

Individual submission



VNI West – Additional Consultation Report

SUBMISSION NUMBER: P007

Name: Catherine King

Location: Ballarat, VIC, Australia

Submission

Submission to VNI West Consultation Report – Options Assessment

I appreciate the opportunity to make a submission to the VNI West Consultation Report. I make this submission in my capacity as a local member of parliament representing my community.

As the Member for Ballarat, I represent a region stretching from Gordon to Lake Burumbeet, including those communities through Hepburn Shire and the City of Ballarat which will be impacted by the Western Renewables Link and, if a transmission station is built north of Ballarat, by VNI West.

Since the Western Renewable Link first begun being discussed in 2017, the potential impact of this development has caused considerable anxiety amongst the communities I represent. In particular, the planned construction of a terminal station north of Ballarat at Mount Prospect has led to increased uncertainty due to potential future connections to other projects like VNI West and other renewable energy developments.

As such, I welcome AEMO's new analysis which identifies Bulgana as the preferred connection point for VNI West, rather than an area north of Ballarat.

In particular, I appreciate the increased focus shown in this consultation paper on social license.

Throughout this process, I have been shocked and disappointed by the lack of respect that has been shown to local communities and the lack of consideration of their land uses, local government views and landscape.

In my view, a significant amount of the anger felt by the community could have been avoided if their views and interests were considered from the very start of the project, rather than four years down the fact.

With that in mind, I implore AEMO and the project proponents to engage fully with the communities around Bulgana who will be impacted by this proposal and to mitigate any negative impacts it may have on their lives or livelihoods.

More broadly, I welcome the focus on cultural heritage, land use and the environmental impacts of the proposed route.

The region north of Ballarat is not only home to the finest potato-growing country in Australia, but is a region of notable heritage and natural beauty. It has always been an inappropriate location for a development of this type as I, and many in the community, have been saying from the start.

The new analysis from AEMO makes clear that constructing the terminal site at Bulgana will lead to better outcomes in all these areas, impacting reduced impacts on Indigenous sites of significance, properties, communities and valuable natural resources.

As such, I encourage AEMO to pursue this as the preferred option.

As Australia continues its transition to net zero, there will be increasing need for new projects just like this one in order to maintain a stable electricity grid.

In rolling out these projects, it will be important to engage thoroughly and honestly with impacted communities all throughout the process – from project conception, to construction and beyond.

In terms of the Western Renewables Link project, there are many lessons about what not to do when it comes to maintaining social license and community support. I encourage proponents of that and other future projects to consider the lessons of the Western Renewable Link project closely and engage openly and consistently with local communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission.

Yours sincerely

Catherine King