

JANUARY TO JUNE 2024



Community Engagement Summary Report



Delivered by

AusNet

Introduction

The Western Renewables Link is a critical upgrade of Victoria's transmission network. It will support Victoria's transition from coal-generated electricity to sustainable, affordable and reliable renewable energy. The project is a proposed new 190km 500kV double circuit overhead electricity transmission line from near Bulgana in western Victoria to Sydenham in Melbourne's north-west. The project will connect renewable energy generated in western Victoria to the homes and businesses across the state and into the National Electricity Market.

Purpose of report

This report covers the period from January 2024 until June 2024 and includes details of new communications and engagement activities undertaken by the Western Renewables Link team including a new landholder guide, field day attendance, webinars and meetings with landholders. The report also details the various project announcements and updates made during this period.

The Western Renewables Link team is continuing to consider all feedback and encourages anyone interested or affected to contact the project team on 1800 975 975 or info@westernrenewableslink.com.au.

What happened between January – June 2024?

As the proposed Western Renewables Link continues to evolve, we have been able to provide landholders and the community with more information to support their knowledge of the project.

Engagement between January and June focused on providing information about:

- Farming and transmission lines.
- Updates to the project's proposed route in the area to the north of Waubra.
- Ongoing landholder engagement.
- New neighbouring landholder updates.

Ongoing community engagement activities were supported via webinars, direct meetings, letters, phone calls and emails to stakeholders.

Keeping the community informed

Engagement activities and project updates were communicated through a range of channels including mail, email, phone calls, social media, eUpdates and newsletters.



Key engagement activities between January – June 2024

New Terminal stations fact sheet published

- [Terminal-stations-February-2024.pdf](https://westernrenewableslink.com.au/terminal-stations-february-2024.pdf)
(westernrenewableslink.com.au)

New Environment Effects Statement fact sheet published

- [Environment-Effects-Statement-February-2024.pdf](https://westernrenewableslink.com.au/environment-effects-statement-february-2024.pdf)
(westernrenewableslink.com.au)

New Draft Planning Scheme Amendment fact sheet published

- [Draft-planning-scheme-amendment-February-2024.pdf](https://westernrenewableslink.com.au/draft-planning-scheme-amendment-february-2024.pdf)
(westernrenewableslink.com.au)

Community engagement team attended the three-day Wimmera Field Days in March

Updated EES Consultation Plan published in March

- [EES-Consultation-Plan-March-2024.pdf](https://westernrenewableslink.com.au/ees-consultation-plan-march-2024.pdf)
(westernrenewableslink.com.au)

Updated Permitted vehicle and equipment heights fact sheet published

- [Permitted-vehicle-and-equipment-heights-March-2024.pdf](https://westernrenewableslink.com.au/permitted-vehicle-and-equipment-heights-march-2024.pdf)
(westernrenewableslink.com.au)

Updated Landholder Guide: Land access for field surveys and investigations published

- [Landholder-Guide-Land-access-for-field-surveys-and-investigations-February-2024.pdf](https://westernrenewableslink.com.au/landholder-guide-land-access-for-field-surveys-and-investigations-february-2024.pdf)
(westernrenewableslink.com.au)

New Landholder Guide: Easement safety and permitted activities published

- [Landholder-guide-Easement-safety-and-permitted-activities-March-2024.pdf](https://westernrenewableslink.com.au/landholder-guide-easement-safety-and-permitted-activities-march-2024.pdf)
(westernrenewableslink.com.au)

Farming with WRL transmission lines video published along with dedicated webpage

- westernrenewableslink.com.au/resource/videos/454968/
- westernrenewableslink.com.au/farming/

Two community webinars focused on farming with the Western Renewables Link in March

- Community webinar 1
- Community webinar 2

WRL interactive map updated to reflect proposed route north of Waubra in May

- <https://caportal.com.au/jbsg/ausnet/map?pview=8a42bc87-9f1f-4bce-a218-a90e2e1fb1b9>

Targeted program of communications and engagement for neighbouring landholders including a new fact sheet published and dedicated webpage

- westernrenewableslink.com.au/assets/resources/Neighbouring-landholders.pdf
- westernrenewableslink.com.au/neighbouring-landholders/

- 5 eUpdates sent to subscribers and published on website including on the ESC Land Access Code of Practice, proposed route north of Waubra and local business register
- 3 project update newsletters sent to subscribers and published on our website
- Ongoing meetings with landholders and neighbouring landholders
- Government and industry meetings continued
- Council Advisory Group meetings continued
- 20th Community Consultation Group meeting in January
- 21st Community Consultation Group meeting in May



Farming with the Western Renewables Link

The ability to continue farming practices with transmission lines has been a consistent concern for the farming community. The aim of the communications and engagement program was to provide accurate information to inform the community that, in most circumstances, farming with transmission lines is possible. The program also provided information about what may be impacted by the Western Renewables Link and how AusNet will support farmers who will have farming restrictions, with a focus on:

- Key farming priority areas of concern which include irrigation, livestock and grazing, cropping and harvesting, horticulture (including potato farming), broad acre cropping, aerial operations, GPS and DGPS, posts and fencing.
- Build community understanding/knowledge of what is currently allowed and in place (safety checks) for properties with existing lines (specifically BATS to BETS) as well as potential impacts for new infrastructure - specifically for machinery heights, safety checks, and easement access.

We released the Landholder Guide: Easement safety and permitted activities, a Farming with Western Renewables Link transmission lines video, a dedicated website page, and ran two community webinars attended by 35 community members. Topics covered included:

- Easement safety and permitted activities.
- Machinery height restrictions and no-go zones.
- The use of spotters when working under transmission lines.
- Aerial spraying, irrigation and fencing.

Fast Facts for January to June 2024



32 emails to project information inbox



7 phone calls



14,529 visits to the project website



47 key stakeholder meetings



4 Council Advisory Group meetings



2 Community Consultation Group meetings



60 meetings held with landholders



227 phone calls and 150 text messages to landholders



753 emails and 197 letters to landholders

Project Statistics to date

- 1,065+ Individual meetings with landholders
- 2,210+ phone calls to landholders
- 133,315+ visits to the project website
- 1,065+ meetings with landholders
- 7,330+ emails to landholders

Updated proposed route to the north of Waubra

Following changes to the project in 2023, we have been working with landholders to the north of Waubra to identify and confirm a new proposed route in this area. Rather than following the existing 220kV transmission line and connecting into the Waubra Terminal Station as previously proposed, the new proposed route will run east from Forest Road to the north of Glendaruel (north of the previous proposed route).

We have worked with landholders, technical specialists and undertaken field surveys to try to balance the many complexities to confirm the new proposed route. From field surveys, investigations and landholder feedback, we have heard that the key considerations in this area include:

- Houses.
- Agricultural land use.
- Waubra wind farm.
- The natural landscape, including Mount Beckworth, Mount Bolton and Mount Ercildoune.
- Volcanic cones, which are recognised places of Aboriginal Cultural Heritage significance.
- Native vegetation and habitat.

These insights have informed the revised proposed route. We have detailed this change in the [Updated proposed route north of Waubra fact sheet](#), available on the project website, Resources page.

The interactive map on the project website has been updated to reflect this change to the proposed route. You can view the updated map [here](#).

Wimmera Field Days

Project team members attended Wimmera Field Days from 5-7 March, with more than 170 people visiting the Western Renewables Link project stand. The booth displayed the updated proposed route and provided key fact sheets about the project. The project team was available throughout the three days to answer questions and address concerns.

Common discussion themes included:

- Route selection.
- Landholder and community sentiment.
- Farming practices.
- General project information.
- Queries about VNI West.



Neighbouring landholder communications and engagement program

We recognise that neighbouring landholders may be impacted by the proposed project and may have questions or concerns. We have an ongoing commitment to the neighbouring landholders to keep them informed about the project and to provide opportunities for them to engage with us and provide their feedback.

In June, we wrote to about 4,000 neighbouring landholders via post to share the following resources:

- A new dedicated webpage on the website with information specifically for neighbouring landholders including an interactive map.
- A new fact sheet that responds to the most common questions we have heard from neighbouring landholders.
- A registration form allowing people to register as neighbouring landholders and express interest in a residential visual impact assessment.

We are also planning engagement activities in the coming months to provide neighbouring landholders with more opportunities to talk to us and find out about the project, including further information on the Environment Effects Statement (EES) process.

Working with the community

AusNet is committed to connecting communities and accelerating a sustainable future. That means going beyond services delivery and delivering positive outcomes for the communities we are working in, particularly where new infrastructure is being built. AusNet's community energy team has worked closely with the Western Renewables Link team to identify opportunities to deliver legacy benefits within the project footprint. These include three in-kind energy-based assessments designed to help organisations achieve their energy ambitions.

We are delivering \$500,000 of in-kind services to deliver the Ballarat West Employment Zone (BWEZ) Distributed Energy Assessment for organisations selected by the Ballarat Energy Network (which is part of the Committee for Ballarat), in and around BWEZ. Our in-kind work on the BWEZ assessment is the first of many energy initiatives we are aiming to deliver for organisations in western Victoria region to support their renewable energy objectives.

At Ballarat Community Health, we are delivering \$70,000 worth of energy assessment services. This includes an assessment of energy demand and use at its seven sites and providing advice on demand management, retailer and tariff selection and the optimal mix of additional infrastructure (solar and batteries).

We are also delivering \$370,000 of in-kind consultation services to the City of Ballarat for its North Ballarat Precinct Structure Plan. This involves working with the City of Ballarat council and the Victorian Planning Authority to conduct an energy analysis to inform the renewable energy implementation requirements and recommendations, encouraging developers to build sustainable greenfield suburbs.

Landholder engagement

As of June 30, Option for Easement have been presented to 99% of landholders along the proposed route. Our Land Liaison Officers are actively working with landholders to discuss the proposals and changes to design to improve the operational outcomes associated with tower and access track locations.

We encourage landholders to seek their own professional advice on the Option for Easement proposals including legal and valuation advice. Land Liaison Officers are working closely with landholders to ensure they fully understand the compensation they would receive for the easement on their property. The \$10,000 Landholder Professional Fees payment is available to assist landholders in the process of reviewing and negotiating the Option for Easement and is not dependent on signing the Option for Easement.



Environment Effects Statement

Opportunities for community involvement

The EES process provides an opportunity for ongoing, transparent community consultation and is documented in the Western Renewables Link EES Consultation Plan, which was updated in March 2024. Ongoing community consultation helps us identify issues of concern and potential impacts of the project; it also informs the technical studies for the EES. We are aiming for the EES to be publicly exhibited in 2025. During the exhibition period, at least 40 business days, the public can review the EES and provide written submissions on the project to Planning Panels Victoria. An EES and Planning Scheme Amendment Inquiry and Advisory Committee (IAC) Panel Hearing will then be held, where submissions from stakeholders, including the community, can be heard. Recommendations are then made by the Inquiry and Advisory Committee (IAC) to the Minister for Planning. Further information about the EES is outlined in the [Environment Effects Statement fact sheet](#) available on the project website in the resources section.

How we use stakeholder feedback to inform project development

The proposed route continues to be refined based on input from landholders, communities and other stakeholders as well as technical investigations. Landholder and community feedback has influenced route design in a number of ways including:

- Investigation of 7 major route alternatives and multiple corridors
- Over 95 transmission line designs
- 4,700+ individual tower moves.

Thank you for your input




The Western Renewables Link team would like to thank everyone who has participated by attending a face-to-face session, meeting, sent an email or engaged with our project team.

Stay involved

For further information about the project, please call 1800 WRL WRL (975 975) or email info@westernrenewableslink.com.au. To register for updates, visit [westernrenewableslink.com.au](https://www.westernrenewableslink.com.au)



Western Renewables Link

 www.westernrenewableslink.com.au
 1800 WRL WRL (975 975)
 info@westernrenewableslink.com.au

Ballarat PO Box
PO Box 638, Ballarat VIC 3353

Information straight to your inbox

Sign up for information straight to your inbox at the project website www.westernrenewableslink.com.au.

Feedback

You can provide feedback on this document via our website www.westernrenewableslink.com.au or by calling 1800 WRL WRL (975 975) or by emailing info@westernrenewableslink.com.au.

Translation and interpretation services



If you need an interpreter, please call 13 14 50.






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.

Complaints

If you have a query, a compliment or a complaint, you can let us know by using the online enquiry form on www.westernrenewableslink.com.au.

Or you can let us know by:

 1800 WRL WRL (975 975)
 info@westernrenewableslink.com.au
 PO Box 638, Ballarat VIC 3353

You can also lodge a complaint or provide feedback directly to your Land Liaison Officer.

Complaint handling steps:

1. You can lodge a complaint with AusNet as outlined above.
2. We will acknowledge receipt of a complaint in writing and will provide a unique complaint reference number within two working days.
3. We aim to resolve the complaint within ten working days.
4. Where we cannot reach a resolution within ten working days, we will keep you informed of the progress being made with handling the complaint by providing regular updates on the investigation and a revised timeframe for resolving the complaint.
5. At any time, you may request to have your complaint escalated to the senior management team by sending an email to GeneralManager@westernrenewableslink.com.au

If your complaint or question relates to the RIT-T process, you can raise it with AEMO by emailing WestVicRITT@aemo.com.au.

If your complaint or question relates to the Environment Effects Statement process, you can raise it with the Department of Transport and Planning by emailing environment.assessment@delwp.vic.gov.au.

If you are not satisfied with the outcome after you have made a complaint to the project team, you may pursue dispute resolution through the Energy and Water Ombudsman Victoria if the complaint relates to access or proposed access to private land under section 93 (1) of the *Electricity Industry Act 2000* (Vic), and/or compliance with the Land Access Code of Practice.

Other sources of information

Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner (www.aeic.gov.au) including information about how to make a complaint, best industry practice and resources for landholders.

Australian Energy Market Operator (www.aemo.com.au) including information on the Regulatory Investment Test for Transmission (RIT-T) process for this project.

Energy and Water Ombudsman Victoria (www.ewov.com.au) including information about complaints and dispute resolution.

Energy Safe Victoria (www.esv.vic.gov.au) including information about the safe design and operation of high voltage transmission networks in Victoria.

Environment Effects Statement Process in Victoria (www.planning.vic.gov.au/environmental-assessments/environmental-assessment-guides/environment-effects-statements-in-victoria) including information about the environment assessment process managed by the Department of Transport and Planning.

Essential Services Commission (www.esc.vic.gov.au) including information about the regulation of transmission licenses in Victoria and the Electricity Transmission Company Land Access Code of Practice.




Valuer General of Victoria (www.land.vic.gov.au/valuations/first-time-here/about-valuer-general-victoria) including general information about how land is valued in Victoria.

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More information

Visit the project website westernrenewableslink.com.au for the latest project information.

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