

Notice of decision

Section 2.22 and clause 20 of Schedule 1 of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*

Application type	Critical State significant infrastructure
Application number and project name	Project EnergyConnect (NSW – Eastern Section) (SSI-9172452)
Applicant	Transgrid
Consent Authority	Minister for Planning

Decision

Under section 5.19 of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* (the Act), the Minister for Planning has approved the critical State significant infrastructure (CSSI) application to develop Project EnergyConnect (NSW - Eastern Section), subject to conditions.

The key components of the development involve:

- constructing and operating:
 - a 375 km long 330 kilovolt (kV) transmission line between the existing Buronga substation and the proposed Dinawan substation, near Coleambally;
 - a 162 km long 500 kV transmission line between the proposed Dinawan substation and the existing Wagga Wagga substation;
 - the Dinawan 330 kV substation;
 - three optical repeater sites to boost communication signal along the proposed transmission lines;
- upgrading the existing Wagga Wagga 330 kV substation to accommodate the development; and
- developing construction facilities, such as construction compounds and accommodation camps.

Construction of the development would take 24 months, and once operational would provide a direct link between the New South Wales (NSW) and South Australian (SA) energy markets between Robertstown in SA and Wagga Wagga in NSW.

A copy of the Department's assessment report and Minister's infrastructure approval are available [here](#).

Date of decision

2 September 2022

Reasons for decision

The following matters were taken into consideration in making this decision:

- the relevant matters required under the Act, including the objects of the Act;
- relevant Commonwealth and NSW legislation, policies and guidelines;
- all information submitted to the Department during the assessment of the application;
- the findings and recommendations in the Department's assessment report; and
- the views of the community about the development (see Attachment 1).

The findings and recommendations set out in the Department's Assessment Report were accepted and adopted as the reasons for making this decision.

The key reasons for approving the application are as follows:

- the development would provide a range of benefits for the State and the National Electricity Market (NEM) as a whole, including directly linking the NSW and SA energy markets;
- the broader Project EnergyConnect is consistent with relevant NSW Government policies and guidelines, including the *Transmission Infrastructure Strategy* (2018), the *Electricity Strategy* (2019), and more broadly the *Climate Change Policy Framework* (2019) and *Net Zero Stage 1: 2020 – 2030* (2021);
- the impacts on the community and the environment can be appropriately minimised, managed or offset to an acceptable level, in accordance with applicable NSW Government policies and standards;
- none of the NSW Government agencies objected to the development and councils are supportive of the development, subject to the recommended conditions;
- the issues raised by the community during consultation and in submissions have been considered and adequately addressed through changes to the development and the recommended conditions of consent; and
- weighing all relevant considerations, the development is in the public interest, subject to strict conditions of approval.

Attachment 1 – Consideration of Community Views

The Department exhibited the application from 19 January to 15 February 2022 (28 days) received 41 unique public submissions (38 objecting, 2 comments and 1 in support) and 5 submissions from special interest groups (3 comments, 1 in support and 1 objecting).

The Department also visited the site and met with potentially impacted landowners.

A summary of how the key issues raised by the community were taken into consideration is provided in the below table.

Issue	Consideration
<p><i>Project justification and economic benefits</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of benefits from the development Property devaluation and loss of local income Potential additional impacts of future renewable energy projects that may be located near the development 	<p><i>Assessment</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project EnergyConnect is consistent with a range of national and state policies, which identify the need for an interconnector between SA, NSW and Victoria to support energy security and reliability. The Department considers an interconnector between SA, NSW and Victoria is critical for energy security and reliability in NSW and would play a critical role in transporting energy from the NSW South-West Renewable Energy Zone (REZ) to major demand centres while facilitating the longer-term transition of the energy sector across the National Energy Market (NEM) to low emission energy sources. Importantly, the Department acknowledges that the development completes the NSW section of Project EnergyConnect and would facilitate the transmission of renewable energy from the South-West REZ to energy consumers. The Department also acknowledges that a detailed 'opportunities and constraints' analysis was undertaken to locate the development to reduce impacts where possible, including consideration of environmental, social, land use and engineering matters, such as National Parks, intensive agricultural land, heritage, and residential areas. The development would deliver significant economic benefits to NSW including a capital investment of \$1.08 billion and creation of up to 500 construction jobs. <p><i>Conditions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prepare and implement a Local Business and Employment Strategy in consultation with Council, including options for prioritising the employment of local and Aboriginal workforce and suppliers.
<p><i>Agriculture and soils</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Loss of agricultural land Interruption of ongoing agricultural operations Land contamination Potential additional impacts of future renewable energy projects that may be located near the development 	<p><i>Assessment</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> About 93% of the site is used for agricultural purposes, comprising livestock grazing (67% of the site), dryland cropping (25% of the site) and a small area of irrigated cropping (1% of the site). No areas of mapped Biophysical Strategic Agricultural Land would be impacted by the development and Transgrid has located the development to avoid the Coleambally Irrigation Area. The Department notes that grazing and cropping could continue within and adjacent to the proposed easement, with some limitations on aerial spraying and on the height of machinery used within easements. During detailed design, Transgrid would prioritise the use of existing access tracks and, where possible, avoid locating transmission line towers within cropping and horticultural land, or within farm dam drainage catchments. Transgrid has committed to consult with landowners to schedule construction works to minimise impacts on vehicular or stock movements, implement biosecurity controls and install aerial warning markers along relevant sections of the transmission line. The Department considers that potential impacts on agricultural land can be appropriately managed via these commitments and the recommended conditions of approval. The Department considers that the potential impacts from contamination, including contaminated land or from potential for spills and uncontrolled releases from the development, would be appropriately managed through a Soil and Water Management Plan. <p><i>Conditions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prepare and implement a Soil and Water Management Plan including measures to minimise and manage erosion and sediment generation, provisions for managing contaminated land and soils, and to mitigate the potential for spills and uncontrolled releases to the environment. No specific conditions have been recommended
<p><i>Biodiversity</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impacts on native vegetation Impacts on flora and fauna species and habitat Impacts to wetlands near Lake Cullivel 	<p><i>Assessment</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Department acknowledges that the construction of a 537 km transmission line would inevitably result in impacts to biodiversity, and notes that the development would disturb 1,615 ha of native vegetation within the 4,889 ha indicative development footprint. The Department considers that the development has been designed to avoid and minimise impacts on high quality vegetation, flora and fauna species and habitat, as far as practicable, including relocating the proposed transmission line

	<p>further south of Lake Cullivel, co-locating sections of the transmission line with existing infrastructure and relocating other sections to avoid key biodiversity features.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Importantly, the detailed design of the final transmission line would be based on further reductions in impacts to avoid biodiversity values, wherever practicable. The Department and the Biodiversity, Conservation and Science Directorate consider that subject to the recommended conditions, the development would not significantly impact the biodiversity values of the locality. <p><i>Conditions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimise the clearing of native vegetation and key fauna habitat, including hollow bearing trees and habitat for threatened flora and fauna species. Prepare and implement a Biodiversity management plan, including details of measures to avoid and minimise impacts, and a program to monitor and report on the effectiveness of biodiversity mitigation and management measures monitor. Prepare and implement a Biodiversity Offset Package and provide a bank guarantee to the value equivalent to the offset liability for the development to the value of \$313 million as security to ensure offsets are implemented.
<p><i>Aboriginal cultural heritage</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impacts on Aboriginal cultural heritage sites 	<p><i>Assessment</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eighty-nine Aboriginal heritage sites and 37 potential archaeological deposits (PAD), primarily of low to moderate significance, are located within the indicative transmission line easement. Sites and PADs would be impacted by the development to varying degrees dependant on their location relative to proposed infrastructure through ground disturbance during construction and ongoing management of vegetation within the easement, which would be confirmed during detailed design. Landowner access restrictions prevented surveys of seven sections of the transmission line, totalling 18 km. Desktop assessment of the unsurveyed areas indicates a low to moderate potential for sites and potential archaeological deposits (PAD) to be present. Transgrid has committed to avoid impacts on five PADs, and would complete surveys of the unsurveyed areas and undertake subsurface testing of any additional PADs identified for impact during detailed design. Importantly, the detailed design of the final transmission line would be based on further reductions in impacts, wherever practicable. <p><i>Conditions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Avoid and minimise impacts on Aboriginal heritage sites and PADs during detailed design and to prepare and implement Heritage management plan, in consultation with Aboriginal stakeholders and Heritage NSW.