



INFORMATION UPDATE – AEMO’S ‘NEW’ INVESTIGATIONS FOR A TERMINAL STATION SITE – WHAT DOES THAT MEAN FOR THE WESTERN RENEWABLES LINK PROJECT (WRL)?

As we all learnt via several announcements in December 2022, the Australian Energy Market Operator (AEMO) is investigating other options for the location of the proposed terminal station for the WRL project. AEMO is looking further west along the proposed WRL line in the Waubra/Lexton area and in the Bulgana area but is also continuing to consider the Mount Prospect location selected by AusNet.

AEMO’s investigations are not directly related to the WRL but are part of a further analysis of options for another transmission line project – VNI West – which is proposed to run up into New South Wales. Both WRL and VNI West remain at various stages of approval, and at this stage they are entirely dependent on each other. VNI West requires a connection point at a terminal station on the WRL line. The WRL line is required to connect VNI West to Melbourne.

VNI West and the terminal station will intensify the already identified significant impacts and risks associated with the WRL. All the terminal station location options involve limited change to the proposed transmission corridor. To date there has been no community consultation on any of these options.

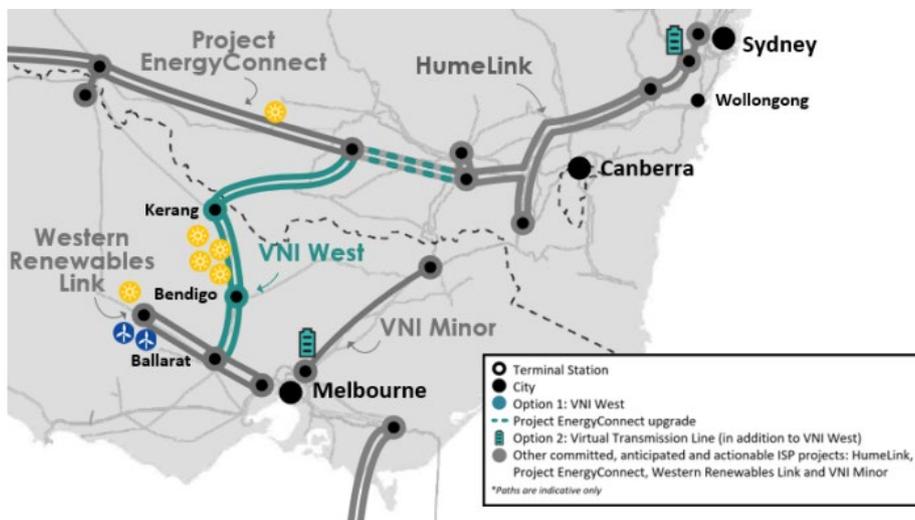
The following overview explains what the Moorabool and Central Highlands Power Alliance Inc. (the **Alliance**) has learnt so far about AEMO’s proposed investigations, how they might impact on WRL, and what it could mean for many of us. As we get more information, we will let you know.

What is VNI West? (Some brief background for context)

VNI West is the [Victoria - New South Wales Interconnector](#) which is a proposed new multi-billion dollar 500kV overhead transmission line that is proposed to connect separate transmission networks in Victoria and New South Wales.

VNI West is part way through a Regulatory Investment Test for Transmission (RIT-T) (**VNI West RIT-T**) which is being jointly investigated by AEMO Victorian Planning (**AVP**) in Victoria and Transgrid in NSW.

The following image is from p.9 of the [Project Assessment Draft Report](#) for the VNI West RIT-T (**VNI West PADR**) which was published in July 2022. It shows the options that were assessed in this Report.



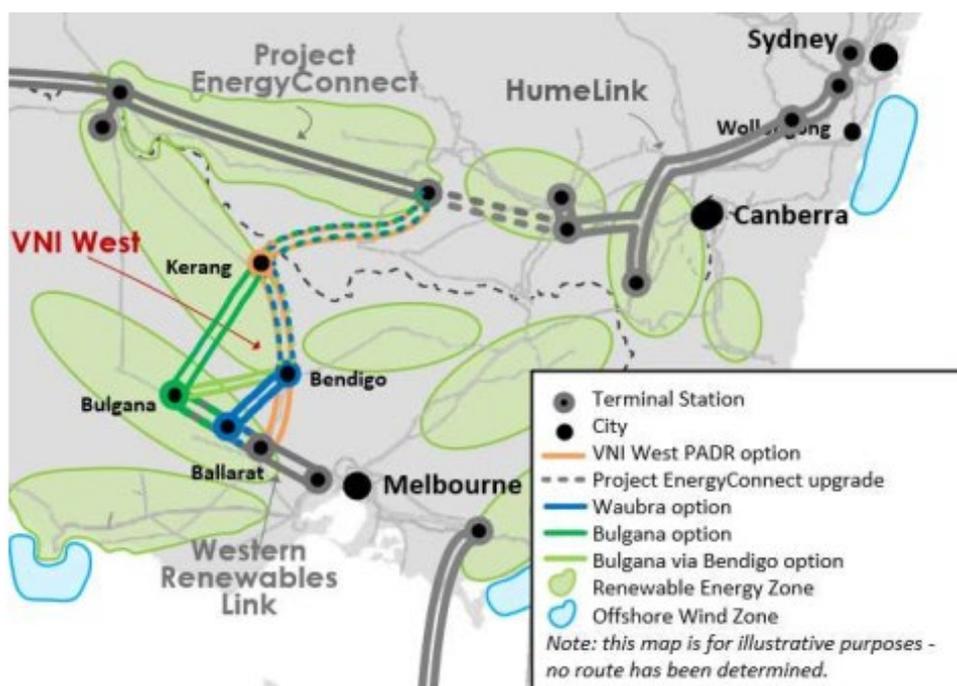
In the VNI West PADR, AEMO and Transgrid determined that 'Option 1' was the preferred indicative route for the VNI West interconnector to link the WRL in Victoria and Project EnergyConnect (PEC) in NSW. In Victoria, this Option 1 route is proposed to run northwards from a terminal station connection point along the WRL via two new VNI West related terminal stations, one near Bendigo and one near Kerang.

AEMO determined the general position of the WRL terminal station – to the 'north of Ballarat' and alongside the existing Ballarat to Bendigo 220kV transmission line – in the July 2019 [Project Assessment Conclusions Report](#) for the Western Victorian RIT-T. As we have known since around April 2021, AusNet has been investigating a site in Mount Prospect as the location for this terminal station.

So, what is AEMO doing now?

On 2 December 2022, AEMO and Transgrid announced in a [VNI West Project Update \(December 2022 Update\)](#) that they were going to investigate other route options for VNI West as well as investigate new terminal station locations for the WRL into which these alternative routes could connect. The December 2022 Update explained they would be looking along the proposed WRL route, west of the currently proposed terminal station, including in the areas around Bulgana and Waubra/Lexton.

On 20 December 2022, AEMO and Transgrid published a '[Frequently Asked Questions](#)' document (**December 2022 FAQ**) for VNI West and provided some more detail. The image below is from p.7 of the December 2022 FAQ and indicatively shows the various proposed new route options and terminal station locations.



How could changes to VNI West affect the WRL and landowners and communities?

The text in the FAQ which accompanies the above image provides some information on the proposed 'VNI West PADR option', the 'Waubra/Lexton option', and the two 'Bulgana options'.

But the brief descriptions do not provide enough clear detail to understand what each option means for those already impacted by WRL. Or what it means for other landowners and communities who never thought they would be affected by WRL, let alone even knowing that something called VNI West was being proposed to run through their region!

The following tables summarise what we have established so far. Note that AusNet’s most current version of the WRL route is shown in its August 2022 ‘[Updated proposed route overview](#)’ and on the [WRL interactive map](#). Unfortunately, the currently proposed WRL route is not proposed to change much no matter what decision AEMO makes about a preferred route for VNI West and the location for the WRL terminal station.

➤ **VNI West PADR options:**

Location of WRL terminal station	Proposed Mount Prospect location unchanged
VNI West PADR Option (Yellow line on image)	Remains as per the originally proposed Option 1 in the VNI West PADR > Mount Prospect to Bendigo to Kerang to NSW
WRL route from Sydenham to Bulgana	Generally unchanged from the currently proposed route
WRL - potential variation proposed	Uprate the originally proposed 220kV section of transmission lines between Mount Prospect area and Bulgana to 500kV
Further impact in Council areas	Landowners and communities in Hepburn, Ballarat, Pyrenees and Northern Grampians will be further impacted if the WRL 220kV line is uprated to 500kV

➤ **Waubra/Lexton option:**

Location of WRL terminal station	Relocated to somewhere in the Waubra/Lexton area
VNI West Waubra Option (Dark blue line on image)	A new 500 kV overhead transmission line to run north-eastwards out of the new WRL terminal station location to connect with a new terminal station near Bendigo and then to Kerang and into NSW
WRL route from Sydenham to Bulgana	Generally unchanged from the currently proposed route with a possible deviation in the Waubra/Lexton area to suit the new terminal station location
Required change to WRL to support VNI West	The originally proposed 220kV rated WRL transmission line between the Mount Prospect area and the new WRL terminal station location will need to be uprated to 500kV
WRL - additional variation proposed	Uprate the remaining 220 kV ‘spur’ section of the WRL line from the new Waubra/Lexton terminal station to Bulgana to 500kV, making the entire WRL a 500kV transmission line
Further and/or new impact in Council areas	Landowners and communities in Pyrenees will be impacted by the new WRL terminal station and part of the VNI West 500kV line; Impact on those in Hepburn, Ballarat, and Pyrenees will be increased by the required uprating of WRL from 220kV to 500kV

	<p>between the Mount Prospect area and the new Waubra/Lexton terminal station location;</p> <p>Impact on those in Pyrenees and Northern Grampians will be increased if the WRL 'spur' from the new terminal station location to Bulgana is uprated from 220kV to 500kV;</p> <p>And if this new Option for VNI West is preferred by AEMO, other landowners and communities in Hepburn, Central Goldfields, Mount Alexander and Bendigo will be impacted by the VNI West 500kV transmission line</p>
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➤ **Bulgana options:**

Location of WRL terminal station	Relocated to somewhere in the Bulgana area
VNI West Bulgana via Bendigo Option (Light green line on image)	A new 500 kV overhead transmission line to run north-eastwards out of the new WRL terminal station to connect with a new terminal station near Bendigo and then to Kerang and into NSW
VNI West Bulgana Option (Dark green line on image)	A new 500 kV overhead transmission line to run north-eastwards out of the new WRL terminal station to connect with a new terminal station near Kerang and then into NSW (No new terminal station near Bendigo)
WRL route from Sydenham to Bulgana	Generally unchanged from the currently proposed route but possibly with some deviation/s to suit the new terminal station location
Required change to WRL to support VNI West	The originally proposed 220kV rated WRL transmission line between the Mount Prospect area and the new WRL terminal station location will need to be uprated to 500kV, making the entire WRL a 500kV transmission line
Further and/or new impact in Council areas	<p>Landowners and communities in Northern Grampians will be impacted by the new WRL terminal station and part of the VNI West 500kV line (both Options);</p> <p>Impact on those in Hepburn, Ballarat, Pyrenees and Northern Grampians will be increased by the required uprating of WRL from 220kV to 500kV between the Mount Prospect area and the new terminal station location;</p> <p>And if either of these new Options for VNI West is preferred by AEMO, other landowners and communities in Northern Grampians, Pyrenees, Central Goldfields, Mount Alexander and Bendigo (if Bulgana via Bendigo Option) or in Northern Grampians and Buloke (if Bulgana Option) will be impacted by the VNI West 500kV transmission line</p>

Can we have a say on AEMO's investigations for the VNI West project and the possible new site for the terminal station?

In the December 2022 FAQ, AEMO and Transgrid said that *'no decision has been made on where best to connect VNI West into WRL, that will be decided . . . through the RIT-T process following further consultation in the new year.'* They also said that they will be consulting with communities that may be *'potentially impacted by the alternative connection location of VNI West into WRL'* so that they *'can be confident we understand all the local factors before making any decision'*. According to them *'a community engagement event schedule will be published on our website and other channels early in the new year.'*

However, it seems that so far AEMO has only given some Council briefings and have not yet connected with communities and landowners about VNI West or the implications for WRL. And there has not been a community engagement event schedule published on the AEMO website yet. This is already evidence of an inferior consultation process.

Despite this, it appears that AEMO *is* already analysing the various options and in the December 2022 FAQ (p.3) they say they intend to publish an additional RIT-T consultation report in February 2023 outlining:

. . . the results of the analysis to date, a proposed preferred option and the reasoning for selecting that option, and seeking formal feedback on the proposal. This will provide meaningful opportunity for stakeholder and community engagement on values, opportunities and constraints before a final decision on connection location is made at the time the RIT-T is concluded, and the Project Assessment Conclusions Report (PACR) is published.

As soon as we know when the report is published and what it means, we will let you know.

AEMO says that if you would like to register interest for future notifications of consultation then email them on vnwestritt@aemo.com.au. We suggest you might want to think about emailing them as soon as possible with any concerns and questions you have.

How does this affect the EES for the WRL?

In the December 2022 FAQ AEMO states that *'if a decision is made to connect VNI West to an alternative WRL terminal station location, the submission of the WRL Environment Effect Statement may be further delayed'*.

We will be investigating the implications of all this and let you know our findings in a later Update, but we believe that AusNet will need to take any changes in the WRL that will be required because of AEMO's decisions about VNI West into account in their Environment Effects Statement (EES). This could require new investigations to be undertaken, particularly if a new site needs to be found for the terminal station.

What can you do?

Continue to support your neighbours, your family, farm, home, business and your environment. Many of us will not only have WRL to deal with but there will be impacts from VNI West as well. Forward this Information Update to them.

Continue to support the work of the Alliance in its upcoming [legal action against AEMO](#):

- Make sure you, your family and friends are all [members](#)
- [Donate](#) to the [Alliance legal action](#) to force the WRL project back to the drawing board

HOLD THE LINE and don't sign anything. We must **STOP AUSNET'S TOWERS**