VNI West

Bushfire

Bushfires are an inherent hazard across many Victorian landscapes, and the Project area is bushfire-prone. The Project has the potential to influence bushfire risk during construction and operation, primarily through ignition sources, access arrangements, and interactions with suppression activities.

With the implementation of proposed design, construction, and operational controls, bushfire risk in the surrounding landscape is expected to remain high due to existing conditions but is not anticipated to be materially increased by the Project.

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 12 and *Technical Appendix E* identify potential bushfire risks associated with the Project, including ignition risk, access, and suppression activities.

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Chapter 12: Bushfire ↗

Technical Appendix E: Bushfire ↗

The existing environment of the Project is characterised by warm summer conditions, with mean maximum temperatures between November and March generally exceeding 25°C. Bushfire risk is typically elevated following dry winters and springs, when fine fuels become more readily ignitable. Across most of the Proposed Easement, land use is predominantly agricultural grassland, which generally presents lower fire intensity potential than forested environments. The Proposed Easement has been designed to avoid forested areas, including State and National Parks, and areas mapped under the Bushfire Management Overlay (BMO), with interaction limited to approximately 2 km across the 240 km Proposed Easement. Steep topography has also been avoided where practicable to reduce fire spread potential.

Bushfire behaviour in the region surrounding the Project is influenced by the wind. A bushfire in the region surrounding the Project is likely to spread in accordance with two scenarios, namely, when a bushfire is influenced by a north-westerly wind and when a bushfire is influenced by a south-westerly wind (which occurs after the north-westerly wind).

During construction, the presence of plant, equipment, vehicles, and hot works introduces potential ignition sources in an already fire-prone environment. This impact will be managed through a Construction Bushfire Mitigation and Management Plan (CBMMP) and a Construction Fire Emergency Management Plan, developed in consultation with the Country Fire Authority (CFA). Measures include controls for hot works, restrictions during high fire danger periods, workforce accommodation standards, on-site initial response capability, provision of firefighting water, and emergency access arrangements. Temporary worker accommodation would also be designed to provide appropriate protection.

Ignition risk during operation is expected to be lower than during construction. 500 kV transmission infrastructure has not been known to cause a bushfire and is not considered a significant ignition source. Lightning protection, routine inspection and maintenance, vegetation management, and access track maintenance will be implemented through an Operations Bushfire Mitigation and Management Plan and an Operational Fire Emergency Management Plan, also in consultation with the CFA. Early detection measures, such as smoke-detection cameras on selected towers, may be considered during detailed design to support timely response.

Bushfire suppression relies on both ground and aerial firefighting resources. While transmission infrastructure may present some constraints in certain circumstances, suppression operations are managed through established procedures, and with appropriate controls and coordination with emergency services, both aerial and ground-based response is expected to operate safely in the vicinity of the Project. Any temporary disruption during construction will be managed through the CBMMP and Emergency Management Plan.

While the overall risk of bushfire remains elevated due to the surrounding environment, these measures would reduce the likelihood of the Project causing a fire and limit potential impacts. The highest risks are from ignition sources present during construction, with risks being considerably lower once the Project is operational, due to 500 kV transmission lines not being considered a significant ignition source. The proposed Environmental Performance Requirements (EPRs) are expected to reduce ignition likelihood and potential consequences through prevention, early detection, and improved emergency response. The Project is not expected to significantly affect bushfire behaviour or response capability, and bushfire risk can be effectively managed through the proposed framework.