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MEDIA RELEASE

Access notices issued to facilitate time-critical ecological surveys

Transmission Company Victoria (TCV) has started issuing Notices of Access to a small number of landholders, to facilitate access to land where time-critical ecological surveys are required and voluntary access has not been agreed.

These Notices of Access formally commence the Section 93 land access process under the Electricity Industry Act 2000 (Vic) and will enable non-invasive ecological surveys to proceed for VNI West.

The surveys are intended to identify and record native vegetation and wildlife habitats, to help ensure the project is designed responsibly through a comprehensive Environment Effects Statement (EES).

In July, landholders along sections of the Project Easement were advised of the need for spring and summer ecology surveys. In October, TCV followed up with reminders outlining the benefits of voluntary access and the available pathways for this important work.

VNI West Program Director Mick Douge said where agreement has not yet been possible, the Notices of Access confirm survey timing and approach in line with statutory requirements – also detailed comprehensively in TCV's Landholder Guide.

"Our strong preference is that wherever possible, we work with landholders to set access conditions that suit their operations, considering aspects such as biosecurity, access points, timing and seasonal requirements," Mr Douge said.

"These surveys are a necessary step to keep VNI West on schedule to support Victoria's future energy need. We've agreed on voluntary access conditions for 165 properties in the project region so far and conducted more than 270 surveys on private property.

"For a small number of properties where we haven't been able to reach agreement, these Notices of Access confirm our legal ability to access for surveys. However, that doesn't close the door on voluntary discussions."

All survey activities will be undertaken in accordance with the Land Access Code of Practice (LACoP), which sets strict standards for notice periods, respectful conduct, safety and biosecurity management such as 'Come Clean, Go Clean' procedures for each property accessed.

"Safety for our teams, landholders and the broader community is not negotiable," Mr Douge said.

"Access will only occur under clearly defined conditions and always with qualified ecologists and trained Landholder Liaisons present.

"We know this is a busy time of year for farmers, and we've worked with landholders through their access agreements to schedule surveys that avoid disruption wherever possible.

“Access conditions are best defined through agreement, however landholders receiving a Notice of Access can discuss adjustments to access dates or times directly with their Landholder Liaisons.”

Where Section 93 access is used for season-specific ecology surveys, landholders can choose to return to a voluntary access pathway at any time.

Voluntary access agreements unlock clear benefits for landholders, including eligibility for 20 per cent of the Landholder Benefit Payment upfront (set at \$46,000 per hectare of easement) and a scaled access payment of \$10,000–\$50,000 depending on the area made available for surveys.

Short-form access agreements are also available for one-off survey activities where landholders want more time to consider the full Enablement and Access Deed.

“Compulsory access remains our last resort,” Mr Douge said.

“The Notices of Access being issued now are not using newly legislated enforcement powers. At all times our focus is on reaching agreement on access arrangements with landholders, that best support each property, farming or business operation.

“Our goal is to keep this project moving responsibly: maintaining open communication, minimising disruption, and designing VNI West with input from the people who know the project region best.”

ENDS

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About VNI West

Victoria to New South Wales Interconnector West (VNI West) is a project to build a new 500 kV double-circuit transmission line between Victoria and New South Wales. Harnessing new sources of electricity generation in both states, VNI West is required to maintain the reliability of electricity supply as aging coal-fired power stations retire. In Victoria, the proposed 70-metre-wide project easement runs north from Bulgana to near Kerang, continuing across the border into New South Wales. This new infrastructure will help to ensure Victorians can access clean, reliable energy into the future.

About TCV

Transmission Company Victoria (TCV) was established by AEMO Victorian Planning to progress the VNI West transmission project. TCV is working directly with landholders, Traditional Owners, and local communities to understand concerns and ensure that early commitments are honoured across the life of the project. TCV provides regular project updates and invites input from landholders and communities throughout the project. For more information, head to www.transmissionvictoria.com.au.

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