VicGrid VNI West

Environment Effects Statement
Non-technical summary



About this summary

This document provides an overview of the Environment Effects Statement (EES) for the Victoria to New South Wales Interconnector West (VNI West) Project – Victorian component (the Project). It is intended to help readers understand the Project, the EES process, and how to access the full EES documentation and make a submission.

This summary is not a substitute for the EES. The full EES main report, technical appendices and supporting documentation contain the detailed information used to assess the Project's environmental effects. This summary is intended to orient readers, explain the EES process and point to where more detailed information can be found in the EES.

The complete EES, draft PSA and technical appendices are available on the VNI West website at **vniwproject.com.au/EES**

Acknowledgement of Country

VicGrid proudly acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands on which VNI West is to be delivered, including those recognised through Native Title and those recognised by the State of Victoria as Registered Aboriginal Parties. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present.

VicGrid also acknowledges other First Peoples who maintain cultural connections, custodial responsibilities, and ongoing relationships to the lands and waters across the project area. We recognise their deep connection to Country and the significant role they play in caring for and managing land, water, natural and built landscapes, and in maintaining profound knowledge systems.

We remain committed to building genuine and enduring partnerships with First Peoples, grounded in respect, transparency, and cultural authority, to ensure that the planning and delivery of this project reflects their rights, culture, and connections to Country.



What is VNI West?

VNI West is a proposed new high-voltage electricity transmission project between Victoria and New South Wales. The broader VNI West project would connect Bulgana in western Victoria to Dinawan in New South Wales. The EES assesses the Victorian component of that broader project.

The Project assessed in the EES is approximately 240 km of 500 kV double-circuit overhead transmission and supporting infrastructure. The Project extends from Bulgana in western Victoria, where it would connect to the proposed Western Renewables Link, up to the Murray River north of Kerang, where it would connect to the New South Wales component of VNI West at the high-water mark on the Victorian side of the river. The Project includes a new terminal station at Tragowel, a new Bulgana Reactor Station, associated network connection works, workforce accommodation and laydown area options, and other temporary and permanent works needed for construction, operation and maintenance.

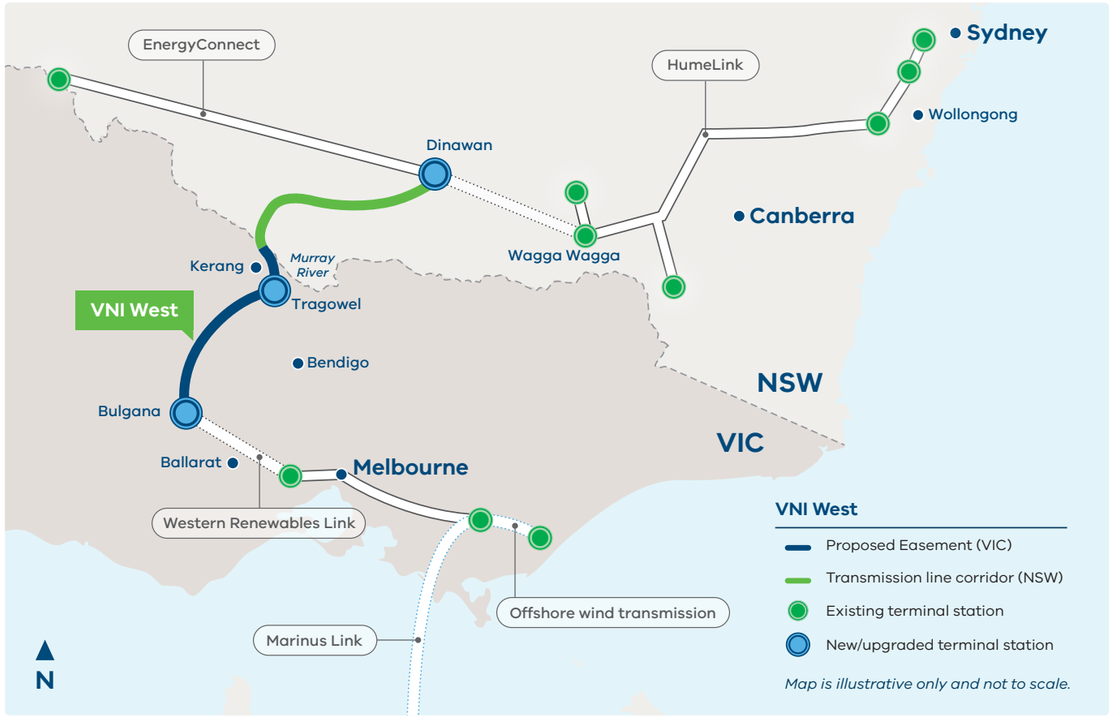
The proponent for the Project is VicGrid VNI West Pty Ltd (VicGrid VNI West). The Project would be developed by VicGrid VNI West with support from a Development Partner. Subject to approvals and procurement, project delivery would then proceed through a delivery arrangement consistent with the environmental management framework assessed through the EES.

The Project is located in western and north-west Victoria and passes through the Northern Grampians, Buloke, Loddon and Gannawarra local government areas.

READ MORE ↗

Chapter 1: Introduction ↗

Chapter 4: Project description ↗



Location of VNI West across Victoria and NSW



Why is the Project proposed?

Victoria's and the broader National Electricity Market's electricity systems are changing. A growing share of electricity is expected to come from renewable generation, storage and stronger transmission connections between regions, while coal-fired generation retires. In this context, additional transmission infrastructure is needed to connect new generation, support the transfer of electricity between regions, and help maintain secure and reliable electricity supply.

The Project is proposed to strengthen interconnection between Victoria and New South Wales, improve access to renewable electricity and storage, and support a secure and reliable electricity supply for Victorians during the energy transition. It is also intended to help connect renewable energy zones in Victoria and New South Wales and reduce network constraints that can limit how efficiently renewable electricity is used.

Existing transmission infrastructure was not designed for a system in which electricity comes from wind, solar and storage in different parts of the country. The Project is proposed as part of the broader changes needed to support that transition in Victoria and the wider National Electricity Market.



Connect energy from renewable energy zones



Strengthen the electricity connection between Victoria and New South Wales



Help keep electricity supply reliable as coal-fired power stations retire

READ MORE ↗

Chapter 2: Project rationale ↗

Why is an EES being prepared?

The Project was referred to the Victorian Minister for Planning under the *Environment Effects Act 1978* (EE Act). In April 2024, the Minister decided that an EES was required because the Project has the potential for a range of significant environmental effects.

The matters identified for assessment included potential effects on biodiversity, surface water and groundwater, Aboriginal cultural heritage, agriculture, landscape values, amenity and social and economic values.

The EES is the main environmental assessment document for the Project. It describes the Project, identifies its potential environmental effects, and sets out the framework proposed to avoid, minimise and manage those effects if the Project proceeds. The EES is not an approval in itself. It provides information for the Minister for Planning to assess the Project's environmental effects and for statutory decision-makers to consider the approvals required if the Project proceeds.

In addition, the Project has also been determined to be a controlled action under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (Cth) (EPBC Act) due to a range of significant environmental impacts. This means the Project also requires Commonwealth consideration, with the Victorian EES process being used to inform that decision under the bilateral assessment agreement between the Victorian Government and Commonwealth.

Project EES timeline



Project approvals

The Project is being assessed through an Environment Effects Statement (EES) administered by the Victorian Minister for Planning (the Minister) under the EE Act.

A number of key statutory approvals are required for the Project under Victorian and Commonwealth legislation. These include (but are not limited to):

- Approval of the controlled action under the EPBC Act (Commonwealth)
- Approval of several Cultural Heritage Management Plans (CHMPs) prepared in accordance with the requirements of the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* (Vic) (AH Act) and *Aboriginal Heritage Regulations 2018*
- Planning Scheme Amendment (PSA) GC316 to the Gannawarra, Loddon, Buloke and Northern Grampians planning schemes under the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* (Vic) (P&E Act)

The principal environmental approval required under Commonwealth legislation is assessment and approval under the EPBC Act. Under the Bilateral Assessment Agreement between the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments, the EES serves as the accredited assessment process for the Project under the EPBC Act.

Several CHMPs are currently being prepared for the Project in consultation with the relevant Registered Aboriginal Parties (RAPs) and First Peoples – State Relations, these will be informed by the findings and risks identified as part of *Technical Appendix R: Aboriginal cultural heritage* and further investigations as required under the AH Act 2006. The CHMPs would be lodged for approval following the Minister's assessment of the EES and are not publicly exhibited with the EES. Works for the Project cannot commence until the CHMPs have been approved as required by Section 49 of the AH Act.

Planning approval under the P&E Act will also be required for the Project. The preferred planning approval pathway is via a PSA, which provides an efficient and simplified approval process to allow the use and development of land for the Project. The PSA requires the preparation of an Environmental Management Framework (EMF) (see *EES Chapter 28: Environmental Management Framework*) which includes Environmental Performance Requirements (EPRs) applicable to the design, construction, operation and decommissioning of the Project.

Refer to *EES Chapter 5: Legislative framework* for further detail on the legislation and associated approval process requirements for the Project.

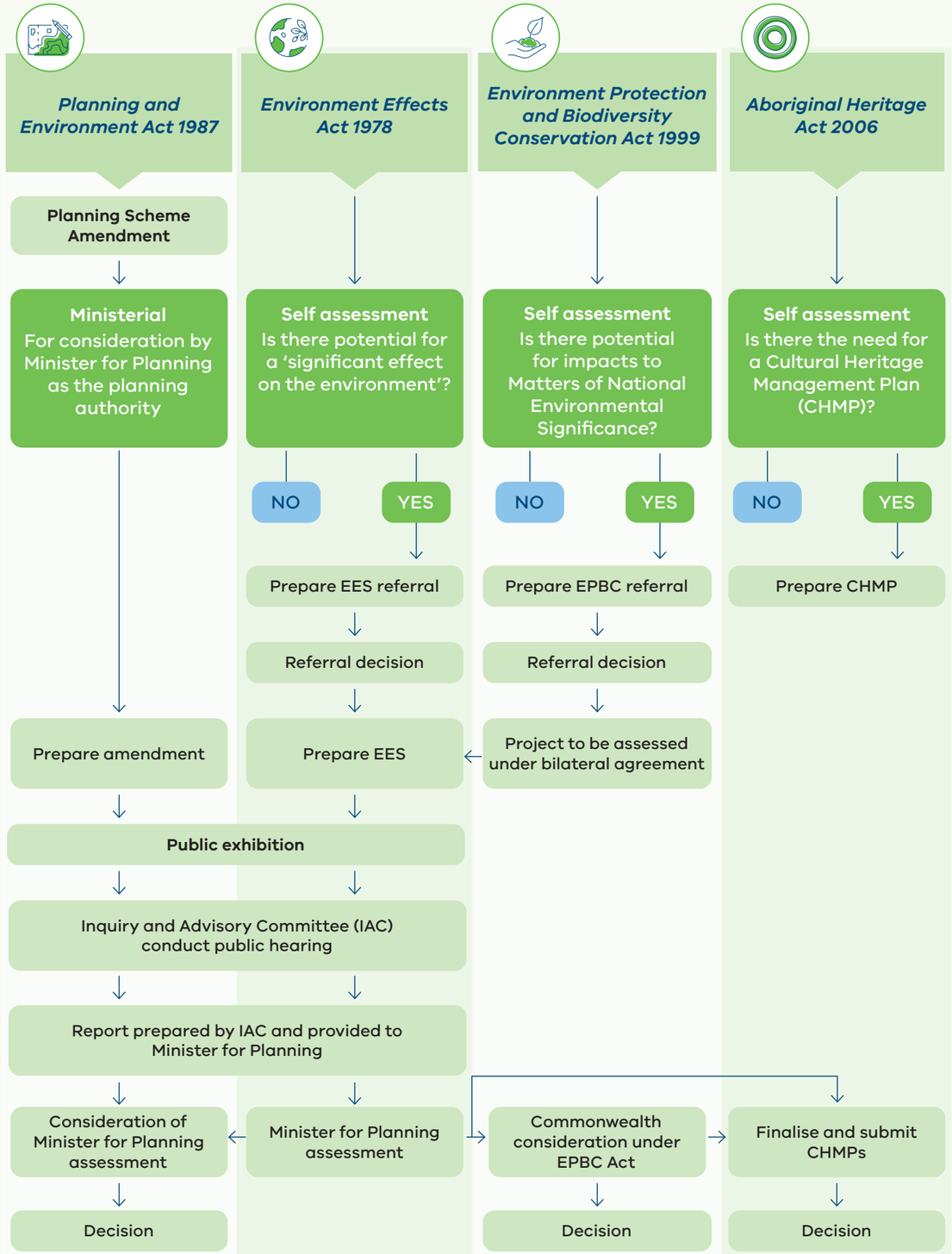
READ MORE ↗

Chapter 1: Introduction ↗

Chapter 5: Legislative framework ↗

Chapter 28: Environmental Management Framework ↗

Key legislation and approval requirements



How the Project was developed

The Project assessed in the EES is the result of several years of investigation, engagement and refinement, rather than a fixed proposal developed in isolation. The Project has been progressively developed over several years through engineering design, environmental studies and engagement with landholders, Traditional Owners, community members, government agencies and other stakeholders.



The process began in 2019 with the commencement of the Australian Energy Market Operator's (AEMO's) Regulatory Investment Test for Transmission (RIT-T) process. This process identified a broad Area of Interest (also known as Option 5A) announced in May 2023. The Area of Interest was narrowed to a Draft Corridor in October 2023, following feedback and further technical, engineering and environmental assessment. The Proposed Easement was then identified in October 2024.

Throughout this process, and continuing through the EES process, the Project considered environmental, social, cultural heritage and engineering constraints, together with the network function the Project is intended to perform. The easement location was refined over time to ensure that the route could avoid and minimise impacts where practicable while maintaining a technically feasible and efficient project outcome. In some constrained areas, additional options were retained and assessed through the EES to support further consideration of environmental, social, land use, cultural heritage and engineering factors.

Other project elements were also assessed and refined during project development, including options for the Tragowel Terminal Station, workforce accommodation and laydown areas, and some construction and design choices.

Narrowing down the Project Area of Interest

Area of Interest

2019 - June 2023

The Area of Interest was the broad starting area identified for the Project through earlier strategic planning. It provided the wider area within which route options could be investigated before more detailed refinement.

5,000+ properties

Up to 50 km wide

Draft Corridor

October 2023

The Draft Corridor is a refined study corridor developed from the broader Area of Interest through more detailed environmental, cultural heritage, agricultural, technical, engineering and planning assessments.

500+ properties

Up to 2 km wide

Preferred Easement

October 2024

The current preferred, approximately 70-metre-wide route for the proposed VNI West 500 kV transmission line in Victoria, identified through route refinement, technical studies and consultation as the least-constrained location within, and in some locations adjacent to, the Draft Corridor.

221 properties

~70 m-wide

Tower optimisation

November 2024 - 2027

Tower optimisation refined proposed tower locations within the Preferred Easement responding to landholder feedback, property layouts, farming operations, technical requirements and environmental considerations.



Key considerations used to avoid and minimise impacts while narrowing the Area of Interest to the Proposed Easement

- Places of Aboriginal cultural significance
- Proximity to dwellings, schools and hospitals
- Overall length required for the transmission route and number of landholders impacted
- Biodiversity and threatened habitat, including conservation and flora reserves
- Incompatible land uses such as transport networks, airfields and airports
- Reducing the number of transmission line angle deviations where possible
- Existing and future land use including agriculture and infrastructure requirements
- Geography and topography of the land, including terrain and waterbodies
- Accessibility for renewable energy developers

What the Project includes

The EES identifies a proposed 70 metre easement for transmission. A broader project area has also been assessed to allow for some adjustment to final tower siting, detailed design refinement, or changes to address recommendations resulting from the EES process, while keeping those later decisions within the framework assessed through the EES. In two locations, a wider easement is required, these are transposition locations which are 170 m wide.

The main components of the Project are:

- Approximately 240 kilometres of new overhead 500 kV double-circuit transmission line
- Transmission towers generally between 60 and 80 metres high on average every 400-550 m
- A new terminal station at Tragowel with 500 kV and 220 kV equipment/interface
- Modifications to the existing 220 kV transmission line between Kerang and Bendigo at the proposed Tragowel Terminal Station
- Two sets of 500 kV shunt reactors at Bulgana, adjacent to or within WRL's proposed Bulgana Terminal Station
- Nine laydown and/or workforce accommodation options
- Areas used for tower assembly, erection and conductor stringing activities

The key components of the VNI West Project in both Victoria and NSW are shown below.

Key Project components

Ground wires on the transmission towers

to provide communication between terminal stations and lightning protection for infrastructure

Approximately

240 km of 500 kV transmission line

located within an easement approximately 70 m wide along most of the route

Around

60 km of temporary access tracks

(total length) outside the easement, providing access to each tower site for construction. These tracks will be located in agreement with landholders, and some may be retained during operation at the discretion of landholders.

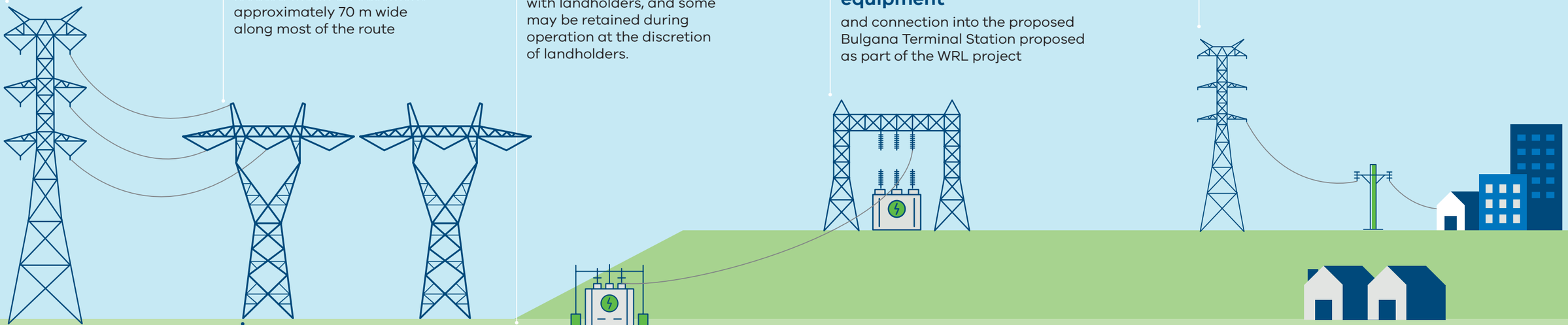
A new terminal station in Tragowel, including both 500 kV and 220 kV equipment

and connection into the proposed Bulgana Terminal Station proposed as part of the WRL project

Approximately

11 new 220 kV lattice towers/ structures and 3 km of 220 kV overhead transmission line

required to facilitate the cut in to the existing AusNet 220 kV transmission line



536 double-circuit 500 kV lattice towers

4 single-circuit 500 kV steel lattice towers

located side-by-side at the two transposition locations

2 transposition locations

where the easement would be approximately 170 m wide with two sets of single circuit towers side-by-side

2 sets of 500 kV shunt reactors

at Bulgana Terminal Station inside or adjacent to the proposed new WRL Bulgana Terminal Station

Up to

9 temporary sites

supporting laydown areas and/or workforce accommodation areas

READ MORE ↗

Chapter 4: Project description ↗

What the EES investigates

The EES investigates the Project's potential effects during construction, operation and, where relevant, decommissioning. It looks at the matters identified in the Scoping Requirements and other significant issues identified through technical studies and engagement. These matters include biodiversity, water, farming and land use, Aboriginal cultural heritage, historic heritage, landscape and visual effects, traffic, noise, community and social effects, bushfire risk, climate change, and other environmental and planning matters.

Nineteen specialist technical studies were undertaken to support the assessment of environmental effects presented in the VNI West EES main report. Their findings are provided in the relevant EES chapters and in detail in the supporting technical appendices. Together, these studies assess the Project's likely environmental effects and provide the basis for the conclusions presented in the EES.

The Scoping Requirements establish the matters to be investigated for the EES. These matters reflect the decision and priorities identified by the Minister for Planning regarding the need for an EES. The EES has been prepared in accordance with the final Scoping Requirements.

Air quality
Dust, emissions and air quality

Aviation
Aircraft operations and airspace

Aboriginal cultural heritage
Places of cultural significance and values

Agriculture
Farms, farming and agricultural land

Bushfire
Fire risk and emergency management

Business and economics
Jobs, businesses and the local economy

Climate change
Climate risks and resilience

Ecology
Plants, animals and habitats

Electric and magnetic field
Electric fields, magnetic fields and interference

Geology and soils
Geology, soils, and contaminated land

Greenhouse gas
Emissions and carbon impacts

Groundwater
Aquifers, bores and groundwater resources

Historic heritage
Historic places and heritage values

Land use and planning
Changes to how land is used

Landscape and visual
Views, landscape and visual character

Noise and vibration
Construction and operational noise

Social
Communities, wellbeing and social values

Surface water
Rivers, wetlands and flooding

Traffic and transport
Roads, traffic and access

Where to find more information

More detail on each topic is provided in ***EES Chapters 8 to 27*** and the supporting ***Technical appendices A to S*** and ***Attachments I to VI***. A high-level summary of key findings is also provided in the ***EES Executive summary***.

The Environment Effects Statement documents

The VNI West Environment Effects Statement (EES) includes an executive summary, chapters, technical appendices and attachments, each offering varying detail for quick reference or in-depth review.

Executive summary

A plain-English overview of the project, its potential impacts and the proposed management measures.

All EES documents, chapters, technical appendices and attachments are available to view and download on the VNI West website.

EES main report

There are 29 chapters that provide an overview of the project rationale, legislative and approval requirements, assessment approach and the community and stakeholder engagement undertaken.

Chapters:

- Table of contents
- Glossary and abbreviations
- Ch. 1 Introduction
- Ch. 2 Project rationale
- Ch. 3 Project development and alternatives
- Ch. 4 Project description
- Ch. 5 Legislative framework
- Ch. 6 Assessment framework
- Ch. 7 Stakeholder and community engagement
- Ch. 8 Electric and magnetic field
- Ch. 9 Geology and soils
- Ch. 10 Groundwater
- Ch. 11 Historic heritage
- Ch. 12 Bushfire
- Ch. 13 Climate change
- Ch. 14 Surface water
- Ch. 15 Greenhouse gas
- Ch. 16 Air quality
- Ch. 17 Landscape and visual
- Ch. 18 Traffic and transport
- Ch. 19 Noise and vibration
- Ch. 20 Agriculture
- Ch. 21 Aviation
- Ch. 22 Business and economics
- Ch. 23 Land use and planning
- Ch. 24 Social
- Ch. 25 Aboriginal cultural heritage
- Ch. 26 Ecology
- Ch. 27 Matters of National Environmental Significance
- Ch. 28 Environmental Management Framework
- Ch. 29 Conclusion

Technical appendices

Detailed technical studies that inform the EES

Appendices:

- A Electric and magnetic field
- B Geology and soils
- C Groundwater
- D Historic heritage
- E Bushfire
- F Climate change
- G Surface water
- H Greenhouse gas
- I Air quality
- J Landscape and visual
- K Traffic and transport
- L Noise and vibration
- M Agriculture
- N Aviation
- O Business and economics
- P Land use and planning
- Q Social
- R Aboriginal cultural heritage
- S Ecology

Attachments

- I Draft Planning Scheme Amendment
- II Stakeholder and community engagement report
- III Draft Offset Strategy
- IV Map book
- V Comparative assessment of overhead and underground transmission technologies
- VI Detailed project development and alternatives

Environmental management

The EES does not only identify the Project's potential effects, it also sets out the framework proposed to manage those effects if the Project proceeds. This is done through the Environmental Management Framework (EMF) and Environmental Performance Requirements (EPRs), which are included in *EES Chapter 28: Environmental Management Framework*.

How environmental effects should be managed

1. What the EES found

The EES identifies the Project's main environmental effects and the issues that would need to be managed if the Project proceeds.

2. Environmental Management Framework (EMF)

The EMF is the Project's overall environmental management framework. It sets out the rules, responsibilities and key documents that would guide environmental management across the life of the Project.

3. Environmental Performance Requirements (EPRs)

The EPRs are the environmental requirements the Project would need to meet. They describe the outcomes that must be achieved during detailed design, construction and operation.

4. Management plans and procedures

More detailed management plans and procedures would then be prepared to show how the Project would meet those environmental requirements in practice.

5. Monitoring, auditing, compliance and reporting

Monitoring, auditing and reporting would be used to check that the Project is meeting its environmental requirements and to address any issues if they arise.

Who is responsible?

VicGrid VNI West

Overall responsibility for the Project's environmental framework.

Delivery Partner/Principal Contractor

Responsible for following the EMF, EPRs and later management plans during delivery of the Project.

Transmission Network Service Provider or operator

Responsible during operation, where relevant, for following the environmental requirements that apply at that stage.

The EMF sets the overall environmental management framework for the Project. It identifies roles and responsibilities, the key documentation that would be required for later stages of the Project, and the basis for monitoring, auditing, compliance and reporting. The EPRs set the environmental outcomes that must be achieved during detailed design, construction, operation and, where relevant, decommissioning. Detailed management plans and procedures are also required to be prepared for all stages of the Project in accordance with the EMF and EPRs.

VicGrid VNI West would retain overall responsibility for the environmental framework for the Project. Delivery contractors would be required to comply with that framework if the Project proceeds.

READ MORE ↗

Chapter 28: Environmental Management Framework ↗

How to view the EES and make a submission

The EES main report, including technical appendices and attachments, including the draft PSA (GC316) will be placed on public exhibition on the Project's website.

During the 30-business day exhibition period, members of the public, stakeholders and other interested parties will be able to view the EES and draft PSA (GC316) and make written submissions on the Project and its assessed environmental effects on the Victorian Government's online consultation platform Engage Victoria.

The EES and draft PSA are available to read and download on the VNI West website at **vniwproject.com.au/EES**

Please also check the Project website for updates and viewing locations: **vniwproject.com.au**

You can request an EES and PSA information pack, free of charge. The pack contains:

- **EES Executive summary:** A plain-English summary of the EES describing the process, scope, project overview and individual chapters.
- **USB drive:** Containing the complete EES documents including EES main report, technical appendices, and the draft PSA.
- **Non-technical summary:** A printed brochure providing an overview of the Project and the EES process (this document).
- **Overview map:** Printed overview map of the Project.
- **Guide/information sheet:** A guide on how to navigate the EES and the submission process.

An EES and draft PSA information pack can be requested by phoning 1800 824 221 or emailing enquiries@vniwproject.com.au

EES documentation will also be available to view at the following Project offices and locations:

- **VNI West regional office Kerang**
  Shop 15, 47 Victoria Street
  Patchell Plaza, Kerang
- **VNI West regional office Stawell**
  179 Main Street, Stawell
- **State Library Victoria**
  328 Swanston Street, Melbourne

Please note, the EES is made up of many large documents, and we encourage the use of electronic versions where possible.

How to make a submission

Anyone can make a submission on the EES and draft PSA.

Submissions must be made in writing and be received by 11:59 pm on Monday 16 November 2026.

Submissions can be lodged via the online form on the Victorian Government's Engage Victoria website: **engage.vic.gov.au/VNI-West-IAC**

Hard copy submissions

If you do not have internet access or are unable to lodge a submission online, contact Planning Panels Victoria (PPV) on 136 186 (select option 6) and request a hard copy submission coversheet.

For privacy reasons, hard copy submissions must be accompanied by a coversheet issued by PPV.

All submissions must state the name and address of the person making the submission.

Submissions will be treated as public documents and will be published on the Engage Victoria website.

More information

More information on how to make a submission, the submission process and public hearings can be found on the Engage Victoria website **engage.vic.gov.au** or by contacting PPV on 136 186 (select option 6).

The submission process is independently managed by PPV and any enquiries regarding the management of submissions, or the Inquiry and Advisory Committee and Hearing process should be directed to PPV.

What happens next?

The Minister for Planning will appoint an independent Inquiry and Advisory Committee (IAC) to consider the EES, draft PSA GC316 and received submissions. The scope of the IAC is limited to providing advice on the identified 'key environmental matters' and 'other environmental matters' outlined in the IAC Terms of Reference issued by the Minister for Planning.

The IAC will conduct a public hearing on the 'key environmental matters', which will commence in the week beginning Monday 8 February 2027.

The 'other environmental matters' will be considered by the IAC on the basis of written submissions only, as outlined in the Terms of Reference.

The IAC will hold a Directions Hearing on Monday 7 December 2026 to consider the arrangements and timetable for the Hearing and the process for submitters who want to be heard or provide further written material on 'other environmental matters'.

If you would like to participate in the IAC process, by either appearing at the Hearing and/or providing further written information, you will need to make a written submission and mark on the submission form that you would like to participate.

In relation to making a submission or the IAC process, contact:

Planning Panels Victoria

Phone: 136 186 (select option 6)
office@planningpanels.vic.gov.au

The IAC will review all submissions, the EES and draft PSA before providing advice to the Minister for Planning about the Project in accordance with its Terms of Reference.

The IAC will provide a report to the Minister for Planning, who will consider this report to inform the Minister's assessment of the Project's environmental effects. The Minister's assessment of the Project will make recommendations about whether the environmental effects of the Project are acceptable and will inform statutory decision-makers responsible for issuing environmental approvals for the Project.

If the Project proceeds following the EES process, the next steps would include completion of the relevant statutory approvals, progression of detailed design, and implementation of the EMF and EPRs through later stages of the Project.

WE ARE HERE

ON EXHIBITION

The **EES and draft PSA is publicly exhibited for 30 business days**. During this time public submissions are invited.

REVIEWS AND ASSESSMENT

The Minister for Planning appoints an **Inquiry and Advisory Committee (IAC) who will review the EES, draft PSA and submissions** made by the public.

Inquiry held

The **Minister for Planning reviews** the IAC inquiry report, submissions and the exhibited documents, and **prepares the Minister's Assessment**.

The relevant **decision-makers consider the Minister's Assessment** in deciding whether or not to approve the Project under applicable legislation.

Primary approvals

> **Commonwealth approval**
The Project is a 'controlled action' and will require assessment and approval under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act). The Minister's Assessment is provided to the Commonwealth Environment Minister to inform their decision under the EPBC Act.

> **Planning Scheme Amendment**
The draft Planning Scheme Amendment (PSA), prepared under the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*, would amend the Northern Grampians, Loddon, Buloke and Gannawarra Planning Schemes to provide primary planning approval for the Project.

> **Cultural Heritage Management Plans**
Cultural Heritage Management Plans (CHMPs) are prepared for approval in accordance with the requirements of the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*.

Find out more

Scan the QR code or visit:
vniwproject.com.au/EES

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