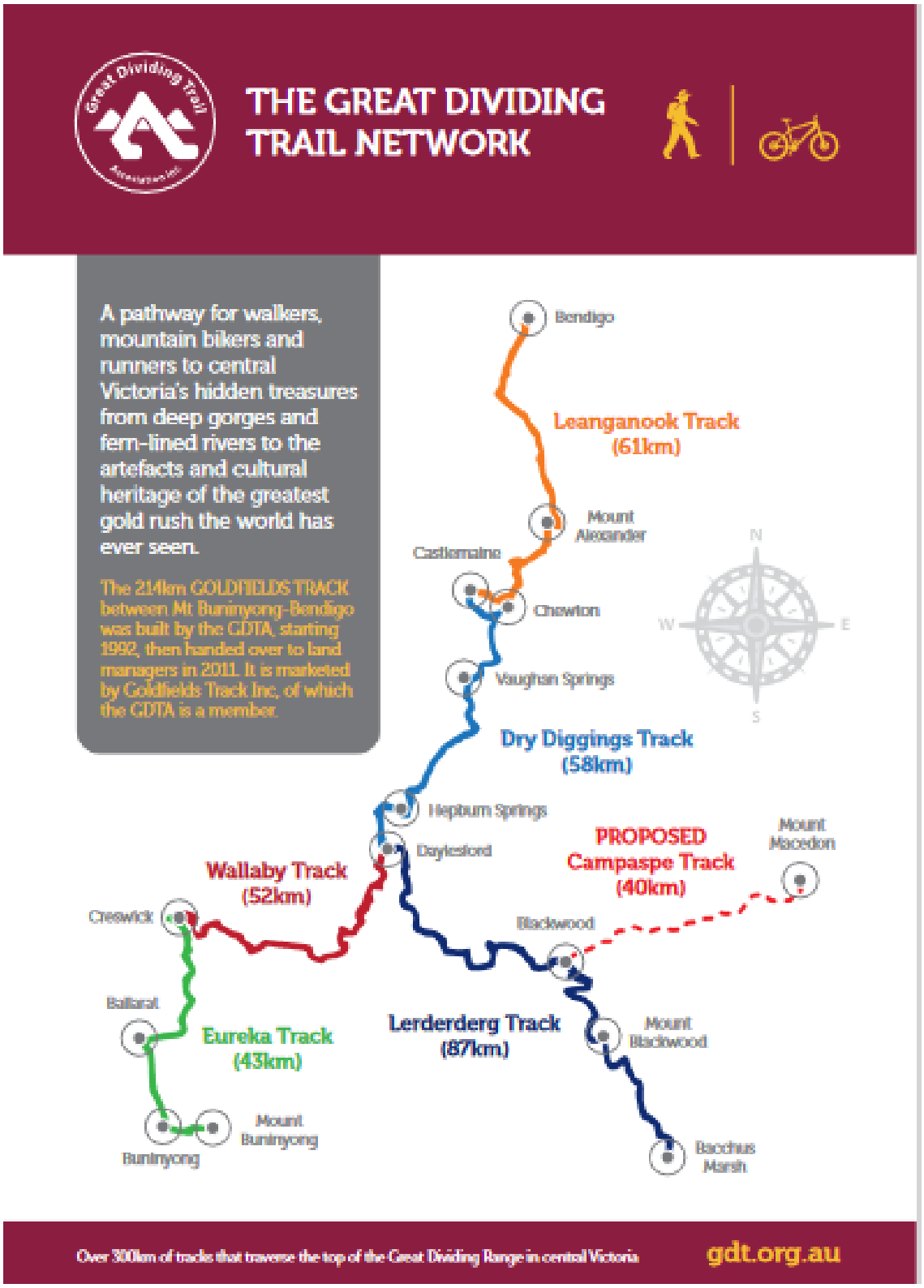

Figure A1: The Great Dividing Trail Network (source: www.gdt.org.au)

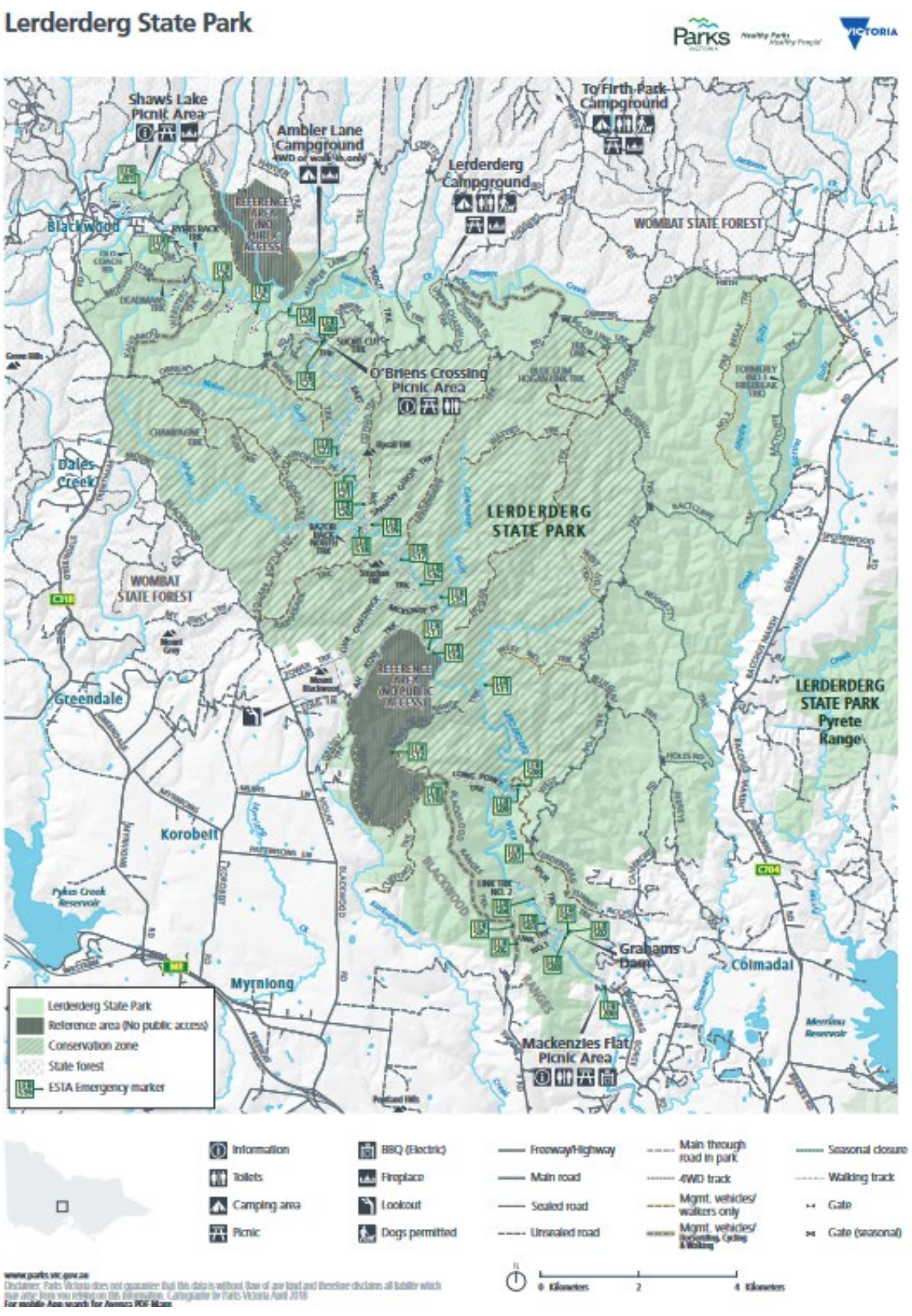

Figure A3: Lerderderg State Park (source: parks.vic.gov.au)

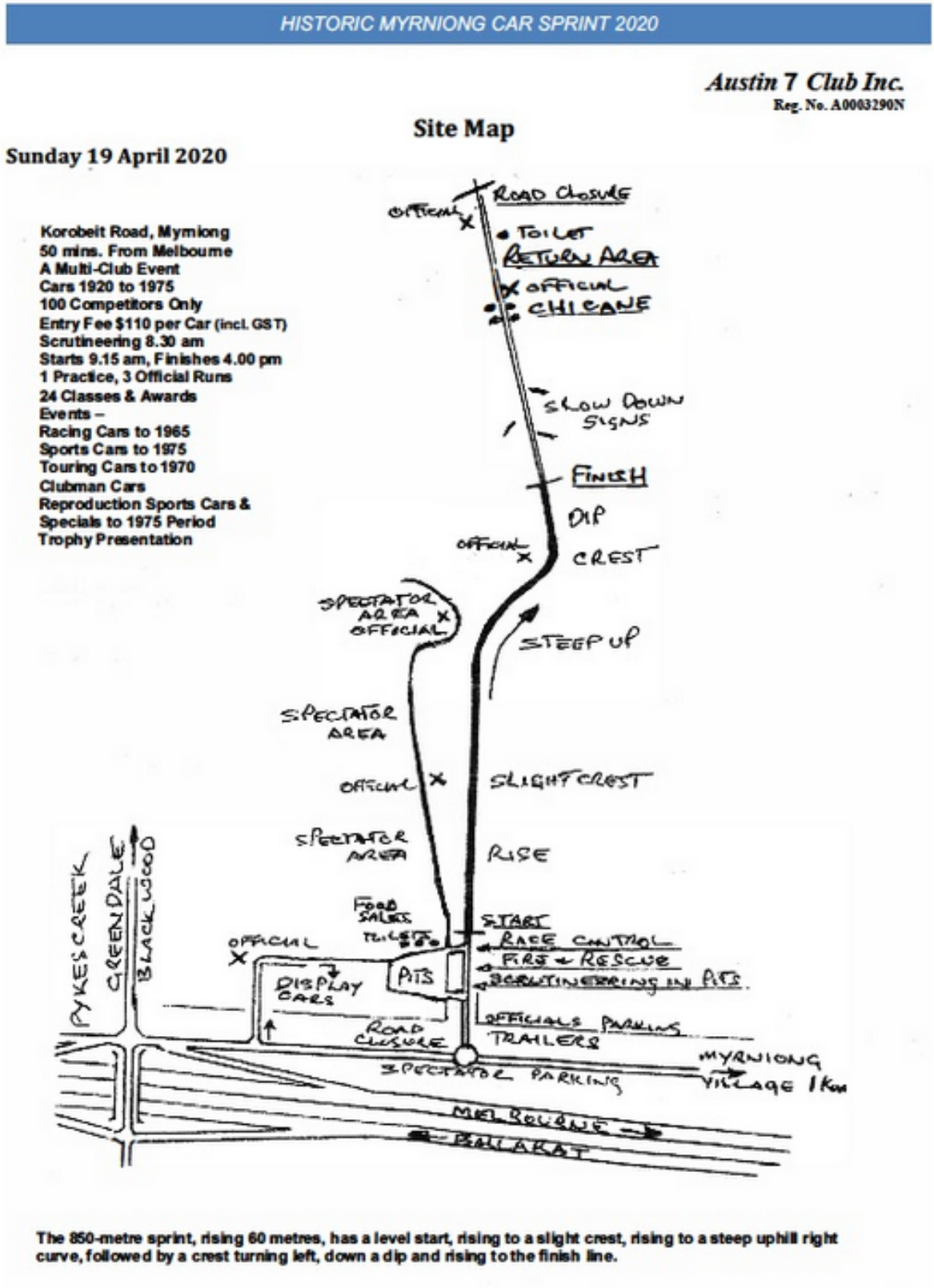

Figure A4: Myrniong Car Sprint (source: austin7club.org/Myrniong.htm)

Appendix 4 – Workforce Accommodation Facilities

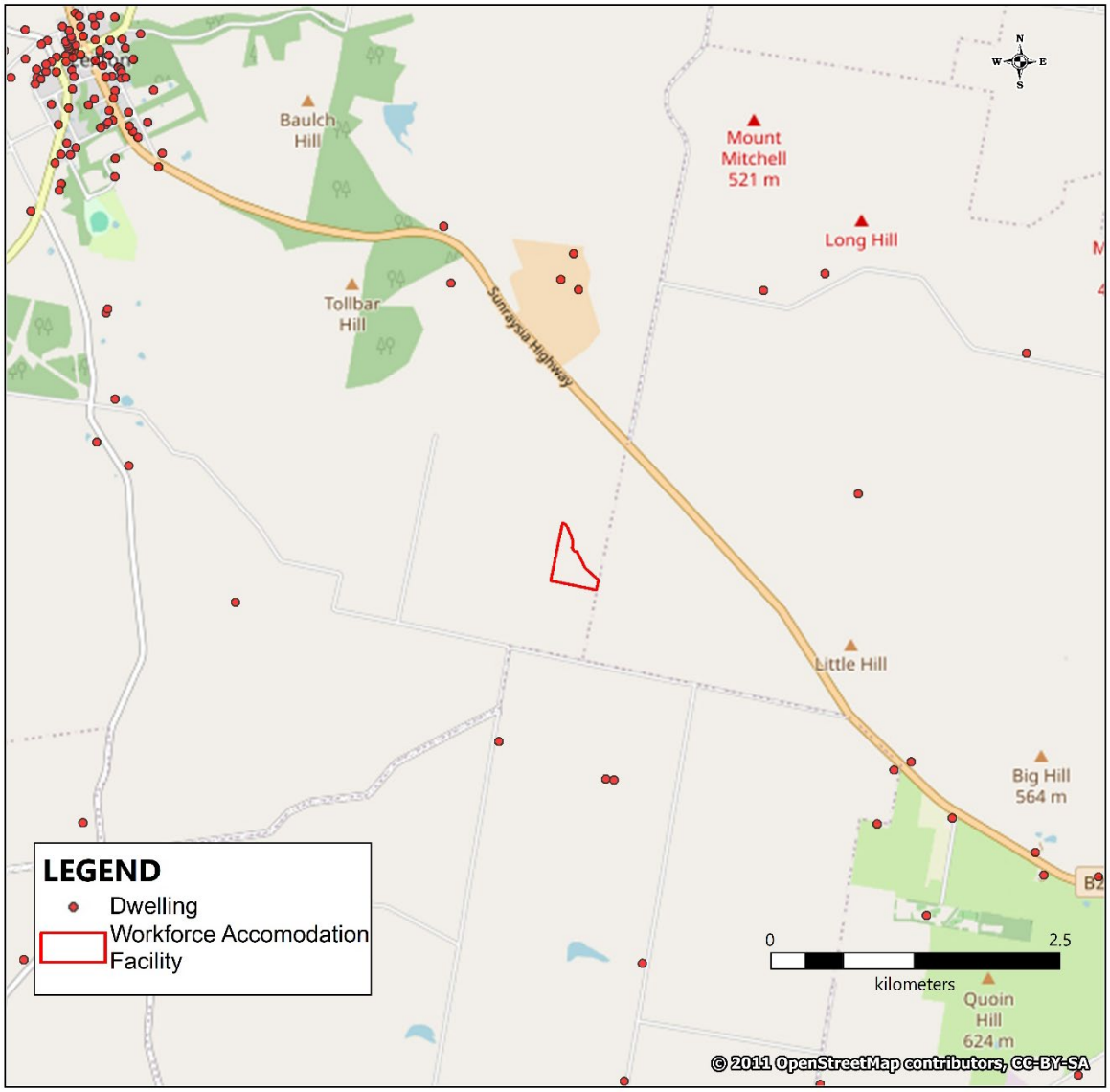

Figure A5: Workforce Accommodation Facility – Lexton

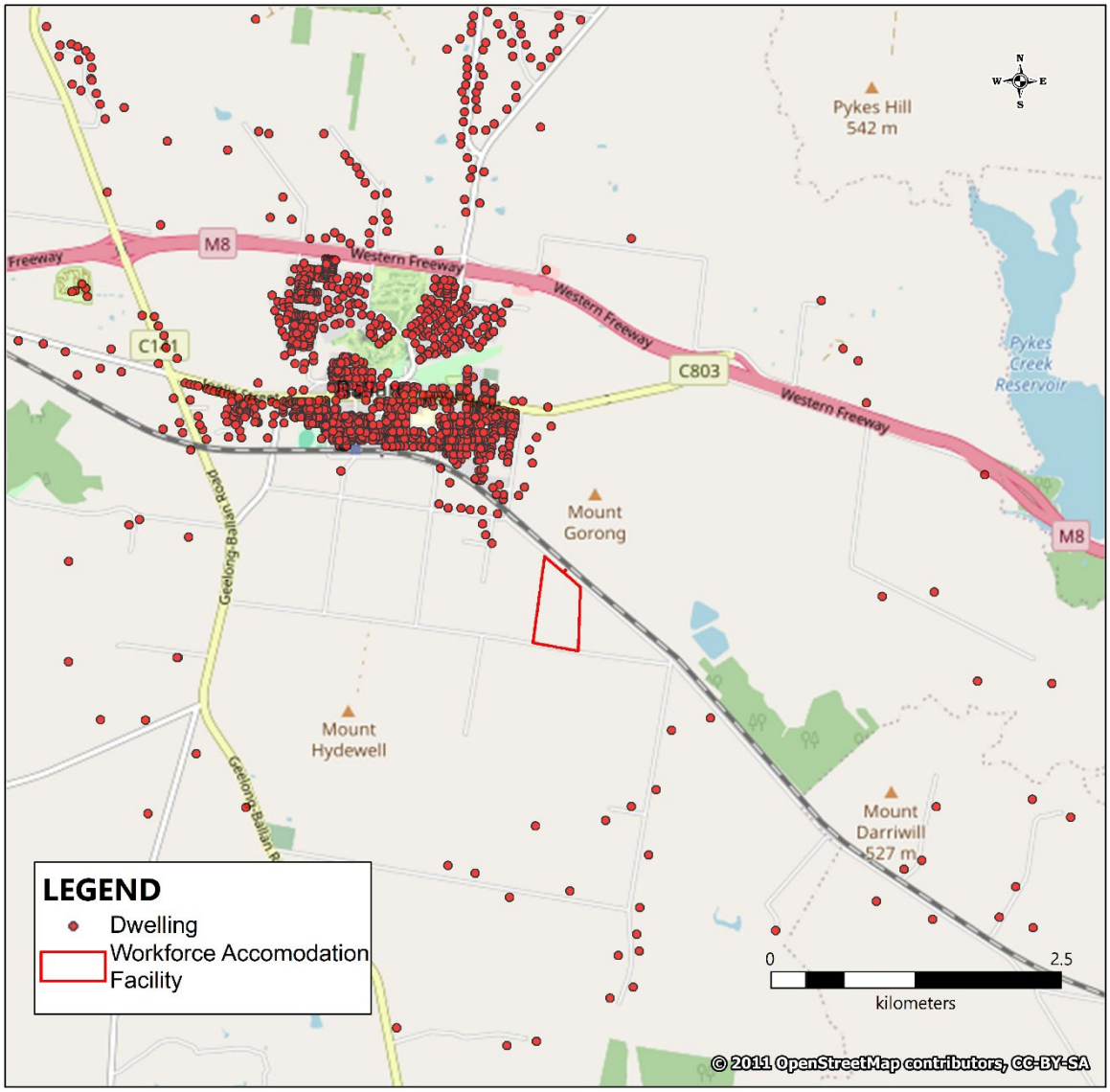

Figure A6: Workforce Accommodation Facility - Ballan

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