Draft Victorian Transmission Plan Guidelines

Final Engagement Report - What We Heard

December 2024

VicGrid

VICTORIA State Government

This report is an update to the Draft Victorian Transmission Plan Guidelines Interim Engagement Report that was released on 30 September 2024.

This final engagement report summarises and analyses:

- all feedback about the renewable energy zone study area, received during a 10-week consultation period from 22 July to 30 September 2024
- feedback about the draft Victorian Transmission Plan Guidelines, received during a 5-week consultation period from 22 July to 25 August 2024.

It explains how feedback helped shape and finalise the 2024 Victorian Transmission Plan Guidelines. It also outlines how feedback will be used in the process to identify draft proposed renewable energy zones as VicGrid develops the 2025 Victorian Transmission Plan.

This report includes 9 regional snapshots, providing more details about the study area themes presented in the interim engagement report, and more nuanced insights into what we heard across the state.

If you would like to provide feedback on this report, please contact

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How will we identify renewable energy zones for Victoria?

The 2024 Victorian Transmission Plan Guidelines include a renewable energy zone study area map showing parts of Victoria we are investigating further, as we work to identify potential future renewable energy zones.

It is the first step in a process that will continue through next year for the 2025 plan, and beyond for subsequent plans.

The study area was determined through a statewide strategic land use assessment that brought together more than 60 datasets across environmental, land use, cultural and engineering themes. By considering these issues early in the planning process, we can highlight areas to protect and avoid where there are significant and sensitive land use or landscape values.

We will narrow down the initial study area to smaller areas as we work to define future renewable energy zones.

Feedback about the study area will be considered as planning moves from statewide considerations to regional considerations and eventually down to local issues.

All the study area feedback we have received will be taken into account as we work through this process over coming months.

Acronyms

Term	Definition
AEC	Australian Energy Council
AEMC	Australian Energy Market Commission
AEMO	Australian Energy Market Operator
AMEC	Association of Mining and Exploration Companies
CEC	Clean Energy Council
CEIG	Clean Energy Investor Group
CFA	Country Fire Authority
DEECA	The Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action
ENA	Energy Networks Australia
EUAA	Energy Users Association of Australia
IAP2	The International Association of Public Participation
ISP	Integrated System Plan
MCA	Multi-criteria analysis
NEM	National Electricity Market
REZ	Renewable energy zone
SEC	State Electricity Commission
SLUA	Strategic land use assessment
TCV	Treasury Corporation of Victoria
VAGO	Victorian Auditor-General's Office
VFF	Victorian Farmers Federation
VNI WEST	Victoria to New South Wales Interconnector West
VTIF	Victorian Transmission Investment Framework
VTP	Victorian Transmission Plan
WRL	Western Renewables Link

Contents

Acknowledgment of Traditional Owners

We acknowledge and respect Victoria's Traditional Owners as the original custodians of Victoria's land and waters, their unique ability to care for Country and deep spiritual connection to it. We honour Elders past and present whose knowledge and wisdom has ensured the continuation of culture and traditional practices.

We are committed to genuinely partnering and meaningfully engaging with Victoria's Traditional Owners and Aboriginal communities to support the protection of Country, the maintenance of spiritual and cultural practices and their broader aspirations in the 21st century and beyond.

Executive summary

VicGrid is the Victorian Government agency responsible for planning and developing new infrastructure to transport energy generated by renewables to the electricity grid. VicGrid is developing and implementing a new statewide approach for how renewable energy and transmission infrastructure is planned. This new approach includes delivering a long-term strategic plan for renewable energy infrastructure and transmission development in Victoria – the Victorian Transmission Plan (VTP). Central to this approach is giving landholders, communities and First Peoples a real voice in the process.

In developing the 2025 VTP, VicGrid will demonstrate its commitment to seeking to partner with First Peoples and delivering place-based engagement with landholders and local communities. VicGrid is also committed to engaging with the energy industry to explore how we can effectively work with generators and developers to incorporate local insights and values in the detailed design of future transmission projects. Incorporating industry and community views early and often means we can make better decisions that minimise impacts and maximise benefits for local communities.

VicGrid released the draft VTP Guidelines on 22 July 2024. The guidelines describe how VicGrid will produce the 2025 VTP. It also includes a renewable energy zone (REZ) study area map, showing the parts of Victoria that VicGrid will investigate further as it works to identify potential future REZs.

The guidelines will be updated over time and used for future VTPs.

The release of the draft VTP Guidelines and study area map commenced a formal 5-week community and industry engagement consultation period for the guidelines (from 22 July to 25 August 2024) and a 10-week consultation period for the study area (from 22 July to 30 September 2024). An interim engagement report was released on 30 September 2024, addressing feedback on the draft VTP Guidelines and preliminary feedback on the study area received during the first 5 weeks of consultation.

This final report provides an update to the interim engagement report, and contains more detailed information about the study area, including regional insights reflecting the place-based engagement that has taken place over the 10-week consultation period.

This report is an update to the Interim Engagement Report - What We Heard that was released on 30 September and provides additional detail regarding feedback received on the study area.

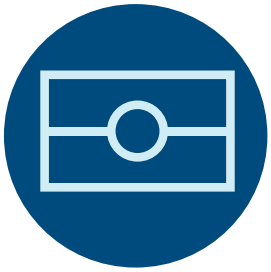
Engagement opportunities included:

In-person community drop-in sessions and events

Online community and industry webinars

Meetings with councils, community groups and members

Opportunity to provide feedback via email and a purpose-designed contact centre



Briefings with Victoria's Registered Aboriginal Parties

Briefings with peak bodies, local government authorities and other key stakeholders

Submissions

Feedback forms

We received more than **1,300 feedback form** responses, more than **170 submissions** and held conversations with more than **450 community** members during drop-in sessions.

Thank you to those who gave their time to be involved and provide feedback. These responses provided valuable insights that we will continue to draw on as we develop the VTP.

In total, we received the following engagement responses:

385
guiding principles feedback form responses

938
REZ study area feedback form responses

28
generator survey responses

171
submissions[1]

34
email queries

8
contact centre queries

25
community events

150
meetings with local councils, community groups and community members

1 Includes 14 submissions summarising feedback from community events.

Engagement results overview

Community and local government

Responses to the community feedback forms, submissions and feedback from the community drop-in sessions revealed themes across the following key areas. The themes are in order from most common to least common feedback:

Biodiversity and natural environment: We heard concerns about impacts on biodiversity and water systems, including endangered species' habitats.

Agriculture and land use: Respondents stressed the need to protect valuable farmland and raised concerns about impacts to farming activities and farm productivity.

Impact on regions: We heard concerns about impost on regional areas to service metropolitan energy demands, socio-economic concerns related to energy and community division linked to developer behaviour, and prior experiences with renewable energy development.

Natural hazard vulnerability: Feedback raised concerns about infrastructure development in relation to natural hazards, including bushfires and flooding. This included concerns about firefighting.

Engagement feedback: We received feedback about the channels we used to engage with communities, how we raised awareness about engagement opportunities, and doubts about the impact feedback would have on the VTP.

Cost of transition: Respondents provided feedback on the cost of power, including potential impacts of renewable energy on electricity prices and other associated costs.

Energy source: Feedback was received about different types of energy sources, and generation and transmission technologies.

Regional opportunity: There was both support for how regions might benefit economically from hosting generation or transmission, and doubts about the actual benefits communities would receive.

This report is an update to the Interim Engagement Report - What We Heard that was released on 30 September and provides additional detail regarding feedback received on the study area.

We received significant feedback from respondents on **biodiversity and natural environment,** with many responses calling out biodiversity and environmental values of specific regions such as Ovens Murray and Goulburn, and the habitats of several endangered species including the brolga, the giant Gippsland earthworm, and a species of legless lizard.

Feedback relating to **agriculture and land use** expressed a strong commitment to protecting valuable farmland given the importance of food and fibre production to Victoria's economy, rural communities and rich heritage. This theme was more prominent in the north-west of the state.

The **impact of the energy transition on regional communities** also featured strongly. This ranges from a feeling that regional communities are bearing the brunt of the transition, to experiences of community division stemming from some previous renewable energy development. Examples included instances of some community members receiving undisclosed benefits while neighbouring properties were burdened with impacts.

Impact is felt differently across regions depending on experience with previous generation and transmission projects. Feedback from communities associated with the Victoria to New South Wales Interconnector West (VNI West) and the Western Renewables Link (WRL) is very focused on specific experiences related to those projects. Other communities experiencing strong interest from generation developers focused feedback on those interactions and associated impacts.

Some people voiced strong concerns that hosting more renewable generation would significantly impact their sense of place and community, wellbeing, culture, ways of living and connection to Country because of transmission and generation infrastructure dominating the landscape. While other themes tend to show a greater degree of regional nuance, this theme is consistent across the state and expresses a sense that regions are shouldering the burden of the transition and are feeling that their region already has its share of projects.

There were many concerns raised about **natural hazard vulnerability,** including bushfires and floods. We heard questions about whether generation and transmission infrastructure would contribute to the risk of bushfires as well as questions about the impact new energy infrastructure might have on fighting bushfires and issues with volunteers being asked to protect international assets. Feedback differed across regions, with more bushfire-prone areas raising these issues more frequently. There were also concerns about the impact of floods on renewable infrastructure and vice versa.

There was a significant body of feedback on the recent draft VTP Guidelines and study area **engagement process.** Many attendees at the community events appreciated the local presence though there were some issues raised about awareness of events, accessibility of channels and transparency of engagement. There was also feedback on negative prior experiences with engagement for renewable energy infrastructure, the impact this had on communities, and how that influenced sentiment towards current and future engagement efforts.

Feedback about **regional opportunity** included both support for the benefits communities could receive from hosting generation and transmission as well as doubts about whether benefits would truly be delivered. Many participants expressed doubt that communities would reap the rewards and fears that profits would flow to overseas ventures. Scepticism about benefits was often linked to past experiences with projects such as WRL or VNI West. There was also interest in and support for regional development opportunities, particularly at the drop-in sessions and from councils and local community groups.

There were suggestions made about alternative **energy sources and technologies,** with some feedback on different types of generation and transmission technologies.

Engagement results overview
Traditional Owners

VicGrid is committed to walking with First Peoples to develop transmission infrastructure planning and projects in a way that protects Country and supports shared benefits for communities. We heard there is a need to support Victoria's Traditional Owner groups to build capacity within their communities and organisations, so we can work together in true partnership.

Feedback from engagement with Traditional Owners has highlighted the importance of mapping cultural heritage to protect sensitive and significant sites. Concerns about impacts on biodiversity and water systems have also been raised. Registered Aboriginal Parties across the state noted the difficulty in resourcing this important cultural heritage mapping work and limitations in their capacity to engage with VicGrid in a way that supports a self-determined approach with communities.

Feedback themes from ongoing engagement with Traditional Owners and First Peoples and dedicated briefings on the draft VTP Guidelines include:

Protecting cultural heritage:
There is an urgent need to map cultural heritage to minimise the impact of REZ and transmission development on Country.

Outcomes:
Feedback raised the importance of mutually beneficial outcomes.

This report is an update to the Interim Engagement Report - What We Heard that was released on 30 September and provides additional detail regarding feedback received on the study area.

Co-designing benefits:
There is a need to clarify what partnership with Traditional Owners and First Peoples could mean in practice, and to work closely with Traditional Owner groups on ways to create benefits for communities through the energy transition.

Resourcing and engagement capacity:
Traditional Owners and First Peoples highlighted the limited capacity and resourcing of groups to engage with the energy transition.

Free, prior, informed consent:
Feedback highlighted the need to engage early in the process, in alignment with principles of free, prior, informed consent.

Next generation:
Feedback called for prioritisation of youth development within broader communities, supporting self-determination.

Accountability:
Traditional Owners and First Peoples stressed the importance of being honest, transparent and sharing accountabilities.

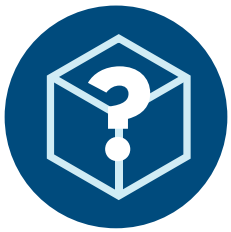
Jobs, skills and economic opportunities:
There is a need to support long-term employment, traineeships and business opportunities , including through participating in procurement and staff recruitment for projects.

Engagement results overview

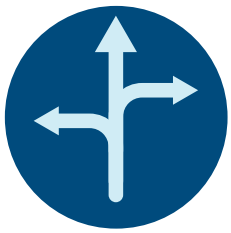
Industry

Submissions and feedback from industry and peak body briefing sessions, and responses to a generator and developer survey, revealed themes across the following areas:

Need for holistic engagement:
We heard that industry required information about a range of related policy areas including network access, connections and community benefits to enable decision-making and foster confidence.



Appropriateness of scenarios:
Feedback focused on the robustness of the scenarios, in particular scenario 3, which deals with potential delays to infrastructure delivery across the National Electricity Market (NEM).



Flexibility of the VTP process:
This feedback related to the frequency of updating the VTP and related impacts on accounting for uncertain futures including emerging technologies.

Modelling:
We received suggestions for modelling and comments on the role it played in developing the VTP.

Engagement feedback:
Comments about VicGrid's engagement approach stressed the importance of genuine and transparent engagement.

Transmission planning:
We heard feedback about the urgency to deliver appropriate transmission to support the transition.

Process for identifying draft proposed REZs:
Feedback related to how VicGrid would investigate parts of the study area and the process for narrowing it to draft proposed REZs, including suggestions and input into different areas of the state.

Developer confidence:
We heard the importance of providing developers with confidence to promote investment in transmission projects.

Regulatory complexity:
Concerns were raised about the complexity of approvals processes at both state and federal levels delaying timely investment decisions and alignment between state and federal planning processes.

This report is an update to the Interim Engagement Report - What We Heard that was released on 30 September and provides additional detail regarding feedback received on the study area.

How this feedback will be applied

One of the purposes of consultation on the draft VTP Guidelines and study area was to gain insight into concerns, values and sentiment from communities, local councils, Traditional Owners and industry.

The feedback received and presented in this report has been used to shape the final VTP Guidelines and will also inform decision-making as the study area is narrowed to draft proposed REZs. That is the work we are doing now.

- **Feedback on the draft VTP Guidelines:** The draft VTP Guidelines outline the methodology for developing the 2025 VTP. Communities and industry were invited to provide feedback through a submissions process, in-person drop-in sessions, online webinars and a guiding principles feedback form. The feedback received has been robustly examined, and has resulted in some changes to the guidelines, outlined in the 2024 VTP Guidelines Changes Summary report. Further explanation, context and consideration has been provided in this final engagement report.
- **Feedback on the guiding principles:** Feedback about the guiding principles will inform the multi-criteria analysis in step 2 of the VTP methodology. This analysis enables quantitative and qualitative factors to be considered alongside energy market modelling as the study area is narrowed to draft proposed REZs. Guiding principles feedback showed the importance communities place on minimising land-use, cultural and environmental impacts. While land-use values have been considered as part of the strategic land use assessment to identify the initial study area, land-use constraints are also being factored into the multi-criteria analysis, alongside community preferences, generator interest and regional development indicators. The guiding principles feedback will also be used to assign weights to the factors considered in the analysis.

  Feedback also showed the importance communities place on avoiding overdevelopment to minimise impacts on regions. Communities asked for more information about how existing generation projects would be considered in developing the VTP. In response, the 2024 VTP Guidelines include more details about how in-service and committed generation projects will be considered in the multi-criteria analysis. This will ensure the overall level of development in a region is considered when determining the most appropriate locations for siting future generation across the state.

  Respondents also provided additional feedback about the guiding principles, including why they had chosen their scores, and additional information. This has been collected and centralised and will be used to make more granular regional and local decisions about the geographic location and development of REZs and input into the development of the 2025 VTP and beyond.
- **Feedback on the study area:** We received detailed feedback from across the state. The majority of feedback form responses focused on the Ovens Murray, Gippsland and Goulburn regions, followed by Wimmera Southern Mallee, the Mallee and Central Highlands. Feedback topics covered land use, biodiversity concerns, natural hazard vulnerability, existing projects and community sentiment. Much of the feedback, particularly from communities, was place-based, highlighting locations or specific land uses that were important to individuals, communities or the region as a whole. Some feedback expressed support for renewable energy development in certain regions, naming the positive regional development opportunities with some councils or landholders advocating to be re-classified and further considered for inclusion in a REZ. All feedback will be taken into consideration as parts of the study area are investigated further and during the process to narrow down and identify draft proposed REZs.

We will continue to seek to partner with First Peoples to honour and protect Country, and engage early and often with landholders, communities and industry as we develop the 2025 VTP. Through this engagement, we will collect valuable insights and ensure feedback is effectively incorporated into policy decisions.

This report is an update to the Interim Engagement Report - What We Heard that was released on 30 September and provides additional detail regarding feedback received on the study area.

Introduction

Victoria's energy system is changing. Our ageing coal-fired power stations are becoming increasingly unreliable and are retiring. Victoria urgently needs to change its power grid to carry energy from new renewable sources across the state to Victorian homes, businesses, hospitals, schools and other vital services.

VicGrid is developing and implementing a new statewide approach for how we plan for renewable energy and transmission infrastructure. This new approach includes delivering a long-term strategic plan for renewable energy infrastructure and transmission development in Victoria – the Victorian Transmission Plan (VTP).

VicGrid was required to publish guidelines outlining the methodology to develop the VTP prior to developing the 2025 VTP. Engagement on the draft VTP Guidelines provided an important opportunity for input to shape the 2024 VTP Guidelines, by engaging with First Peoples, landholders, communities and industry. The 2024 VTP Guidelines were published on 30 September 2024.

The draft VTP Guidelines included:

- **a study area showing what parts of Victoria we may investigate further for suitability to host potential future renewable energy zones**
- **how we will determine how much energy is needed, and when**
- **how we will determine what transmission projects are needed to support new energy generation**
- **how we will partner with First Peoples and engage with landholders, communities and industry.**

A draft of the first VTP will be published in early 2025. It will ensure Victoria has the right infrastructure in the right place at the right time to support the transition to renewable energy. It will also ensure we are not building more than Victoria needs – so we can maximise the benefits of the transition to renewables, while minimising the impacts to communities and minimising costs to energy users. The planning and development of REZs will enable a coordinated approach, beyond the constraints of traditional network planning, that will help enable Victoria's strong pipeline of new power supply to be built and operating in time to provide reliable power when large ageing coal-fired power stations retire.

Key to this approach is giving landholders and communities a real voice in this process and walking together as partners with First Peoples in line with self-determination principles. The development of the 2025 VTP will demonstrate VicGrid's commitment to partnering with First Peoples and delivering place-based engagement with landholders and local communities. VicGrid is also committed to engaging with the energy industry to explore how we can effectively work with generators and developers to incorporate local insights and values in the detailed design of future transmission projects. Incorporating industry and community views early and often means we can make better decisions that minimise negative impacts and maximise benefits for local communities.

As such, First Peoples, community and industry will continue to be consulted as we develop the draft VTP (March 2025) and final 2025 VTP (July 2025).

The purpose of consultation on the draft VTP Guidelines was to:

- inform Victorians about the VTP, the draft VTP Guidelines and how these support identification of REZs, and future transmission
- gather feedback on the draft guidelines and to understand specific concerns, needs and expectations of different stakeholder groups in order to refine the final guidelines
- inform Victorians about the purpose and role of VicGrid.

The VTP Guidelines are part of a set of reforms to support the state's energy transition under the Victorian Transmission Investment Framework (VTIF). These reforms are guiding new policies that will cover network access, connections, procurement, community benefits and associated regulatory arrangements.

These new policy instruments include:

- **New Victorian network access arrangements:** The existing open access regime under the National Electricity Rules (NER) allows renewable energy generators to connect to the grid at almost any location. In some cases, a generator's location means it is not adding usable new energy to the grid or is impacting other generators already connected. The new Victorian Access Regime will improve investor certainty and support the timely coordination of investment in transmission, generation and storage infrastructure. We will be consulting on the implementation of the new access arrangements and connections reform. This includes consultation on the proposed grid impact assessment for projects located outside REZs.
- **A new procurement framework:** All of us pay for energy infrastructure through our power bills, so it is important that we make sure we are getting value for money. That is why VicGrid is putting in place a fit-for-purpose procurement framework for the delivery of major transmission projects identified in the VTP. This new framework will be developed through consultation with industry and be in place in time for the 2025 VTP.
- **A new approach to community benefits:** The Victorian Government is committed to ensuring positive outcomes for communities that host new infrastructure as part of the energy transition. That is why VicGrid is putting in place new arrangements to support landholders, neighbours, First Peoples and communities as part of the Renewable Energy Zone (REZ) Community Benefits Plan. The draft plan introduces new REZ Community Energy Funds that will see energy developers contribute to funds to benefit regional communities. Decisions on investments from the funds will be made in consultation with local and regional communities in each area. We consulted with community and industry from May to June 2024 to develop the details of this new approach, and the final plan is expected to be released early in 2025. We are also partnering with First Peoples to co-design models of dedicated benefits for Traditional Owners.

VicGrid strongly values public consultation, and we will be undertaking a range of engagement activities over coming months on these elements, including about details of the new access arrangements, the new procurement framework and the final REZ Community Benefits Plan.

Methodology

From July to September 2024, VicGrid ran a suite of activities to seek feedback on the draft VTP Guidelines and study area[2]. This included running community and industry events, Traditional Owner engagement, answering enquiries, and receiving feedback via forms and submissions. Consultation on the draft VTP Guidelines closed on 25 August and feedback on the study area closed on 30 September. This final report is an update to the previously released interim engagement report and covers detailed feedback received about the study area.

Community events

VicGrid held 25 community events, including 23 community drop-in sessions and 2 pop-up events across 14 regional towns and cities, and 2 community webinars. Events were designed to give community members an opportunity to learn more about the draft VTP Guidelines, study area and the VTP, to ask questions and to provide feedback directly to VicGrid staff, or through online or paper feedback forms.

We had more than 450 community members attend the drop-in sessions, and 94 community members attend the community webinars.

Meetings

The regional engagement team also held more than 100 meetings with regional and statewide stakeholders to further explore regional concerns and aspirations.

Traditional Owner engagement

VicGrid has engaged directly with Registered Aboriginal Parties (RAPs), including dedicated briefings on the draft VTP Guidelines, with a focus on how VicGrid can embed Aboriginal cultural values in the strategic land use assessment and protect Country by avoiding places of cultural significance.

VicGrid also held its first Traditional Owner Forum, bringing together representatives from 10 out of 12 state-recognised RAPs and representatives from VicGrid, the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action and the State Electricity Commission.

Industry events

VicGrid held 13 industry events, including 2 pre-briefings, 10 briefings (including peak bodies) and an industry webinar.

These events offered an opportunity for industry to learn more about the draft VTP Guidelines and the VTP, to ask questions and to prepare for submissions. It also allowed VicGrid to strengthen relationships with industry by demonstrating a commitment to ongoing consultation.

We had more than 150 industry participants attend the industry webinar.

Enquiries

Feedback was also received via email and a dedicated phone contact centre. The contact centre received several phone calls, and a steady stream of emails were received throughout the engagement period.

2 See Appendix 1 for a full list of events

This report is an update to the Interim Engagement Report - What We Heard that was released on 30 September and provides additional detail regarding feedback received on the study area.

Feedback forms and submissions

- A **guiding principles feedback form** asked respondents to score guiding principles based on importance with the opportunity to provide free text feedback on reasons for the scores and other information. This information built on the **Renewable Energy Planning Survey,** which was open from November 2023 to February 2024 and helped gain an understanding of the diverse community views and values towards renewable energy and transmission development across Victoria. Community feedback about the guiding principles will help shape the assessment process as the study area is investigated and narrowed to draft proposed REZs.
- A **renewable energy zone study area feedback form** asked respondents to provide feedback on their chosen geographic area(s). This built on feedback received via an **interactive mapping activity,** which ran from November 2023 to February 2024 and sought community views on important land use and landscape values in their area.
- A **generator and developer survey** asked for information on the potential location and volume of new generation and storage that could be expected in Victoria in the next 15 years. The survey aimed to gauge developers' key considerations when investing in generation infrastructure to ensure the eventual proposed REZs were viable from a developer perspective.
- Feedback was also received via submissions with a total of 171 received from community members, shires and councils, community session reports and industry.
- In addition, a range of briefings were held with peak bodies, government bodies, local government authorities, advocacy groups and associations.

Engagement principles

Our engagement framework across all stages of developing the VTP, including consultation on the draft VTP Guidelines, is modelled on existing best-in-class frameworks for public consultation and engagement for public sector entities.

We adopted the core principles of public engagement as outlined in the Victorian Public Sector Public Engagement Framework 2021–25, namely that all of our engagements are and continue to be:

- **Meaningful:** The process of public engagement is genuine and informs the final decisions.
- **Inclusive:** The engagement is respectful, inclusive and accessible.
- **Transparent:** The engagement is clear and open about what the public can and cannot influence.
- **Informed:** The engagement provides relevant and timely information to the public.
- **Accountable:** The engagement is high quality and responsive to the public.
- **Valuable:** The engagement creates value for the community and government. This can include social, economic, and environmental value.

We also draw heavily on the VAGO Public Participation in Government Decision-making guide, influenced by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2).

Guiding principles insights

Community-informed guiding principles will help shape our approach to narrowing the study area to draft proposed renewable energy zones.

Victorians were invited to provide feedback about these guiding principles through a feedback form. The guiding principles had been shaped by previous community engagement, including feedback and input received through planning for the future of offshore wind in Victoria, the Renewable Energy Planning Survey, and engagement on the draft REZ Community Benefits Plan.

Guiding principles weighting

Respondents were asked to *"Give each guiding principle a score out of 100, based on how important you think each is when planning energy generation and transmission development."*

The principles were:

- avoid over-developing renewable energy in a region to minimise cumulative impacts
- minimise costs to keep power bills low
- minimise land use, cultural and environmental impacts from development
- contribute to regional development.

"Minimise land use, cultural and environmental impacts from development" received the highest average rating with *"avoid over-developing renewable energy in a region to minimise cumulative impacts"* also prioritised.

Figure 1: Feedback, grouped by region, on each guiding principle based on the importance when planning energy generation and transmission development.

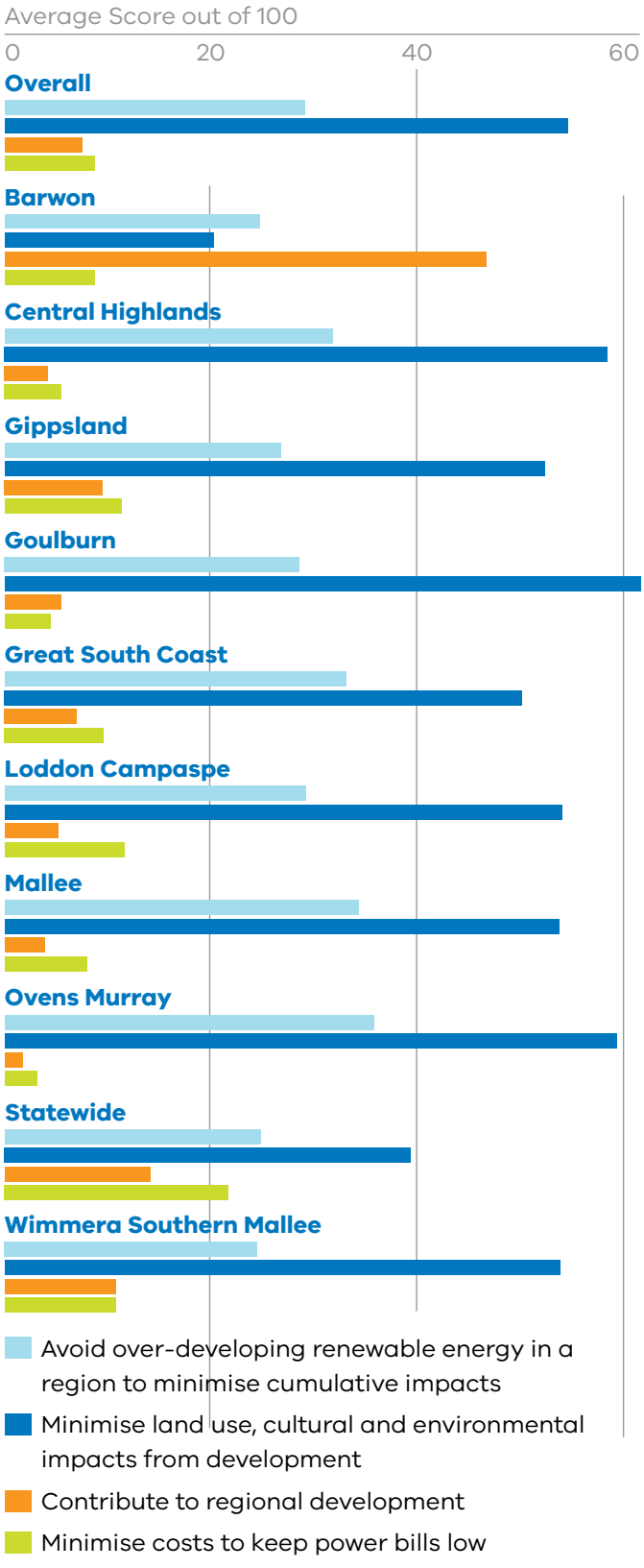


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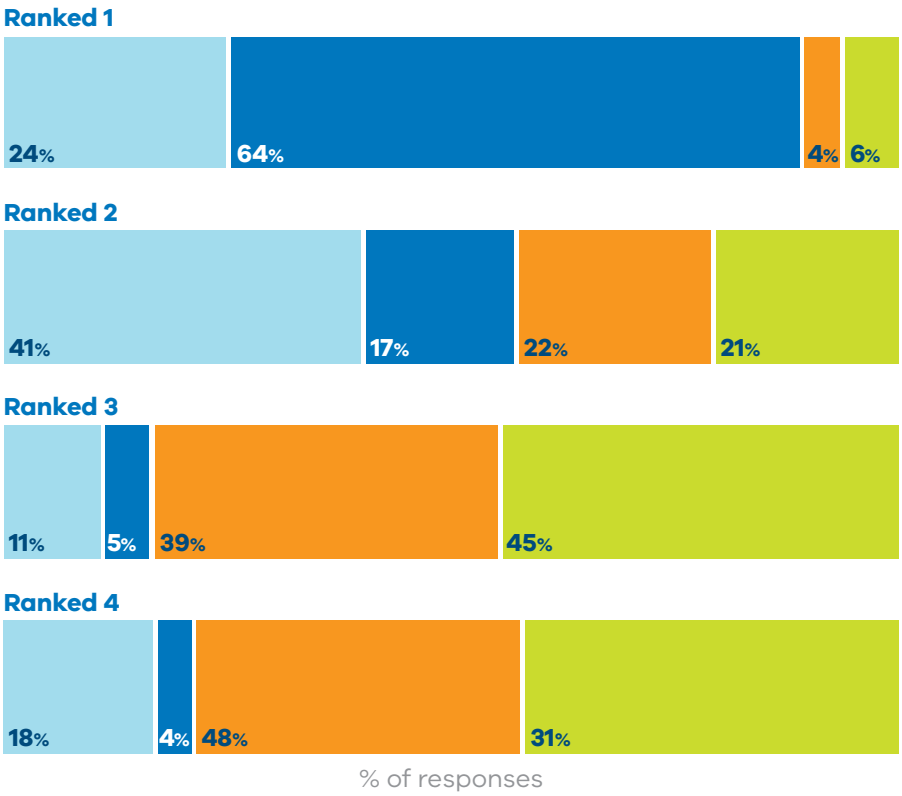
Figure 2 illustrates how the guiding principles were ranked by respondents, showing which guiding principle had been ranked most frequently as first, second, third and fourth in terms of importance when planning energy generation and transmission development. When considered in terms of weighting, it was again evident that "minimise land use, cultural and environmental impact" was the most highly weighted principle, with 64% of respondents giving it the highest weighting. "Avoid over-developing renewable energy to minimise cumulative impacts" was most often weighted second highest, with 41% of respondents giving it the second highest weighting. "Contribute to regional development" and "minimise costs to keep power bills low" were more typically weighted lower.

This is largely in line with the findings from the Renewable Energy Planning Survey with the top 5 ranked factors including:

- protect Victoria's natural environment, including national parks and wetlands
- minimise impacts on water systems such as water supply areas, lakes and rivers
- protect identified areas of valuable biodiversity
- minimise impacts on agricultural land
- keep power bills as low as possible.

Figure 2: Ranking of guiding principles by respondents based on importance when planning energy generation and transmission development.



Example comments from respondents:

"Impact on existing land uses needs to be a high priority. Need to minimise the impact of regional areas to power the city."
Goulburn

"Put environmental matters and species protection first, look carefully at historic impacts by wind farms over the past 20 years and start to tell the truth about the impact they are having on the brolga. Australia's GHG emissions are half of one percent of world emissions, and electricity generation is only 30% of that. Stop destroying the environment and forcing species such as brolga into extinction on the claim that the wind farms will save the planet. They will have absolutely no impact on world emissions at all."
Central Highlands

In this survey participants also ranked biodiversity, land use and keeping power bills low in the top 5 most important factors in planning renewable generation projects and transmission infrastructure. This survey was conducted among 2,015 community members across 7 regions in Victoria from 17 November 2023 to 16 February 2024 and was conducted both face to face and online, aiming to explore community and stakeholder views and values towards renewable energy and transmission development.

Participants responding to the current guiding principles feedback form were given the option to provide more context to their choices. When the accompanying comments are themed, just over half the comments relate to biodiversity and natural environment concerns and just under half relate to agriculture and land use.

This suggests that the weightings used in the strategic land use assessment largely reflect both the Renewable Energy Planning Survey and the current engagement feedback.

In response to feedback about the guiding principles, which shows the importance of considering land use values and cumulative impacts, the 2024 VTP Guidelines have provided more details about how land-use data will be considered in the methodology to identify potential future REZs. We will also consider the size and location of in-service and committed generation projects. This will ensure the overall level of development in a region is considered when determining the most appropriate locations for siting future REZs across the state.

This report is an update to the Interim Engagement Report - What We Heard that was released on 30 September and provides additional detail regarding feedback received on the study area.

Community and local government feedback

Community feedback from the feedback forms, submissions, direct enquiries and community events was analysed to identify overarching themes. These themes were consistent with feedback received from local shires and councils.

Themes

Biodiversity and natural environment: We heard concerns about impacts on biodiversity and water systems, including endangered species' habitats.

Agriculture and land use: Respondents stressed the need to protect valuable farmland and raised concerns about impacts to farming activities and farm productivity.

Impact on regions: We heard concerns about impost on regional areas to service metropolitan energy demands, socio-economic concerns related to energy and community division linked to developer behaviour, and prior experiences with renewable energy development.

Natural hazard vulnerability: Feedback raised concerns about infrastructure development in relation to natural hazards, including bushfires and flooding. This included concerns about firefighting.

Engagement feedback: We received feedback about the channels we used to engage with communities, how we raised awareness about engagement opportunities, and doubts about the impact feedback will have on the VTP.

Cost of transition: Respondents provided feedback on the cost of power, including potential impacts of renewable energy on electricity prices and other associated costs.

Energy source: Feedback was received about different types of energy sources, and generation and transmission technologies.

Regional opportunity: There was both support for how regions might benefit economically from hosting generation or transmission, and doubts about the actual benefits communities may receive.

The major themes statewide across all channels centre on biodiversity, agriculture and impact on regions. In the feedback forms there was some support for the transition to renewables, but sentiment towards hosting renewable energy infrastructure among those who engaged via feedback form, submission or community event, was still largely negative. This indicates significant engagement work is required to address community questions and concerns, and help build understanding and support.

During community events, people expressed support for the strategic land use assessment. There was also some support and appreciation for VicGrid's role and ambitions though there was a general feeling that coordination of development and genuine engagement should have come sooner. Communities are often focused on projects that are impacting their region. For example, in the Barwon sessions, feedback centred on Western Renewables Link (WRL), and at Birchip negative experiences with developers drove feedback. This highlights the importance of place-based engagement to draw out regional nuance and to integrate communities when planning generation and transmission. Regional concerns will help inform decisions as we identify draft proposed REZs. Community feedback will also contribute to design of future engagement and additional policy considerations.

Positive sentiment example:

"The benefits of Gippsland transitioning to clean wind energy are enormous. The air quality improvement instead of coal being burnt, and polluting the very air we all breathe, is a massive benefit. Job creation for construction and maintenance. We should have started transitioning long ago. Get on with it."
Gippsland

Neutral sentiment example:

"The present VicGrid criteria for location of REZs should also take into account the proportion of lifestyle properties. The majority of residents in the Southern Strathbogies live on lifestyle properties and the location of future REZs should avoid concentrations of lifestyle properties as well as residential zones."
Goulburn

Mixed sentiment example:

"There is no place in Victoria where these renewable energy zones should be imposed without thorough consideration of the impacts on the environment, amenity and the communities that live there."
Statewide

Negative sentiment example:

"Electricity does not connect to farms, towns, communities in VNI West area. There are no benefits, no cheaper electricity bills and reliable electricity."
Wimmera Southern Mallee

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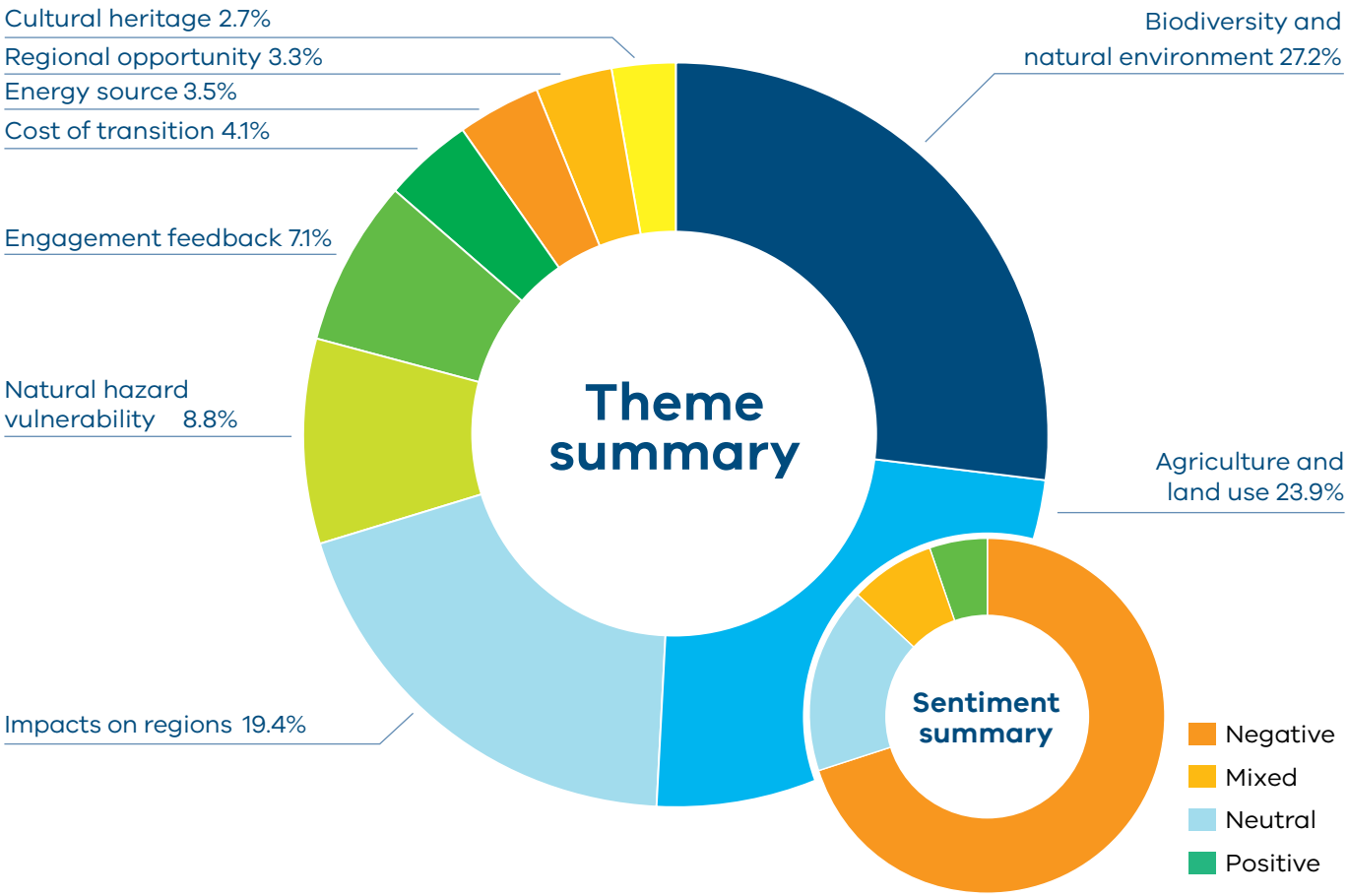
Figure 3: Major themes and sentiment from all channels

Sentiment describes the underlying emotional tone or attitude expressed in responses in feedback forms, submissions and at community events. Responses were classified as positive, negative, neutral or mixed, depending on the feelings or attitudes conveyed. It does not refer to sentiment about a particular entity, issue, or event and does not imply negative sentiment against renewables or the transition. Examples (left) provide further clarity.



Thematic insights

Biodiversity and natural environment

This theme covers concerns about biodiversity and water systems, including endangered species' habitats. Feedback ranges from information about specific addresses and locations to broader regions. Priorities include visual amenity, endangered species such as the brolga and giant Gippsland earthworm and regional tourism areas. Many of the key call-outs align with the previous interactive mapping exercise and work is under way to align both engagements.

Example comments from respondents:

"Korumburra and surrounds also have a protection overlay for our giant earthworms, which even David Attenborough has visited and made a documentary on, why is this not a red flag?"
Gippsland

"Kiewa Valley, Ovens Valley and King Valley. These areas are irreplaceable and should be preserved."
Ovens Murray

Agriculture and land use

This theme covers feedback about impacts on the use of farmland, and socio-economic concerns related to agriculture. It reflects a sentiment that productive agricultural land should be preserved for farming and food and fibre production rather than energy generation and transmission. Feedback raised concerns that some areas considered highly productive had been classified as tier 1 in the study area. Questions were also raised about the compatibility of different types of farming with different types of energy infrastructure, and how this would be considered in developing the VTP. This theme is more prominent in the Central Highlands, Wimmera and Mallee regions and also conveys the proud tradition of generational farming. This theme also includes broader land use feedback such as concerns about buffer zones, housing density and collaborating with councils to consider local planning schemes and policy development.

Example comments from respondents:

"The land is in limited supply. It is imperative that this be retained and set aside, especially for food production. The ability to grow food and provide for ourselves and overseas buyers is power to our country."
Mallee

"Now you want to cover our most productive farmland in renewable energy and transmission lines to feed it back to the city. Where do you think our food is going to come from in the future to feed the people in the cities?"
Gippsland

"It needs to be acknowledged that many local governments will be embarking on critical local planning and policy development in response to the draft Housing Targets released in June 2024. This presents difficulties in VicGrid's ability to leave sufficient flexibility for residential growth targets to be met at a local level, as well as municipal councils' ability to adapt to growth challenges over the 15-year lifespan of the first VTP."
Local shire

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Impact on regions

This theme relates to concerns about the impost on regional areas to service city energy demands, and any socio-economic concerns related to energy. It also captures the division in communities as a result of existing and planned projects, the feeling of 'haves' and 'have nots' and the impact of prior experiences and poor engagement by developers. This is the theme that shows the highest degree of consistency across regions. While other themes show regional variation, this theme more often relates to regions feeling aggrieved that they are forced to shoulder the burden of the transition to feed the city. This theme relates to the guiding principle of avoiding over-developing renewable energy in a region to minimise cumulative impacts. Many participants noted there was already significant generation in their area and felt they had already contributed enough. There was feedback requesting reassessment of certain regions or tier assignments within a region; this included advocating for certain regions, and mentions of existing buffer zones and wind exclusion zones.

Example comments from respondents:

"A recent proposal to install a wind energy facility in Nanneella/Koyuga has caused a great deal of anxiety across our community and for good reason."
Goulburn

"We don't want our homes industrialised. Put all this stuff near the cities where the power is required."
Mallee

"Many hold the view that the region should not have to generate power for Melbourne, and that Melbourne should host future renewable energy developments and transmission infrastructure."
Great South Coast

Natural hazard vulnerability

This theme relates primarily to bushfire concerns and fears that properties won't be able to be protected by the Country Fire Authority (CFA). There were also some references to flood risk. This includes the impact of renewable energy infrastructure during flood events. This theme is particularly prominent in the Ovens Murray region with concerns raised about battery fires and a planned battery storage project in the region. Respondents questioned whether transmission lines would hinder firefighting efforts and the impact of potentially noxious fumes on the region, waterways and evacuation routes. Undergrounding transmission lines was also often cited as a preference to mitigate bushfire risk. Concerns about insurance were also raised.

Example comments from respondents:

"Fires are notorious in Western Victoria and without fire support, farms will be decimated, resulting in a significant risk to lives, food production and animal mortality. Many communities on the map, including Mortlake, will be at risk of being indefensible in the event of fire, putting half the state of Victoria at risk of harm."
Great South Coast

"Apart from the lack of data, the process has not listened to the community telling them that our farm is on a proven flood plain."
Wimmera Southern Mallee

"I am asking for energy facilities … not be installed on a flood plain where access roads, crane pads and relocating soil post construction could impede the free passage of flood water."
Goulburn

Engagement feedback and previous engagement experiences

This theme relates primarily to feedback about engagement channels, awareness of engagement and doubts about the impact feedback will have on the VTP. Some feedback raised concerns about the length of the consultation period and allowing ample time to understand the guidelines and prepare submissions.

This theme includes a significant amount of feedback about prior engagement experiences. There were many references to negative experiences with existing and planned projects. Community division was attributed to these experiences. They have also resulted in doubts about current and future engagement and doubts about the opportunities for regional development.

Example comments from respondents:

"Community consultation not taking into consideration the aging population in the area with limited access to internet or access to town - consider letterbox drops for future engagement."
Gippsland

"Council only became aware of current consultation on the Guidelines covering an arbitrary 30-day period, shortly before the process commenced. With existing limited resources and in lead-up to upcoming caretaker period in September 2024 and local government elections in October 2024, the timing has been undesirable and limits opportunity for detailed review, briefing and alignment with Council meeting cycles."
Great South Coast

"We also consider that the limited timeframe allowed for the initial consultation (noting the first VTP is to be published in July 2025) may limit the capacity for meaningful feedback and collaboration from stakeholders, particularly in consideration of rural councils, who are often under-resourced in their capacity to provide considered strategic feedback/documentation."
Central Highlands

"It now appears that cowboy operations can create division and angst within rural communities by contacting individual landholders about access to their land for turbines for a proposed wind farm, whether the areas are in a REZ or not. It also appears that they can totally ignore the impact such a development would have on the cohesiveness of the impacted local communities. Such behaviour is untenable."
No region selected

"The way the process of development of wind 'farms' by unscrupulous and sometimes quite shady businesses, has had no regulation or code of conduct imposed on them by the state. It is hard to think of another practice that is as unregulated as this."
No region selected

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Regional opportunity

This theme relates to feedback about how a region will benefit economically from hosting generation or transmission. Some feedback recognised the benefits to communities, but many people raised doubts about long-term benefits. There was a general feeling that benefits generally flowed to overseas developers and questions about who would cover end-of-life and decommissioning costs. This was largely driven by prior experiences, which had bred distrust. This highlights the important role of community benefits initiatives and providing clear, trustworthy information.

Example comments from respondents:

"How neighbouring communities will share in profits overseas investors will make ... balancing their need to profit with the community need to benefit from hosting the infrastructure."
Mallee

"Benefits include upgrading of the roads for construction of the renewable energy infrastructure, having a renewable energy source, contributing to the rural and regional economies."
Goulburn

Agriculture sector feedback

Feedback was received from a number of agriculture advocacy groups and research and development organisations.

The Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF), the peak body for Victoria's agriculture industry, made detailed submissions about the draft VTP Guidelines and study area. The VFF highlighted that the guidelines might fail to address social licence and landholder acceptance issues, particularly those arising from the established Regulatory Investment Test for Transmission (RIT-T) process. Concerns included costs to farming businesses not being adequately considered in the methodology, some criticism of the statewide strategic land use assessment and calls for some Crown land to be more rigorously considered for hosting infrastructure.

The VFF called for a more detailed approach to assessing the potential impacts of renewable energy and transmission infrastructure on the agriculture industry in different regions and on different types of farming enterprises. To help address these concerns and prevent reductions to farmgate production, the VFF provided analysis and suggested areas to avoid based on productive soil, climate reliability, rainfall reliability and irrigation systems.

VFF feedback highlighted how safety regulations could impose constraints on agriculture and called for changes to the Land Access Code of Practice to ensure energy infrastructure did not hinder agricultural activities and provided appropriate compensation. The submission also raised concerns about energy infrastructure's potential impacts on farm productivity, soil health and the use of farm machinery.

The VFF proposed the following areas of avoidance:

- **South West Victoria:** This region is significant for dairy production. The VFF raised concerns about potential disruptions to daily milking routines, impact on soil health, and restrictions on the use of farm machinery.
- **Northern irrigation areas:** These areas are crucial for dairy production and require reliable feed and stock water. Renewable energy infrastructure could potentially interfere with irrigation systems and reduce productive output.
- **Gippsland:** Another important region for dairy production, Gippsland requires reliable water sources and fertile soils. Renewable energy infrastructure could potentially impact soil health and restrict the use of farm machinery.
- **Lindenow Valley:** Known for high-value horticulture production, this area requires specific soil, water and climate conditions. Renewable energy infrastructure could potentially reduce productive output, spread weeds and diseases, and restrict the use of farm machinery.
- **North and West Victoria:** These regions are significant for horticulture production, particularly for high-value crops. The presence of renewable energy infrastructure could impact soil health, irrigation systems, and reduce productive output.
- **Macalister Irrigation District:** This district is crucial for food and fibre production and supports major processing facilities.
- **Kiewa Valley:** This area is important for dairy production and requires reliable water sources. Renewable energy infrastructure could impact soil health and restrict the use of farm machinery.
- **Central Highlands:** Known for horticulture production, this area requires specific soil, water and climate conditions. Renewable energy infrastructure could reduce productive output and restrict the use of farm machinery.

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The VFF also called for refinements to the statewide strategic land use assessment to ensure areas prioritised for development could support co-location of renewable energy with agricultural production, emphasising the need for regulatory standards to support co-location.

The VFF voiced concerns about the loss of social licence for renewable energy and transmission project developments, attributing it to failure to adequately disclose potential land use and regulatory conflicts. They welcomed the Victorian Government's commitment to a statewide plan but emphasised the need for a holistic approach to understanding the impacts on agricultural land to minimise disruption to food and fibre production. The VFF was disappointed that VicGrid published the study area map without completing further work to better understand the impact of development on different farming systems.

The VFF also criticised the RIT-T process for failing to consider the costs of transmission infrastructure to farm businesses and agricultural production. They argued that the draft VTP Guidelines methodology repeated these failures, particularly in the cost-benefit analysis process, which they said was vague and didn't consider market and non-market impacts. The VFF called for the methodology to calculate potential losses for each production system, emphasising the need for appropriate compensation for landowners and farm businesses. They advocated for changes to the least-cost methodology to include the annual loss of production per kilometre of easement to ensure the VTP Guidelines did not deliver the least cost to the government at the expense of farmers and rural communities.

The VFF highlighted the importance of early, deeper and ongoing engagement with landholders, communities and First Peoples. They said the draft VTP Guidelines lacked details about how future engagement would be structured and called for public access to the detailed data used to determine the REZ study area. They also emphasised the need for transparency and good governance, arguing that the public should have the opportunity to test the suitability of the analysis and methodology used in the strategic land use assessment.

Dairy Australia, the Australian national body for the dairy industry, was concerned that the weightings used in the strategic land use assessment did not sufficiently consider the importance of agriculture. They called for meaningful consultation with Victorian agricultural industries to ensure planning and development of REZs and transmission corridors would take into account the extensive use of agricultural land. Dairy Australia called for clear guidance on the implications of being located within tier 1 and tier 2 areas, as well as modelling the impact of planning changes on rural land use and highlighting regional effects.

Dairy Australia also noted that frequent updates to the VTP might undermine investor confidence. They said the draft guidelines failed to address agricultural industries individually, thereby neglecting cumulative impacts. They also said the definition of 'least cost' in energy market modelling for the VTP was narrowly focused, potentially ignoring broader costs to land users.

Dairy Australia was concerned that the declaration of REZs in key agricultural areas could exacerbate land use competition and increase land prices. They noted that community engagement in the VTP development process was critical but appeared unclear and limited in scope.

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Regional insights

Overall, regional concerns reflected the broader thematic insights, citing concerns about the impact on agriculture, biodiversity and natural environment and the impact of renewable development on individual regions. Communities in the Wimmera Southern Mallee, Loddon Campaspe and the Mallee were relatively more concerned about impacts on agriculture and land use with a strong sentiment that land should be prioritised for food production before energy generation. This in part reflected the rich farming heritage in these regions. Feedback about the impact of renewable energy infrastructure on agriculture showed some regional nuance depending on the type of farming, soil types, rainfall level, and irrigation systems of a particular region. Other considerations included competing land uses, such as mineral sands mining. There were also calls to more deeply consider co-location including impact on farm productivity, soil health and the ability to use farm machinery.

While concerns about biodiversity were region-specific, such as calling out certain locations or species, concerns about the impact on the regions was expressed consistently statewide, although certain grievances related to region-specific planned or current projects. Previous experiences with current and proposed projects were a major driver of both engagement and areas of concern.

Response numbers were driven by a variety of factors. This included the number and location of VicGrid community events, social and traditional media activity and campaigns, engagement fatigue and disillusionment with previous engagement experiences, and the region's experience and familiarity with the energy transition.

The following regional snapshots cover what we heard during engagement on the draft VTP Guidelines and study area through feedback forms, submissions, community drop-in sessions and broader conversations with stakeholders such as local government representatives and community groups. As such, feedback may not be representative of each region as a whole and may be skewed towards certain areas within a region.

Goulburn

Greater Shepparton, Mitchell, Moira, Murrindindi, Strathbogie Ranges

Figure 4: Feedback themes from the Goulburn region.

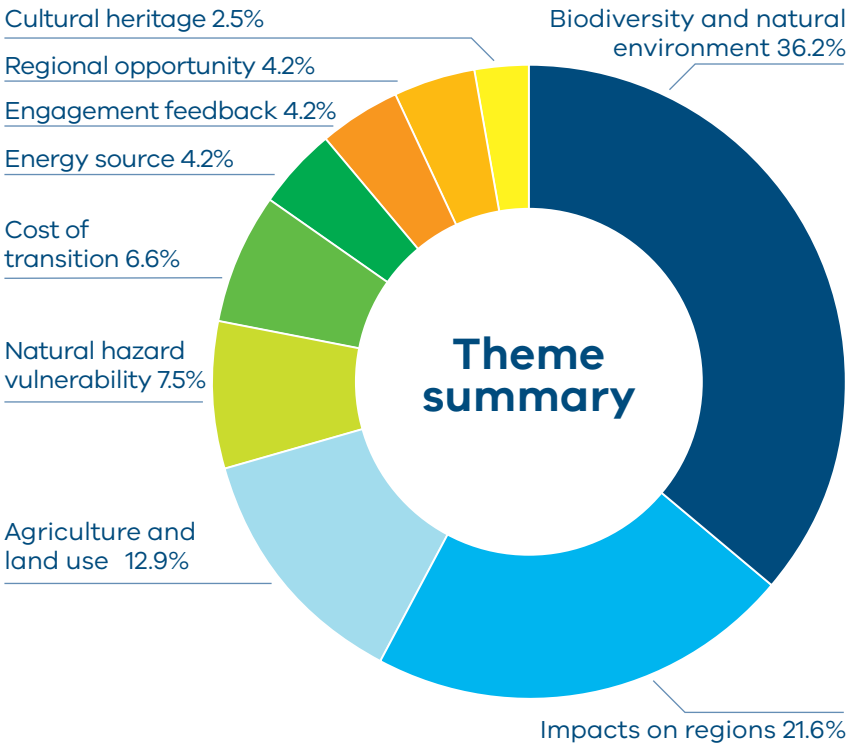
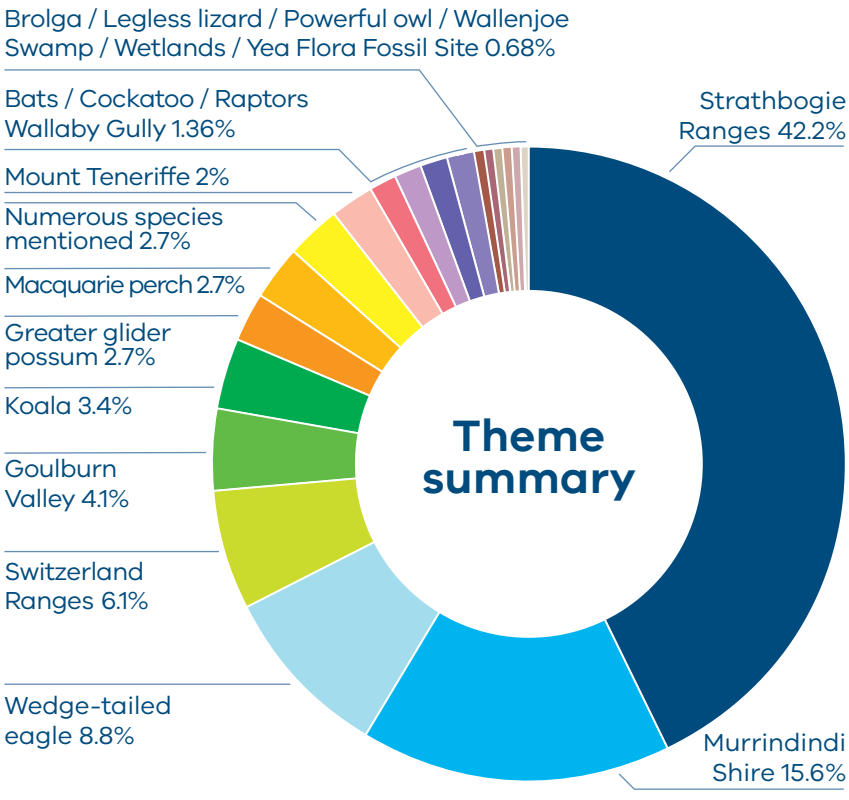


Figure 5: Biodiversity data from the Goulburn region.



The Goulburn region delivered the third highest number of study area feedback form responses, with people providing detailed and passionate feedback about the local area. The 3 major themes in this region were biodiversity and natural environment, the impact on regions, and agriculture and land use. Responses focused on the Strathbogie Ranges and the Murrindindi Shire and feedback reflected concerns about a planned wind project in the region. Prior and ongoing negative experiences with developers featured frequently, with many people mentioning 'underhanded' and 'shoddy' behaviour. There was also doubt about the actual benefits of renewable generation and transmission for communities.

Feedback frequently focused on the natural beauty and uniqueness of the landscape, significant biodiversity, threats to habitat connectivity, protection of waterways as the area is a major source of water to the Goulburn Broken catchment and the natural amenity of the area. Species mentioned include the wedge-tailed eagle and the greater glider possum.

The Committee for Greater Shepparton noted that the local government areas of Greater Shepparton, Campaspe and Moira formed a significant manufacturing hub. The committee said issues with current energy reliability and quality had undermined industry confidence in the energy transition. The committee's submission stressed it was vital to invest in grid

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133
REZ study area feedback forms

105
Guiding principles feedback forms

20
Submissions

2
Community events

infrastructure that could match future energy demand and improve reliability, and called for the region to be prioritised for investigation as part of planning the transition to renewable energy.

At the drop-in session in Shepparton, key themes included the impact of development on agricultural land, queries about the co-existence of irrigated agriculture and renewable energy generation and transmission, and a strong view that renewables were expensive and full life-cycle costs were not considered. Some attendees held a view that people interested in hosting renewable energy infrastructure were trying to shift out of farming. Concerns were also raised about energy security issues.

The Murrindindi Shire Council recognised the need to plan for a smooth transition to an economy based on renewable energy. The council noted the shire was already hosting significant renewable energy infrastructure, including the Eildon hydroelectric power stations and the Rubicon Hydroelectric Scheme. The council highlighted the potential economic opportunities from participating in the renewable energy industry, as well as the risks to the tourism and outdoor recreation industries dependent on environmental values. The council called for an integrated approach to transmission planning that considered the impact on sensitive cultural heritage areas, significant landscapes and community safety. The council suggested the VTP Guidelines should consider local economic opportunities, such as supply-chain capacity, resilient infrastructure to mitigate prolonged outages, direct local employment, and financial compensation for those most affected by new infrastructure. The council also emphasised the importance of meaningful engagement with the community, particularly in light of past traumatic events including the Black Saturday bushfires. The council urged VicGrid to ensure clear, timely, and open communication, authentic partnerships with First Peoples, and thorough engagement beyond minimal statutory requirements.

Broader conversations with local councils and groups in the region showed interest in learning more about the economic development opportunities associated with hosting renewable energy infrastructure.

Example comments from respondents:

"All of the Strathbogie Ranges area has sensitive natural fauna and flora that should be protected. It is also an area that has land at an altitude that is difficult to access, making it impossible to install wind turbines without considerable damage to the landscape."

"The Shire of Murrindindi has long been known for its natural beauty, encompassing forests, hills, rivers and productive farming land. The region's natural assets have been promoted as delivering 'Murrindindi Magic'. This 'magic' is totally incompatible with the imposition of ugly, unreliable and non-environmentally friendly energy generation and transmission infrastructure. "

"...will there be reparation to communities who have been tormented by shoddy behaviours from developers?"

"The area is one of the most beautiful and unique landscapes in Victoria. It would be a tragedy for major infrastructure to be built in this highly unique landscape of rolling hills and granite boulders which is enjoyed by both the local community (including landowners who have bought lifestyle properties in the area for its natural amenity, not for agriculture or economic purposes) as well as the large number of tourists who enjoy walking, driving and cycling in the area. The recreational value of the area would be destroyed by infrastructure development."

Gippsland

Bass Coast, Baw Baw, East Gippsland, Latrobe City, South Gippsland, Wellington

Figure 6: Feedback themes from the Gippsland region.

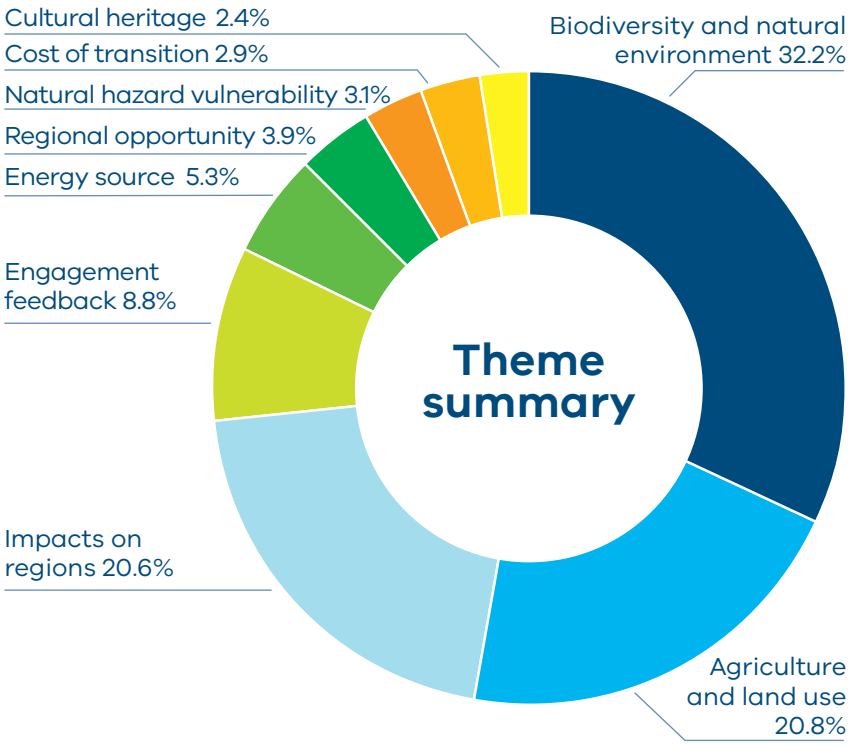
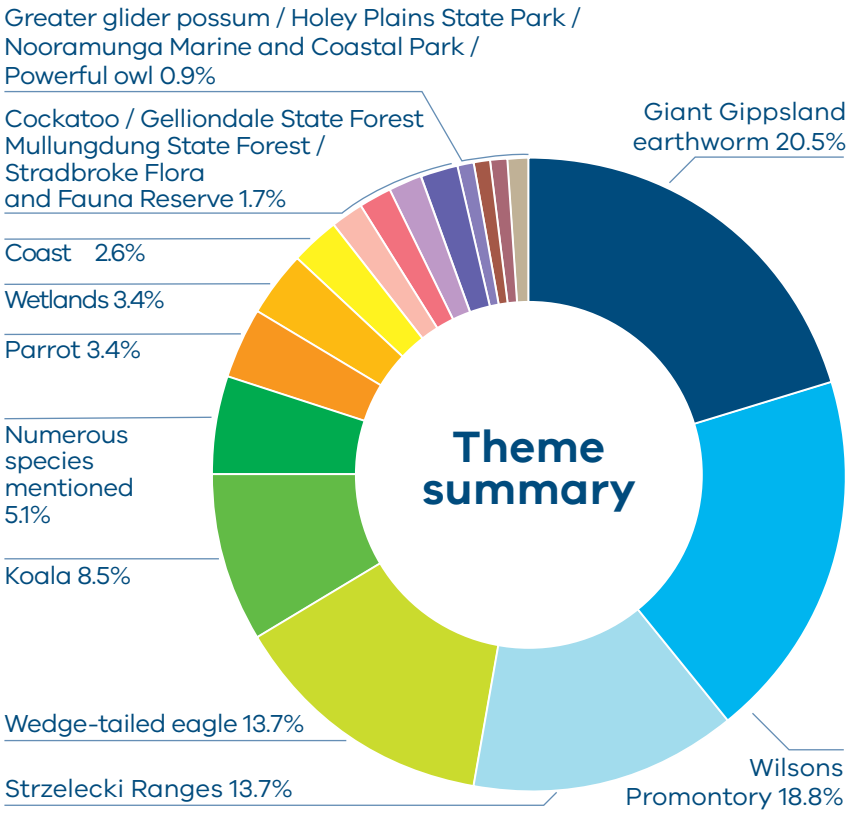


Figure 7: Biodiversity data from the Gippsland region.



Gippsland received the second highest number of feedback form responses and the most-attended initial community sessions, driven in part by community interest and awareness of the transition and in part by local news articles.

Gippsland feedback prioritised biodiversity and the natural environment followed by agriculture and land use. Feedback reflected strong regional pride in the natural beauty of the area, the rich farming tradition and the status as a tourism destination. Some feedback focused on the ongoing stress of the energy transition, reflecting experiences in this region with the impending retirement of local coal-fired power stations, offshore wind development and significant existing and proposed local renewable projects. Many concerns were raised about the habitat of the giant Gippsland earthworm around Loch and several mentions of Wilsons Promontory. Community members and the council noted that South Gippsland has a high density of dwellings, making development of turbines with the necessary set-back distances from dwellings challenging. There was also community sentiment that wind turbine exclusion zones on the Mornington Peninsula were unfair.

At the drop-in sessions there was a mix of support for and opposition to developing REZs in South Gippsland. Some attendees welcomed the opportunity for economic development and the energy security that this could bring. Others raised concerns about impacts on agriculture and land use, biodiversity and the Bunurong people's gathering places in the area.

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161 REZ study area feedback forms

55 Guiding principles feedback forms

24 Submissions

3 Community events

Feedback also focused on the engagement process, with participants not aware of engagement opportunities, not able to provide feedback via accessible channels and concerned about the tight timeline. Several community members at drop-in sessions thought the consultation was about where wind turbines would be located in Gippsland, rather than about planning REZs.

The RDA Gippsland Committee supported renewable energy development but emphasised a partnered, place-based approach to avoid impacting regional economic significance and high-value agricultural land. They recommended VicGrid increase local engagement resources and simplify communication materials. The committee also suggested considering the Latrobe Valley for future renewable infrastructure, aligning with the Gippsland Regional Plan 2020-2025.

The South Gippsland Shire Council supported renewable energy but stressed the need to limit impacts on agriculture and tourism. They highlighted the region's limited locations for wind projects due to rural dwelling density and buffer zone requirements. The council advocated for investment at Barry Beach Marine Terminal and Port Anthony, emphasising the need for genuine community engagement and government support to attract commercial investment.

The Bass Coast Shire Council supported a clean energy future with its net zero emissions target by 2030. They emphasised the need for inclusive community engagement and coordination, ensuring all stakeholders, First Peoples and residents were involved in the planning process. The council called for guidelines to protect native vegetation, wildlife and farmland, and addressed concerns about the visual and noise impacts of energy infrastructure, suggesting strategies such as undergrounding lines where possible to minimise disruptions.

The Latrobe City Council noted that while the study area map was developed to identify locations in Victoria suitable for new energy infrastructure, it included limited opportunities for development in Latrobe City compared to the western parts of the state. Factors such as the protection of the Strzelecki Forest and Alpine Ranges contributed to this, but the council was concerned about the potential impact on local job creation in the new energy sector.

Example comments from respondents:

"Agriculture is such an important and undervalued area of our economy. It totally feels it is being given little thought in this process."

"There is no mention of social impacts of renewable energy development. Time and time again these developments have lead to community division in the areas concerned and pitted neighbour against neighbour. These divisions reduce social cohesion in previously fairly harmonious communities. This has been seen in South Gippsland previously and other places in Victoria."

"There are many sites which could accommodate wind turbines in the Strzeleckis as well as on the Bass Coast plains. However, any locations chosen should not involve the loss of native forests in their construction. I do not have specific locations to recommend, but the idea that they should be so remote that no one sees them is ridiculous … The Danes have embraced the construction of wind turbines on the coast, out to sea and in rural areas, there is no outrage about them there as there is here."

"Deprioritise Korumburra, Loch, Bena and Kongwak as they are sites of natural beauty and productive farming … they are well patronised by city dwellers and provide a unique country experience that is unlike any other locations in Australia, and close to Melbourne….It doesn't make sense to ruin the aesthetics and productivity of an area and then also have to make the infrastructure to move the energy to the city when the power lines already exist elsewhere."

Ovens Murray

Alpine, Benalla, Indigo, Mansfield, Towong, Wangaratta, Wodonga

Figure 8: Feedback themes from the Ovens Murray region.

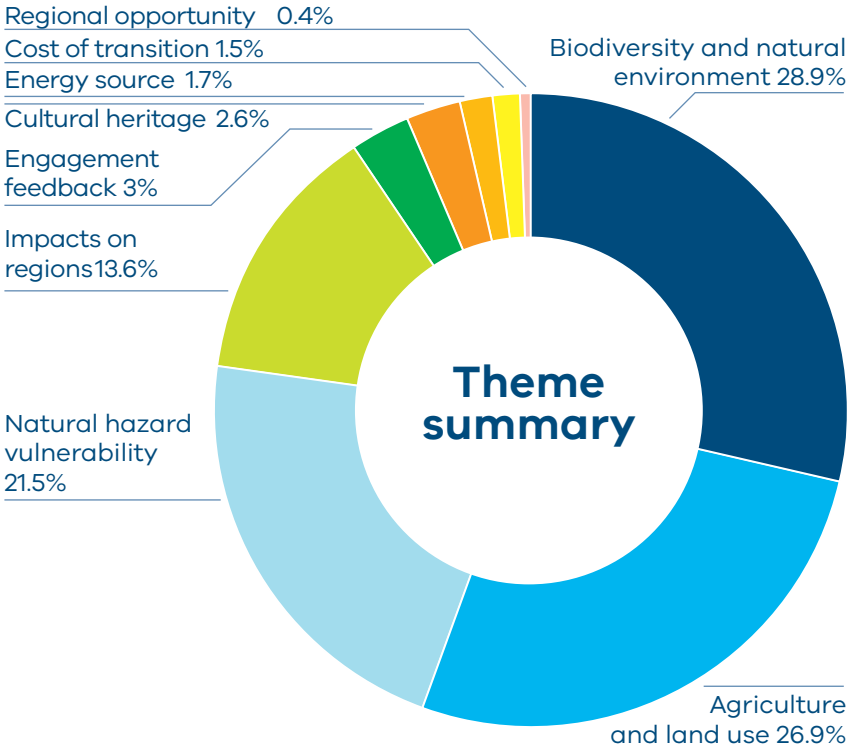
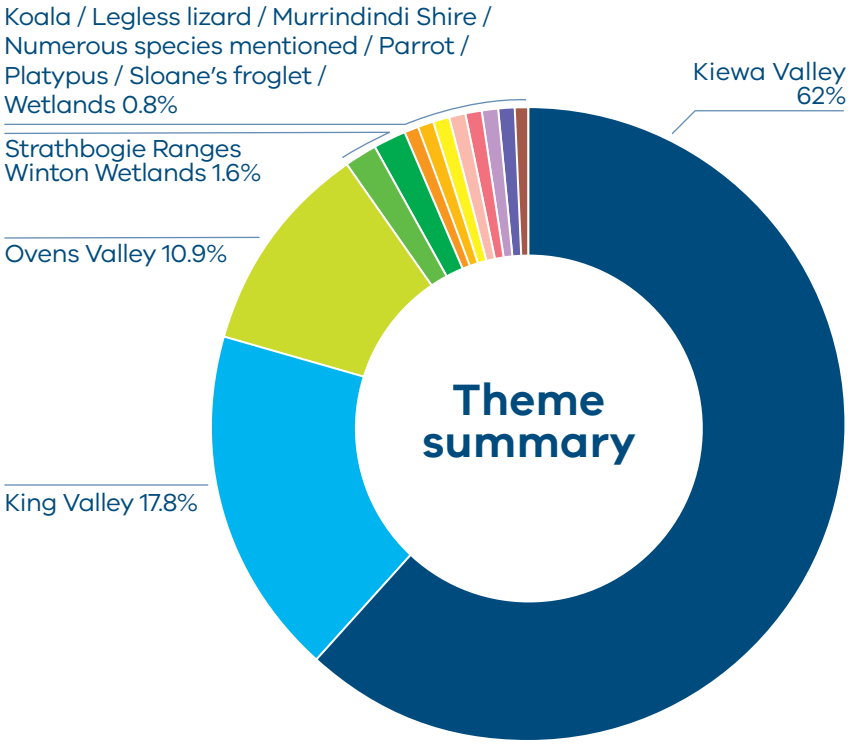


Figure 9: Biodiversity data from the Ovens Murray region.



The Ovens Murray region received the highest number of study area feedback form responses and expressed the most concern about bushfires. Concerns were also raised about insurance for properties neighbouring solar projects.

Feedback focused on impacts on agriculture, natural amenity and tourism, raising examples of distrust and community division related to existing and planned renewable energy projects. A large number of responses related to the Kiewa Valley. Respondents were aware this area had been deprioritised in the study area but raised concerns about several proposed projects in the region, including a proposed battery energy storage system (BESS) project at Dederang. This region is also concerned with both biodiversity, the natural environment and agriculture, and emphasised the region's status as a gateway to Victoria's snowfields. The large volume of responses from a deprioritised area reflects the high level of community engagement and commitment to protecting the region. Broader conversations with regional stakeholders including councils and community groups revealed an interest in learning more about regional development opportunities.

This report is an update to the Interim Engagement Report - What We Heard that was released on 30 September and provides additional detail regarding feedback received on the study area.

172	45	10	0
REZ study area feedback forms	Guiding principles feedback forms	Submissions	Community events

The Rural City of Wangaratta's submission supported the transition to renewable energy but emphasised the need for additional information to be considered in decisions about appropriate locations for future infrastructure. The council suggested considering planning overlays such as Special Water Supply Catchment areas, Bushfire Management Overlay, Significant Landscape Overlay, Areas of Cultural Heritage Sensitivity, Flood and Land Subject to Inundation Overlays, and Agricultural Versatility. It noted the potential benefits of development, including new jobs and supporting REZ Community Energy Funds. The council stressed the need to consider residential growth areas and called for further consultation with local governments to ensure future housing needs were met. Specific areas of concern included the south-east, which is considered high in agricultural versatility and is part of the Special Water Supply Catchment Area. The council requested this area be downgraded to tier 3 or deprioritised due to its high-value crops and challenging topography. The council requested an area in Wangaratta's north-west be deprioritised due to its proximity to the Warby-Ovens National Park and ongoing residential growth. The council raised several questions about planning scheme changes, community engagement obligations, and redundant infrastructure from solar and wind projects.

Mansfield Shire council raised concerns about Mt Buller Alpine approaches, and views towards the mountain and other significant landmarks such as Mt Stirling and Timbertop from locations around Mansfield, including from Bonnie Doon, Peppin Point and Tolmie areas.

Example comments from respondents:

"Although my concerning area has deprioritised, the Kiewa Valley is no place for batteries. With a high fire danger and significant overlay the valley area proposed at present for 2 BESS is close to bush, permanent water courses which supply water to stock on neighbouring properties, houses and a small school."

"We need to protect the Alpine Valleys-they are unique and irreplaceable. They are the gateway to the mountains"

"All areas need protecting! Reasons: fire safety concerns in a heavy Alpine area already fatigued and sensitive to fire and flood; Rivers would be damaged and soil would be contaminated; people and farm animals contaminated as well as flora and fauna."

"All productive farming/agriculture and alpine areas should be protected from industrialisation in Victoria. Communities matter. People matter. Our food bowl - MATTERS. How much of this state will be destroyed for intermittent power? We, the taxpayer deserve a full account and justification."

Central Highlands

Ararat, Ballarat, Golden Plains, Hepburn, Moorabool, Pyrenees

Figure 10: Feedback themes and from the Central Highlands region.

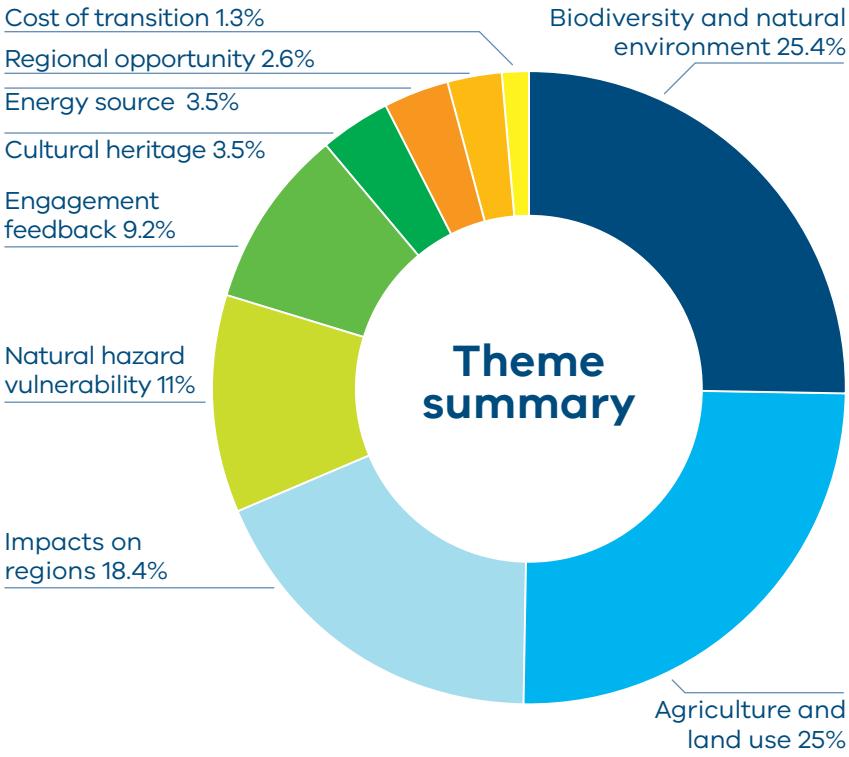
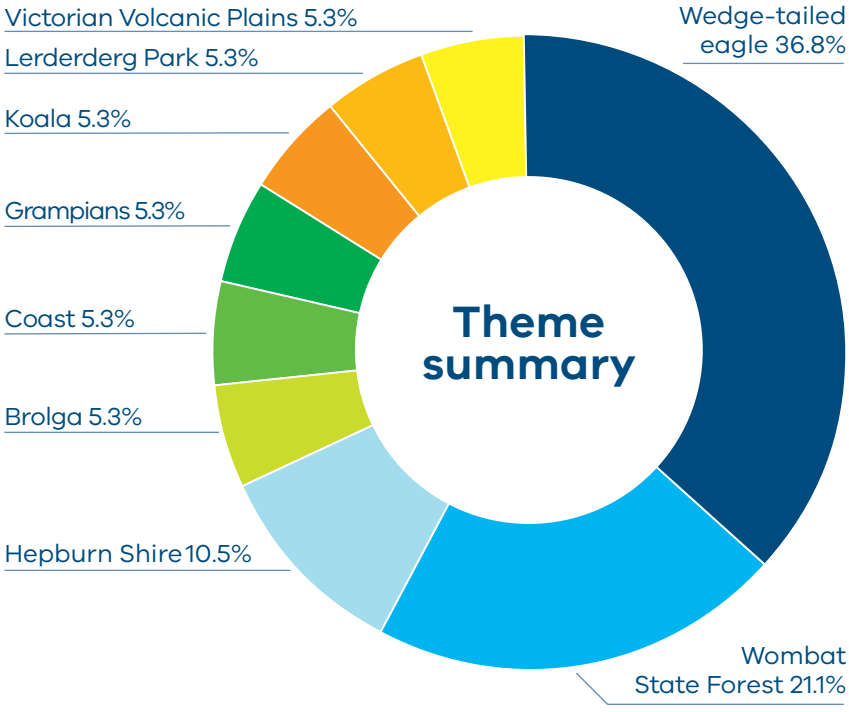


Figure 11: Biodiversity data from the Central Highlands region.



Concerns in the Central Highlands region focused on biodiversity and natural environment, agriculture, the impact on regions and natural hazard vulnerability. This region was also concerned about the impact of renewable energy infrastructure on different types of farming, such as potato growing. Concerns included impact on irrigation and height of farming equipment that was compatible with renewable energy infrastructure. Concerns were raised about the impact of renewables on the region's rich cultural and natural assets as well as the visual amenity. Biodiversity concerns centre on the wedge-tailed eagle and the Wombat State Forest.

The development of the WRL project has contributed to community fears that their region would be fundamentally altered by energy generation and transmission development. Other concerns included fear of decreased land values, fear that towns would shrink because farmers might abandon farms, insurance issues and fire risk. Concerns also focused on decommissioning and who was accountable for costs if renewables projects changed ownership or became insolvent. Energy security issues were also raised. In addition, engagement fatigue and experiences with major transmission projects WRL and VNI West over the past 4 years contributed to a loss of trust.

This report is an update to the Interim Engagement Report - What We Heard that was released on 30 September and provides additional detail regarding feedback received on the study area.

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Community events

The Moorabool Shire Council requested more communication at an officer level to help local government planning and policy formation related to the VTP and WRL. The council raised concerns about the impact of renewable energy infrastructure on agricultural land, especially regarding the WRL project. The council emphasised the strategic importance of preserving high-quality soils for food production, particularly around Bungaree and Wallace, as well as the need for improved local biodiversity data and strategic planning controls to aid conservation efforts. It suggested integrating biodiversity data from AusNet's surveys into the strategic land use assessment to enhance conservation efforts.

The Pyrenees Shire Council recognised the importance of adopting renewable energy infrastructure and emphasised the need for clear references to the Victorian Government's draft REZ Community Benefits Plan in the guidelines. It raised concerns about the lack of clarity in the guidelines about stakeholder and community consultation. It also raised concerns about how the south-west of the shire had been classified in the study area, and called for further investigations of that area. The council also noted the potential visual amenity impacts of wind energy projects and transmission, including WRL.

The Hepburn Shire Council said it would advocate for responsible and community-friendly renewable energy development within the region. They advocated for protecting agricultural land, using low-impact technologies, and involving Traditional Owners in decision-making. The council called for improved consultation timelines and a comprehensive assessment of economic, environmental and social impacts.

Example comments from respondents:

"Aesthetics should be considered along with wildlife conservation when deciding to ruin the landscape."

"All Victorian farming land should be protected at all costs. The renewables scheme is decimating the agricultural industry and destroying our prime farming land."

"The farmland in Kingston and the surrounding area is volcanic soil. Farms are relatively small, rather than broad acre. There is high rainfall. This is 'class 1 farmland' used for potato production and intensive crop farming. About half of the local growers are impacted by WRL (or) VNI West, either as landowners or as tenants who lease farmland in the district. Small farm size means the easement's impact will be relatively large. WRL-VNI West is estimated to impact up to 1,000 hectares of potato-growing land. That's equivalent to 60% of McCain's production area in Ballarat. Destruction of our state's successful potato sector is a plausible high-impact scenario that will result in significant consequences, including social upheaval for our community."

"Hepburn Shire is a high fire-risk area, compounded by extreme wind events. Fire is a key factor that should be considered in the placement of renewables infrastructure."

Wimmera Southern Mallee

Hindmarsh, Horsham, Northern Grampians, West Wimmera, Yarriambiack

Figure 12: Feedback themes from the Wimmera Southern Mallee region.

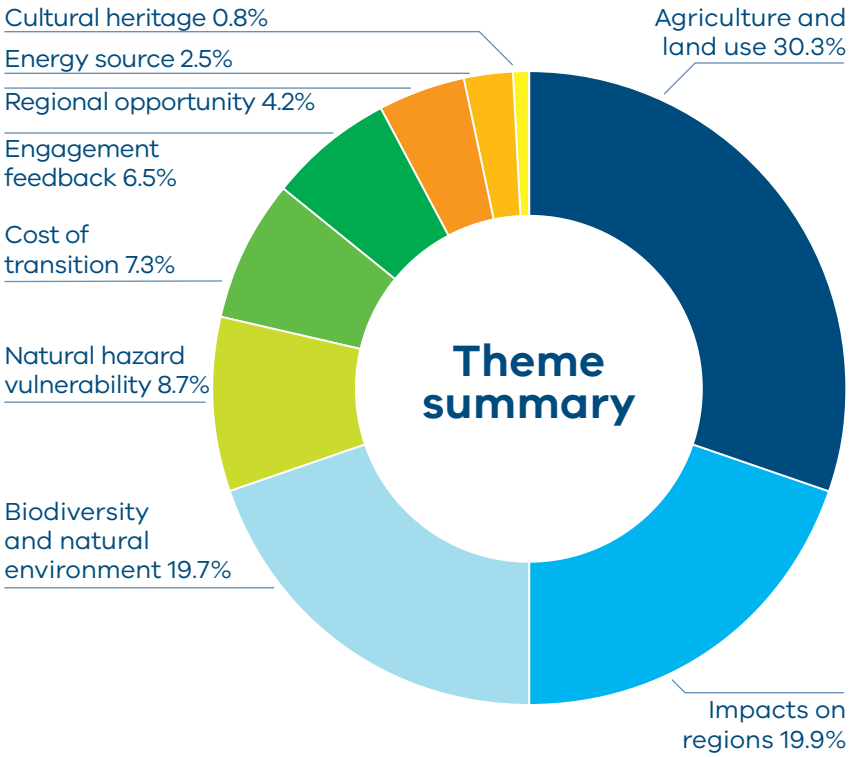
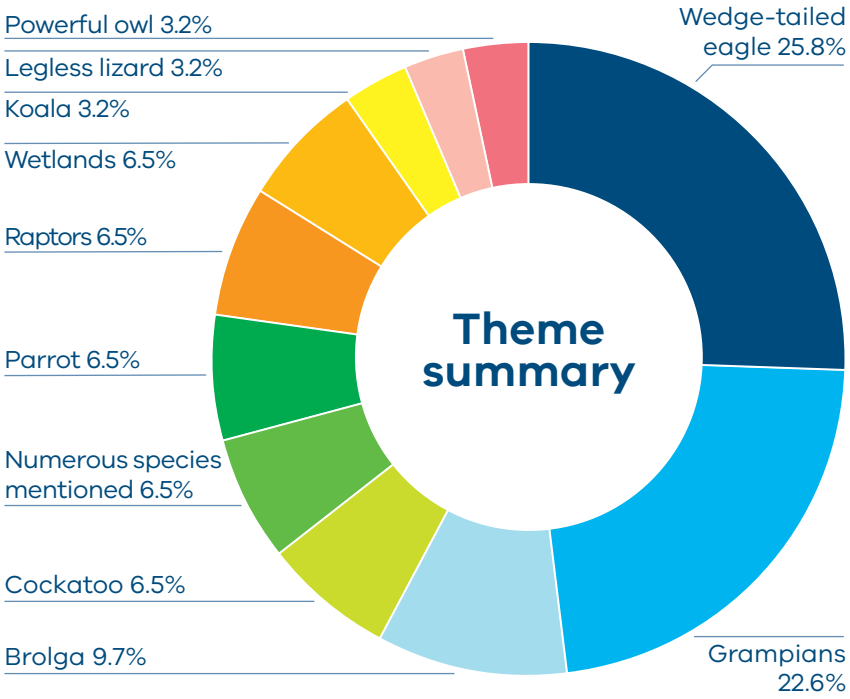


Figure 13: Biodiversity data from the Wimmera Southern Mallee region.



Feedback about the Wimmera Southern Mallee centred more strongly on the impact on agriculture and increased mentions of negative experiences with previous and planned development. Concerns were often raised about the use of non-disclosure agreements by energy project developers, and how this had created community division and damaged intergenerational relationships with a sense of 'haves' and 'have nots'.

During the Horsham drop-in session, the main theme centred on why the Wimmera was classified as tier 1 in the study area when it included highly productive soils and more advanced technology had given farmers the ability to boost productivity with less rain. The assumption that all farmers were struggling and would welcome alternative income sources through renewables was seen as incorrect. Some feedback expressed that many farms in the region were highly profitable and that the compensation and benefits were insufficient to garner their support. Some suggested that areas in the north-west with more marginal soils would be better suited to wind development. Written feedback also mentioned soil quality. Fire risk and associated insurance was also a theme in this region. Feedback often mentioned floodplain issues. There was some support for the transition from local businesses that required better energy security to expand investment or that were involved in eco and green tourism initiatives.

This report is an update to the Interim Engagement Report - What We Heard that was released on 30 September and provides additional detail regarding feedback received on the study area.

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REZ study area feedback forms

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Submissions

3
Community events

Community members at the Horsham drop-in wanted to better understand the economic and social benefits of the transition.

Biodiversity mentions in this region included the Grampians National Park and several species such as the wedge-tailed eagle. Concerns were raised about mineral sands mining and subsequent competing land uses, as well as the need to solve energy security issues.

At the drop-in session in Stawell, attendees delivered a clear message that they did not want to be in a REZ. Concerns about VNI West were raised, including potential impacts on land values, inadequate compensation and ability to use land for future financing.

The Buloke Northern Grampians Landcare Network noted the importance of protecting areas where limited bio-links connected nature conservation reserves, national and regional parks. Examples included the areas between Kara Kara National Park, Dalyenong, Tottington, Bolangum and Morrl Morrl nature conservation reserves, which provided limited habitat for a number of native species. Similarly, the network requested avoiding areas of high conservation value around the Avon Plains and Woornook Lakes.

The Horsham Rural City council called for consideration of the airport, its surrounding flight descending zone and future expansion in line with a 50-year planning horizon. Council noted potential future increases in wind turbine heights, both for new developments and upgrades to existing sites, should be considered so they don't interfere with current or anticipated aviation operations. Proactive planning in this regard would safeguard both the airport's functionality and the region's growing renewable energy infrastructure, the council said. It also called for the VTP to minimise impacts on people's properties, livelihoods, and farming communities. The council noted that most farmers in the region used precision farming technology to maximise productivity and minimise or optimise input costs, including labour. Additional interruptions to the layout of paddocks would lead to reductions in efficiencies and create risks from in-paddock obstacles. Council recommended that the VTP prioritise use of road reserves for powerline routes where possible, to avoid impacts on finite productive farmland.

Example comments from respondents:

"In our area, agriculture and our highly productive farmland is the most important thing for our businesses and community. We will not host any renewable energy infrastructure. We also wish to protect our natural environment from this destructive industrialisation. Clearly, overdeveloping an area is a bad thing unless that area wants it. It is important to keep power bills low, but we do not believe that building VNI West or any renewables is going to reduce bills ever. We are not interested in the 'community benefits' or community bribery."

"Please regard our local flora, fauna many are endangered or protected species. Our farming enterprises that will be compromised, some to the point of closure."

"The burden of energy transition being placed on rural and regional communities is significant. These communities already struggle to manage access to services, higher rates of the burden of chronic disease, significantly higher rates of deaths by suicide and this has not been considered when planning these projects."

"Avoid the Grampians National Park and other National Parks and state forests and nature reserves. Keep the buffer of 10km distance from park boundaries. Avoid the Wimmera River and adjoining tributaries. Keep buffer at 2km. Prioritise open areas and the numerous low use roadway and laneways reserves and the hundreds of unmade roads and lanes in rural areas."

Mallee

Buloke, Gannawarra, Mildura, Swan Hill

Figure 14: Feedback themes from the Mallee region.

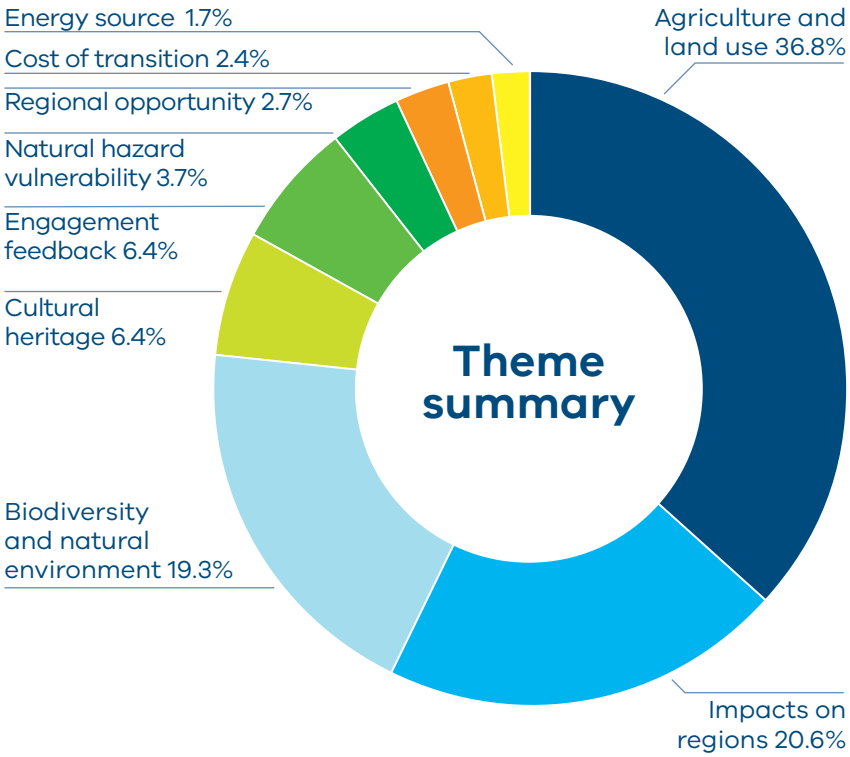
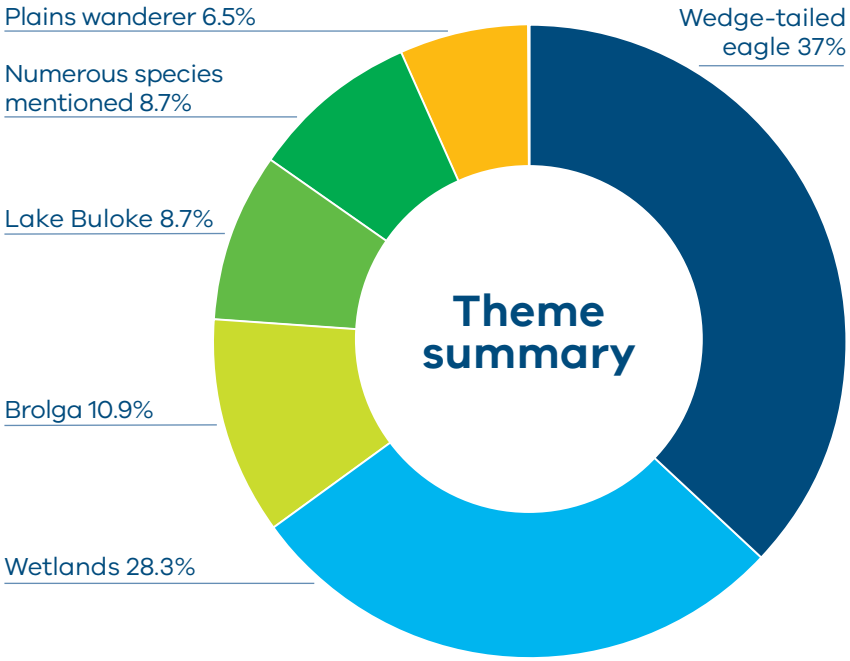


Figure 15: Biodiversity data from the Mallee region.



In the Mallee, there was strong sentiment that land was for producing food not energy. The 2 main themes were agriculture and land use, and the impact on the regions. Feedback highlighted the enduring traditions of farming families and negative past experiences with current and planned projects. There was a bulk of feedback about how experiences with renewable energy development had contributed to community divisions, damaged intergenerational relationships and a feeling of being steamrolled and ignored.

During the first drop-in session in Birchip, concerns were raised about the divisive nature of private developers' use of non-disclosure agreements. Some attendees voiced cautious support for ongoing engagement. People were also sceptical about the need to transition to renewable energy. At a follow-up event at Birchip, community members expressed strong opposition to the transition. More than 100 people attended the session, with some protesting in a convoy of trucks displaying anti-renewables and anti-mining slogans. There were comparatively fewer mentions of biodiversity in this region.

Feedback about the region often included opposition to mineral sands mining and concerns about competing land uses.

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REZ study area feedback forms

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Guiding principles feedback forms

8
Submissions

2
Community events

The Swan Hill Rural City Council's submission endorsed renewable energy development as outlined in its newly adopted Economic Development Strategy for 2024-2030 and agricultural policies within the Swan Hill Planning Scheme, while emphasizing the importance of considering existing local land uses, especially in irrigation districts. The council highlighted the significant resources within the municipality that could affect the feasibility of transmission and renewable energy developments and recommended that the draft VTP Guidelines evaluate a wider range of information including economic development strategies of councils, housing and workforce strategies, environmental and sustainability strategies, the value of irrigated land and food production, areas unsuitable for solar projects due to intensive horticulture, existing transmission corridors to prevent asset duplication, and the proximity to townships and settlements to prioritize community support and wellbeing, along with data from existing renewable energy projects assessing their environmental, economic, and social impacts.

Additionally, the council suggested assessing local infrastructure needs, such as roads and bridges, and recommended infrastructure standards for supporting transmission and renewable energy projects. It emphasised community safety issues, fair approval processes, and balanced assessments of landscape impacts.

The Mildura Rural City Council advocated for the region to be prioritised for renewable energy generation and transmission infrastructure in the 2025 VTP. Council said the Mildura region had one of the highest solar irradiation levels in Australia, making it an ideal location for solar energy projects. Council said supporting the community to reduce emissions and address climate change were priorities, as noted in its Council Plan 2021-2025 and Community Vision 2021-2040.

The Gannawarra Shire suggested investigating locations that had existing proposals with landowner support, noting there could be potential to expand development with fewer impacts.

Example comments from respondents:

"I am deeply concerned that in the Mallee and beyond, agricultural land is under threat from many sources, mining, solar panels, wind turbines … Each seeking to establish in areas close to power sources. It seems these projects are proceeding independently of each other without any overall consideration or regulation of what is quietly happening, valuable food growing land is being taken for other purposes."

"All existing agricultural land across the Wimmera Mallee should be protected! Farming is our livelihood and our future as an electorate. We can't EAT money!"

"We live in the Mallee, a small rural town with a community rich in spirit, that is made of mainly farmers and people working in agriculture. Our community would not operate without our farmers, due to many businesses relying on farmers to purchase their products…Our local football club relies heavily on local farmers to sow, spray, spread fertiliser, and strip their crop every year. They also rely on sponsorship from farming families in order to have a competitive team throughout the year. We don't have a beach, we don't have a river, we don't have a shopping centre, we don't have a cinema, we don't have lots of things … But we do have a beautiful landscape that surrounds our tight-knit community, with special sunrises and sunsets that aren't blocked by wind turbines and buildings. Without our farmers … the community will break down, people will leave, people will be out of jobs, and there will be no money. Farming in our community is so important, it keeps the town alive. Keep wind turbines out of our community."

Loddon Campaspe

Campaspe, Central Goldfields, Greater Bendigo, Loddon, Macedon Ranges, Mount Alexander

Figure 16: Feedback themes from the Loddon Campaspe region.

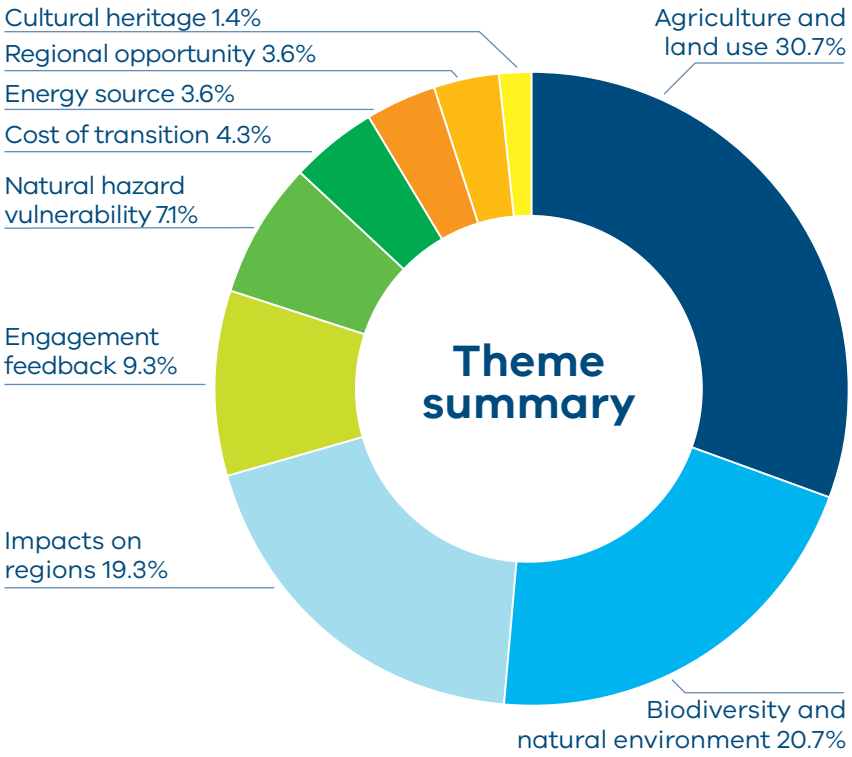
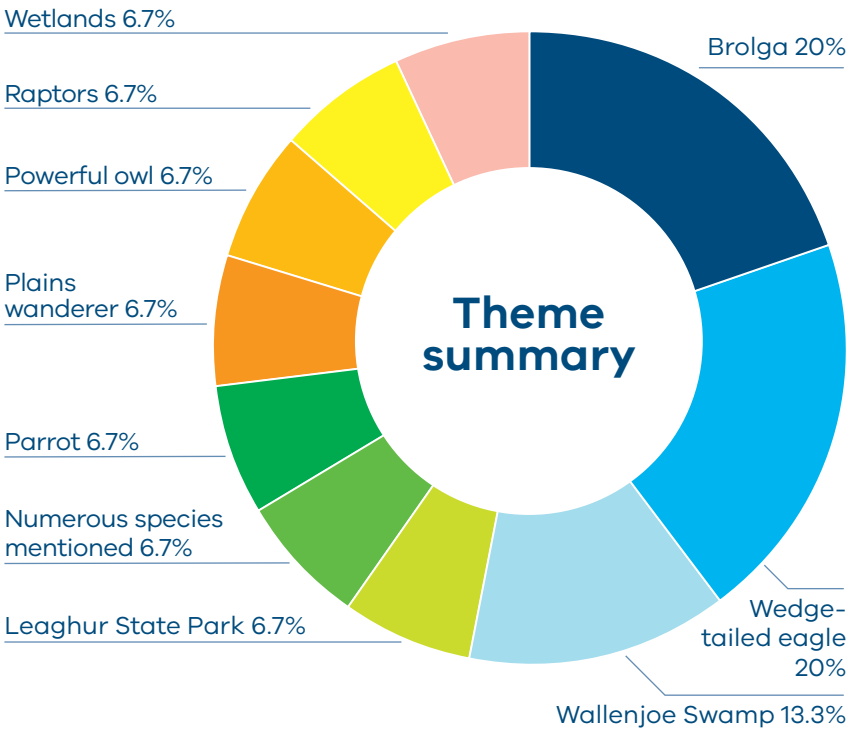


Figure 17: Biodiversity data from the Loddon Campaspe region.



There were fewer feedback form responses about the Loddon Campaspe region. Themes included impact on agriculture, impact on regions and engagement feedback. People mentioned negative experiences with renewable energy developers and how this had impacted their community. Some community members said they felt developers had taken advantage of vulnerable landholders after a past flood event when they weren't in a state of mind to 'think clearly'. Concerns were also raised about protecting farmland.

This report is an update to the Interim Engagement Report - What We Heard that was released on 30 September and provides additional detail regarding feedback received on the study area.

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15 Guiding principles feedback forms

7 Submissions

2 Community events

A small number of people attended the Rochester drop-in sessions. They shared feedback about a proposed wind project at Nanneella, the impacts of renewable energy projects on local farmland, and the impacts of the VNI West project and local generation projects on the social cohesion of their communities. Questions were raised about whether subsidies were being paid to generation companies, and whether communities hosting infrastructure would receive any tangible benefits. Concerns were also raised about the impact new infrastructure might have during future flood events.

Example comments from respondents:

"Land that can be irrigated and that is used for intensive food production should be avoided."

"Flood plains should be avoided. Infrastructure such as the crane pads for wind energy facilities may impede the free passage of flood water, i.e. the floodplain associated with the Wallenjoe Swamp."

"Liveability of our regions should be considered. Rural people already face enough challenges in running our businesses, without forcing more stress and division on to them. These issues are ruining small rural communities. I am personally witnessing arguments between neighbours who have been long-time friends and now can't be in the same room."

"Naneella Koyuga area should be protected from wind turbines. This area is a prime agricultural area in Victoria's food bowl, which grows crops that provide feed for dairy cattle in the area. There is also a beautiful natural area called the Wallenjoe Swamp that houses a large amount of birds and wildlife. This landscape should be protected."

Great South Coast

Corangamite, Glenelg, Moyne, South Grampians, Warrnambool

Figure 18: Feedback themes from the Great South Coast region.

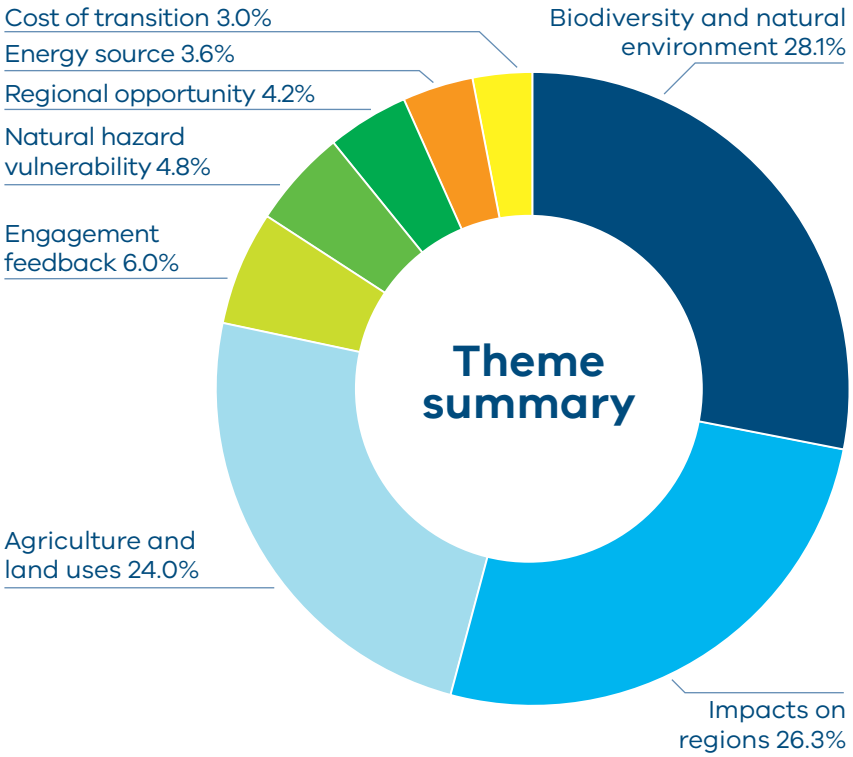
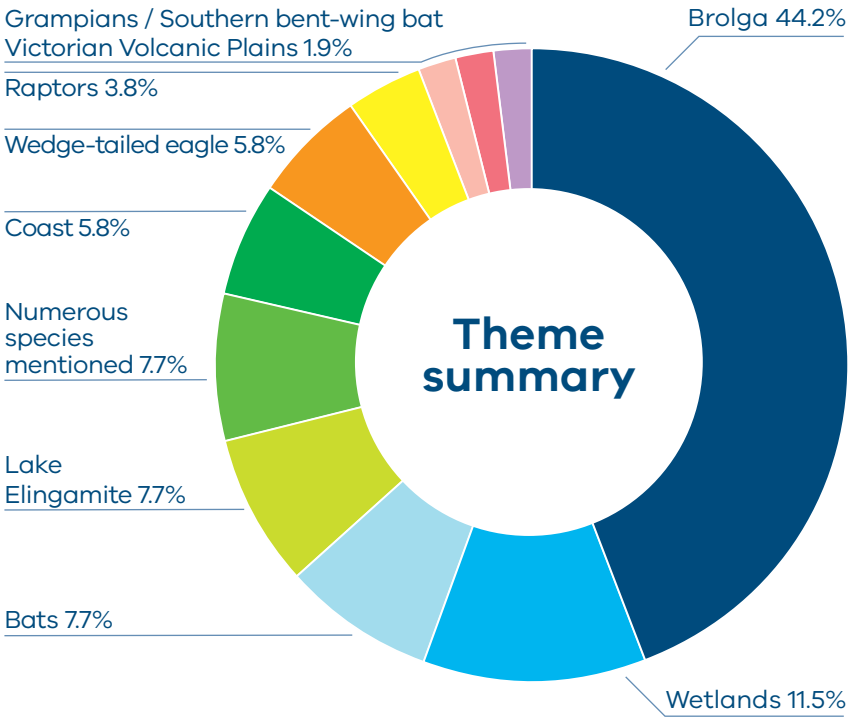


Figure 19: Biodiversity data from the Great South Coast region.



Feedback from the Great South Coast region focused on the significant role the region had played in Victoria's energy transition so far, noting the large number of proposed and existing local renewables projects.

Another major theme in this region was the impact on agriculture, particularly on dairy farming. Many people noted the region's high quality volcanic soil and its ability to hold moisture.

Themes also included concerns about biodiversity including brolga, the southern bent-wing bat and microbats. This region weighted the guiding principle "avoid over-developing renewable energy in a region to minimise cumulative impacts" more highly than the statewide average. The impact of existing renewable generation and transmission was a strong theme in this region, with concerns including impacts on visual amenity, tourism, local businesses and the essence of the area. Concerns were also raised about planning regulations near wind projects restricting neighbours' ability to build on-farm staff accommodation.

This report is an update to the Interim Engagement Report - What We Heard that was released on 30 September and provides additional detail regarding feedback received on the study area.

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Submissions

2
Community events

At the drop-in session in Mortlake, community members asked about tangible benefits of hosting infrastructure, and how renewables development could deliver broader regional economic benefits to help drive population growth. Concerns were raised about the viability of some renewables projects and why some local wind projects were running at reduced capacity.

The Moyne Shire Council's submission said that if all currently proposed projects were completed, the shire would host about 700 wind turbines, generating about 3 GW of electricity. The council was concerned that most of the shire's land had been identified as tier 1 or 2 in the study area – most suitable or suitable for further investigation. The council called for renewable energy projects' cumulative impacts on agricultural land, heritage values and community wellbeing to be considered in planning. Increased buffers between wind projects and towns, houses and neighbouring property boundaries could help mitigate impacts, the council said. The council also highlighted potential long-term economic and social benefits, including supply by local businesses, employment, and training during the construction and operation of wind projects. The council advocated for undergrounding high-voltage power lines where feasible, and the need for a decommissioning policy for renewable energy projects.

The Corangamite Shire called for better strategic planning and coordination of renewable energy and transmission infrastructure development. The council stressed the importance of protecting high-value agricultural land, and was critical of the engagement process so far.

The Glenelg Shire Council's submission said the council was keen to participate in planning Victoria's energy future, noting private sector interest and investments in wind, biofuels, and projects such as the Kentbruck Green Power Hub. These initiatives aligned with the Portland Industrial Land Strategy 2016 and the Portland Strategic Framework Plan 2020. The council stressed the importance of strategic planning, community consultation, and assessing cumulative impacts on housing and infrastructure while safeguarding sensitive areas.

Example comments from respondents:

"The land from Colac through Camperdown, Noorat and beyond Warrnambool is a significant dairying zone. Frankly, areas of this level of agricultural significance are very few in Victoria and Australia. The South West of Victoria contributes 25% of the nation's milk supply. In the Camperdown/Terang area and down to the coast, the land is ofstate and national strategic importance. For food security and sustainable agriculture into the future, land of high agricultural significance must be protected."

"Biodiversity considerations are a priority for many people – in particular brolga breeding areas and the artesian water systems that are unique to this area and a very important resource for high-value beef and dairy agricultural production."

"The long-term negative impacts of the transmission lines will far outweigh the short-term cost of power such as making some animals extinct within regions, health impacts and ruin the natural unique landscape of the volcanic plains."

Barwon

Colac, Otway, Greater Geelong, Queenscliffe, Surf Coast

Figure 20: Feedback themes from the Barwon region.

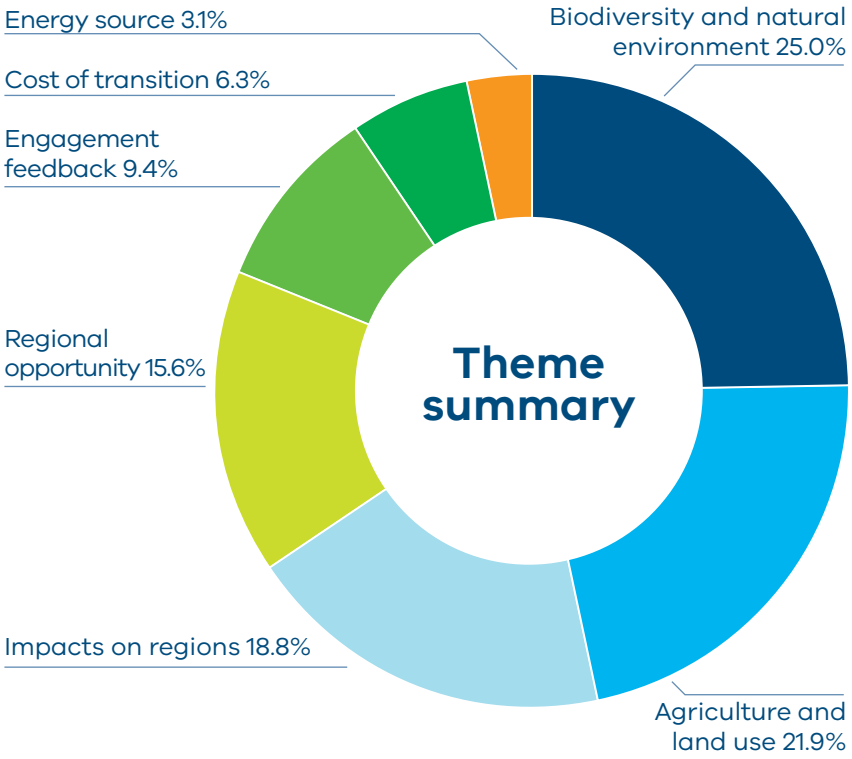
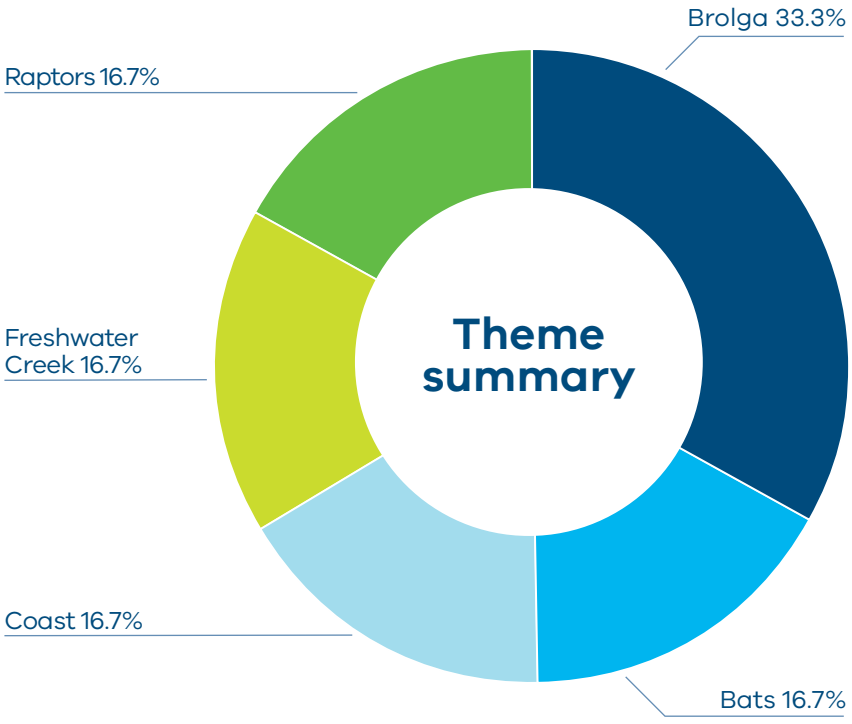


Figure 21: Biodiversity data from the Barwon region.



Responses from the Barwon region were limited. Themes included agriculture and land use, in particular the impact of renewable energy infrastructure on dairy farming, impact on the region, engagement feedback and several mentions of biodiversity, including the brolga.

Submissions focused on the impacts of renewable energy projects on the environment, health and agriculture, and called for strategic planning to balance these factors with the benefits of renewable energy.

This report is an update to the Interim Engagement Report - What We Heard that was released on 30 September and provides additional detail regarding feedback received on the study area.

14	5	4	1
REZ study area feedback forms	Guiding principles feedback forms	Submissions	Community events

The City of Greater Geelong raised concerns about the classification of Northern and Western Geelong Growth Area (NWGGA) as tiers 1 and 2 in the study area. The council said the NWGGA included the largest greenfield planning project in regional Victoria, with the capacity to accommodate 110,000 new Geelong residents, and supported rare and endangered ecological remnants on the Victorian Volcanic Plain. The area's biodiversity was endangered and already subject to significant threat from existing uses and proposed development, the council said.

Example comments from respondents:

"The Freshwater creek zone - with limited wildlife habitat, there are small section of bushland left around the Blackgate Road, Pettavel Road area. The rest of the region has been cleared for farming. With such limited bushland this area needs to be prioritised to be left alone, and or used to offset impacts elsewhere and attempt to increase native vegetation"

"It is vital to understand the areas that are compatible with such development. I assert that farmland of strategic agricultural significance in the state must be protected from renewable development. The dairy industry, in particular, is not compatible with large-scale wind and solar projects. In dairy areas, properties are typically smaller in size, have significant infrastructure, are more densely populated with homes and are an intense form of agriculture operating 7 days per week and demanding constant personnel presence."

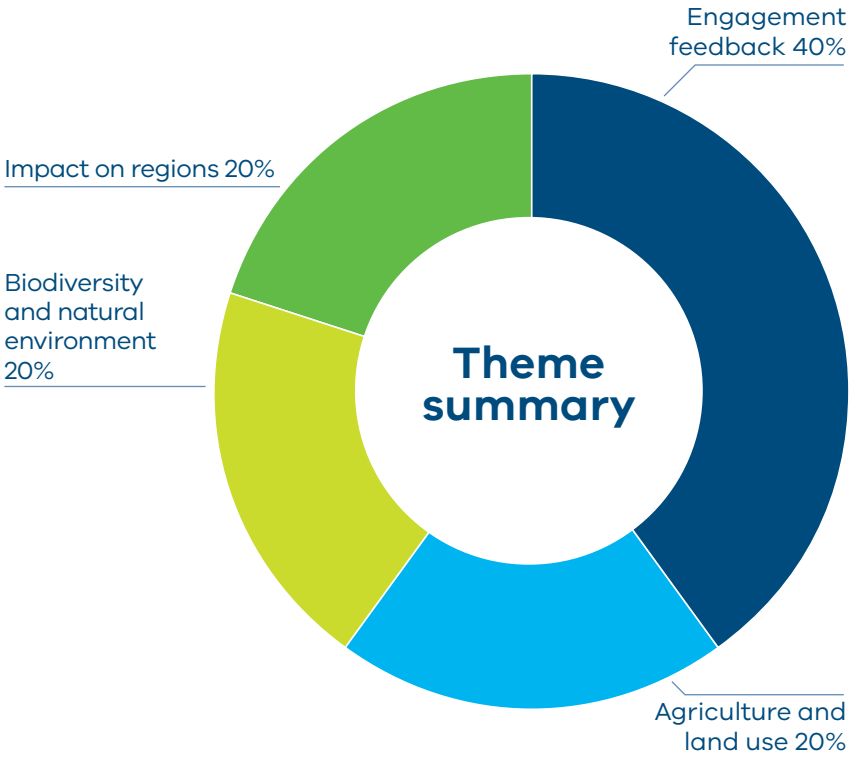
"The City's concern is that the proposed plan in this location is inconsistent with strategic planning for land relevant to NWGGA. The City recommends NWGGA is excluded from the VTP renewable energy zones."

"Southwest Victoria has very significant values in agriculture and environment. It would not be appropriate to overdevelop the area to the detriment of these values, when the power generated will largely be transmitted away from the region. The scale of any development should provide equally scaled community benefits, including to agricultural communities and regional environmental initiatives. Impacts on community amenity and social cohesion should be minimised."

Greater Melbourne

0	0	3	0
REZ study area feedback forms	Guiding principles feedback forms	Submissions	Community events

Figure 22: Feedback themes from Greater Melbourne.



There was limited feedback received from the greater Melbourne area. One submission advocated for further consideration for hosting infrastructure while the Melton City Council's submission supported VicGrid's creation to modernise grid network planning and emphasised the need for higher social licence standards by weighting projects with lower impacts. The submission highlights the council's experience with inadequate current planning and the significant community impact of proposed transmission lines. Recommendations include early community impact consideration, using new technologies like underground lines, and protecting green wedges from energy projects. The council is committed to working with stakeholders to ensure sustainable development while preserving environmental and cultural values.

There was also feedback from other regions calling for Greater Melbourne to be considered to host generation given the city created the greatest demand.

Example comments from respondents:

"Melton is a host community of high impact overhead transmission and has been not adequately considered in the Draft VTP Guidelines. As a host community of existing and proposed high voltage transmission lines, decisions made by VicGrid on the VTP will have significant impacts on not just communities within a future Renewable Energy Zone (REZ), but also existing communities such as the City of Melton."

"Why should the country have to put up with the ugly windfarms in an area that doesn't have sufficient wind anyway to the city people who use most of the electricity."

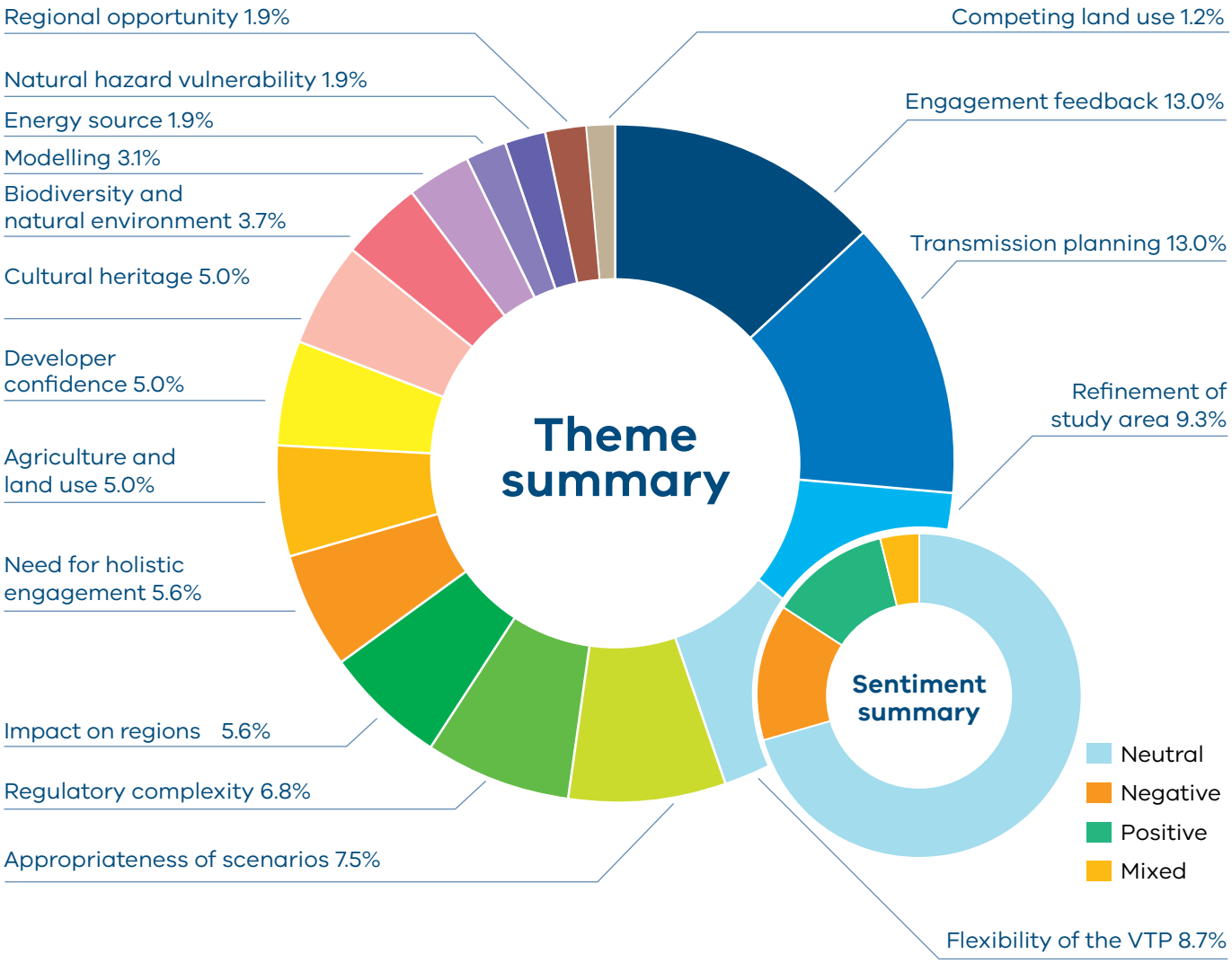
This report is an update to the Interim Engagement Report - What We Heard that was released on 30 September and provides additional detail regarding feedback received on the study area.

Industry feedback

We received 47 submissions from industry providing a rich body of feedback and insight into energy and broader industry needs and experience. Feedback from industry was broadly supportive of the VTP, offering various suggestions. Some of these related specifically to the guidelines and some to the study area.

Key themes include feedback on engagement, transmission planning, the flexibility of the VTP, the methodology to identify draft proposed REZs and the appropriateness of engagement. There are also many comments about the need for holistic engagement, issues with regulatory complexity and fostering developer confidence.

Figure 23: Major themes and sentiment from all channels.



This report is an update to the Interim Engagement Report - What We Heard that was released on 30 September and provides additional detail regarding feedback received on the study area.

Industry themes include:

Engagement feedback

There were several concerns raised about the robustness of engagement across community and Traditional Owners. This includes questions on how feedback will be applied, guardrails in place to ensure transparency, and suggestions for frameworks and methods to conduct engagement. Industry expressed concern about the potential impact if engagement was not undertaken on a genuine basis, with the intent that it be incorporated into the 2025 (and subsequent) VTP. There was also some appreciation for the scope and style of engagement.

Example comment from respondent:

"Provide further information about how VicGrid's community engagement model and associated objectives will be operationalised. For example, the engagement model could describe how it will facilitate an ongoing conversation with communities in addition to engaging within prescribed windows typical of standard consultation practices. It could also share what commitments VicGrid could make to provide accessible information to communities to 'myth bust' why energy infrastructure is required and how that infrastructure may or may not impact them."

Flexibility of the VTP process

There was feedback received about how future developments, including emerging technologies, generation mix variations, and high-impact-low-probability events could be addressed by the VTP. This includes questions about the frequency of the VTP, its relationships with other key documents such as the Australian Energy Market Operator's Integrated System Plan (AEMO's ISP) and the Victorian Annual Planning Report (VAPR).

Example comment from respondent:

"The implementation of innovative technologies like SmartValve in Victoria's electricity network offers a promising path for grid enhancement. In recent years, this technology has been used in other states, such as NSW. This technology provides a cost-effective and efficient method for increasing grid capacity, ensuring reliable power delivery to Victorian consumers while advancing the state's sustainability goals. VicGrid should review the recent projects, emerging network and renewable energy zone plans of other jurisdictions to ensure that innovations such as SmartValve are integrated to the future VTP wherever possible."

Transmission planning

This theme expresses an urgency to deliver transmission to support the transition. It included feedback that lack of visibility on future transmission solutions impacts developer confidence. Also included in this theme are suggestions about including non-network solutions as a complimentary solution to new transmission.

Example comment from respondent:

"We recommend that VicGrid assess the location, capacity and timelines for the transmission build and be flexible and allow developers to determine the location and type of generation to be connected to each REZ."

Process to identify REZs

This theme covers feedback focused on how the study area will be narrowed to draft proposed REZs, including suggestions and input about different areas of the state. Some submissions advocated for reassessing certain regions or tier assignments within a region, mentioning existing buffer zones and wind exclusion zones. Others pointed to the need to balance infrastructure requirements, land use, community sentiment and network access arrangements to ensure Victoria's REZs were conducive to investment. There were also suggestions for establishing a co-design process with developers, similar to an approach used in NSW.

Example comment from respondent:

"To promote the plan's effectiveness, the criteria for selecting REZs should be broad and include community sentiment, where the energy resources are, and where generators want to locate. The VTP should also include the necessary transmission investment to ensure that electricity generated in the REZs can reach demand centres."

Appropriateness of scenarios

There was significant feedback regarding the third scenario, which considers potential delays in infrastructure delivery across the National Electricity Market (NEM), and how realistic the delivery timeframes are. Additional feedback was received seeking further explanation of the inputs and assumptions supporting the scenarios. There were also calls for offshore wind to be included in planning.

Example comment from respondent:

"It is encouraging to see that the VTP has considered these targets [offshore wind targets] in all 3 scenarios and assumes that these are met in full i.e., 9 GW by 2040. It is also very encouraging to see that in 2 out of the 3 scenarios these targets are met on time and only one scenario considers a one-year delay, which we consider is a sensible scenario / sensitivity analysis to consider."

"The delay scenario posits only a one-year delay. Multi-year delays (when compared to the original timetable) of major infrastructure projects like Energy Connect, the Western Renewables Link, and Snowy 2.0, and ongoing delays to some of the projects supported by VRET2, indicate that this assumption is not sufficiently pessimistic."

Need for holistic engagement

Many industry submissions noted the guidelines did not contain information about other issues or concerns such as access, connections and community benefits. Feedback also asked for further information about the relationship between AEMO and VicGrid, and how existing projects would be considered.

Example comment from respondent:

"The details of access arrangements are therefore important inputs to the development of potential projects located inside and outside of REZs. To ensure that industry can continue to progress potential project developments in Victoria, VicGrid should engage with stakeholders early on potential access schemes under the VTP. This includes consultation on the proposed grid impact assessments for projects connecting outside of REZs, and any access arrangements that would apply to offshore wind projects connecting onshore to the Victorian grid."

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Developer confidence

This theme covers feedback related to the value proposition of REZs and the importance of providing developers with confidence to promote investment. Developers are seeking commitment about curtailment, to provide some assurance about the revenue potential of their investments. Feedback also raised the importance of knowing where network capacity exists. There is also reference to the material complexities of developing projects in Australia, such as connections, onerous planning processes, social licence concerns and significant competition from other international jurisdictions for limited capital. The importance of understanding benefits arrangements is also stressed as a key driver for developer confidence.

Example comment from respondent:

"When designing Victorian REZs we recommend that VicGrid consider the specific value proposition for developers to locate in a REZ. Driving investment in a REZ comes down to value for money, which is effectively the trade-off between the access fees levied and the various benefits to locating in a REZ."

Regulatory complexity

There was feedback from generator developers about the complexity of approvals processes at both state and federal levels delaying timely investment decisions and the importance of alignment between state and federal planning processes.

Example comment from respondent:

"We recommend that the Victorian Transmission Plan considers a coordinated approach with other jurisdictions regarding the timing and commercial structures of projects brought to market, ensuring alignment and optimal resource allocation."

Modelling

This covers feedback and comments on the modelling methodology. Suggestions included assessing marginal loss factors and including renewable generation costs at the long-run marginal cost of each technology. This theme also encompasses the sentiment that modelling is an important tool in the planning process, but VicGrid should not be overly reliant on it.

Example comment from respondent:

"While such modelling is important in the planning process, we therefore recommend that VicGrid not be overly reliant on this modelling."

How this feedback will be applied

Application of community feedback

Overview

The latest round of engagement represents the next step in integrating stakeholder feedback into the VTP.

Previous community feedback was sought via the Renewable Energy Planning Survey from November 2023 to February 2024. Insights gained through the survey were used to develop theme-level weights and validate inputs in the statewide strategic land use assessment that was used to identify the initial study area. An interactive mapping exercise was also undertaken to understand areas and landscapes important to communities across Victoria. Insights from this exercise were used to cross-reference community values against spatial datasets and areas considered more and less appropriate for REZ development.

Feedback received in this round of engagement has helped shape the 2024 VTP Guidelines, and will be considered as we investigate parts of the study area and develop the 2025 VTP. Study area feedback provides further insight into individual regions, community preferences and values. As the study area is investigated, these insights will help guide decisions and consideration of the impacts of REZ development on individual regions.

Guiding principles feedback

- Feedback about the guiding principles will inform the multi-criteria analysis in step 2 of the VTP methodology. This analysis enables quantitative and qualitative factors to be considered alongside energy market modelling as the study area is narrowed to draft proposed REZs. Guiding principles feedback showed the importance communities place on minimising land-use, cultural and environmental impacts. While land-use values have been considered as part of the strategic land use assessment to identify the initial study area, land-use constraints are also being factored into the multi-criteria analysis, alongside community preferences, generator interest and regional development indicators. The guiding principles feedback will also be used to assign weights to the factors considered in the analysis.
- Feedback also showed the importance communities place on avoiding overdevelopment to minimise impacts on regions. Communities asked for more information about how existing generation projects would be considered in developing the VTP. In response, the 2024 VTP Guidelines include more details about how in-service and committed generation projects will be considered in the multi-criteria analysis. This will ensure the overall level of development in a region is considered when determining the most appropriate locations for siting future generation across the state.
- Respondents also provided additional feedback about the guiding principles, including why they had chosen their scores, and additional information. This has been collected and centralised and will be used to make more granular regional and local decisions about the geographic location and development of REZs and input into the development of the 2025 VTP and beyond.

This report is an update to the Interim Engagement Report - What We Heard that was released on 30 September and provides additional detail regarding feedback received on the study area.

Study area feedback

The strategic land use assessment was applied to create the study area map as the starting point for investigations. As such, it is has served as a tool for interested stakeholders to provide further insight about the study area.

The purpose of the place-based engagement on the draft VTP Guidelines and study area was to gain important insights and understanding about regional concerns, values and sentiment. Feedback on the study area will be considered during the process, as parts of the study area are investigated and narrowed to identify draft proposed REZs. This feedback will be used in a number of ways:

- Place-based feedback, specifically agricultural land use, will be considered as we investigate parts of the study area. There is also work under way to consider the compatibility of different types of farming practices with energy generation and transmission infrastructure. Concerns relating to buffer zones and housing density are being further considered as the study area is investigated.
- Concerns about region-specific biodiversity, including endangered species, will also be considered when investigating smaller areas within the study area. Meanwhile, there is work under way to further investigate the use of datasets for specific species and collaboration with other government departments as part of a whole-of-government approach to protecting Victoria's biodiversity.
- There was a body of feedback concerning natural hazard vulnerability, specifically fire and flood. This ranged from region-specific insights to concerns about firefighting and renewable energy infrastructure. Natural hazards and climate vulnerability were considered in the strategic land use assessment and this additional feedback will be tested against existing datasets. We will work with regional stakeholders and the CFA to investigate concerns about firefighting near renewable energy infrastructure.
- There was a bulk of feedback about the cumulative impacts of generation project development and the need to take existing and planned energy projects in a region into account. In response, more detail has been provided in the 2024 VTP Guidelines, explaining how the methodology will take into account the size and location of in-service and committed generation projects. This will ensure the overall level of development in a region is considered when determining the most appropriate locations for siting future generation across the state. There was also feedback regarding the impost on the regions to produce power for the city and calling for areas in or close to the city to host more generation. It should be noted that rooftop solar is now the second largest source of renewable energy generation in Australia.
- There was doubt expressed that hosting renewable generation and transmission would benefit communities. VicGrid is currently working through feedback on the draft REZ Community Benefits Plan, which introduces initiatives to help address this issue. Community engagement on the draft plan was undertaken from 14 May 2024 to 25 June 2024 and the final plan is in development. More information about the proposed benefits has been included in the guidelines. The proposed REZ Community Benefits Plan is a framework for allocating direct benefits to communities hosting new transmission and renewable energy infrastructure. This involves coordination of financial contributions from transmission, storage and generation projects developed across the state. VicGrid's approach incorporates community views from the start to help make better decisions, minimise impacts and maximise tailored benefits for communities. Community benefit initiatives aim to establish and maintain positive long-term connections between new energy projects and local communities contributing to the future of the regions where projects are located.
- There was significant feedback on prior experiences with renewable generation and transmission projects. This relates to one of VicGrid's key purposes and VicGrid will continue to work to provide better outcomes for communities.

Engagement feedback

- There was a range of feedback on engagement including about style, duration, location, feedback form structure, and advertising and awareness of community events. All feedback has been recorded and will be applied to enhance future engagement.
- There were also questions on how feedback would be applied throughout VTP development. A section outlining engagement opportunities has been included in the 2024 VTP Guidelines. To maintain timely and transparent feedback processes, VicGrid remains committed to providing updates to stakeholders using channels such as the interim and final engagement reports and individual briefings as appropriate.
- Local councils stressed the need for ongoing collaboration with councils to align on local planning and policy development. VicGrid remains committed to collaborating with local councils throughout development of the VTP.

Application of Traditional Owner feedback

Feedback has highlighted the importance of mapping cultural heritage across Victoria to protect sensitive and significant sites. A clear message was that the available information used to understand areas of cultural heritage is incomplete.

Feedback from First Peoples and Traditional Owners on renewable energy and transmission development is a vital input in the process. For example, on cultural heritage mapping, feedback from First Peoples and Traditional Owners will be used as an input to the strategic land use assessment model to progressively include relevant tangible and intangible Aboriginal and historical cultural values to help avoid places of cultural significance. This will be done in conjunction with the more detailed assessments for proposed REZs and any new transmission projects for the 2025 VTP, and processes following publication of the 2025 VTP.

Note, the strategic land use assessment does not replace regulatory requirements. *The Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006 (Vic)* and the *Heritage Act 2017 (Vic),* along with other relevant state and Commonwealth legislation, still applies to any future works.

Feedback providing insights into specific sites and areas of significance will be applied as parts of the study area are investigated and narrowed to draft proposed REZs.

VicGrid will continue to work with Traditional Owners and First Peoples to support and empower them to assist in mapping and assessments.

Application of industry feedback

The feedback from industry was robustly examined to identify potential impacts to the draft VTP Guidelines, the 2025 VTP and related policy matters. Feedback has been applied to the 2024 VTP Guidelines. Further details about the changes that have been made can be found in the 2024 VTP Guidelines Changes Summary report. This feedback is also being considered as we develop the draft and final 2025 VTP and beyond.

Need for holistic engagement:

- The 2024 VTP Guidelines were updated to include information about new community benefits and network access arrangements, and the associated ongoing engagement with stakeholders.
- The relationship between VicGrid and AEMO is highlighted in the guidelines. VicGrid will continue to make ongoing efforts to communicate pertinent matters to industry through our established engagement methods, including briefings, one-on-one meetings and webinars.

Appropriateness of scenarios

- VicGrid notes the feedback on scenarios, specifically regarding scenario 3 and the potential for greater delays in delivering infrastructure projects across the NEM. Feedback on scenarios has been considered and changes have been made to the high-demand scenario 2 including updating with revised demand data and to incorporate Marinus Link Stage 2. The call for offshore wind to be included in planning is also noted. VicGrid will also consider the feedback to inform its weighting of the 3 scenarios and sensitivity analysis.

Flexibility of the VTP

- While the VTP will remain on its legislated timeline, it is part of a broader set of complementary planning documents including AEMO's ISPs and the VAPR. The timing and sequence are designed to allow for a balance between providing certainty for community and investors about renewable energy development and flexibility to respond to evolving circumstances and strategic integration of renewable energy sources as they are commissioned. The planning cycle allows for integration with existing planning documents allowing them to inform each other.

Modelling

- Feedback and suggestions about modelling has all been noted, but does not require a change to the methodology outlined in the guidelines.
- It should also be noted that energy market modelling is one input into the process to identify draft proposed REZs. A multi-criteria analysis will enable quantitative and qualitative impacts relating to land use, community preferences, regional development and developer/generator interest to also shape the process.

Engagement feedback

- Feedback has been considered and many of the suggestions such as approaches to engagement with First Peoples, placed-based engagement, the creation of industry reference groups, and use of the IAP2 framework are all part of our engagement strategy and approach. Wording in the guidelines about engagement has been uplifted to clearly reflect this.
- Documents such as this final engagement report aim to provide additional assurance of VicGrid's commitment to ongoing engagement efforts and meaningful consultation.

How this feedback will be applied

Transmission planning

- Concerns about the urgency of delivering transmission infrastructure will be considered in the broader engagement planning process and in the role VicGrid plays in guiding interactions with developers. This feedback will be considered as we work to provide certainty for communities and investors in renewable energy, and flexibility for transmission planning to respond to evolving circumstances.

Process to identify draft proposed REZs

- Industry feedback about specific parts of the study area will be included as part of the community and developer multi-criteria analysis, which will help narrow the study area to draft proposed REZs. Specifically, responses to the generator and developer survey will be considered. Industry feedback will be considered in conjunction with the existing data sources and community feedback.

Developer confidence

- Concerns about how to encourage, and not erode, developer confidence have been noted, and will be an important consideration in ongoing policy development and engagement. In addition, the 2024 VTP Guidelines have been updated to more clearly explain the value proposition to developers of locating a project in a REZ. Alongside strengthening community engagement, the Victorian Transmission Investment Framework reforms that guide VicGrid's work aim to foster confidence and a strong investment environment to drive timely coordination of investment in transmission, generation and storage infrastructure across Victoria's REZs.

This report is an update to the Interim Engagement Report - What We Heard that was released on 30 September and provides additional detail regarding feedback received on the study area.

Next steps

- The feedback received on the draft VTP Guidelines has been applied to the 2024 VTP Guidelines and will continue to shape decisions as the draft 2025 VTP is developed. Please see the 2024 VTP Guidelines Changes Summary report for details of the changes.
- Draft proposed REZs will be released early in 2025, as part of the draft 2025 VTP. These will be determined through a process that considers community preferences, economic costs, land use values, regional development opportunities, generator interest, existing levels of development and resource potential. For each area being investigated we will identify how much wind or solar capacity to build, how much battery storage capacity each needs, and when those projects should be brought online. There will be further opportunity for communities to provide feedback about draft proposed REZs.
- As part of the 2025 VTP, we will identify what upgrades and new transmission infrastructure will be needed to support the new generation capacity that will be connecting. We will also identify the order transmission projects should be developed. Combinations of projects will be assessed under different scenarios – or potential futures. Scenarios take into account the Victorian Government's energy policies, energy demand, the adoption of consumer energy resources (such as solar panels, batteries and electric vehicles) and the closure of existing power stations. The combination of transmission projects that is most robust across all scenarios will be identified as the draft optimal pathway, and released for feedback as part of the draft 2025 VTP. Community and industry feedback will shape the final optimal pathway, which will be published in the final 2025 VTP in mid-2025. The 2025 VTP will outline the transmission infrastructure projects required to enable REZ development over the next 15 years.

We will continue to seek to partner with First Peoples, work closely with communities from a place-based perspective, and engage with industry throughout the planning, investment and development stages of Victoria's energy transition.

Appendix 1

Engagement events

Community events

Type	Location	When	Type	Location	When
Drop-in	Warracknabeal	29 July	**Drop-in**	Sale	7-8 Aug
Webinar	Community webinar 1	29 July	**Drop-in**	Stawell	8-9 Aug
Drop-in	Birchip	30-31 July	**Drop-in**	Colac	8 Aug
Webinar	Community webinar 2	1 Aug	**Drop-in**	Ballan	12-13 Aug
Drop-in	Horsham	1-2 Aug	**Drop-in**	Korumburra	14-15 Aug
Drop-in	Hamilton	4-5 Aug	**Drop-in**	Rochester	14-15 Aug
Drop-in	Mortlake	6 Aug	**Drop-in**	Shepparton	15-16 Aug
Drop-in	Kerang	6-7 Aug	**Drop-in**	Foster	22 Aug

Traditional Owner

Type	Location	Type	Location
Briefing	Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation	**Briefing**	Barengi Gadjin Land Council Aboriginal Corporation
Briefing	Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owner Aboriginal Corporation	**Webinar**	Traditional Owner Briefing
Briefing	Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation	**Briefing**	Taungurung Clans Aboriginal Corporation
Briefing	Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation	**Traditional Owner Forum**	Melbourne Conference and Exhibition Centre

Industry events

Type	Group	Type	Group
Briefing	AEMO	**Briefing**	AEC member briefing
Briefing	VFF	**Briefing**	CEC internal briefing
Briefing	TCV	**Briefing**	EUAA internal briefing
Webinar	CEIG member briefing	**Briefing**	SEC
Briefing	AEC	**Briefing**	CEC Member Briefing
Briefing	ENA	**Briefing**	AMEC
Webinar	Industry		

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Appendix 2

There were 66 public submissions from individuals. We also received public submissions from the following organisations:

- ACEN Australia
- APA
- AusNet
- Bass Coast Shire Council
- BEAM Mitchell Environment Group
- Biodiversity Council
- Campaspe Shire Council
- Central Highlands Regional Partnership
- Clean Energy Council
- Clean Energy Investor Group
- Community Power Agency
- Corangamite Shire Council
- Cubico Sustainable Investments
- Dairy Australia
- Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions
- Energy Storage Industries
- Engie
- FERA
- Gannawarra Shire Council
- Glenelg Shire Council
- Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority
- Hepburn Shire Council
- International Association of Public Participation
- Kingston & District Power Alliance
- Latrobe City Council
- Meadow Creek Agricultural Community Action Group
- Melton City Council
- Moorabool Shire Council
- Moyne Shire Council
- Murrindindi Shire Council
- Neoen
- Nexa Advisory
- Northern Grampians Shire Council
- Origin Energy
- Pyrenees Shire Council
- Quandong Holdings
- RE-Alliance
- Regional Development Australia Grampians
- Rural City of Wangaratta
- South Gippsland Shire Council
- Southerly Ten
- Southern Grampians Shire Council
- Storey & Ward Lawyers
- Strathbogies Responsible Renewables Community Group
- Swan Hill Rural Council
- Southern Wimmera Renewables Research Association
- Trust for Nature
- Victorian Farmers Federation
- Victorian Greenhouse Alliances
- Wallaloo and Gre Gre District Alliance
- Yarriambiack Shire Council

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