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Victoria to New South Wales Interconnector West – Submission to Consultation Report – Options Assessment under the Regulatory Investment Test for Transmission

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the Consultation Report for the Victoria to New South Wales Interconnector West project (VNI West)

RWE is a global energy company with over 12 GW of installed renewable energy capacity across our core technologies and markets. Its global renewable energy development pipeline exceeds 20GW. RWE operates across core markets including the Americas, Europe and Asia Pacific, with operations in 18 countries.

RWE's first Australian project is the 249 MW Limondale solar farm in Balranald, south-west NSW, and we have a development pipeline of wind, solar and storage projects across the NEM, including in Victoria.

We support the proposed Option 5 (Bulgana-Kerang-Dinawan) as the preferred option for VNI West, based on our investigations and development activities in Western Victoria in the last 3 years. As we set out in our submission to the Project Assessment Draft Report, we saw the initial proposed route of VNI West, specifically the leg from Ballarat to Kerang, as a missed opportunity for renewables development and increased grid strength and redundancy in Victoria. All other options – even the second-ranked Option 3A – do not, in reality, unlock the same volume of quality renewable development areas.

While routes incorporating the Ballarat-Bendigo and/or Bendigo-Kerang legs have theoretically higher REZ transmission limits on AEMO's modelling, we suggest that any theoretical advantage will not eventuate, due to development constraints.

Our experience in scoping greenfield opportunities for wind, solar and storage projects in northern and western Victoria suggests that the proposed Ballarat to Kerang leg, including the proposed North Ballarat substation, faces significant social licence and environmental issues both for transmission and new renewables projects, as well as lower wind resource and higher flooding potential. Our experience has been borne out in AEMO's own multi-criteria analysis.

Page 2

RWE has identified strong opportunities for renewables development that could connect into the Option 5 high voltage route – projects that would deliver more lower cost energy with zero emissions and better reliability and security of supply to consumers. The Option 5 route offers:

- Lower density dwellings
- Increased wind resource
- Larger agricultural properties, more compatible with renewable projects
- Less native vegetation and ecological constraint areas
- Less regions of cultural heritage sensitivity
- Less regions subject to flooding
- A new transmission route rather than a parallel one, increasing redundancy in contingency events, including extreme weather events and bush-fires

The apparently better social licence for Option 5 should not be taken for granted, but it does offer the opportunity for early, ongoing and meaningful community engagement to occur as per the Victorian Government's policy under their Transmission Investment Framework, rather than starting on the back foot with communities already feeling pressure around Ballarat and Bendigo.

Thank you for your important work designing the grid of the future. We would be happy to discuss this submission in more detail if that would assist.

Yours sincerely,



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