

Kerang, Charlton and Stawell Report Back

Summary of what we heard at the Community Drop-in Sessions April 2024

From 16 to 18 April 2024 Transmission Company Victoria (TCV) held community drop-in sessions at Charlton, Kerang and Stawell – key central locations within the VNI West draft corridor area. These drop in sessions were attended by close to 150 people.

We wanted to thank everyone for making the time to talk with us. Whilst some of the discussions were challenging, it was really helpful hearing in person how the project is being viewed and the interests among those attending.

This report provides a summary of common areas of community interest or concern expressed in the course of the drop-in events, and how we will use this feedback to inform the next steps in our engagement program.

What was the purpose of the events?



- To provide an opportunity for community members and landholders to talk with project specialists in person.
- Through this opportunity, to listen, answer questions and use feedback and personal contacts established to help us refine the route and minimise impacts.
- To make project information available and through dialogue to increase project understanding.
- To share information about the Environment Effects Statement process for VNI West, as well as how and when the community and landholders can provide input.



When and where were the events held?

- **Kerang** – Kerang Memorial Hall, Tuesday April 16, 2:30pm to 7:30pm
- **Charlton** – Charlton Hall, Wednesday April 17, 2:30pm to 7:30pm
- **Stawell** – Stawell Entertainment Centre, Thursday April 18, 2:30pm to 7:30pm



How many people attended the events?

Approximately 150 attendees attended across three events.



Who did attendees hear from and speak to?


The TCV project team, technical experts, and representatives from VicGrid were on hand to have conversations with community members across six specialist areas: Environment and Planning, Engineering and Design, Agriculture, Community and Landholder Engagement and Victorian Government initiatives.

Key themes

See the table below for a summary of key areas of interest and how we're responding to the issues raised.




Table 1 – Key themes

Key theme	What we heard	What we're doing?
 <p>Landholder engagement and compensation</p>	<p>Questions from community members and landholders about the process of acquiring an easement and compensation for affected landholders, including factors considered in compensation calculations.</p>	<p>During the April drop-in sessions, we were able to meet a number of landholders. In many cases our landowner liaisons were able to introduce themselves and talk about individual properties and circumstances and from there, introduce landholders to a specialist to address details about their circumstances.</p> <p>Discussions like these help us understand an individual's circumstances as well as the opportunities to minimise impact on their properties and activities as we plan the route.</p> <p>As a result of the drop-in sessions, we were able to follow up issues raised with 7-8 landholders including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A landholder previously reluctant to communicate, attended the drop-in session and met the land access team members. This interaction facilitated the required land liaisons to have ongoing discussions regarding the project and access requirements. • A group of family members attended a drop-in session and met with the land access team. This interaction resulted in broader engagement with the required TCV disciplines including a deeper understanding of how compensation works, objectives of the design process and the importance of the land access in the area they reside. This has since resulted in the signing of a land access agreement. • A landowner concerned about environmental effects on their property attended a drop-in session and met environmental specialists. Detailed discussions about the project approach on how to avoid impacts to the environment were had. These discussions deepened the confidence of the landholder in knowing that design is doing everything they can to avoid the environmental sensitivities in their area. Discussions about the property and environmental features are continuing. • There were many queries about the details of the compensation elements and the provisions that apply regarding a landowner's property and their activities. A number of these are continuing and discussions are leading to the signing of land access agreements. • A landholder attended with concerns the project would prevent them from continuing irrigation farming practices on their property. Conversations with the land liaison team and agricultural specialists clarified most activities are not impacted by transmission lines. Compensation was also raised, and the landholder now has a deeper understanding of how the process works. The landholder is having ongoing conversations with the land liaison. <p>Individual discussions with landholder liaisons remain the best way for you to tell us the impacts to your property and circumstances. Having a discussion with us doesn't require any commitment and doesn't</p>

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		<p>increase the likelihood of having project infrastructure on your property, but it does provide the best opportunity to shape the way any project infrastructure may look like on your property, and to minimise any potential impacts.</p> <p>Depending on what's important to you, the things we can talk about can include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access for surveys and investigations, land access conditions, biosecurity procedures and payments applicable. • What would happen if project infrastructure is proposed for a property, the process and professional support available in negotiating agreements for an easement with the landholder. • Compensation payments that apply and how the relationship would be managed during the term of the agreement. • How ownership and use of the easement would work during construction and in the longer term <p>We received a number of queries about the general value of compensation. It's a difficult question to answer because the project's impacts will be very different to each property affected. It's worth thinking about compensation as a remedy for a loss to a property and operations caused by the project. The <i>Land Acquisition and Compensation Act 1986</i> sets out requirements for compensation and includes factors such as property devaluation, impacts to business operations and farming, as well as impacts to broader land use.</p> <p>In addition to compensation from TCV, landholders will also receive compensation from the Victorian government of \$200,000 per km over 25 years (\$8,000 per km per year over 25 years indexed to CPI).</p> <p>More information about TCV's landholder engagement process and compensation can be found in the Landholder Guide and in a new video on the TCV website.</p>
 <p>Regulatory approvals including EES</p>	<p>Questions about the Environment Effects Statement process for VNI West, particularly opportunities for community members and landholders to provide input and feedback.</p>	<p>At the time of the drop-in sessions, the requirement for an Environment Effects Statement (EES) for the VNI West project had not been determined by the Minister.</p> <p>The Minister has since confirmed that TCV is required to prepare an EES for VNI West. This means the project impacts will be rigorously assessed by experts, through a process overseen by Victoria's Department of Transport and Planning (DTP). The EES process will take place over the next 12-18 months.</p> <p>There will be opportunities during this DTP-run process for input by landholders, local communities, Traditional Owners and other stakeholders. Further information on the EES process can be found on the Department of Transport and Planning website and also in the EES fact sheet on the TCV website.</p> <p>Questions were also raised about why the VCAT process doesn't apply to this project. The simple answer is that the EES is the most thorough review that a project can be subject to in Victoria. The level of assessment, expert review and scrutiny is far greater than a VCAT hearing would generally involve.</p> <p>There were some comments about the National Electricity (Victoria) Act 2005 (NEVA) Orders issued by the Minister for Energy and Resources in 2023. We note the NEVA Orders are subject to legal challenge. Further background can be found in the Project Assessment Conclusions Report (also known as PACR).</p>

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 <p>Project need and timelines</p>	<p>Community members were interested in understanding the project timeline and need.</p> <p>In particular, questions about the timeline for narrowing the corridor, project approvals processes and the development of construction plans.</p>	<p>We understand from a number of comments, that the need for VNI West is not well understood by some community members. We received a number of questions about why it is favoured over other options, as well as the plans to progress planning, approval and construction stages.</p> <p>In discussions about the project need, we shared that for decades Victorians have enjoyed a reliable supply of electricity, mostly from coal fired power stations in Gippsland. As these ageing coal-fired power stations retire however, renewables will fill the supply gap as they are the lowest cost new build electricity technology (See CSIRO explainer animation).</p> <p>We discussed how VNI West plays an important role in the energy transition, as it will transmit 'clean' electricity from Renewable Energy Zones (REZs) in Victoria and New South Wales, maintaining the reliability and security of electricity supply as ageing coal-fired power stations retire.</p> <p>In response to questions about the process of narrowing the corridor, the Report on the Draft Corridor for VNI West outlines the route refinement process and rationale to narrow the initial area of interest between 5km and 50km wide to a draft corridor approximately 2km wide. The report also outlines how community input was used in 'avoidance' of sensitive environmental social and cultural values wherever possible.</p> <p>We received some comments about the uncertainty and frustration caused by the length of time it is taking to further narrow the corridor. We are currently working to narrow the corridor to a preferred easement of approximately 100m wide and are aiming to announce this by the end of September. We're doing our best to ease this uncertainty as quickly as possible, while carrying out thorough analysis and consultation to find a route the least impact possible to farming, the environment and communities. When we have identified a preferred easement, we will engage impacted landholders first and then more broadly communicate.</p> <p>The environment and planning approvals process for VNI West will continue throughout 2024 and 2025 and is anticipated to conclude in 2026 with construction to follow, pending the EES outcome. Community consultation is an essential part of the EES process, and there will be opportunities for stakeholders and community members to make submissions and provide feedback (see the EES fact sheet on the TCV website under the EES tab for more details). More information on project need and timelines can be found in the About VNI West factsheet on the TCV website.</p>
 <p>Potential impacts and mitigation measures</p>	<p>Concerns regarding the broad impacts of VNI West and how these will be minimised or mitigated.</p>	<p>Some questions were raised about the impacts on built-up areas including along the Murray River.</p> <p>The Report on the Draft Corridor for VNI West outlines how the broader area of interest was narrowed down to a draft corridor based on the principle of avoidance of sensitive environmental, social and cultural values wherever possible.</p> <p>We're continuing this 'avoidance' approach by applying it at a finer grain, engaging with landholders in more densely populated areas like the Murray River region to understand the sensitivities around their properties so we can minimise impacts to properties as much as possible.</p> <p>We acknowledge that it will not always be possible to avoid all sensitivities, however the more that landholders are able to discuss specific property details with their landholder liaison, the better chance we will have to mitigate any impacts.</p> <p>In addition to questions about how individual input was influencing our process of identifying the preferred easement, we also heard questions about impacts to regulated industries, current approaches to fighting</p>

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		<p>fires and resilience to weather events. These are good examples of the range of broad issues that will be assessed during the EES process.</p> <p>Detailed environmental and social studies along the corridor are required for planning and regulatory purposes and will help to inform the preferred easement and design. The EES will comprehensively assess potential impacts, as well as identifying how impacts can be minimised or mitigated.</p>
 <p data-bbox="421 715 577 738">Survey works</p>	<p>Questions about survey works, including whether the location of surveys is indicative of a confirmed location for of the VNI West easement.</p>	<p>There was a notable response to field surveys including queries and comments at the April events about the purpose of the investigations, whether they are indicative of the preferred easement and how the disturbance is rectified following investigations.</p> <p>We are carrying out a range of field surveys across the VNI West draft corridor. The surveys are important and build our understanding of environmental considerations and geological features in the area. These surveys are not an indication of the exact location for project infrastructure. Locations are selected primarily due to public accessibility, regional representation and roadway safety – they are in no way indicative of the final route or tower locations for VNI West.</p> <p>We started field surveys in October 2023. They include a range of unobtrusive activities such as non-invasive ground investigations and site walkovers to identify key wildlife habitat and vegetation, as well as geo-technical surveys, drilling small boreholes to determine ground and soil conditions. Surveys to date have mainly been carried out on public land, with the permission of relevant authorities and all required permits.</p> <p>If TCV needs to access a property, we will request consent from the landowner. When working with landholders, we will respect any biosecurity measures and follow other landholder's direction, which will be documented in a formal Land Access Agreement with the landholder. Landholders will receive a land access payment in recognition of inconvenience caused. More information can be found on the TCV website https://www.transmissionvictoria.com.au/landholders</p> <p>If a landholder signs a Land Access Agreement for survey works, it is for those works only; it is not an agreement to host infrastructure on private property and does not indicate consent for construction or other works to be undertaken.</p> <p>Information on Planned Field Survey Activities is available on the TCV website and updated regularly.</p>
 <p data-bbox="421 1209 618 1265">Local community benefits</p>	<p>Interest in community benefits and how they will be shared.</p>	<p>A number of questions were raised with us about how local communities can benefit from the project. VNI West is a major infrastructure project that will deliver a significant economic boost to rural Victoria, creating jobs during construction and ongoing operations, and benefiting sectors including electrical, transport and civil works.</p> <p>In addition, VNI West will contribute to a fund to provide direct benefits to local communities. The Victorian Government through VicGrid is proposing to create community energy funds in each of the state's renewable energy zones. The funds will coordinate financial contributions from project proponents for regional infrastructure and programs based on local needs and priorities. TCV will work with local communities, stakeholders and VicGrid to ensure contributions benefit local communities.</p> <p>Further information and updates can be found on the VicGrid website at https://engage.vic.gov.au/vtif-rez-community-benefits</p>

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		<p>Some community members were interested in potential business opportunities arising through the construction phase of the project. Construction is planned to start in 2026, so at this point we're suggesting that those interested should join our mailing list for emailed Project Updates.</p>
 <p>Community engagement and communication</p>	<p>Request to understand how community and landholder feedback has influenced the project to date, particularly the route refinement process.</p>	<p>A number of people wanted to understand how their feedback was used for the project.</p> <p>The overall approach adopted to refine the broad area of interest down to a narrower draft corridor was based on the principle of avoidance of sensitive environmental, social and cultural values wherever possible.</p> <p>Feedback from landholders, community members, government agencies, Traditional Owners and other stakeholders provided an important contribution, identifying environmental, land use, cultural and social constraints.</p> <p>Detail on how community and landholder feedback informed the selection of the draft corridor can be found on pages 35-39 of the Draft Corridor Report on TCV's website.</p>
 <p>Renewable Energy Zones and renewable energy development</p>	<p>Questions about the interaction between VNI West and Renewable Energy Zones, including local renewable energy development projects.</p>	<p>We recognise that there is understandably some confusion about the different organisations involved in the development of VNI West and local renewable energy projects.</p> <p>We heard a number of comments that the energy landscape is complicated and involves a large number of different organisations, who all play different roles in the planning and development process.</p> <p>With respect to our role, TCV is responsible solely for the development of the VNI West project.</p> <p>To inquire about individual projects, including private renewable energy developments like wind farms, it's best to contact the company progressing them.</p> <p>For an overview of functioning or planned renewable energy developments, please view the Department of Transport and Planning's online map and on the AEMO website</p> <p>A range of materials including fact sheets about REZs can also be found on the VicGrid website at www.energy.vic.gov.au/renewable-energy/vicgrid/renewable-energy-zones</p> <p>For more information about the key organisations with a role in VNI West, we have developed a quick guide. Please view the Roles and Responsibilities factsheet on the TCV website.</p>
 <p>Mental and emotional wellbeing</p>	<p>Concerns about the impact of VNI West on the mental and emotional wellbeing of community members and landholders.</p>	<p>We heard a number of comments that the prospect of new transmission has caused significant stress for some community members and landholders.</p> <p>We acknowledge that the project will have a genuine impact on community members and landholders and appreciate that that these impacts may affect mental health.</p> <p>We hope to alleviate these impacts by engaging thoughtfully with the community to answer questions and seek input into the project. We will also work closely with landholders to seek a location for transmission that minimises impacts.</p> <p>We acknowledge that although we will do our best to mitigate impacts to mental health through the engagement process, professional support may be more useful for some community members and landholders.</p>

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		<p>We encourage anyone experiencing challenges to their own, a friend or a family member's mental health and wellbeing to utilise the professional health and wellbeing support service engaged by TCV.</p> <p>Members of the community can contact the Community Support Service to make an appointment to speak to a professional counsellor for free and confidential advice. Please call 1300 687 327 and reference "VNI West".</p>

Questions about any aspect of VNI West can be directed to TCV via 1800 824 221 or emailed to enquiries@transmissionvictoria.com.au. You can sign up to receive regular TCV Project Updates via email, on [our website](#), or by contacting us directly.