



Ecology

Environment Effects Statement

The [Environment Effects Statement \(EES\)](#) is Victoria's most rigorous and transparent environmental impact assessment. It describes the project, its rationale, and potential environmental and social effects.

Scoping requirements

In February 2025, the Victorian Minister for Planning issued the final scoping requirements for the VNI West EES, setting out the proposed specific matters to be investigated and documented. While the scoping requirements are intended to cover all relevant matters, the EES can also address other significant matters that emerge during EES investigations or through consultation.

Biodiversity and habitat scoping requirements

The preliminary risk screening found biodiversity to be a high priority for technical investigation of potential impacts. Desktop assessments identified a range of threatened and listed species and ecological communities under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act) and State Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1999 (FFG Act) that may be present within or near the project easement. Assessments also identified nearby parks and reserves that provide important habitat for native species. Many significant reserves and wetlands are located within or adjacent to the project area of interest, including the Ramsar-listed Kerang Wetlands, Great Spectacle Lakes Complex Wildlife Reserve, the Kara Kara Conservation Management Network (which includes the Kara Kara National Park, Morri Morri Nature Conservation Reserve and Mount Bolangum Nature Conservation Reserves), Tragowel Swamp, and Bunguluke Wetlands.

Matters for investigation

- *Direct or indirect loss, disturbance and/or degradation of terrestrial and aquatic biodiversity values, including native vegetation, listed or other protected flora and fauna species under the EPBC Act and FFG Act, and nearby habitat that may support listed or other protected flora, fauna, or ecological communities.*

- *Potential for significant effects on native vegetation, listed threatened ecological communities, key threatened flora species, and key threatened fauna species (including migratory species).*
- *Potential initiation or exacerbation of listed potentially threatening processes under the FFG Act.*
- *Potential impact on the ecological character and limits of acceptable change of the Kerang Wetlands Ramsar-listed site.*
- *Potential impact on groundwater-dependent ecosystems caused by groundwater drawdown or surface hydrological changes.*
- *Disruption to the movement of fauna (both day and night) between areas of habitat across the broader landscape, including risk of collisions with transmission line infrastructure.*
- *Potential cumulative effects on listed threatened flora and fauna species (including migratory species) from the project in combination with other projects.*
- *The availability of suitable offsets for the loss of native vegetation and habitat for listed threatened species under the EPBC Act and/or FFG Act.*

Assessment overview

The aim of the ecology (biodiversity and habitat) assessment is to identify the presence of flora and fauna species considered significant, threatened, rare, or endangered within the project area under State and Commonwealth legislation. This knowledge will inform the project's design, including transmission tower and line locations. The aim is to avoid important flora and fauna where possible and develop mitigation measures.

Scan this QR code to view the complete list of [scoping requirements](#) for the VNI West project





Study methodology

The study methodology includes the following:

- **Flora surveys:** This involves site walkovers to document flora species. At relevant sites, vegetation quality assessments (VQAs) will be conducted to determine vegetation quality. Vegetation surveys are completed before fauna surveys to identify important habitats. Results will be mapped on a Geographic Information System (GIS), a computer-based system used to capture, store, analyse, manage, and present geographical data.
- **Fauna surveys:** Reviewing potential habitat of various fauna in the project area. This involves different methods, depending on the target species. For example, terracotta rooftiles will be placed in a grid formation on grassland to document the striped legless lizard.
- **Spotlighting at night:** In certain habitats, qualified ecologists will conduct spotlighting at night to identify nocturnal species like the inland carpet python. A technique known as 'call playback' – where bird calls are played through a bluetooth speaker – will be used to identify owl species.
- **Camera trap surveys:** This involves the placement of motion-sensing cameras to detect and photograph the passing of small animals to assess whether certain species are present.
- **Song meters:** These record sound for a set period during day and night.

Local input

Landholders and local groups have provided input into:

- Important trees and vegetation areas on private properties.
- Areas which are actively being managed for conservation or known habitat areas that are preserved on private properties.
- The presence of individual fauna species such as carpet pythons, eagles and owls, and other birds.

Existing conditions

Existing conditions understood to date include:

- Most of the transmission easement has been cleared for agricultural use but there are scattered trees and patches of vegetation on properties throughout. The best and highest quality remaining vegetation is usually found in public road and river reserves.
- Some properties along the easement have remaining high-quality native vegetation in pockets or along waterways, which have been surveyed where access was allowed. The surveys found various types of vegetation in the easement, many of which are important because they are limited in the area. These include plains woodland, plains grassy woodland, riparian woodland, heathy woodland with box ironbark, buloke/grey box/black box woodland, lignum swampy woodland, ridge plains mallee, and chenopod grassland.

Continuing studies and assessment

Flora and fauna surveys are ongoing. Surveys will be conducted on public land and private properties where land access is available. Activities include:

- Terracotta rooftile grids being set up and existing tile grids being checked monthly during the warmer months for fauna.
- Nocturnal surveys for the inland carpet python and owl species.
- Active surveys to be undertaken seasonally for threatened bird species such as the blue-winged parrot.
- Bat trapping to look for the elusive corben's long eared bat near the Murray River.
- Continued surveys of trees and vegetation.