



Australian Government

Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner

5 April 2023

Australian Energy Market Operator (AEMO)
By email: VNIWestRITT@aemo.com.au

Dear AEMO

Re: VNI West Consultation – Options Assessment

The Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner (**AEIC**) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission in response to the VNI West Consultation Report – Options Assessment, dated February 2023.

The AEIC fulfils a national, independent role in Australia’s energy sector and our responsibilities include:

- facilitating the handling of complaints from concerned community residents about planned and operating wind farms, solar farms, energy storage facilities and new large-scale transmission projects,
- identifying and promoting best practices for industry, government and related agencies to adopt with regard to the planning, operation and governance of such projects, and
- improving information access and transparency about proposed and operating projects, and relevant government and industry information more broadly.

We confirm our support for the conclusion of the Consultation Report, that, all things considered, Option 5 should be the preferred corridor option for the VNI West connection to the Western Renewables Link (WRL) project.

We agree that the Option 5 proposed corridor is likely to be much less impactful on communities and residents compared to the current proposed corridor (Option 1). In addition, Option 5 provides the opportunity to uprate the proposed WRL transmission line from Ballarat to Bulgana (from the proposed 220kV to 500kV) and brings a new 500kV transmission line capacity to the Bulgana/Kerang corridor. This substantial increase in capacity should provide opportunities for new energy generation development along those corridors as well as opportunities for new, material energy demand.

Unlike the other options considered, Option 5 does not pass near Bendigo. It is expected that energy demand in and around the greater Bendigo area will materially increase in the coming period. It is therefore important that the state’s network planners (e.g. AEMO, VicGrid) work with

local governments and economic development agencies to plan and deploy appropriate electricity network capacity to serve demand growth in the greater Bendigo precinct.

As Option 5 results in the relocation of the terminal substation from the Mount Prospect area (north of Ballarat) to Bulgana, the criteria requiring WRL's corridor to pass through the Mount Prospect area has fundamentally changed. Therefore, in our view, an opportunity now exists to reassess the corridor/route options between Waubra and a suitable connection point to the 500kV lines that surround the greater Melbourne area, not dissimilar to the approach taken in the assessment of Option 5 for the VNI West corridor.

The efficient delivery of large-scale transmission projects that appropriately manage the potential impacts on regional communities and landholders is likely to be our collective highest priority as we progress the energy transition in Australia over the coming decade. Option 5 appears to be a very sensible re-design of the VNI West corridor in that regard.

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on this important consultation. We would be delighted to discuss these matters with AEMO/Transgrid in further detail.

In the meantime, should you have any questions about this submission or require additional information please do not hesitate to contact us by email (aeic@aeic.gov.au) or telephone (1-800-656-395).

Sincerely



Andrew Dyer
Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner