VicGrid VNI West

VNI West Environment Effects Statement (EES) Summary Guide



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The EES: What You Need to Know

Please note: This booklet is intended to provide an overview of the **Environment Effects Statement (EES)** being prepared for the **VNI West** project in Victoria.

The EES is a formal, regulated process under the Environment Effects Act 1978. It's designed to carefully assess how major projects may affect the environment, communities, and Cultural Heritage so potential impacts can be identified, understood, and assessed to inform decision making.

For a project like VNI West, this means detailed studies, expert input, and ongoing community consultation.

This is one step in a longer journey, and **your knowledge plays an important role**.

Please note: This booklet is for general information only. It outlines potential topics being explored through the EES.

For more information, please refer to the detailed EES fact sheets on the VNI West website. Visit: **www.vniwproject.com.au** or scan the QR code.

The EES scoping requirements are available on the Department of Transport and Planning website, **planning.vic.gov.au**.

What is an Environment Effects Statement?

In Victoria, the Environment Effects Act 1978 provides for environmental impact assessment of proposed project works capable of having a significant effect on the environment.

An Environment Effects Statement (EES) usually includes:

- A description of the proposed project
- A summary of consultation with the community and stakeholders, including any issues raised
- Information about the current environment that could be affected
- Predictions about the likely environmental impacts of the project
- Examination of feasible alternatives
- Steps to avoid, reduce, or manage negative impacts
- A plan to monitor and manage environmental effects during the life of the project

The Department of Transport and Planning (DTP) and a Technical Reference Group (TRG) oversee the EES process, which includes public submissions.

Who Decides What's Investigated and How

The Department of Transport and Planning developed the scoping requirements for VNI West in consultation with the VNI West project team and the convened Technical Reference Group.

In November 2024, the Department of Transport and Planning formally released the draft VNI West scoping requirements for public comment, providing landholders and community members with the opportunity to provide feedback.

In February 2025, the Victorian Minister for Planning issued the final scoping requirements for VNI West.

While the scoping requirements are intended to cover all relevant matters, the EES can also address other significant matters that emerge during the EES investigations or through consultation.

Why Does the EES Matter?

The energy grid we rely on is changing. As old coal power stations retire, new transmission infrastructure is needed to keep homes, farms, and businesses powered – not just in cities, but in communities across Victoria.

VNI West is a major project and like all significant infrastructure, it must be planned with care. That includes understanding how it could affect the land it crosses, the people who live and work nearby, and the broader environment.

The EES helps ensure:



Impacts are assessed using clear evidence and technical standards



Community and stakeholder input is considered



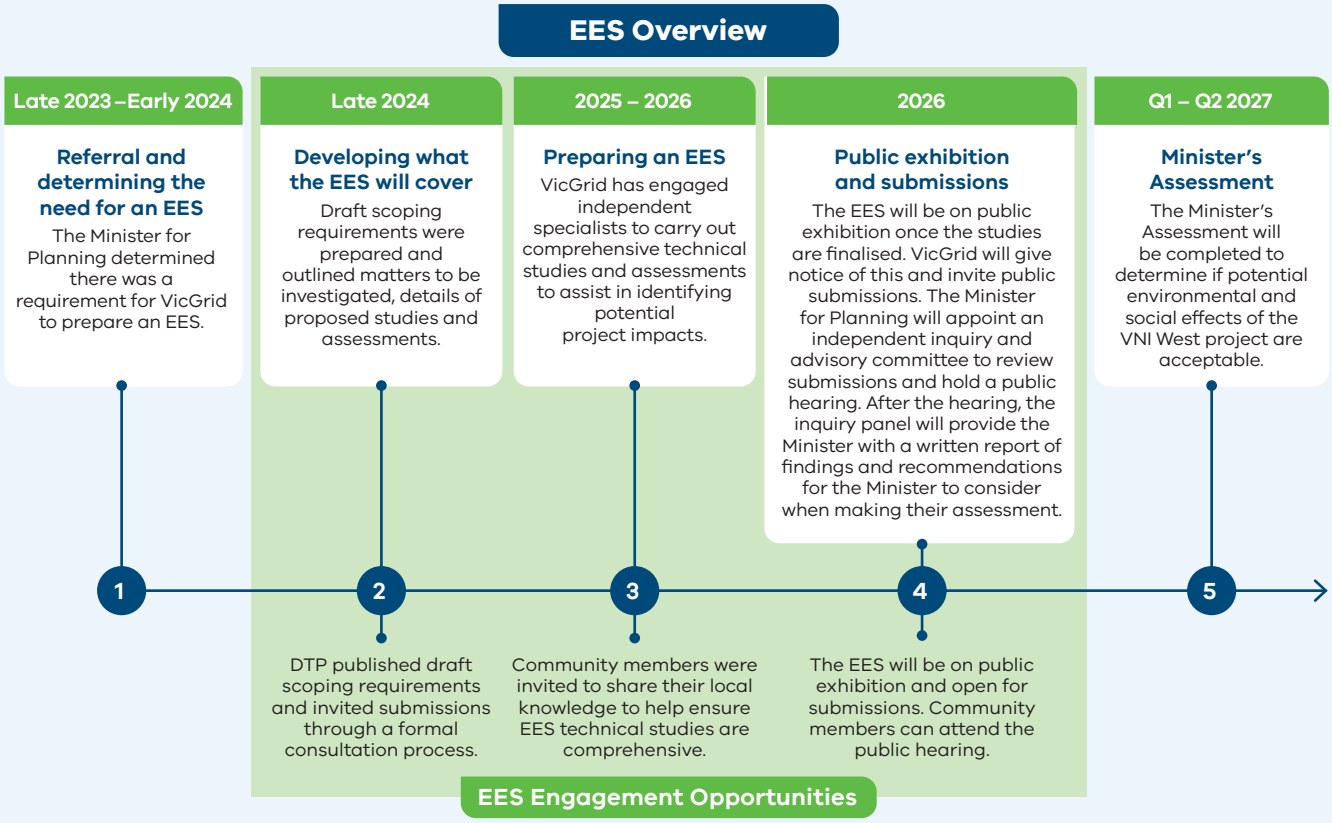
Project design can be refined to avoid or reduce impacts



All relevant decision-makers have the information they need

How the EES Process Works

The EES process for VNI West is outlined below.



What are the Technical Reference Group, and Inquiry and Advisory Committee?

- The **Technical Reference Group** – convened by the Department of Transport and Planning – provides advice on the studies being prepared for the EES.
- Organisations represented on the Technical Reference Group are the Department of Transport and Planning – Impact Assessment, Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action – Planning and Environment Assessment, Shire Councils in the project corridor, Environment Protection Authority Victoria, Goulburn Murray Water, North Central Catchment Management Authority, First Peoples – State Relations, Barengi Gadjin Land Council Aboriginal Corporation, Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation, Heritage Victoria, Agriculture Victoria, and the Country Fire Authority.
- The **Minister for Planning** will appoint an **inquiry and advisory committee** to review the EES and submissions made, and oversee a public inquiry. After the inquiry, the committee will provide the Minister with a written report of findings and recommendations for the Minister to consider when making their assessment.

Why Your Input Matters

The EES process values local knowledge. While technical experts bring deep insight into land, ecology, and engineering, it's the people who live and work in the area who know the land best.

What you share now can help the project team:



Validate and refine technical data



Identify risks or concerns that aren't visible in mapping



Plan more effectively for impacts on land use, amenity, and heritage

This is your opportunity to share local knowledge and help ensure the EES technical studies reflect what matters most to your community.

Agriculture

This study is focused on understanding how VNI West might affect farming land and practices during construction and once the transmission line is up and running.

A guide to understanding the scoping requirements

The VNI West easement crosses a variety of agricultural land types and uses. The EES must look at how the project could affect:

- Cropping and grazing
- Biosecurity risks like weed or disease spread
- Access issues for farm machinery
- Irrigation infrastructure and water use
- Day-to-day farming operations during construction and operation

What we're looking at

The goal is to understand how farming land is currently used and how to minimise impacts wherever possible. This includes identifying:

- Types of farming and land use across the corridor
- Infrastructure like irrigation systems or access tracks
- Potential disruption to seasonal work or longer-term productivity

This helps VicGrid design the project to avoid disruptions wherever possible, and put protections in place where disruptions can't be avoided.

How we're doing it

We're combining multiple sources of information to guide the assessment, including:

1. Mapping and data from Victorian Land Use Information (VLUIS 2024), the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), and the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences (ABARES)
2. Site visits and drive-bys to observe farm infrastructure and validate mapping
3. Direct conversations with farmers and landholders through interviews and open days
4. Input from agricultural groups and industry stakeholders

So far, the team has conducted 19 structured interviews with landholders, neighbours and well-informed local stakeholders, held numerous informal discussions with community members across the project area, and gathered close to 40 responses through our online agricultural survey.

What's next

The assessment will continue as we gather more input. Findings will help guide project design to avoid key infrastructure and identify practical ways to reduce disruption where needed.

We need your input

The best understanding of local farming comes from the people who know the land.

If you have insights about how your land is used, or what's important to protect, we want to hear from you.

Ecology

This study focuses on how the VNI West project may affect native plants, animals, and ecosystems – especially those protected under State and Commonwealth conservation laws. These species and habitats are part of what make the region unique, and the aim is to avoid or reduce impacts through thoughtful planning and design.

A guide to understanding the scoping requirements

The VNI West area includes important native vegetation and threatened species. The EES must look closely at how the project could impact the local environment. This includes:

- Loss or disturbance of important habitats, vegetation, or wildlife
- Impacts to threatened species and ecological communities under the EPBC and FFG Acts*
- Changes to wetlands, groundwater-dependent ecosystems, and fauna movement
- Cumulative effects from other nearby projects
- Ensuring any loss of habitat is addressed in line with national and state conservation requirements

* Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC) and state Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1999 (FFG)

Several important reserves and wetlands are located in or near the project area. These include the Kerang Wetlands Ramsar site, the Great Spectacle Lakes Complex Wildlife Reserve, Tragowel Swamp, Bunguluke Wetlands, and the Kara Kara Conservation Management Network (which covers Kara Kara National Park, Morrl Morrl Conservation Reserve, and Mount Bolangum Nature Conservation Reserve).

What we're looking at

The ecology assessment aims to understand what species and habitats are present, how they're connected, and how to avoid, minimise, or manage potential impacts. The assessment focuses on:

- Threatened or significant flora and fauna, including species like the Growling Grass Frog and Striped Legless Lizard
- Native vegetation communities within the study area
- Wetlands, waterways, and ecological corridors
- How species move across the landscape

The goal is to design a project that works around the natural environment – protecting what we can, and reducing impacts where avoidance isn't possible.

How we're doing it

This assessment combines fieldwork, mapping, and community input. Methods include:

1. Flora surveys (including site walk overs) and vegetation quality assessments (VQAs) to map native plants
2. Spotlighting at night to identify nocturnal species like the Inland Carpet Python
3. Species-specific methods, like rooftop tile grids to detect Striped Legless Lizards
4. Sound recorders (song meters) to pick up calls from owls, frogs, and other threatened species
5. Camera traps to monitor animal movement
6. Ongoing community input on known habitat areas, species sightings, and conservation efforts



Did you know? Call playback is used during night surveys to encourage owls to respond. This helps ecologists identify specific species.

Most high-quality native vegetation has been found in roadside and river reserves, with some important patches on private land (where landholders have provided access).

What's next

Surveys will continue through spring and summer 2025/26, on both public land and private properties (where access
is available). Activities will include:

- Monthly checks of terracotta tile grids
- Seasonal bird surveys to identify the presence of threatened species, like the Blue-winged Parrot
- Night surveys for owl species and Inland Carpet Pythons
- Seasonal bird surveys, including the Blue-winged Parrot
- Targeted bat trapping to help identify species like Corben's Long-eared Bat (which is hard to detect by sight or sound)

Engagement with landholders and local groups will continue to build a clearer picture of on-ground conditions.

After the surveys are complete, ecology specialists will assess the potential impacts of each transmission tower and land beneath the lines and recommend measures to avoid or minimise these impacts where appropriate.

Land Use

Given the project corridor spans agricultural land, townships, airstrips, and areas of environmental and community significance, it is crucial to understand how land use may be affected during VNI West's construction and in the long term.

A guide to understanding the scoping requirements

The scoping requirements highlight the need to consider:

- Potential short- and long-term disruption to existing and proposed land uses (including agriculture), public infrastructure, and emergency management
- Associated economic and social impacts
- Potential impacts on tourism and nearby tourist attractions
- Risks to planned upgrades or future development

What we're looking at

This assessment focuses on identifying how the project might affect current and future land uses, including direct and indirect effects within the easement and a one-kilometre buffer on either side. This includes:

- Understanding potential disruption to farming operations, infrastructure, and local services
- Identifying areas of land that require special consideration due to their existing or proposed use
- Opportunities to adjust the project design to minimise disruption

How we're doing it

The assessment includes a combination of technical research, mapping, and stakeholder input. Key steps include:

1. Reviewing legislation, policy, land use mapping, and planning schemes
2. Visiting sites to observe land use on the ground
3. Engaging with councils, landholders, Traditional Owners, and communities across the corridor
4. Assessing potential impacts as the project design evolves

Did you know? More than 90% of land across the project area is used for farming.

72% 'low-intensity' farming – mostly cropping and grazing (minimal land manipulation)
21% 'high-intensity' farming – including horticulture, feedlots, piggeries, poultry farms, and irrigation systems.

What's next

The draft land use and planning assessment will be prepared and submitted to the Technical Reference Group for review.

We need your input

We've heard from many landholders and councils, with valuable insights shared about housing pressures, local development, tourism, and community sentiment.

Please let us know if there's anything we've missed about current land use, future plans, or local context.

Bushfire

Bushfire risk is an important consideration in the planning, construction, and operation of major infrastructure. This assessment looks at how VNI West could influence fire behaviour, emergency access, or response efforts and how these risks can be mitigated through design.

A guide to understanding the scoping requirements

Bushfire has been identified for investigation due to concerns about managing and suppressing fires near transmission infrastructure. The EES must consider fire ignition risks as well as the impact the project may have on surrounding land and firefighting efforts.

What we're looking at

The assessment examines how the project might influence bushfire risk during construction and operation. It includes:

- Local vegetation and fuel loads
- Fire behaviour, including how grassfires behave in windy conditions
- Emergency access and water sources
- Potential ignition risks and how they can be reduced

How we're doing it

The assessment includes a combination of desktop analysis, fieldwork, modelling, and local engagement. This involves:

1. Reviewing fire history, weather patterns, and vegetation types
2. Mapping fuel loads and public land reserves along the project easement
3. Reviewing relevant planning and bushfire overlays
4. Field assessment to confirm information collected during the desktop assessment
5. Engaging a qualified Fire Behaviour Analyst (FBAN) to model bushfire scenarios
6. Consulting with local communities and stakeholders to understand existing conditions and risks

What's next

Field surveys are underway to confirm vegetation types, fuel loads, and access points. These insights will guide mitigation strategies to ensure the project supports local fire management.

We need your input

We want to hear from you if:

- You've experienced fires in the area or know of historical fire events
- You have concerns about emergency access, ignition risks, or vegetation near your property
- You have knowledge of water sources, firefighting infrastructure, or community fire plans near the project easement

Your local insight helps us make better decisions and ensures bushfire risks are properly understood.

Climate Change

This part of the EES focuses on two key questions:

1 Could VNI West contribute to climate change?

2 How could climate change affect the project over time?

South-eastern Australia already experiences climate extremes including droughts, floods, and summer heatwaves. Identifying risks early means the assessment helps ensure infrastructure is designed to withstand future conditions, including more extreme weather patterns.

A guide to understanding the scoping requirements

The EES scoping requirements say the project must consider two key climate change issues: how it might contribute to greenhouse gas emissions and climate change, and how climate change might affect the project itself.

These topics have been given medium priority for technical studies, based on strong interest.

The project also needs to take climate change into account to ensure the infrastructure is resilient and to reduce the risk of it failing in the future.

What we're looking at

The project area spans two climate zones:

Climate Zone 4 (North):
Hot, dry summers and cool winters

Climate Zone 6 (South):
Milder temperatures but still prone to extremes

The climate change assessment is focused on:

- Greenhouse gas emissions generated by construction and operation
- The project's alignment with the Climate Change Act 2017
- Risks to infrastructure and operations caused by extreme weather
- How these risks can be reduced through good design and planning



How we're doing it

The assessment follows Australian Standard AS 5334-2013, which outlines how to plan for climate risks in infrastructure projects. It includes:

1. Reviewing historical weather data and future climate projections
2. Identifying risks to project infrastructure and rating their severity
3. Holding workshops with technical experts to test findings
4. Using a high-emissions climate model (RCP 8.5) to explore possible future conditions

Why RCP 8.5? The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) uses climate scenarios called Representative Concentration Pathways (RCPs). These range from very low emissions (RCP 2.6) to very high emissions (RCP 8.5).

This assessment uses RCP 8.5 (a high emissions scenario) to explore the upper end of possible climate risks. **It doesn't assume this is the most likely outcome**, but it helps test the project's resilience under more extreme conditions.

What's next

The next phase of work will continue to refine the risk assessment and ensure that climate resilience is built into the project design. This includes practical design responses to reduce risks from fire, flood, extreme heat, and other hazards.

We need your input

Climate change affects everyone. We've heard from communities that their key concerns include:

- Increased bushfire risk
- Greater flood risk
- Transmission towers failing in extreme weather

We welcome local input on how climate risks are affecting your region – particularly around fire, flood, or storm-related concerns.

Greenhouse Gas

We're assessing the greenhouse gas emissions linked to the project's construction and operation, and how they sit within Victoria's broader climate targets set out in the Climate Change Act 2017.

A guide to understanding the scoping requirements

The EES requires an assessment of the project's likely greenhouse gas emissions during construction and operation. Specifically, the assessment considers:

- Emissions generated by vehicles, machinery, and energy use
- Emissions tied to materials and manufacturing
- How these emissions compare with targets under the Climate Change Act 2017

What we're looking at

We're assessing how much direct and indirect greenhouse gas the project is likely to emit during construction and operation. This includes:

- Emissions from construction and long-term operation
- Direct and indirect sources of emissions
- Where emissions can be minimised or avoided

How we're doing it

The assessment draws on national and international standards for measuring greenhouse gas emissions. It includes:

1. Desktop research into emissions generated across the supply chain
2. Emissions modelling across construction and operational phases
3. Reference to key frameworks including the NGER Determination, ISO standards, the GHG Protocol, and PAS 2080

Key Acronyms

NGER Determination: National Greenhouse and Energy Reporting – Australia's framework for measuring and reporting emissions

ISO standards: Internationally agreed methods for measuring environmental impacts

GHG Protocol: Greenhouse Gas Protocol – the world's most widely used greenhouse gas accounting standard

PAS 2080: A global standard for managing carbon in infrastructure projects

What's next

The results of the greenhouse gas assessment will be reported in the context of Victoria's existing emissions profile, to help interpret the scale and significance of the project's contribution.

We need your input

We're committed to reducing emissions where possible and local insights can help.

If you have ideas, concerns, or opportunities we should consider when it comes to materials, construction methods, or energy use, we want to hear from you.

Electromagnetic Fields

Electricity powers almost every part of our daily lives and wherever electricity flows, Electromagnetic Fields (EMF) are present. Communities are understandably concerned about whether EMF from high-voltage transmission lines poses any risk to human or livestock health.

The EMF assessment for VNI West will help answer that question, drawing on decades of international research as well as local modelling.

A guide to understanding the scoping requirements

The EES identifies EMF for investigation due to community concerns around the possible health effects of transmission infrastructure. Although EMF has been assigned a low priority in the scoping requirements, the assessment will still consider these concerns and ensure emissions remain within safe, regulated levels.

Why has EMF been assigned a low priority? We understand community members have raised concerns about EMF and its potential impacts. These concerns are valid and have been carefully considered. However, decades of national and international research shows that EMF from powerlines and substations – when properly designed and located – is not known to cause negative health effects.

What we're looking at

The EMF assessment examines:

Potential health risks from electromagnetic fields during construction or operation

Whether EMF emissions could interfere with farm equipment, communications, or other sensitive infrastructure

How we're doing it

The EMF assessment covers the entire project easement and the Tragowel Terminal Station. It involves:

1. Reviewing national and international EMF exposure guidelines
2. Identifying homes, infrastructure, or other sensitive receptors that might be affected
3. Modelling EMF levels from the proposed design using a reference scenario
4. Comparing projected levels against safety thresholds
5. Applying mitigation measures if required and reassessing any residual impacts

This assessment does not require field surveys but has been informed by community feedback collected during the route refinement process in late 2024 and early 2025.

Did you know? We're surrounded by EMF every day. From household appliances, electrical wiring and mobile phones to powerlines. Transmission infrastructure emits extremely low frequency EMF, which studies have found drops off significantly with distance. Current scientific evidence does not support a link between extremely low frequency EMF at everyday exposure levels and adverse health effects.

What's next

Modelling work is continuing to confirm that projected EMF levels meet required safety limits across the project easement. Preliminary results show EMF levels along the easement are expected to stay well within required safety standards, and it is likely that the minimum separation distance of 300 metres between towers and dwellings applied for VNI West will result in EMF impacts not being an issue of concern.

We need your input

Community members, landholders, and Traditional Owners have raised important questions about EMF from health concerns to how it might affect farm equipment.

If you live or work along the project easement and have questions or insights, we encourage you to get in touch.

Geology and Contaminated Land

While most of the project area has historically been used for farming, it's important to assess the potential presence of contaminated soils and naturally occurring acid sulphate soils.

A guide to understanding the scoping requirements

Contaminated land falls under the EES category of catchment values and hydrology. It has been assigned a low priority for investigation due to the area's predominant historical agricultural land use. While contamination risks are low, the project still needs to assess whether contaminated or acid sulphate soils might be disturbed. Key concerns include:

- Disturbance of contaminated, saline, dispersive, or acid sulphate soils
- Erosion due to vegetation loss or construction activities

Although some contamination may be present in specific areas (e.g. near old sheep dips or sheds), these risks are generally well documented and avoidable. Likewise, areas that may contain acid sulphate soils are limited and can be easily managed.

What are acid sulphate soils? Acid sulphate soils are naturally occurring soils that contain iron sulfides. When these soils are disturbed, the sulfides can react with air and water to produce sulfuric acid. This acid can harm plants and animals, corrode concrete and steel, and pollute waterways and groundwater. That's why understanding their location is crucial before construction begins.

What we're looking at

- Whether project works could disturb contaminated or hazardous soils
- Whether acid sulphate soils are likely to be encountered
- How soil disturbance could affect human health or the environment
- Whether appropriate mitigation strategies are in place



How we're doing it

A remote assessment has reviewed:

1. Aerial images to identify potential contamination sites
2. EPA Victoria registers (e.g. priority sites, audits, licensed sites, landfills)
3. Geology, land use, and groundwater characteristics
4. Acid Sulfate Soils (ASS) maps and indicators (e.g. topography, water proximity)

In 2023, soil and groundwater testing was undertaken at the proposed Tragowel Terminal Station:

- Soil samples from six boreholes were tested for heavy metals, herbicides, and pesticides
- Field pH tests were used to check for acid sulphate soils
- Groundwater samples were collected using hydrasleeve and bailer methods

The preliminary ASS desktop assessment indicates potential acid sulphate soil presence near:

- The Murray River
- Swamps, billabongs, and drainage channels
- Areas with alluvial or lakebed deposits

These will be managed through appropriate mitigation such as soil liming where necessary.

What's next

The assessment is ongoing, but further field surveys are not expected at this stage.

We need your input

Are you aware of historical activities, waste sites, or other features in your area that might affect the soil?

This is your opportunity to tell us about anything unusual we should consider.

Groundwater

This study focuses on how VNI West may interact with groundwater – water stored beneath the earth's surface in soil and rock. While major impacts are unlikely, it's still important to assess potential effects on groundwater flows and users.

A guide to understanding the scoping requirements

Groundwater is a low priority in the EES because construction is unlikely to reach deep groundwater systems and transmission structures are expected to have shallow foundations. While these foundations intersect groundwater in some areas, their localised nature means minimal regional impact.

Overall the risk of groundwater contamination or depletion is considered low. However, the EES must still assess whether activities like excavation of water use could:

- Intersect aquifers or groundwater flows
- Affect the quality, movement, or availability of groundwater
- Disrupt environmental features that rely on groundwater, like wetlands or lakes

What is an aquifer? An aquifer is a natural underground layer of rock, sand, or gravel that stores water. Groundwater moves slowly through it, and depending on quality, can be used for farming, drinking, or supporting wetlands and rivers. **Key aquifers of interest in the area are the Quaternary Aquifer, Shepparton Formation, and Loxton-Parilla Sand**

What we're looking at

The assessment identifies potential risks to groundwater users, environmental features, or underground water flows, even if the risks are low. It also checks whether construction may interact with groundwater and how impacts can be avoided or minimised. This includes understanding:

- Which aquifers are present across the project area
- How deep groundwater is in different locations
- How groundwater moves across the landscape – locally and regionally

How we're doing it

The assessment uses a combination of desktop analysis, existing datasets, and limited geotechnical investigations. This includes:

1. Mapping groundwater levels and aquifers using public data and past studies
2. Analysing the geology of the Murray Basin geological region (where the project is located)
3. Reviewing tower foundation depths and construction requirements
4. Identifying where works might intersect with aquifers or draining features
5. Reviewing the findings in the context of nearby developments, to assess cumulative effects

What's next

The groundwater assessment is ongoing. It's focused on whether construction or operation could intersect groundwater or affect nearby users. Field surveys are not currently planned, and overall risk remains low.

We need your input

If you use groundwater for stock, crops, or your home, or have natural springs on your property, your local knowledge can help strengthen the assessment.

Understanding where groundwater is accessed helps identify potential risks and ensure nothing is missed.

Surface Water

Surface water is listed under the catchment values and hydrology scoping requirements. It has been assigned a medium priority due to the potential for transmission lines to cross key rivers and wetlands, and for infrastructure to be built in flood-prone areas. These interactions could change how water moves across the landscape and affect water quality or flood risk.

A guide to understanding the scoping requirements

The EES must consider:

- Effects on waterways, floodplains, and wetland systems including Ramsar-listed wetlands and both permanent and seasonal water bodies
- How infrastructure might interact with floodwaters and alter flood flows
- Possible impacts on surface water systems across state borders (New South Wales)

What we're looking at

The surface water assessment is investigating how the project could affect waterbodies and floodplains (including rivers, wetlands, and irrigation channels) during and after construction. Key areas include:

- Murray, Avoca, Wimmera, Loddon rivers, and Six Mile Creek
- More than 230 waterways and 25 mapped wetlands
- The Tragowel Terminal Station site, which sits on a floodplain near Bannagher Creek, a tributary of the lower Loddon River

Flood modelling has confirmed that this site is prone to inundation during major flood events. Parts of the site are covered by local planning overlays that recognise this flood risk.

How we're doing it

The assessment involves:

1. Desktop analysis of waterways, floodplains, and catchment features using public data
2. Flood modelling at the Tragowel Terminal Station site
3. Screening for flood and water risks across each stage of the project
4. Identifying mitigation strategies and assessing any remaining risks
5. Reviewing how the project might interact with other developments in the region

A site visit was conducted to understand local water flows and infrastructure that could influence surface water behaviour.

Catchment management authorities and water corporations have been consulted about flood history, development requirements, and the role of water channels around Tragowel. Further engagement will take place during detailed design.

What's next

The assessment is continuing, with a focus on how construction and infrastructure may affect flood patterns, surface water flows, and water quality across the entire project area.

We need your input

We're working closely with catchment authorities and local councils and we also want to hear from you.

If you've experienced local flooding, or have specialised knowledge about water behaviour on your land or in your community, your insights can help ensure our planning is as accurate and effective as possible.

Noise and Vibration

We're assessing how VNI West's construction and operation could affect nearby homes, farms, and public spaces through noise or vibration, and how those impacts can be understood and managed in line with the Environmental Protection Authority Victoria's guidelines.

A guide to understanding the scoping requirements

Noise and vibration are a medium priority for investigation. While construction impacts are expected to be temporary, the project may generate operational noise (e.g. aeolian and corona noise) which can be managed through appropriate design and separation distances. This assessment includes:

- Impacts on amenity at nearby homes, farm, and open spaces
- Compliance with the Environment Protection Authority's Noise Protocol
- Managing cumulative effects alongside other developments

What we're looking at

The assessment considers how noise and vibration could affect people living or working near the project area. This includes:

- Homes and farms near the easement
- Construction-related vibration near utilities, heritage structures, or other buildings
- Potential noise from transmission infrastructure once operational

How we're doing it

The assessment combines desktop studies with on-ground noise monitoring. Steps include:

1. Identifying sensitive receptors across the project easement
2. Measuring existing (baseline) noise levels at key sites
3. Evaluating noise and vibration risks during construction and operation
4. Identifying ways to reduce impacts
5. Considering combined impacts with other nearby projects

Glossary: What we're measuring

- **Baseline noise:** Existing noise in the area before construction
- **Background noise:** Quietest consistent sound levels over time
- **Ambient noise:** Overall average sound levels during a period
- **Corona noise:** Weather-dependent sounds produced by high-voltage equipment
- **Aeolian noise:** Sound created by wind passing through wires or structures

What's next

Further noise monitoring will be undertaken if needed to support the final assessment. Findings will be documented in the EES, along with recommended measures to minimise noise and vibration impacts.

We need your input

Local understanding helps us build a clearer picture of how noise and vibration are experienced across the region.

If there are specific times, places, or activities you want us to consider, particularly near homes, schools or community facilities, we would value your feedback.

Air Quality (Community Amenity)

This study is focused on how construction might temporarily affect local air quality near homes, schools, farms, and community spaces, and how those impacts can be minimised.

A guide to understanding the scoping requirements

The EES must consider whether any dust or air emissions from the project could affect local amenity; especially in areas where people live, work, and farm. While air quality is generally well understood and managed in projects like VNI West, it's important to look closely at each phase and location to ensure those impacts are minimised or avoided entirely.

What we're looking at

The air quality assessment focuses on how construction activities such as earthworks, machinery use, or vehicle movements may temporarily affect air quality. The aim is to identify sensitive areas and make sure appropriate dust and emissions controls are in place within the areas closest to the project's construction.

How we're doing it

The assessment draws on the Environment Protection Authority Victoria's guidelines and meteorological data from the closest Bureau of Meteorology stations, including Swan Hill, Charlton, and Stawell. It includes:

1. Desktop mapping of nearby homes, farms, and schools
2. Analysis of wind patterns, climate, and seasonal conditions across the corridor
3. Review of local air quality monitoring data, including PM10 and PM2.5 (measures of particles found in air) readings
4. Consideration of how the VNI West project may interact with other developments in the region
5. Identification of where mitigation measures may be needed, and how effective they are likely to be

There are no new field surveys required for this assessment – it is based on existing data and standard environmental modelling.

What's next

The air quality assessment is ongoing. Findings will be used to make sure construction plans include strong protections for local amenity, particularly in rural and residential areas.

We need your input

If you live or work near the corridor, your experience matters.

Let us know about dust, wind, or air quality issues in your area.

Traffic and Transport

This study focuses on how VNI West could affect local roads, intersections, and transport routes – especially during construction. It considers how the movement of heavy vehicles could impact safety, access, and road conditions across the project area given construction vehicles will need to use local roads. This could create safety risks for property access, affect school bus routes, and cause wear and tear on the roads.

A guide to understanding the scoping requirements

The EES must assess how construction traffic could affect road safety and transport networks. This includes:

- Managing traffic disruptions for residents, businesses, and travellers during construction
- Safety risks on local roads, especially on transport routes
- Plans for assessing road conditions before and after construction, and how any damage will be repaired
- Impacts to school bus routes and residential access
- Effectiveness of proposed traffic management measures

What we're looking at

The goal is to understand how construction traffic will move through the region and what upgrades, management plans, or mitigations may be needed to keep road users safe and minimise disruption. The assessment looks at:

- How the project connects to the broader road network
- The condition and surface type of roads near the Project Easement
- Which roads and intersections are suitable for larger vehicles
- What upgrades or improvements may be required
- Localised risks or pinch points, including school bus routes and high-traffic areas

How we're doing it

The assessment involves engineering reviews of the roads intersecting or near the project easement. This includes:

1. Field surveys on public roads, including photography of key road features (no access to private land is required)
2. Condition assessments of approximately 150 local roads identified through early mapping
3. Safety analysis, looking at access points, intersections, and vehicle movement
4. Consultation with local councils to understand road usage, concerns, and priorities

This information helps ensure construction plans are workable and accurately reflect existing road conditions.

What's next

Road assessments are continuing. The findings will support construction planning, identify required upgrades, and inform how to safely manage vehicle movements.

The final EES will outline how potential impacts will be managed including traffic management principles, safety plans, and road upgrades where needed.

We need your input

Local knowledge helps identify risks and practical issues that mapping can't always capture.

If you have anything you'd like to discuss about road safety, access, or traffic during construction, please get in touch. Your insights will help us plan and reduce disruption.

Business Impact

Understanding how VNI West could affect local businesses, tourism, and regional economies is a key part of the EES. This assessment looks at both direct and indirect impacts and helps to identify ways to minimise disruption and support local economic activity.

A guide to understanding the scoping requirements

Business impacts fall under the broader socioeconomic scoping requirements. The EES must consider the potential for:

- Significant disruption to existing or proposed land uses and infrastructure
- Effects on tourism and local attractions
- Economic impacts on employment, business, housing, and the regional economy

What we're looking at

The business impact assessment focuses on how the project could affect local businesses and the economy, particularly during construction. It also considers how broader changes in land use or access could affect tourism, events and trade across the region. Local and state-wide economic impacts are being considered. There is a separate study that is looking specifically at farming and agriculture business.

How we're doing it

The assessment draws on preliminary research, economic modelling, and consultation with local council and business owners. This includes:

1. Mapping current business activity, employment, and industry mix
2. Reviewing how the project could affect commercial activity and tourism
3. Using economic modelling to understand both direct and flow-on effects
4. Consultation with businesses and councils to understand existing conditions and potential impacts
5. Using local insights to help identify risks and opportunities for the regional economy during and after construction

What's next

The assessment is continuing with a focus on detailed economic modelling. The findings will help shape how we manage construction impacts and support affected businesses.

We need your input

Do you run a business or rely on tourism in the VNI West project area?

Your local knowledge helps us understand the real-world impacts and how we can plan construction to support local trade.

Aviation

This study looks at how VNI West may affect aviation activity in the region, with a particular focus on how low-level flights are used for farming, emergency services, and local transport. While aviation has been identified as a lower priority in the scoping requirements, it's still important to assess potential safety issues and work with local landholders to understand existing airstrip use.

What is aviation? Aviation refers to the operation of aircraft including flying, design, maintenance, and supporting infrastructure. In rural areas, this often includes farming aircraft, emergency services, and private flights.

A guide to understanding the scoping requirements

The project easement passes near both certified and uncertified aerodromes. The EES must consider potential impacts to aviation, including:

- Effects on low-level flying used for crop spraying, aerial baiting or culling, and firefighting
- Potential interference with aviation navigation facilities
- Safety risks near aircraft take-off and landing zones
- The height and placement of transmission towers relative to regulated airspace protections
- Consideration of Obstacle Limitation Surfaces (safety zones around airports or airstrips) for certified aerodromes

Certified vs uncertified aerodromes: Certified aerodromes are regulated by the Civil Aviation Safety Authority and have stricter safety and design standards. Uncertified aerodromes are typically private airstrips used for local or agricultural operations.



What we're looking at

The assessment aims to ensure aviation safety and productivity is maintained for the range of aircraft and operators that may be affected. Key focus areas include:

- How towers could interact with known flight paths or low-flying zones
- Locations and operating conditions of nearby airstrips
- Common airspace uses – especially for farming and emergency services

We're working closely with landholders and local aviation users to understand on-ground realities, identify local aistrips, and avoid unintended impacts.

How we're doing it

The assessment includes a mix of off-site analysis, flight data, and local engagement. It involves:

1. Identifying all certified aerodromes within 30 nautical miles (55.56 kilometres) of the corridor, and uncertified aerodromes within 3 nautical miles (5.56 kilometres)
2. Comparing tower heights to aviation safety zones to assess any risk to aircraft landing or take-off
3. Reviewing how local aerial operations such as crop spraying or firefighting might be affected
4. Looking at potential impacts on airspace protections such as Obstacle Limitation Surfaces
5. Ongoing discussions with landholders who own or use private airstrips
6. Developing practical solutions to ensure aviation safety during construction and operation

What's next

The assessment is ongoing. We'll continue to work with landholders, emergency services, and other stakeholders to make sure the project considers the needs of people who rely on safe access to local airspace whether for farming, firefighting, or everyday operations.

We need your input

We want to hear from you if you own or operate an uncertified airstrip near the project easement or use aircraft for farming, maintenance or emergency services.

Local knowledge helps identify flight paths, aerial operations, and safety concerns that aren't always visible through mapping or data.

Landscape and Visual Impact

Parts of VNI West may be visible from some homes, roads, and public spaces – particularly in open landscapes or near elevated viewpoints. The Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) is looking into where these impacts might occur, how they affect the surrounding environment, and what can be done to reduce disruption to views and landscape character where possible.

A guide to understanding the scoping requirements

The scoping requirements identify the potential for visual impacts on areas where people live, work, or travel – such as towns, homes, public roads, and parks or scenic reserves. This includes:

- Impacts on landscape character and natural landforms
- Changes to visual amenity in private and public views
- Cumulative impacts alongside other visible developments in the region

The EES aims to identify where these impacts might occur and how they can be minimised, particularly in places with scenic, cultural, or recreational value.

What we're looking at

The assessment helps us understand how visible VNI West infrastructure will be and how it may affect the landscape and people's views. This includes:

- Areas with recognised landscape value like national parks and scenic reserves
- How visible the infrastructure will be from nearby homes and public spaces
- Whether the change will be considered minor or significant, and how visual impacts could be managed

The assessment considers how transmission infrastructure will affect visual amenity during construction and operation.

How we're doing it

The assessment includes extensive field surveys and photography to show how the transmission infrastructure will look in the landscape. This involves:

1. Visiting public and private view locations across the project area
2. Capturing georeferenced photographs and data
3. Creating accurate photo simulations (called photomontages) of how the infrastructure will appear
4. Using a framework to assess the landscape value, viewer sensibility, and how visible the infrastructure will be

How landscape value is measured

Landscapes are assessed as Very High, High, Moderate, or Low, based on their environmental and cultural value, protections, and visual features.

Very High

National significance including landscapes which are included in Australia's National Heritage List and/ or Commonwealth Heritage List or designated wilderness areas



High

State or Regional significance designation, and/or presence of Significant Landscape Overlays

Prevalence of preferred landscape features, with minimal presence of non-preferred landscape features



Moderate

Local significance and/or some presence of preferred landscape features, with these being more prevalent than non-preferred landscape features



Low

Minor presence of preferred landscape features, and/or a prevalence of non-preferred landscape features



How visibility and sensitivity are assessed

Visibility/Sensitivity scale

- Visibility is rated from Nil to Very High, depending on how much of the infrastructure is seen
- Sensitivity is based on who is viewing it. Residents and visitors to scenic or protected areas are considered highly sensitive to visual change

Local input

Several landholders have requested that the LVIA consider the effect on their properties, given their proximity to proposed infrastructure. Land access agreements are in place for surveys on private land, and this input is directly informing the assessment.

How visual impact was considered in the route design

Minimising the visual impact of VNI West has been part of the project's design process from the start. Examples include:

- Adjusting the easement to avoid a cluster of dwellings near Kerang-Murrabit Road and Plumptons Wildlife Reserve
- Recommending a five kilometre buffer around topographic high points like Mt Doboobetic and Klunders Hill Lookout
- Increasing setbacks from nearby homes where possible

What's next

Further surveys are continuing. Photomontages and findings will be included in the final EES.

We need your input

We know the landscape matters and how things look and feel can shape how people connect with place.

If there's a particular view or location you believe should be considered, or you'd like to see how VNI West infrastructure might look from your property,
let us know.

To help bring the project to life, we are making our VNI West visualisation tool available to landholders, neighbours and community members to see what the project could look like from viewpoints important to them.
Request VNI West Visualisation: https://vniwproject.com.au/landholders-community/community-events.

Social

Large infrastructure projects can affect more than just the land on which they're built. They can also shape how people live, work, and feel. We're assessing how VNI West may impact community wellbeing, daily life, and the social fabric of towns, farms, and neighbourhoods along the project easement.

A guide to understanding the scoping requirements

Social impacts are a high priority for investigation due to the scale and location of the project. Potential impacts can affect individuals, families, businesses, and the wider community. This includes:

Disruption to how land is used, including farming, infrastructure, and emergency access

Broader effects on social wellbeing, mental health, and community cohesion

What we're looking at

We're identifying how the project may change people's day-to-day lives, from property access and land use to local services and social networks. This includes:

- Short- and long-term effects on wellbeing, sense of place, and local identity
- Impacts on farming operations, business activities, and community infrastructure
- Where support, mitigation, or further engagement may be needed

How we're doing it

The social impact assessment draws on both technical data and lived experience. Our approach includes:

1. One-on-one interviews and stakeholder conversations
2. Online surveys and community drop-in sessions
3. Reviewing other EES technical studies

Local input

We understand the uncertainty this project brings for many and that it can affect mental health, trust, and daily life. That's why we're focused on seeking input from those most affected. So far, we've heard from landholders, Traditional Owners, Registered Aboriginal Parties (RAPs), business owners, local government, and community groups.

Key themes from the community so far

Topics raised include:

- Visual impact and infrastructure design
- Mental health impacts (including impacts as a result of landholder decisions)
- EMF impacts
- Community engagement adequacy
- Cultural heritage and spiritual impacts
- Benefits sharing and compensation
- Project suppliers and partners
- Economic growth and housing opportunity
- Environmental impacts (including biodiversity, biosecurity, bushfire, and flood risk)

Need support? You're not alone.



We understand VNI West may impact the mental health and wellbeing of community members and landholders.

Free and confidential 24/7 counselling is available through Converge International, a professional wellbeing support service engaged by VicGrid. Please call **1300 687 327** and reference "VNI West".

Free and confidential support is available through Finwell Support, a professional wellbeing support service for farmers and small business owners. Please call **1300 735 578** and reference "VNI West".

VicGrid does not have access to your personal information. Your privacy and wellbeing remain the top priority.

For additional support services, please refer to **page 34**.

What's next

The social impact assessment is ongoing. Findings will be used to shape mitigation strategies, guide project delivery, and support fair, respectful outcomes for affected communities.

We need your input

Your perspective matters.

If you know of a way that VNI West may affect your community, wellbeing, or the way you live or work, we encourage you to share it. Your feedback helps us build a clearer picture and deliver a considered response.

Aboriginal Cultural Heritage

This study focuses on how the project may affect places, objects, and landscapes that are of cultural heritage significance. These are protected under Victorian legislation and must be carefully considered wherever a major project takes place.

The aim is to assess the potential for harm, avoid or minimise impacts, and work in partnership with Traditional Owners and Registered Aboriginal Parties (RAPs) throughout the process.

A guide to understanding the scoping requirements

Aboriginal Cultural Heritage has been identified as a high priority for further technical studies. This is because the VNI West project easement is long and crosses an area with a rich Aboriginal cultural history and ongoing significance.

Even though the project design has aimed to avoid sensitive areas, there is still a risk of disturbing Aboriginal Cultural Heritage, particularly where towers or terminal stations are proposed. These risks include potential impacts to both visible sites and less tangible cultural values, such as those connected to the land, water, biodiversity, or landscape.

When the project was referred for an EES, there were 121 registered Aboriginal places of cultural heritage significance within or close to the draft corridor, made up of 230 recorded components.

What we're looking at

- Known Aboriginal heritage places
- Areas that may contain unrecorded cultural values, including intangible connections to land, water, biodiversity, or other features
- Risks of damage or disturbance to cultural heritage, including indirect impacts on nearby sites
- Opportunities to support Traditional Owner involvement in planning and delivery of the project

How we're doing it

1. Working closely with Registered Aboriginal Parties and other Traditional Owner groups to understand the significance of both visible and intangible cultural heritage
2. Developing Cultural Heritage Management Plans and other strategies to comply with the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006
3. Avoiding or minimising impacts wherever possible through informed design
4. Preserving and protecting cultural heritage through partnerships with Traditional Owners wherever possible

More information on the Cultural Heritage Management Plans under development for VNI West and assessments required for the project can be found on the VNI West website or by scanning the QR code.

Did you know? Finding Aboriginal places or artefacts on your land **does not affect your ownership or stop you from using your land as usual**. Only **vacant Crown land** can be subject to a Native Title claim.

What's next

Cultural heritage assessments are continuing, including further engagement with Registered Aboriginal Parties and Traditional Owners.

We need your input

If you know of places, stories, or objects of Aboriginal cultural importance on your land or in your area, please speak with the project team.

Historic Heritage

We're assessing the potential for VNI West's construction to affect historic sites, structures, or artefacts (whether already identified or discovered during works) and how to manage these risks in line with heritage legislation.

A guide to understanding the scoping requirements

Historic heritage has been assigned a medium priority for investigation. While known sites can typically be avoided during design, construction may still impact both listed and previously unidentified heritage sites. The assessment must consider:

- Known and previously unrecorded heritage places, sites, and objects, in line with the Heritage Act 2017 and Heritage Victoria's guidelines
- Direct and indirect impacts on historical heritage – including buildings, archaeological features, or culturally significant places
- How any unexpected finds during construction will be managed in accordance with approved protocols

What we're looking at

We're reviewing the history and land use across the project area to identify places with heritage significance, including:

- Known heritage sites listed in state, national, and local registers
- Unrecorded or potential archaeological sites that may be affected by project activities
- Areas near infrastructure (like substations or towers) where temporary or permanent works could cause impact

How we're doing it

The assessment combines research and fieldwork, including:

1. Reviewing historical maps, photographs, and land use records
2. Searching key heritage registers and databases
3. Conducting field surveys at locations with potential heritage value including Jobling Road, Tragowel, the former Tragowel State School, and Joel Joel Public Hall

Databases and registers reviewed include:

- Victorian Heritage Database including the Victorian Heritage Inventory and Register
- Local planning schemes (Buloke, Gannawarra, Loddon, Northern Grampians Shire Councils)
- Commonwealth, National, and World Heritage lists

So far, 27 features have been identified through preliminary assessments. Field surveys were conducted at 12 locations during two site visits in 2024 and 2025.

What's next

Historic heritage investigations are continuing, including further site visits to confirm any potential impacts. While major impacts are not anticipated, potential heritage items uncovered during construction will be managed using an approved find protocol in line with heritage legislation.

We need your input

If you're aware of local sites, stories, or structures with historical significance, especially those not listed on official registers, we'd like to hear from you. Local knowledge plays an important role in helping us understand and protect the project area's shared heritage.

Why your input matters

Communities in the VNI West project area know their land, their environment, and their risks better than anyone. Local knowledge about flood behaviour, farming activity, local creeks and streams, bushfire history, and more, is critical to informing how the project is planned and assessed.

That's why we're sharing these draft information snapshots and asking for your local insights before the EES is submitted. Whether it's confirming what we've got right, raising something that you know about your local area, or simply adding detail to what's already there – your input helps ensure this process reflects the reality on the ground.

How to find more information

Scan the QR code below to view detailed EES fact sheets on the VNI West website. These are expanded versions of the summaries included in this booklet and outline the environmental, social, and cultural assessments being considered in the VNI West EES.

The full scoping requirements can be viewed on the Department of Transport and Planning website, **planning.vic.gov.au**

This is your opportunity to help ensure the VNI West EES technical studies are comprehensive and grounded in local knowledge.

Get involved – your local knowledge matters

Local knowledge is extremely valuable for a thorough EES assessment. We strongly encourage you to provide your input into existing conditions. You can call, email, or visit our website.

Email: enquiries@vniwproject.com.au
Call: 1800 824 221
Visit: www.vniwproject.com.au or scan the QR code



Support Services

We acknowledge the impact VNI West may have on the wellbeing of those living and working along the project easement.

Free confidential counselling is available through **Converge International,** a 24/7 counselling service engaged by VicGrid.

Call 1300 687 327 and reference "VNI West"

Additional Support Services

finwell Support

Free and confidential wellbeing support for farmers and small businesses.

1300 735 578
finwellsupport.com.au

RFCS Victoria West

Financial counselling, small business and wellbeing support for farmers and regional businesses.

1300 735 578
wswrcs.com.au

HEAD TO HEALTH

Easy access to digital mental health and wellbeing services, information, and support.

1800 595 212
headtohealth.gov.au

Beyond Blue

Free online and telephone helpline for people seeking mental health information or qualified support.

1300 224 636
beyondblue.org.au

Lifeline

Provides access to 24 hour crisis support and suicide prevention services.

13 11 14
lifeline.org.au

Important Notice

This document or the information in it may be subsequently updated or amended.

This document does not constitute legal or business advice and should not be relied on as a substitute for obtaining detailed advice about the National Electricity Law, the National Electricity Rules or any other applicable laws, procedures or policies or investment or business decisions. VicGrid (and its related entity) has made every reasonable effort to ensure the quality of the information in this document but cannot guarantee its accuracy or completeness.

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For more information, please refer to the detailed EES fact sheets on the VNI West website. Visit: **www.vniwproject.com.au**, or scan the QR code.

The scoping requirements are available on the Department of Transport and Planning website, **planning.vic.gov.au**.

VNI West

Contact us

Website: **www.vniwproject.com.au**
Email: **enquiries@vniwproject.com.au**
Free call: **1800 824 221**
Facebook: **@VNIWest**

If you need an interpreter, please call 13 12 50 and reference VNI West. 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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