

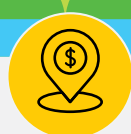
Benefit Sharing Program



\$55 million
Investing in Community to deliver lasting local benefits along the proposed route



Traditional Owners Benefits
shaped and underpinned by self-determination



Industry
Driving economic growth with a
\$170 million
hyper-local spend and prioritisation of local jobs



Landowners and Neighbouring Landowners
Financial recognition for their role on the project

Delivered by

AusNet

ABOUT

Western Renewables Link Benefit Sharing Program



The Australian Aboriginal Flag and the Australian Flag fly over Lake Wendouree



The Western Renewables Link Benefit Sharing Program is a commitment to delivering sustainable and meaningful benefits to communities along the proposed route, reflecting priorities identified through local engagement.

A reliable energy system is essential for all Victorians and the Western Renewables Link (WRL) will play a critical role in securing our energy future. The communities that host this vital infrastructure are at the heart of making it possible and the WRL Benefit Sharing Program will support the delivery of new investment, funding and job opportunities for communities as part of this once-in-a-generation change.

The WRL Benefit Sharing Program was developed through engagement with landowners, Traditional Owners, communities and key stakeholders. It is designed to directly respond to the challenges of those most affected

by the project. The program will support local projects, improve public infrastructure, recognise landowners and near neighbours and invest in Traditional Owner partnerships. Delivering meaningful impact and a sustainable legacy, the program will focus on outcomes that are feasible and viable.

As part of the program, AusNet has committed \$55 million in funding to support community partnerships, investment initiatives and a co-designed Community Benefit Fund. In response to community feedback calling for earlier benefits \$15 million has been made available during the development phase and is committed whether the project proceeds.

The remaining \$40 million will be delivered if the project is approved and proceeds to construction.



\$15 million in benefit funding will be delivered now regardless of whether the project proceeds.

THE PROGRAM

The Western Renewables Link Benefit Sharing Program aims to deliver enduring benefits and sustainable outcomes for communities across the six local government areas where the WRL project is proposed to be built, creating meaningful impact and lasting legacies.

Strategy



Contribute to the resilience and prosperity of communities along the proposed alignment



Partner with Traditional Owners



Facilitate economic growth and development



Back community-led progress toward a net zero future

Delivery



Project development and approvals

Construction and beyond*



Community

\$15 million
Community Partnerships and Investment

\$15 million
Community Partnerships and Investment

\$25 million
co-designed Community Benefit Fund



Landowners and Neighbouring Landowners

\$46,000 per hectare of easement for landowners who opt in to the Voluntary Hosting Benefit**

\$20,000 or \$40,000
Near Neighbour Benefit Program payment depending on vicinity and proximity



Traditional Owners

Traditional Owner Benefit Sharing underpinned by principles of self-determination



Industry

Projected **\$170 million**
hyper-local spend

*Benefits in this phase will be delivered if the project is approved and proceeds to construction

**For those who sign a Land Access Consent and Option for Easement agreement early and voluntarily. The VHB is in addition to the \$8,000 per kilometre per year for 25 years (indexed to CPI) transmission line hosting payment announced by the Victorian Government in 2023

Strategy

Guiding Pillars of the WRL Benefit Sharing Program

The WRL Benefit Sharing Program is guided by four key pillars that shape all elements of the program. These pillars are based on an understanding of local issues with priorities shaped through engagement with landowners, Traditional Owners and communities along the proposed alignment.



Contribute to the resilience and prosperity of communities along the proposed alignment

This pillar aims to support a strong, resilient region by partnering on community-led initiatives that foster participation, strengthen local identity and enhance overall liveability. Our efforts aim to improve social cohesion and support vibrant communities where local habitats are protected and people can thrive, now and into the future.



Facilitate economic growth and development

This pillar commits to unlocking long-term economic opportunities for communities along the proposed alignment by building local capability and strengthening pathways to employment. This includes equipping job seekers with the skills needed to participate in the renewable energy sector, increasing job availability across six local government areas and expanding access to training and formal education.



Partner with Traditional Owners

We aim to work in genuine collaboration with Traditional Owner groups, guided by the principle of self-determination and led by Traditional Owner priorities. This includes strengthening Traditional Owner participation in the renewable energy transition through economic development, energy security and the protection of Aboriginal Cultural Heritage identified in the project footprint, with guidance from Elders and Registered Aboriginal Parties.



Back community-led progress toward a net zero future

This pillar aims to assist communities to move toward a net zero future by improving access to renewable energy. Our goal is to support practical, locally driven solutions that support a sustainable future, benefiting both people and the planet.



Delivery



Community Partnerships and Investment

The Community Partnerships and Investment stream of the WRL Benefit Sharing Program will deliver \$30 million in funding to support initiatives that reflect local priorities and create lasting benefits for communities along the alignment. Guided by the strategic pillars of the WRL Benefit Sharing Program and underpinned by local research and engagement, this investment is designed to strengthen community resilience.

In response to community feedback, \$15 million of this funding has been brought forward to support initiatives during the development phase. This early investment reflects AusNet's commitment to sharing value with communities so they can experience tangible benefits well ahead of construction. Importantly, this funding will be delivered regardless of whether the project proceeds. The remaining \$15 million will be available if the project proceeds.

Community Partnerships and Investment

The examples below show how early investment is helping unlock local potential and create enduring benefits across western Victoria.

Affordable community energy

We are supporting a range of energy initiatives across western Victoria to help local organisations advance their renewable energy goals and reduce operating costs.



Ballarat West Employment Zone

In partnership with the Ballarat Energy Network, we delivered energy assessments to help local organisations identify opportunities for cleaner, more efficient energy use.

Ballarat Community Health

We assessed energy use across seven Ballarat Community Health sites and are now installing rooftop solar and batteries at five of them. These upgrades are expected to save around \$180,000 over 15 years, freeing up funds that can be reinvested into patient-facing care across Moorabool, Pyrenees, Ballarat and Ararat communities.

North Ballarat Precinct Structure Plan

We contributed to the planning for Ballarat's next big suburb by conducting energy analysis to guide sustainable development to help future-proof infrastructure and make the suburb energy self-reliant.

Pyrenees Shire

We're delivering solar, battery, and power upgrades at key community sites to improve energy resilience and emergency preparedness. Every dollar saved on energy costs can be reinvested into vital community services, helping local organisations do more of what matters most.

Improving mobile connectivity in western Victoria

To address long-standing mobile blackspots in western Victoria, the Western Renewables Link project is investing over \$3 million to build new communication towers in Lexton, Smeaton and Coimadai. These upgrades will deliver improved 4G and 5G coverage, supporting local residents, businesses and emergency services. The initiative responds directly to community feedback and aims to enhance safety, connectivity and quality of life across the region. Additional tower locations are being explored in partnership with Telstra, pending project approval.

Community Partnerships and Investment



Local families at Waubra's existing playground, soon to be transformed through a community-led upgrade supported by WRL.

CASE STUDY

A community playground built for families

In Waubra, a grassroots vision is coming to life with the creation of a vibrant new playground, driven by the local community and backed by a \$200,000 grant from AusNet. Located near The Springs Hotel, the upgraded space will feature climbing structures, swings, slides, BBQ facilities and picnic areas, offering a welcoming stop for families and travellers alike.

With strong support from local schools, sporting clubs and community fundraising efforts, the project is a shining example of how local ideas, powered by practical partnerships, can deliver lasting benefits for regional communities.

\$4 million in local grants to enable community-led projects

\$4 million of the WRL Benefit Sharing Program will be allocated to establishing a **Local Grants Fund** designed to be accessible and responsive to local priorities.

The fund will support community-led initiatives across the local government areas along the proposed project alignment. Intended to respond to high demand for flexible funding, the program empowers local collectives

and organisations to deliver projects that respond to and reflect community priorities. The first funding round is expected to open in the first quarter of 2026.



Community Benefit Fund

\$25 million Community Benefit Fund

If approvals are granted and the project moves ahead, \$25 million will be allocated to a **Community Benefit Fund**, building on earlier engagement and partnering with communities to shape how funding is allocated based on local priorities.

The fund will be co-designed with community members. An independent third party will facilitate the process and participants will be reimbursed for their time and costs.

This approach shifts decision-making power to those with local knowledge, helping to build trust, strengthen ownership and make certain funding delivers meaningful impact.

Opportunities and benefit sharing for Traditional Owners, industry, landowners and near neighbours

The delivery of critical infrastructure relies on the involvement of Traditional Owners, landowners and their neighbours whose connection to the land is central to the project's development. While we recognise that the project raises concerns for many, AusNet is committed to listening, engaging respectfully and sharing value with those most directly affected.

The WRL Benefit Sharing Program aims to reflect this commitment by delivering financial recognition and economic benefits through local procurement and investment. This includes targeted support for Traditional Owners, landowners, and near neighbours; those most connected to the places where it's proposed the project will be built.



Landowners and Near Neighbour Benefit Programs

In response to landowners feedback calling for improved compensation and benefits, AusNet introduced the Voluntary Hosting Benefit (VHB) in early 2025. The VHB is in addition to statutory compensation and a direct financial recognition of the role landowners play in enabling future energy infrastructure. It offers a property-specific payment of \$46,000 per hectare of easement hosted, available to landowners who sign key agreements before the project's proposed planning scheme amendment has been approved and published in the Victorian Government Gazette. Early payments of up to 40% are available for agreements signed before late 2025 and are retained even if the project does not proceed. The remaining balance is paid when construction begins.

AusNet's Near Neighbour Benefit Program acknowledges that neighbouring landowners often share similar experiences to those directly hosting infrastructure and provides financial recognition of the important role they play in delivering critical infrastructure. Eligible neighbours may receive a one-off payment of \$20,000 or \$40,000, depending on how close they live to the easement and whether their property is rural or urban. This goes beyond VicGrid's draft Renewable Energy Zone Community Benefits Plan proposal. When that plan is finalised, AusNet's Near Neighbour Benefit Program will be updated, if necessary, to ensure it continues to exceed or align with VicGrid's policy.



Traditional Owner Benefit Sharing

Traditional Owner groups have expressed their desire to self-determine the design of the benefit sharing agreement for the Registered Aboriginal Parties (RAPs) along the WRL alignment. Benefits will be developed in partnership and could involve initiatives such as workforce development programs, maximising procurement opportunities for Aboriginal businesses, renewable energy projects and vegetation management activities. These benefit-sharing arrangements will be in addition to ensuring procedural rights under Traditional Owner Settlement Agreements or Native Title Agreements are fulfilled and any further benefits delivered through broader project targets.



Local Spend, Procurement and Building Community Capacity

Additional local benefits will be activated during construction, with a strong focus on jobs, training, and regional investment. This includes a projected \$170 million hyper-local spend within the project LGAs, prioritising local jobs and the repurposing of some infrastructure, such as sections of the workforce accommodation facilities for community use. The project is aiming to allocate 10% of total labour hours to apprentices, trainees and cadets. Preliminary targets have also been set to support Aboriginal inclusion in employment and business. The project also aims to increase the participation of women across trade roles, management and specialist positions.

For more information on landowners and neighbour benefits, visit our website: westernrenewableslink.com.au/landholders





All updates about the WRL Benefit Sharing Program, including opportunities to get involved and apply for funding, will be shared through our project Newsletter.

Sign up here by scanning the QR code on your phone, to stay informed and be part of shaping your community's future.



Find out more:

westernrenewableslink.com.au



Need assistance to contact us?



If you need an interpreter, please call 13 14 50.



If you are deaf and/or find hearing or speaking with people on the phone difficult, please contact the National Relay Service on voice relay number 1300 555 727, TTY number 133 677 or SMS relay number 0423 677 767.

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