

Partnering with Traditional Owners throughout transmission planning and development

Victoria will need to build new, major electricity transmission infrastructure across many regional parts of the state for the first time in around 30 years.

The Government wants to make sure this is done in a way that minimises impacts on Country and provides dedicated benefits to impacted Traditional Owner groups and Aboriginal Victorians.

This fact sheet highlights key features of a new framework for planning and investing in new major transmission infrastructure to achieve this.

The purpose of this document is to invite feedback from Traditional Owner groups on preferred partnering approaches to implement this new framework, building on the Department of Energy, Environment, and Climate Action's (DEECA) existing partnerships.



Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners

We acknowledge and respect Victorian 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.

DEECA is committed to genuinely partnering with Victorian Traditional Owners and Victoria's Aboriginal community to progress their aspirations.

Background

As Victoria's ageing and increasingly unreliable coal-fired power stations retire, more and more renewables – paired with battery storage – will provide the state's electricity as part of our clean energy transition.

New transmission infrastructure is critical to get electricity from new areas where it is generated to homes and businesses where it is used.

Renewable Energy Zones (REZs) are areas in our state with the greatest potential for renewable energy, such as wind, sunshine, rain, tides, waves and geothermal heat. Developing these clean energy resources at scale and in a coordinated way with the batteries and high-voltage wires required to store and transport electricity will support the next-generation power grid we are building.

We need good planning and management to deliver the best outcomes for all Victorians. This must be coupled with genuine partnership with Traditional Owners, communities and industry.

That's why the Victorian Government will introduce new legislation into Parliament in early 2024 to change the way electricity transmission infrastructure in Victoria is planned and developed.

This decision reflects feedback received through public consultation in 2022, demonstrating broad support for a new framework that facilitates anticipatory investment and better integrates community views, land use considerations and environmental impacts earlier in the planning process.

Traditional Owners have highlighted their status as rights holders, with VicGrid's intentions centring around how to partner meaningfully throughout the whole transmission planning and delivery process.

A [summary report of findings](#)¹ from this consultation was released in February 2023.

VicGrid, a body within DEECA, will be responsible for implementing the new framework, and coordinating and planning Victoria's major transmission links and REZs.

Traditional Owners

We know that Traditional Owners are more than stakeholders – they are partners who have rights that must be upheld under the *Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010 (Vic)*, *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006 (Vic)* and *Native Title Act 1993 (Cth)*. Traditional Owners have legal rights and cultural responsibility that will be recognised.

We understand and respect the First Peoples' legal and cultural rights, along with their deep connections with Land and Sea Country as original custodians.

VicGrid, under DEECA's [Pupangarli Marnmarnepu 'Owning Our Future' Aboriginal Self-Determination Reform Strategy](#)², is committed to partnering with Traditional Owners and other Aboriginal Victorians to identify key considerations and concerns, and benefits and opportunities of interest to Traditional Owners, Aboriginal communities and other Aboriginal stakeholders.

¹ engage.vic.gov.au/victorian-transmission-investment-framework

² deeca.vic.gov.au/aboriginalselfdetermination/self-determination-reform-strategy



Victorian Transmission Investment Framework

The Victorian Government is changing how REZs and major transmission links are currently planned and built to ensure it benefits all Victorians.

The new framework:

- Sets out a planning process for new major transmission network upgrades and expansion for the next 25 years. As a result of this process, a Victorian Transmission Plan will be published every 4 years. The Plan will prepare Victoria for a range of possible future scenarios in a way that minimises the risk of both under-investment (not being prepared) and over-investment (building more than is necessary).
- Incorporates views of Traditional Owners, local communities, landowners and other regional stakeholders as well as land-use and environmental considerations through a new planning tool – strategic land use assessment. These views are fed into the planning process earlier, well before transmission routes are determined.
- Provides community benefits for Traditional Owners and local communities that host new transmission infrastructure.
- Affirms DEECA's Traditional Owner engagement and partnership principles as a foundation for engaging on preferred partnering approaches and commitment to apply feedback based on the rights and self-determining interests of Traditional Owners.
- Establishes VicGrid as the responsible entity for implementing the new framework, including coordinating major transmission infrastructure development, alongside a wider role in delivering improved engagement outcomes and benefits for Traditional Owners and local communities.

The next section describes in more detail specific features of the new framework. VicGrid would like to further engage with Traditional Owners to understand your views and expectations on partnering and developing an agreed set of principles of what our partnership with you means.

Strategic Land Use Assessments

The strategic land use assessment (SLUA) will support better decisions on land use and seek to minimise impacts of transmission development on communities, landscape, cultural heritage and biodiversity. This tool will be used to identify the most appropriate areas to locate transmission, generation and storage infrastructure in Victoria, taking into account Traditional Owner and community values, priorities and concerns. Unlike the existing transmission planning process, the SLUA will apply these considerations before a major transmission project or preferred route is selected to ensure any development minimises adverse impacts as much as possible.

DEECA respects and supports Traditional Owners' rights on Country as Custodian of the Land. This will be an important factor in the SLUA process. As part of this, where transmission projects impact public land, the State must uphold its obligations to Traditional Owners under the *Native Title Act 1993* (Cth) and the *Traditional Owners Settlement Act 2010* (Vic).

The new framework will introduce a SLUA process that involves two phases:

Phase 1

Landscape level suitability assessment

A high-level assessment that identifies study areas (i.e. Priority REZ Areas) for the future development of generation and transmission. Each 'study area' may span up to ~ 50km wide.

Phase 2

Detailed identification of transmission corridors

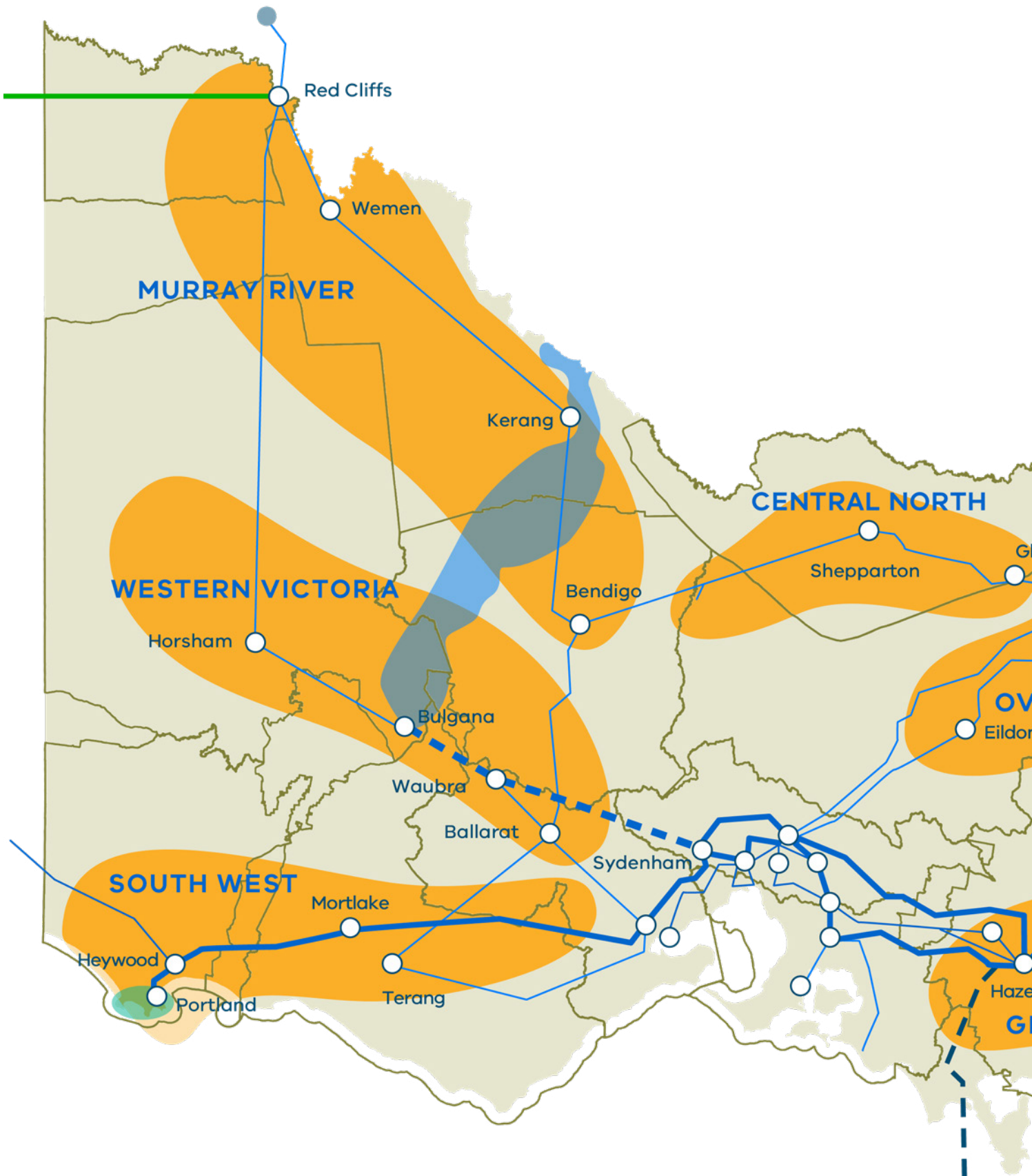
Detailed assessment to identify preferred corridors for locating transmission within each Priority REZ Area identified from Phase 1. Each corridor may span up to ~3-10km wide.

Alongside broader reforms, the Victorian Government is progressing the development of the first Victorian Transmission Plan. Draft priority areas for REZ development are expected to be identified for consultation by early 2024. This will inform a first draft Victorian Transmission Plan for consultation expected by late 2024.

Development of the first Victorian Transmission Plan will be an opportunity to trial elements of the new planning process, like the SLUA. We will build and enhance our approach over time to improve future Victorian Transmission Plans.



Victorian Renewable Energy Zones



New major transmission links under development

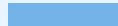
INTEGRATED SYSTEM PLAN



Western Renewables Link (WRL)

PROPOSED ROUTE

New 190km high voltage overhead transmission line from Sydenham to Bulgana in Victoria's west



VNI-West¹

AREA OF INTEREST FOR CURRENT PREFERRED PROJECT OPTION 5A (TO BULGANA)

New high voltage overhead transmission line connecting Victoria and NSW. Option 5A connects WRL (at Bulgana) with EnergyConnect (at Dinawan) via a new terminal station near Kerang, and crossing the Murray River north of Kerang

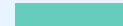


MarinusLink

PROPOSED ROUTE

New 1500MW undersea and underground electricity connection to further link Tasmania and Victoria.

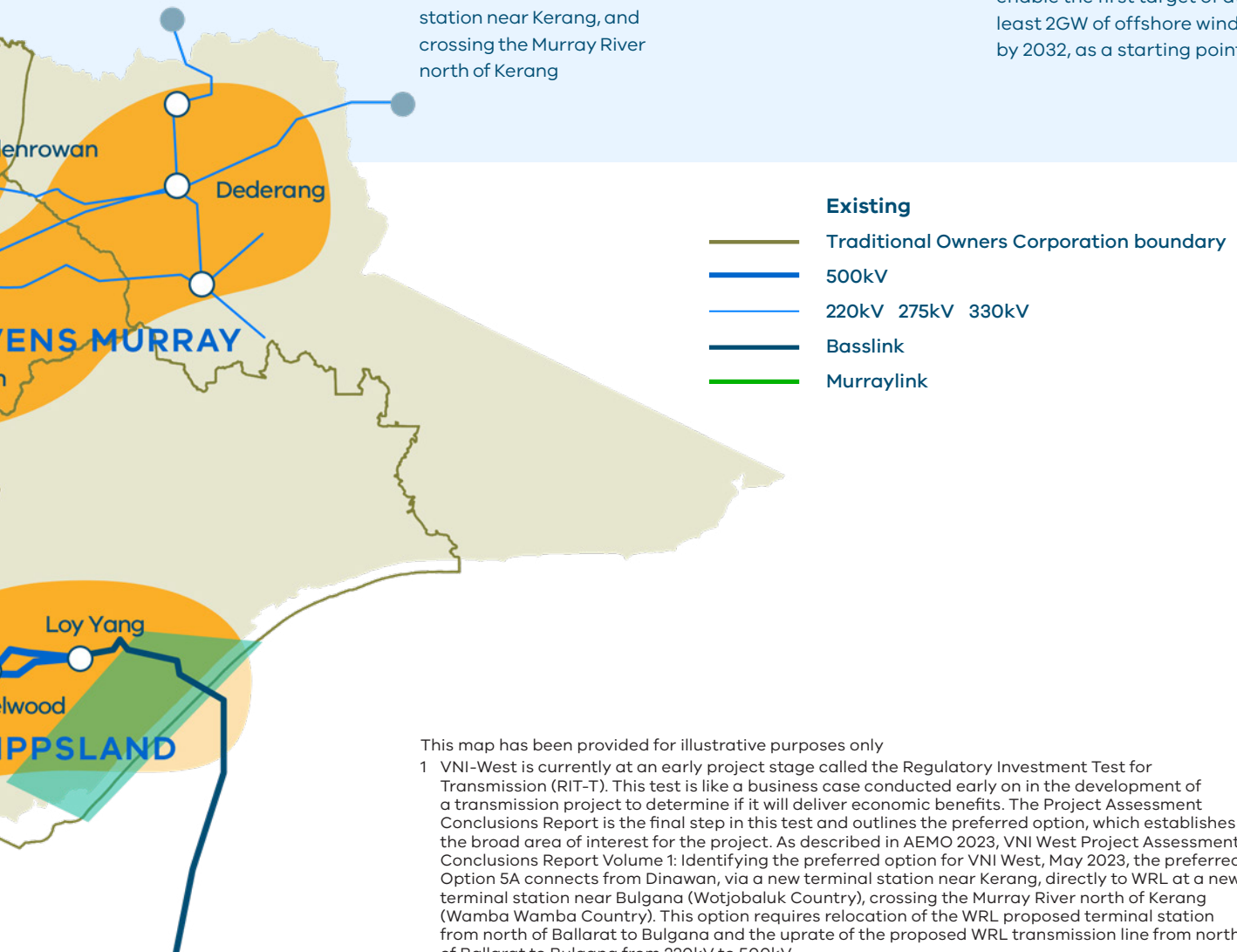
REZ DEVELOPMENT



Offshore Wind Transmission²

AREA OF INTEREST FOR OFFSHORE WIND CONNECTION POINTS

Development of transmission infrastructure to provide coordinated connection points for offshore wind developers in Gippsland and Portland to enable the first target of at least 2GW of offshore wind by 2032, as a starting point.



This map has been provided for illustrative purposes only

1 VNI-West is currently at an early project stage called the Regulatory Investment Test for Transmission (RIT-T). This test is like a business case conducted early on in the development of a transmission project to determine if it will deliver economic benefits. The Project Assessment Conclusions Report is the final step in this test and outlines the preferred option, which establishes the broad area of interest for the project. As described in AEMO 2023, VNI West Project Assessment Conclusions Report Volume 1: Identifying the preferred option for VNI West, May 2023, the preferred Option 5A connects from Dinawan, via a new terminal station near Kerang, directly to WRL at a new terminal station near Bulgana (Wotjobaluk Country), crossing the Murray River north of Kerang (Wamba Wamba Country). This option requires relocation of the WRL proposed terminal station from north of Ballarat to Bulgana and the uprate of the proposed WRL transmission line from north of Ballarat to Bulgana from 220kV to 500kV.

2 Offshore Wind Implementation Statement 1, October 2022, p12-13

The new framework does not change the planning and environmental approvals processes for transmission infrastructure. However, the SLUA process will ensure that consideration of Traditional Owner views and cultural values that are generally required as part of assessment criteria during later stages of project approvals, including under the *Environmental Effects Act (1978) (Vic)*, will also be addressed early in the planning process. This is expected to minimise the risk that transmission projects identified through the new framework will be proposed in sensitive areas of cultural heritage.

Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Data

The Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Register and Information System (ACHRIS) is the online tool that is a central repository for Traditional Owners to store information about cultural heritage. ACHRIS is currently the only up to date and authoritative documented source for known Aboriginal cultural heritage places and objects within Victoria.

DEECA Regional Heritage Specialists are trained to access ACHRIS, as well as being able to assess and record Aboriginal heritage places and objects in partnership and recognition of Traditional Owners' and Elders' knowledge and understanding.

VicGrid understands that Traditional Owners are knowledge holders of intangible cultural heritage values of landscape such as story and song lines, which may not be captured in ACHRIS or any other databases. We also understand that a number of Traditional Owner groups are working on developing their own cultural landscape mapping databases.

In addition to early consultation with Regional Heritage Specialists and use of data on ACHRIS, VicGrid is keen to partner with Traditional Owners to develop an approach that supports identification of areas that are suitable for locating energy infrastructure and minimises impacts on areas of sensitive cultural value. This approach will provide valuable feedback for the development of the first Victorian Transmission Plan and inform how we undertake future SLUAs.

Some examples of potential partnering approaches could include:

- Supporting establishment of Traditional Owner Group cultural landscape mapping databases.
- Establishing a dedicated Traditional Owner Advisory Forum for Phase 1 of SLUA.
- Establishing a number of dedicated Traditional Owner Reference Committees for Phase 2 of SLUA, each comprising representatives of Traditional Owner groups that may be affected by potential transmission corridors.

Community benefits

An important part of the new framework is introducing a balanced approach to community benefits so that Traditional Owners and local communities that are impacted also benefit from renewable energy development.

As part of a package of measures, the Victorian Government is committed to enabling dedicated benefits for Traditional Owners. These benefits will apply to new transmission projects, including the Western Renewables Link and VNI West projects as well as Marinus Link and the transmission connections for offshore wind. VicGrid will work in partnership with you to understand your expectations of benefits.

VicGrid is committed to partnering with Traditional Owners embedding self-determination outcomes in our business practices and service delivery, and ensuring you have a say with how you and your communities benefit from this infrastructure.

Methods and timelines for engagement will be jointly led by Traditional Owners and key government specialists with the aim of supporting Aboriginal decision making, leadership and self-governance.

Some examples of potential partnering approaches could include:

- Funding for dedicated program managers to focus on renewable energy and participate in planning and consultation processes
- Establishing an advisory group focused on renewable energy to provide advice to Traditional Owner groups



Find out more

For more information, and to read the Victorian Transmission Investment Framework Final Design Paper, please visit



engage.vic.gov.au/victorian-transmission-investment-framework

For further information about our work developing Victoria's REZs, please visit



energy.vic.gov.au/renewable-energy/renewable-energy-zones

For questions or to provide feedback, please contact your DEECA Program Manager Aboriginal Partnerships or Regional Manager, Community and Partnership Programs, or



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