

# 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 July 2024 until December 2024 and includes details of new communications and engagements activities undertaken by the Western Renewables Link team including pop up engagement sessions, field day attendance, new information released 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](mailto:info@westernrenewableslink.com.au)

## What happened between July – December 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 July and December focused on;

- Updated proposed route
- Bulgana Terminal Station update
- Field surveys and investigations
- Draft Planning Scheme amendment
- Neighbouring landholder engagement and residential impact assessments
- Ongoing landholder engagement

Ongoing community engagement activities included pop up engagement sessions, field days, 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, eUpdates and newsletters.

A range of new project materials were produced to support conversations with community members during the pop ups through September and October. Advertorials, advertising in local and regional newspapers, social media posts via Instagram and Facebook and updated project newsletters were methods used to promote the upcoming engagement opportunities.



## Key engagement activities and materials published between July – December 2024

- **Transmission line construction November 2024** ([www.westernrenewableslink.com.au/assets/resources/Transmission-line-construction.pdf](http://www.westernrenewableslink.com.au/assets/resources/Transmission-line-construction.pdf))
- **The electricity network – transmission and distribution November 2024** ([www.westernrenewableslink.com.au/assets/resources/The-electricity-network-transmission-and-distribution.pdf](http://www.westernrenewableslink.com.au/assets/resources/The-electricity-network-transmission-and-distribution.pdf))
- **Transmission towers and conductors November 2024** ([www.westernrenewableslink.com.au/assets/resources/Transmission-towers-and-conductors.pdf](http://www.westernrenewableslink.com.au/assets/resources/Transmission-towers-and-conductors.pdf))
- **Landholder compensation and payments September 2024** ([www.westernrenewableslink.com.au/assets/resources/Landholder-compensation-and-payments.pdf](http://www.westernrenewableslink.com.au/assets/resources/Landholder-compensation-and-payments.pdf))
- **Terminal stations September 2024** ([www.westernrenewableslink.com.au/assets/resources/terminal-stations.pdf](http://www.westernrenewableslink.com.au/assets/resources/terminal-stations.pdf))
- **Aboriginal Cultural Heritage** ([www.westernrenewableslink.com.au/assets/resources/Aboriginal-Cultural-Heritage.pdf](http://www.westernrenewableslink.com.au/assets/resources/Aboriginal-Cultural-Heritage.pdf))
- **Field surveys and investigations: Aboriginal Cultural Heritage August 2024** ([www.westernrenewableslink.com.au/assets/resources/Field-surveys-and-investigations-Aboriginal-cultural-heritage.pdf](http://www.westernrenewableslink.com.au/assets/resources/Field-surveys-and-investigations-Aboriginal-cultural-heritage.pdf))
- **Field surveys and investigations: Fauna August 2024** ([www.westernrenewableslink.com.au/assets/resources/Field-surveys-and-investigations-Fauna.pdf](http://www.westernrenewableslink.com.au/assets/resources/Field-surveys-and-investigations-Fauna.pdf))
- **Field surveys and investigations: Historic Heritage August 2024** ([www.westernrenewableslink.com.au/assets/resources/Field-surveys-and-investigations-Historic-heritage.pdf](http://www.westernrenewableslink.com.au/assets/resources/Field-surveys-and-investigations-Historic-heritage.pdf))
- **Field surveys and investigations: Landscape and visual impact August 2024** ([www.westernrenewableslink.com.au/assets/resources/Field-surveys-and-investigations-Landscape-and-visual-impact.pdf](http://www.westernrenewableslink.com.au/assets/resources/Field-surveys-and-investigations-Landscape-and-visual-impact.pdf))
- **Draft Planning scheme amendments** ([www.westernrenewableslink.com.au/assets/resources/Draft-planning-scheme-amendment.pdf](http://www.westernrenewableslink.com.au/assets/resources/Draft-planning-scheme-amendment.pdf))
- **Updated proposed route overview August 2024** ([www.westernrenewableslink.com.au/assets/resources/Updated-proposed-route-overview-August-2024.pdf](http://www.westernrenewableslink.com.au/assets/resources/Updated-proposed-route-overview-August-2024.pdf))
- 6 eUpdates sent to subscribers and published on the website including project updates and the updated proposed route
- 2 project 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
- 5 Community Consultation group meetings held over the last 6 months

## Updated proposed route

In August the project released an update about the proposed route including information on terminal station works near the existing Bulgana Terminal Station and previously confirmed changes at Hepburn Lagoon and to the north of Waubra.

The terminal station previously proposed to the north of Ballarat is no longer required due to the increase in capacity of the 220kV section of the proposed transmission line between Bulgana and north of Ballarat to 500kV. Instead, a new 500kV terminal station is proposed near the existing Bulgana Terminal Station.

After working with landholders and undertaking field surveys and investigations in the area, the project announced that it had identified a proposed site for the new terminal station, which is to the north-east of the existing Bulgana Terminal Station.

The updated proposed route release was supported with new materials including an updated proposed route fact sheet, updates to the interactive web map on the project website and FAQs.



## Fast Facts for July to December 2024



77 emails to project information inbox



28 phone calls



21,240 visits to the project website



53 key stakeholder meetings



5 Council Advisory Group Meetings



5 Community Consultation Group meetings



91 meetings with landholders



338 phone calls and 332 text messages to landholders



567 emails and 16 letters to landholders

### Project statistics to date



1160+ individual meetings with landholders



2250+ phone calls to landholders



154,242 visits to project website



7900+ emails to landholders

# Community engagement program

The Western Renewables Link has been conducting surveys of western Victoria since 2021. A significant amount of work has happened during these investigations and many findings have been discovered into the region's flora, fauna and environment.

This information was shared during the community information sessions and at the Elmore Field Days. Field surveys and investigations fact sheets are available on the project [website](#).

## Community survey

We heard from more than 100 community members through our community survey between 2 September and 28 October about what key planning and environmental matters are most important to them.

The survey respondents told us that the key areas of concern and interest continue to be:

- Project planning and route selection (including design and advocacy for undergrounding)
- Landscape and visual amenity (including impacts on local landscapes and key viewpoints)
- Land impacts (including compensation, easement acquisition, access and land use)

We also heard from survey respondents what the community is interested in finding out more about including construction impacts, and the planning and approvals process for the project.

As the project moves towards public exhibition, we wanted to better understand the community's preferred ways of receiving information about the Western Renewables Link. The survey results have informed us that email, information sessions in local areas and letters via post are our community's preferred method of receiving information.

The survey has given the project team insight and information to better understand what the community values and some key areas of interest about the potential impacts of the project.

## Pop ups

Throughout September and October, the Western Renewables Link team hosted pop-up information sessions about the updated proposed route, field survey findings and the Draft Planning Scheme Amendment. The community survey was available during these information sessions.

Eight pop ups were held along the proposed route with the project team speaking to 100 community members during the program.

Common issues and concerns the community shared included;

- Neighbouring landholder engagement and benefits
- Route development and undergrounding
- Visual amenity and impacts
- Project timelines

## Elmore Field Days

Project team members attended Elmore Field Days from 1 – 3 October with more than 180+ people engaging in conversations with staff members on the project stand. The booth displayed the updated proposed route, field survey findings information sheets and key fact sheets about the project. The project team was available throughout the three days to answer questions and address any concerns.

Common discussion themes included:

- Updated proposed route
- EES process and timelines
- Route development and undergrounding
- Impacts and benefits for landholders and neighbours
- General project updates
- Broader energy transition across Victoria and Australia



Pop up	Date	Interactions
Creswick	2 September 11am – 5pm	3
Ballarat	4 September 11am– 5pm	1
Stawell	9 September 11am – 5pm	6
Beaufort	11 September 11am – 5pm	5
Bacchus Marsh	18 September 11am–5pm	44
Melton	23 September 11am–5pm	16
Watergardens	25 September 11am – 5pm	21
Lexton	7 October 3pm – 7pm	4



## Neighbouring landholder and communications engagement program

We continue to work with neighbouring landholders to keep them informed and updated about the proposed project. In late June we wrote to neighbouring landholders located within two kilometres of the proposed route via post, encouraging them to visit our new dedicated webpage for project neighbours on our website and invite them to register their details as a neighbour. We received over 150 new project neighbour registrations, and 140 of these households signed up for, and are now receiving, regular eUpdates.

Following our initial contact with many new project neighbours, we have continued to speak with many via phone, email and in-person. We found meeting and speaking with project neighbours to be extremely valuable and we thank those residents that invited us to visit their properties to better understand their individual concerns and the concerns of others in their community.

### Residential visual impact assessments

When registering online, project neighbours were given the option to express their interest in having a project specialist conduct a residential visual impact assessment at their property. Approximately 80% expressed interest in a residential visual impact assessment, highlighting that the visual impact of the proposed transmission infrastructure is one of the major concerns to residents living near the proposed route.

We recognise that the proposed Western Renewables Link will be visible from many locations and will affect landscapes, views and amenity for residents and visitors. Since 2020, we have been conducting visual impact assessments to help us understand, minimise, and mitigate the overall visual impact through planning and design of the project and have completed residential visual impact assessments at a range of locations. This fieldwork will inform the detailed Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, one of the technical reports which will be included in the project's Environment Effects Statement (EES).

From the list of new project neighbour registrations, our technical specialist was able to identify additional residential viewpoints along the route to include in the technical report with the consent of the project neighbours. The project team facilitated these onsite assessments throughout October and November, meeting and talking with these project neighbours, assessing the potential impact on views from their properties and listening to their individual concerns.

We also reached out to those project neighbours who were not selected for a residential visual impact assessment and offered alternative opportunities to engage with the project team in person to discuss any concerns they have.

## Landholder engagement

As of 1 December 2024, Option for Easement proposals have been presented to 100% of landholders along the proposed route. Our dedicated Land Liaison Officers are actively working with all landholders to negotiate and provide further clarity on the Option for Easement that has been presented. AusNet offers a \$10,000 Landholder Professional Fees payment to enable landholders to seek their own professional advice on the Option for Easement proposals, including legal and valuation advice. This 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.



## Working with the community

We are working with local community groups, councils, local business and industry within the proposed project area to help them realise their renewable energy ambitions. We are doing this by assisting with engineering feasibility assessments, developing roadmaps and delivering a variety of technology solutions such as solar, battery energy storage solutions, energy efficiency upgrades, microgrids and energy trading solutions.

Through our support of the energy transition at a community level we aim to support:

- Greater energy equity.
- More energy resilience during adverse weather events.
- Increased economic productivity using renewable sources (carbon abatement).
- Additional revenue generation through energy trading and energy arbitrage.
- High value/high skills jobs creation.

### Current projects

We are delivering \$500,000 of in-kind services to deliver the Ballarat West Employment Zone (BWEZ) Distributed Energy Assessments 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 assessments 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.




## 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](mailto:info@westernrenewableslink.com.au). To register for updates, visit [www.westernrenewableslink.com.au](http://www.westernrenewableslink.com.au)

### Western Renewables Link

 [www.westernrenewableslink.com.au](http://www.westernrenewableslink.com.au)  
 1800 WRL WRL (975 975)  
 [info@westernrenewableslink.com.au](mailto: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](http://www.westernrenewableslink.com.au).

### Feedback

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



## Western Renewables Link

 [www.westernrenewableslink.com.au](http://www.westernrenewableslink.com.au)  
 1800 WRL WRL (975 975)  
 [info@westernrenewableslink.com.au](mailto: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](http://www.westernrenewableslink.com.au).

## Feedback

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

Or you can let us know by:

 1800 WRL WRL (975 975)  
 [info@westernrenewableslink.com.au](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto: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](http://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](http://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](http://www.ewov.com.au)) including information about complaints and dispute resolution.

**Energy Safe Victoria** ([www.esv.vic.gov.au](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://www.land.vic.gov.au/valuations/first-time-here/about-valuer-general-victoria)) including general information about how land is valued in Victoria.

The information in this document is for reference only – it is not designed to be, nor should it be regarded, as professional or legal advice. You should seek appropriate independent professional and/or legal advice where appropriate and before making any decisions based on material in this document. The information is an overview (in summary form) and does not purport to be complete. This document, and the information in this document, will not form the basis of any contract or commitment. AusNet Services does not guarantee or warrant the accuracy, completeness, or currency of the information provided and AusNet Services, its directors, officers, employees, agents and advisers disclaim all liability and responsibility (including for negligence) for any direct or indirect loss or damage which may be suffered by any recipient through use or reliance on anything contained in or omitted from this document.

## More information

Visit the project website [westernrenewableslink.com.au](http://westernrenewableslink.com.au) for the latest project information.

## Contact us

 [westernrenewableslink.com.au](http://westernrenewableslink.com.au)  
 1800 WRL WRL (975 975)  
 [info@westernrenewableslink.com.au](mailto:info@westernrenewableslink.com.au)

Delivered by

**AusNet**