

Aboriginal Cultural Heritage

Aboriginal Places and values have deep importance to both the Aboriginal community and wider community, providing connections to Country for Traditional Owners and significant links with the world's oldest living culture. We have been conducting field surveys since 2021 to help us identify and protect Aboriginal Cultural Heritage during the planning and design of the proposed Western Renewables Link.

What is Aboriginal Cultural Heritage?

The *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006 (Vic)* defines Aboriginal Cultural Heritage as "Aboriginal places, Aboriginal objects, and Aboriginal ancestral remains". The Western Renewables Link Environment Effects Statement (EES) is considering:

- Tangible elements, such as landmarks and artefacts, ceremonial sites, tools, fish traps and culturally modified trees.
- Intangible values, such as song lines, landscapes, knowledge and practices related to and valued by Aboriginal people, both past and present.
- Truth-telling and recognition of past events, such as places and stories associated with frontier conflict and the Stolen Generations.



Surface and subsurface lithic artefacts

Lithic artefacts are artefacts made of stone and are found as individual artefacts or in scatters. Surface and subsurface lithic artefacts are the material remains of past Aboriginal people's activities. The artefacts were used for a wide range of activities including hunting, woodworking, skinning, butchering, fishing and food preparation.

Subsurface artefact scatter sites can be discovered alone or in association with other material such as charcoal, animal bone, clay balls, hearth stones, shell and ochre. No two sites are the same.

Scatter sizes vary from one square metre to one hectare. Surface scatters are most visible where there is good ground surface visibility or where the ground has been disturbed.

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Why are we conducting Aboriginal Cultural Heritage field surveys and investigations?

Field surveys and investigations are required to confirm the existing conditions and environmental sensitivities of the land and assess the potential impacts of the project. The findings of field surveys are helping us to identify the proposed route with the least overall impact and to identify indicative tower sites and access track locations in consultation with landholders.

The information collected through Aboriginal Cultural Heritage assessments is culturally meaningful and connected to identity and Country for Aboriginal people. Field surveys and investigations also help us to identify and confirm the presence of Aboriginal Cultural Heritage values, as well as protect important sites in the planning and design of the proposed Western Renewables Link.

The Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Impact Assessment, one of 20 technical reports being prepared for the project's Environment Effects Statement, will provide detailed information about Aboriginal Cultural Heritage in the project area, including potential for project impacts on recorded and unrecorded heritage places and landscapes, and measures to avoid, mitigate or manage potential impacts on Aboriginal Cultural Heritage.

Information from field surveys is also used to support the development of Cultural Heritage Management Plans.

Who are the Traditional Owners on the proposed route?

We are working in partnership with the recognised Registered Aboriginal Parties (RAP) of the Borengi Gadjin (representing the Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergaia and Jupagulk Peoples), Eastern Maar, Djaara (Dja Dja Wurrung), Wadawurrung and Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Traditional Owners Corporations as well as First Peoples - State Relations Victoria where there is no appointed RAP.

Registered Aboriginal Parties make decisions that reflect the views and values of Traditional Owners about protecting and managing Aboriginal Cultural Heritage in a specified geographical area.

What areas have been assessed?

The Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Impact Assessment considers all land identified for use during construction and operation of the proposed project.

Six study areas for the impact assessment were defined across the project land to align with Registered Aboriginal Party (RAP) boundaries. When considered as a whole, the study areas have a similar footprint to the project land.



How are field surveys conducted?

The Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Impact Assessment relies on a range of methods and data sources, including desktop research on previously registered Aboriginal places, culturally sensitive landforms, prior archaeological studies, geology, geomorphology and land use history; a predictive model that assesses and categorises the potential for Aboriginal cultural heritage (specifically, archaeological values) to be present within different landforms; and fieldwork.

Fieldwork comprises Traditional Owners from each Registered Aboriginal Party, cultural heritage advisors and archaeologists conducting field surveys and investigations to identify if evidence of Aboriginal Cultural Heritage is present and to assess the extent, nature, and significance of any material that is identified. Activities may include walking over areas and making observations, as well as small-scale excavations, to find evidence of features such as:

- Scarred and other culturally modified trees
- Mounds
- Fresh water middens
- Stone tools
- Artefact scatters
- Quarries
- Rock art.

A standard assessment (walk over) typically involves an on-foot field survey to assess ground conditions, identify areas of archaeological potential, and inspect the area for surface evidence of Aboriginal cultural heritage. In some instances, this may also require some ground disturbance involving the use of hand augers.

A complex assessment (subsurface testing) involves hand excavation, including 0.5 x 0.5 metre shovel test pits and/or 1 metre x 1 metre test pits excavated with hand shovels with sediments sieved on table sieves. This testing aims to establish the presence or absence of any subsurface Aboriginal cultural heritage material. If subsurface Aboriginal cultural heritage material is identified, additional subsurface testing may be required to determine the extent. At the completion of excavation and recording, all test pits will be backfilled, and the area left as close as possible to its original state.

What are Cultural Values Assessments and what do they involve?

Cultural Values Assessments are designed to identify the intangible Aboriginal Cultural Heritage values and connection to Country by Traditional Owners including stories and song lines.

When conducting field work for Cultural Values Assessments, a group of Elders and other Traditional Owner knowledge holders will visit the area of interest, often accompanied by a cultural heritage advisor, and discuss their findings and record their observations of the intangible cultural heritage or cultural values associated with the area.

This may include discussing stories and song lines associated with landscape features and looking for evidence of occupation, including tangible cultural heritage to support the cultural values, as well as contemporary Aboriginal values. These surveys generally involve visual inspections, workshops and development of recommendations and no ground-disturbing activities.

Culturally modified trees

Culturally modified trees are found all over Victoria, wherever there are mature native trees, especially box and red gum. They often occur along major waterways, lakes and floodplains.

Aboriginal people used the bark from trees to make containers, shields, canoes, and to build shelters. In addition, trees with toe holds cut into the bark were used as lookouts, hunting and foraging. Some trees were decorated and carved, but examples of this are rare in Victoria.

Culturally modified trees are valuable in assessing the use of perishable materials by Aboriginal people and provide evidence of Aboriginal presence in the landscape. They help to locate where Aboriginal people lived and assist in locating other types of archaeological sites. Culturally modified trees are important today as they provide Aboriginal people with a link to their culture and their history.





Natural causes and modern damage can also cause scars on native trees and assessment by a heritage advisor is often required to distinguish between these and cultural modifications.



More information

More information about Aboriginal Cultural Heritage in Victoria is available on the First Peoples – State Relations website, at: www.firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au/aboriginal-cultural-heritage You can find the latest information about the project and Aboriginal Cultural Heritage impacts on the project website's **Resources** page, and the latest project information on the project website's **News & Events** page.


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