VNI West

Social

The study area for the social impact assessment included the four local government areas (LGAs) traversed by the Project: Buloke, Gannawarra, Loddon, and Northern Grampians.

All EES documents, chapters, technical appendices, and attachments are available to view and download on the VNI West website at **vniwproject.com.au/EES**

EES Chapter 24 and ***Technical Appendix Q*** assess potential positive and negative social impacts associated with the Project, including effects on way of life, community cohesion, labour availability, land use and amenity, and quality of life, while outlining measures to mitigate disruption and support social well-being.

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Chapter 24: Social ↗

Technical Appendix Q: Social ↗

Culture is a social impact category related to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal culture, including shared beliefs, customs, and values. The Project has the potential to affect culture, cultural values, and the way culture is perceived by those with a history or attachment to the study area. A Traditional Owner Social Impact Assessment was undertaken to support understanding of the potential social impacts of the Project for Traditional Owner groups. People living, working, visiting, and/or who have a cultural connection to the study area are most likely to experience social change resulting from the Project during its construction, operation, and decommissioning.

Social impacts associated with the Project during construction and operation include both direct and indirect effects on communities within the study area. Direct impacts include disruption to agricultural practices, temporary reduction in available workforce, and associated effects on livelihoods and way of life. Indirect social impacts include perceived or actual concerns that may contribute to reduced community cohesion, diminished trust in the Project, and potential impacts on mental health and emotional wellbeing. Community engagement conducted as part of the Project suggested that the overall proliferation of renewable energy projects in parts of the region traversed by VNI West was creating stress and anxiety for some in local communities and that these issues may extend beyond any one project.



Social (cont.)

Positive social impacts are also anticipated, including financial contributions to communities, increased revenue for local councils, and potential growth in regional business activity and employment opportunities.

Construction impacts are assessed as ranging from low to high negative residual significance. The most significant construction impact is considered to be the effect on community cohesion, rated as high. Impacts on mental health and emotional wellbeing, as well as landscape and visual amenity, are assessed as medium. Impacts on accessibility, farm workability, and labour availability are generally low to medium. With mitigation, impacts on agricultural way of life during construction are reduced to low.

Residual operational impacts are generally lower in magnitude but remain variable, ranging from low to high depending on the receptor. Impacts associated with the transition away from agricultural practices, ongoing farm workability constraints, property devaluation, business boycott risk, and reduced tourism opportunities are considered low. However, impacts on mental health and emotional wellbeing, as well as concerns relating to trust in decision-making processes, are assessed as medium. The distributive inequity of energy supply is considered a high residual impact.

Key positive social outcomes of the Project include support for community organisations, improved social and energy infrastructure, increased renewable energy supply and associated environmental benefits, and new business revenue and employment opportunities. Following mitigation and enhancement measures, including the development of a Project Social Value Strategy, local procurement strategy and local employment plan, positive residual impacts during construction range from medium to very high. Positive operational impacts related to way of life, community, accessibility, culture, and livelihoods are assessed as high in significance.

To manage both positive and negative social impacts, the Project proposes to develop and implement a Social Value Strategy and a comprehensive Community and Stakeholder Engagement Plan. These measures, together with targeted community support initiatives such as grants programs and energy upgrade partnerships, aim to strengthen community resilience, support local benefits, and reduce adverse social impacts such as reduced cohesion and mental health stressors.

Overall, while the Project would generate a range of negative social impacts, particularly relating to community cohesion, mental health, and perceptions of fairness, it would also deliver significant positive social and economic benefits. With mitigation and enhancement measures implemented, residual impacts are expected to range from negligible to very high depending on the aspect, with strong positive outcomes in employment, regional activity, and community benefit.