Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure

Planning Secretary's Environmental Assessment Requirements

Section 5.16 of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*Part 8 of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Regulation 2021

Application Number	SSI-72887208
Project	 Victoria to New South Wales Interconnector West (VNI West), which includes: approximately 235 km of new 500kV double-circuit overhead transmission line between the NSW and Victoria border near Murrabit and the new Dinawan substation; expansion of the new Dinawan 330 kV substation; connection and line diversion works at the existing Wagga Wagga substation, new Dinawan substation; and the new Gugaa substation; and ancillary works, such as temporary facilities including construction compounds and laydown areas, upgrading or establishing new access tracks, concrete batching plants, stockpiling areas, accommodation facilities, and site offices.
Location	 From the Victorian border at Murrabit to the new Dinawan substation in NSW, traversing the Murray River, Edward River and Murrumbidgee local government areas (LGAs). From the Wagga Wagga substation and finishing at the new Gugaa substation, within the Wagga Wagga LGA.
Proponent	Transgrid
Date of Issue	4 October 2024
General Requirements	The Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) must meet the minimum form and content requirements as prescribed by Part 8 of the <i>Environmental Planning and Assessment Regulation 2021</i> (the Regulation) and must have regard to the <i>State Significant Infrastructure Guidelines</i> . In particular, the EIS must include:
	 a stand-alone executive summary; a summary of the background to the project, including alternatives that were considered to the project; a full description of the project, accompanied by suitable maps and plans, including the: disturbance area; physical layout of the project over time, including sections of key components; key uses and activities to be carried out on site; likely timing of the project including any stages, the key phases within each stage (site preparation, construction, commissioning, operation, decommissioning and rehabilitation) and the sequencing of these stages and phases; the Project Area (as per Table 1 of the SSI guidelines – preparing an environmental impact statement) and Development Footprint (disturbance area including but not limited to areas for infrastructure, road works, access tracks); consistency in information presented in the EIS and all technical reports,

including distances, development footprint, project design and infrastructure proposed, construction timeframes and receiver numbers;

- the relevant strategic context for the project, having regard to:
 - State legislation, policies and guidelines including current initiatives to improve energy security and reliability in the National Electricity Market;
 - any other existing, approved or proposed projects that could result in cumulative impacts with the project; and
 - an analysis of the feasible alternatives to carrying out the project, considering its objectives, including the consequences of not carrying out the infrastructure;
- the relevant statutory context for the project, including:
 - the assessment pathway for the project under the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*;
 - the approvals required before the project may be carried out; and
 - any relevant matters for consideration;
- a description of the engagement that was carried out during the preparation of the EIS, the key issues raised during this engagement and the proposed engagement strategy for the project if it is approved;
- a risk assessment of the potential environmental impacts of the project, identifying the key issues for further assessment;
- an assessment of the likely economic, social and environmental impacts of the project having regard to the requirements in any relevant Government legislation, policies and guidelines (see below), and any other significant issues identified in the risk assessment, focusing on the specific issues identified below, including:
 - the state of the existing environment;
 - community views;
 - the measures that would be implemented to avoid or minimise impacts, including a consolidated summary of the proposed mitigation measures for the project;
 - the predicted impacts of the project, including any cumulative impacts of the site and existing or proposed developments in the region taking into consideration any relevant legislation, environmental planning instruments, guidelines, policies, plans and industry codes of practice including Cumulative Impact Assessment Guideline (DPIE); and
 - actions proposed to deal with any uncertainties associated with the assessment; and
- a detailed evaluation of the merits of the project as a whole.

Estimated Development Cost and Employment

- Provide the estimated cost (EDC) of the project prepared in accordance with the relevant planning circular using the Standard Form of EDC Report.
- Provide an estimate of the retained and new jobs that would be created during the construction and operational phases of the project including details of the methodology to determine the figures provided.

In addition the EIS must also be accompanied by a declaration from a Registered Environmental Practitioner that the EIS includes the information specified in the Department's Registered Environmental Assessment Practitioner Guidelines.

Key issues

The level of assessment of key matters must be proportionate to the likely significance of the impacts on the matter.

In particular, the EIS must address the following specific matters:

Biodiversity:

- an assessment of the biodiversity impacts of the project, in accordance with the *NSW Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016*, the Biodiversity Assessment Method (BAM) and documented in a Biodiversity Development Assessment Report (BDAR). The BDAR must:
 - be prepared using the approved BDAR template;
 - document the application of the avoid, minimise and offset framework including assessing all direct, indirect and prescribed impacts in accordance with the

BAM:

- assess any impacts to nearby conservation areas, including Murray Valley National Park (including the Wetuppa Forest) and South West Woodlands Nature Reserve;
- assess the impacts associated with all ancillary infrastructure, including the transport route road upgrades;
- include an assessment for SAII in accordance with Section 9.1 of the BAM;
 and
- be finalised by an accredited assessor as BAM-compliant within 14 days of submission;
- an assessment of the likely direct and indirect impacts on listed aquatic threatened species, populations or ecological communities, scheduled under the Fisheries Management Act 1994, and a description of the measures to minimise and rehabilitate impacts;
- a cumulative impact assessment of biodiversity values in the region from nearby developments; and
- if an offset is required, details of the measures proposed to address the offset obligations.

Heritage:

- an assessment of the impact to Aboriginal heritage (cultural and archaeological), including test excavations, in accordance with the *Guide to Investigating*, Assessing and Reporting on Aboriginal Cultural Heritage in NSW (OEH, 2011) and the Code of Practice for the Archaeological Investigation of Aboriginal Objects in NSW (DECCW, 2010);
- evidence of adequate consultation with Aboriginal parties in determining and assessing impacts, having regard to the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Consultation Requirements for Proponents (DECCW, 2010);
- if the test excavations do not conform with the Code of Practice, then the excavations may only be carried out with the written endorsement of Heritage NSW following consultation with the Registered Aboriginal Parties; and
- an assessment of the impact to historic heritage having regard to the *Guidelines* for Preparing a Statement of Heritage Impact (DPE, 2023).

Water and Soils:

- an assessment of the impacts of the project on the quantity and quality of the region's surface water resources, including the Murray River, Edward-Wakool system, Billabong-Yanco system, the Murrumbidgee River and other watercourses present within the proposed corridor, having regard to NSW Water Quality Objectives;
- details of water requirements, supply arrangements and wastewater disposal arrangements for construction and operation (including consultation with suppliers);
- an assessment of the impacts of the project on groundwater aquifers and groundwater dependent ecosystems having regard to the NSW Aquifer Interference Policy and relevant Water Sharing Plans;
- an assessment of the potential flooding impacts and risks of the project;
- where the project involves works within 40 metres of the high bank of any river, lake or wetlands (collectively waterfront land), identify likely impacts to the waterfront land, and how the activities are to be designed and implemented in accordance with the DPI Guidelines for Controlled Activities on Waterfront Land (2018) and (if necessary) Why Do Fish Need to Cross the Road? Fish Passage Requirements for Waterway Crossings (DPI 2003); and Policy & Guidelines for Fish Habitat Conservation & Management (DPI, 2013); and
- a description of the erosion and sediment control measures that would be implemented to mitigate any impacts in accordance with *Managing Urban Stormwater: Soils & Construction* (Landcom 2004).

Land:

an assessment of impacts of the project on soils and land capability of the site

- and surrounds:
- identify potential biosecurity risks and appropriate strategies to prevent, eliminate or minimise those risks;
- an assessment of the risk of soil contamination and disturbance of land (including associated with naturally occurring asbestos in the vicinity of the site); and
- an assessment of impacts of the project on agricultural land, land reserved under the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974, Crown lands including State Forests, travelling stock reserves, mineral resources and exploration licenses, rail reserves and pipeline corridors.

Transport:

- an assessment of the peak and average traffic generation, including light vehicles, shuttle buses, heavy vehicles and high risk heavy vehicles requiring escort and construction worker transportation;
- an assessment of the likely transport impacts to the site access route(s), including the above listed vehicles, site access point(s), any Crown land, particularly in relation to the capacity and condition of the roads, road safety and intersection performance;
- a cumulative impact assessment of traffic from nearby developments (including mining operations);
- provide details of measures to mitigate and / or manage potential impacts (developed in consultation with the relevant road / rail authorities) including:
 - a schedule of all required road upgrades (including resulting from heavy vehicle and over mass / over dimensional traffic haulage routes);
 - clear figures of proposed road upgrades (including the site access point); and
 - road maintenance contributions, and any other traffic control measures; and
- details of the ongoing maintenance works required to service assets, outlining the measures to maintain the road;

Visual:

- a detailed assessment for the whole project of the likely visual impacts of the project on surrounding residences, scenic or significant vistas, night lighting, air traffic and road corridors in the public domain; and
- provide details of measures to mitigate and / or manage potential impacts.

Noise:

- including an assessment of the construction noise impacts of the project in accordance with the *Interim Construction Noise Guideline* (ICNG), blasting impacts, cumulative noise impacts (considering other developments in the area), and operational noise impacts in accordance with the *NSW Noise Policy for Industry* (2017), including corona noise; and
- provide details of measures to mitigate and / or manage potential impacts.

Air Quality:

• an assessment of the air quality impacts of the project, including from dust.

Hazards:

- identify possible effects on telecommunications systems, assess impacts and mitigation measures to avoid potential disruptions to radio communication services, which may include the installation and maintenance of alternative sites;
- an assessment of potential hazards and risks associated with electric and magnetic fields (EMF) having regard to the latest advice of the Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency (ARPANSA);
- an assessment of the risks to public safety, paying particular attention to bushfire risks, emergency egress and evacuation, the handling and use of any dangerous goods and potential impacts to high pressure gas pipelines;
- describe the bushfire protection measures for the project, including the proposed approach to vegetation management in the transmission easement, having regard to the requirements in the *Planning for Bushfire Protection Guideline* (RFS 2019); and

- assess potential impacts on aviation safety, including:
 - defined air traffic routes, aircraft operating heights, approach / departure procedures, radar interference, communication systems, navigation aids, use of emergency helicopter access, aerial baiting and culling in the National Parks, safe and efficient aerial application of agricultural fertilisers and pesticide, and aerial fire control;
 - identify certified aerodromes within 30km of the transmission line and uncertified aerodromes and landing areas within 10km of the transmission line, and consider the impact to nearby aerodromes, aircraft landing areas;
 - address impacts on obstacle limitation surfaces; and
 - identify aviation marking requirements, if any.

Waste:

 identify, quantify and classify the likely waste streams to be generated throughout all stages of the project, and describe the measures to be implemented to reduce waste generation, manage, reuse, recycle and safely dispose of this waste (in consultation with waste facilities, including Council).

Social Impact:

 an assessment of the social impacts in accordance with Social Impact Assessment Guideline (DPIE) and SIA Guideline - Technical Supplement (DPE) and consideration of any increase in demand for community infrastructure and services, and details of how the construction workforce will be managed to minimise local impacts, including consideration of construction workforce accommodation.

Economic:

- an assessment of the economic benefits of the project for the region and the State as a whole, including:
 - an assessment of the impacts to State Forests; and
 - details of any proposed benefit sharing arrangements.

Plans and Documents

The EIS must include all relevant plans, architectural drawings, diagrams and relevant documentation required under Part 8 of the EP&A Regulation. Provide these as part of the EIS rather than as separate documents.

In addition, the EIS must include high quality files of maps and figures of the subject site and proposal.

Legislation, Policies & Guidelines

The assessment of the key issues listed above must take into account relevant guidelines, policies, and plans as identified.

A list of some of the legislation, policies and guidelines that may be relevant to the assessment of the project can be found at:

- https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/Policy-and-Legislation/Planning-reforms/Rapid-Assessment-Framework/Improving-assessment-guidance
- https://www.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/major-projects/assessment/policies-and-guidelines;
 and
- https://www.dcceew.gov.au/environment/epbc/publications#assessments.

Engagement

During the preparation of the EIS, you must consult with the relevant local, State or Commonwealth Government authorities, infrastructure and service providers, community groups, affected landowners, Native Title holders, exploration licence holders, quarry operators and mineral title holders.

Expiry Date

If you do not lodge an EIS for the infrastructure within 2 years of the issue date of these SEARs, your SEARs will expire. If an extension to these SEARs will be required, please consult with the Planning Secretary 3 months prior to the expiry date.

Attachment A

Guidelines for preparing assessment documentation relevant to the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act* 1999 (EPBC Act) for proposals being assessed under the NSW Assessment Bilateral

Victoria NSW Interconnector West Project (EPBC 2024/09871)

Introduction

- On 4 September 2024, a delegate of the Federal Minister for the Environment and Water determined that the Victoria NSW Interconnector West Project was a controlled action under section 75 of the *Environment* Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act). The EPBC Act controlling provisions for the proposed actions are:
 - i. listed threatened species and communities (sections 18 and 18A).
- The proposed action will be assessed in accordance with the bilateral assessment agreement Amending Agreement No. 1, and as such, is required to be assessed in the manner specified in Schedule 1 to that Agreement, including, addressing the matters outlined in Schedule 4 of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Regulations 2000* (EPBC Regulations).
- 3. The proponent must undertake an assessment of all protected matters that may be impacted by the development under the controlling provision identified in paragraph 1. The Federal Minister for the Environment and Water considers that the proposed action is likely to have a significant impact on threatened species and communities listed in Appendix A.
- 4. The proponent must consider each of the protected matters under the triggered controlling provisions that may be impacted by the action. Note that this may not be a complete list and it is the responsibility of the proponent to undertake an analysis of the relevant impacts and ensure all protected matters that are likely to be impacted are assessed for the Commonwealth Minister's consideration.

General Requirements

Relevant Regulations

5. The Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) must address all matters outlined in Schedule 4 of the EPBC Regulations and all matters outlined below in relation to the controlling provisions.

Project Description

- 6. The title of the action, background to the action and current status.
- 7. The precise location and description of all works to be undertaken (including associated offsite works and infrastructure), structures to be built or elements of the action that may have impacts on Matters of National Environmental Significance (MNES).
- 8. How the action relates to any other actions that have been, or are being taken in the region affected by the action.
- 9. How the works are to be undertaken and design parameters for those aspects of the structures or elements of the action that may have relevant impacts on MNES.

Impacts

- 10. The EIS must include an assessment of the relevant impacts of the action on the matters protected by the controlling provisions, including:
 - i. a description and detailed assessment of the nature and extent of the likely direct, indirect and consequential impacts, including short term and long term relevant impacts;
 - ii. a statement whether any relevant impacts are likely to be unknown, unpredictable or irreversible;
 - iii. analysis of the significance of the relevant impacts; and
 - iv. any technical data and other information used or needed to make a detailed assessment of the relevant impacts.

Avoidance, mitigation and offsetting

- 11. For <u>each</u> of the relevant matters protected that are likely to be significantly impacted by the action, the EIS must provide information on proposed avoidance and mitigation measures to manage the relevant impacts of the action including:
 - i. a description, and an assessment of the expected or predicted effectiveness of the mitigation measures:
 - ii. any statutory policy basis for the mitigation measures;
 - iii. the cost of the mitigation measures;
 - iv. an outline of an environmental management plan that sets out the framework for continuing management, mitigation and monitoring programs for the relevant impacts of the action, including any provisions for independent environmental auditing;
 - v. the name of the agency responsible for endorsing or approving each mitigation measure or monitoring program.
- 12. Where a significant residual adverse impact to a relevant protected matter is considered likely, the EIS must provide information on the proposed offset strategy, including discussion of the conservation benefit associated with the proposed offset strategy.
- 13. For <u>each</u> of the relevant matters likely to be impacted by the action the EIS must provide reference to, and consideration of, relevant Commonwealth guidelines and policy statements including any:
 - i. conservation advice or recovery plan for the species or community;
 - ii. relevant threat abatement plan for the species or community;
 - iii. wildlife conservation plan for the species; and
 - iv. any strategic assessment.

Note: the relevant guidelines and policy statements for each species and community are available from the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water Species Profiles and Threats Database: http://www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/sprat/public/sprat.pl.

14. In addition to the general requirements described above, specific information is required with respect to each of the determined controlling provisions. These requirements are outlined in paragraphs 15-17.

Key Issues

Biodiversity (threatened species and communities)

Assessment Requirements

- 15. The EIS must identify <u>each EPBC</u> Act listed threatened species and communities likely to be impacted by the action. For any species and communities that are likely to be impacted, the proponent must provide a description of the nature, quantum and consequences of the impacts. For species and communities potentially located in the project area or in the vicinity that are not likely to be impacted, provide evidence why they are not likely to be impacted.
- 16. For <u>each</u> of the EPBC Act listed threatened species and communities likely to be impacted by the action the EIS must provide a separate:
 - description of the habitat (including identification and mapping of suitable breeding habitat, suitable foraging habitat, important populations and habitat critical for survival), with consideration of, and reference to, any relevant Commonwealth guidelines and policy statements including listing advice, conservation advice and recovery plans;
 - ii. details of the scope, timing and methodology for studies or surveys used and how they are consistent with (or justification for divergence from) published Australian Government guidelines and policy statements:
 - iii. description of the relevant impacts of the action having regard to the full national extent of the species or community's range;
 - iv. description of the specific proposed avoidance and mitigation measures to deal with relevant impacts of the action:
 - v. identification of significant residual adverse impacts likely to occur after the proposed activities to avoid and mitigate all impacts are taken into account;
 - vi. a description of any offsets proposed to address residual adverse significant impacts and how these offsets will be established;
 - vii. details of how the current published NSW Biodiversity Assessment Method (BAM) has been applied in accordance with the objects of the EPBC Act to offset significant residual adverse impacts; and
 - viii.details of the offset package to compensate for significant residual impacts including details of the credit profiles required to offset the action in accordance with the BAM and/or mapping and descriptions of the extent and condition of the relevant habitat and/or threatened communities occurring on proposed offset sites.

Note: For the purposes of approval under the EPBC Act, it is a requirement that offsets directly contribute to the ongoing viability of the specific protected matter impacted by a proposed action and deliver an overall conservation outcome that improves or maintains the viability of the MNES i.e. 'like for like'. Like-for-like includes protection of native vegetation that is the same ecological community or habitat being impacted (preferably in the same region where the impact occurs), or funding to provide a direct benefit to the matter being impacted e.g. threat abatement, breeding and propagation programs or other relevant conservation measures.

17. Any significant residual impacts not addressed by the BAM may need to be addressed in accordance with the EPBC Act 1999 Environmental Offset Policy.

www.dcceew.gov.au/environment/epbc/publications/epbc-act-environmental-offsets-policy.

Other approvals and conditions

18. Information in relation to any other approvals or conditions required must include the information prescribed in Schedule 4 Clause 5 (a) (b) (c) and (d) of the EPBC Regulations.

Environmental Record of person proposing to take the action

19. Information in relation to the environmental record of a person proposing to take the action must include details as prescribed in Schedule 4 Clause 6 of the EPBC Regulations.

Information Sources

20. For information given in an EIS, the EIS must state the source of the information, how recent the information is, how the reliability of the information was tested; and what uncertainties (if any) are in the information.

REFERENCES

- Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 section 51-55, section 96A(3)(a)(b), 101A(3)(a)(b), section 136, section 527E
- Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Regulations 2000 Schedule 4
- Amending Agreement No. 1 (2020) Item 18.1, Item 18.5, Schedule 1
- Matters of National Environmental Significance Significant impact guidelines 1.1 (2013) EPBC Act
- Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 Environmental Offsets Policy October 2012

The international conventions, management plans and principles that must be considered in relation to this proposal include:

- Australia's obligations under the:
 - Convention on Biological Diversity (Biodiversity Convention);
 - the Convention on Conservation of Nature in the South Pacific (Apia Convention);
 - the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES); and
- Any relevant recovery plans or threat abatement plans.

The policies and plans that must be considered in relation to this proposal include:

- Relevant conservation advice and other relevant policies for each species or ecological community available
 on the department's SPRAT Database (https://www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/sprat/public/sprat.pl)
- Bioregional plans
- Relevant strategic assessment reports.

Commonwealth Listing Advice, Survey Guidelines and Referral Guidelines contain information on threatened species and ecological communities which may provide further support to proponents and NSW DPHI in considering and evaluating the significance of residual impacts on the action's controlling provisions. These documents may be found on the department's SPRAT Database.

Appendix A

Protected matters relevant to the Victoria NSW Interconnector West Project (EPBC 2024/09871)

Specific risks

Key risks associated with the proposed action from the Commonwealth perspective include the potential for:

- Direct impacts to threatened ecological communities:
 - o reduce the extent of an ecological community
 - fragment or increase fragmentation of an ecological community, for example by clearing vegetation for roads or transmission lines
 - o adversely affect habitat critical to the survival of an ecological community
 - o interfere with the recovery of an ecological community
- Direct and indirect threats to listed species:
 - habitat clearing
 - displacement from important foraging, nesting and/or breeding habitat
 - o reshaping of the topography
 - o disturbance and reduced habitat quality due to noise, dust and light spill during construction and operation
 - o invasive species or weed dispersal
 - o changes to fire regimes.

Listed threatened species and communities and migratory species

Based on the information in the referral documentation, the location of the action, species records and likely habitat present in the area, there are likely to be significant impacts to:

- Natural Grasslands of the Murray Valley Plains Critically Endangered
- Seasonal Herbaceous Wetlands (Freshwater) of the Temperate Lowland Plains Critically Endangered
- Weeping Myall Woodlands Endangered
- White Box-Yellow Box-Blakely's Red Gum Grassy Woodland and Derived Native Grassland Critically Endangered.

Additionally, there is some risk that there may be significant impacts on the following matters and further assessment to determine if the communities and species listed below are present in the proposed action area and, if so, the extent to which they may be impacted by the proposed action, is required:

- Austrostipa metatoris (a perennial spear grass) Vulnerable
- Blue-winged Parrot (Neophema chrysostoma) Vulnerable
- Buloke Woodlands of the Riverina and Murray-Darling Depression Bioregions Endangered
- Chariot Wheels (*Maireana cheelii*) Vulnerable
- Diamond Firetail (Stagonopleura guttata) Vulnerable
- Grey Box (Eucalyptus microcarpa) Grassy Woodlands and Derived Native Grasslands of South-eastern Australia – Endangered
- Grey Snake (Hemiaspis damelii) Endangered

- Grey-headed Flying Fox (*Pteropus poliocephalus*) Vulnerable
- Major Mitchell's Cockatoo (Lophochroa leadbeateri leadbeateri) Endangered
- Painted Honeyeater (Stagonopleura guttata) Vulnerable
- Pink Tailed Worm Lizard (*Aprasia parapulchella*) Vulnerable
- Plains mallee box woodlands of the Murray Darling Depression, Riverina and Naracoorte Coastal Plain Bioregions – Critically Endangered
- Plains-wanderer (Pedionomus torquatus) Critically Endangered
- Red Darling-pea (Swainsona plagiotropis) Vulnerable
- Slender Darling-pea (Swainsona murrayana) Vulnerable
- Southern Bell Frog (*Litoria raniformis*) Vulnerable
- Superb Parrot (*Polytelis swainsonii*) Vulnerable
- Winged Pepper-cress (Lepidium monoplocoides) Endangered.

Note: uncertainty around the extent and number of protected matters that may be impacted will need to be resolved through the assessment process once final alignment and construction plans have been completed.

Note: this may not be a complete list and it is the responsibility of the proponent to ensure any protected matters under these controlling provisions are assessed for the Commonwealth decision-maker's consideration.