

Individual submission



VNI West – Additional Consultation Report

SUBMISSION NUMBER: P059

Name: Yeungroon CFA Rural Fire Brigade

Location: Yeungroon, VIC, Australia

Submission

To the Reviewer of the VNI-West Submissions,

On behalf of the members of the Yeungroon Fire Brigade we wish to raise concerns and seek answers to the impact that the proposed Victoria to New South Wales Interconnector West will have on our firefighting capacity.

We operate as a volunteer only brigade and with declining rural population are already experiencing difficulties of volunteer fatigue. Thankfully for us Victoria has moved to a rapid dispatch model for air attack as this significantly decreases the likelihood of a small-scale fire developing into a landscape level fire with greater risk to life.

The Country Fire Authority's Standard Operating Procedures prohibits fire trucks from accessing under transmission lines. We note that in previous energy projects the operation of helitankers or planes in the area, requires permission must be sought from the transmission line owner which significantly delays response. With the spiderweb of lines proposed for the VNI-West project, the planning process to avoid and operational responses for fires in the vicinity would require a great deal of work at a local volunteer level.

Can you please clarify exactly what are the restrictions for aerial appliances and transmission lines, both CFA and other emergency responders?

What are the dangers to firefighters operating in the vicinity of the transmission infrastructure, particularly taking into consideration low visibility?

What length of response time is anticipated for clearance of aerial appliances should an event occur? And who would be issuing the clearance?

A large portion of our operational response is events started from weather events.

Is the risk likely to be higher with transmission lines in the area due to significant weather events resulting from climate change?

Do the transmission infrastructure conduct lightning and particle interferences, exposing our area to increased fire risks, noting that our area has dust and smoke impacts due to agricultural practices as well as weather?

What is the risk of damage to overhead transmission from windstorms, dust storms and thunderstorms?

Of great concern for our brigade is our flood response also, as flooding occurs on a regular basis in our Brigade Area, with four different waterways contouring through.

What impact does water have on the transmission infrastructure?

If a transmission line is down in water, how far can the electricity be conducted through the water, exposing risks of electrocution?

Thankfully to a lesser extent some responses also involve vehicle incidents, which raises concerns.

If a vehicle has contacted transmission infrastructure what are the risks to volunteer response crew?

If there is an incident near the powerlines is there restrictions for ground, or air ambulance access?

We are incredibly concerned that increased fire risks and delays in blacking out small fires may lead to increased volunteer time on the fireground. We are also concerned of the potential for fire size escalation increasing risk to lives and livelihoods, as well as destroy the environmental communities.

Has any consideration of maximising the potential to create fire breaks, while minimising the impact on the environment been given?

We have also read that there is significant impact from transmission lines disturbances to communications systems -2-way radios and mobile phones, that are essential during emergencies. This is a huge concern as interference with communications can cause unsafe situations, that pose a danger to our firefighters.

Can you provide validated evidence that this is not the case?

Compensation is clearly going to be offered to landowners hosting the transmission infrastructure, which has obviously been factored into the project costs. There would appear to be a number of necessary uncompensated activities that would need be to be undertaken by brigades such as ours. We know these lines exist elsewhere, but they are perhaps where paid firefighters respond with closer support options. We are all volunteers including the Incident Control in the immediate response time, our nearest brigades for assistance are likely 30+ minutes away, so all Brigades in the proposed area would likely have to undertake additional training, additional prevention mitigation of extra water tanks to compensate for impacted aerial response and possibly even additional firebreaks.

At what stage does consultation with the CFA begin?

Will it be at the upper Headquarters level, or will local Brigades be permitted to contribute local knowledge?

Finally, and possibly most concerning for us is the anecdotal evidence we are hearing from other communities who have experienced the unpleasantness of planning where transmissions lines go. Other Brigades have told us that divisions arise within the community as a result of the divisive consultation exercise, and this was interfering with the smooth running of local Brigades.

What community consultation is planned moving forward?

What is the expected timeline for this consultation?

What is the expected timeline to commence the placement of infrastructure?

Sincerely,

Brigade Secretary