

Community Engagement and Social Value Guidelines for renewable energy and transmission projects

Changes summary

June 2026

VicGrid worked with the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action to review feedback on the draft Community Engagement and Social Value Guidelines.

Between September and November 2025, we received more than 160 written submissions. We also heard from communities, landholders, neighbours, Traditional Owners, local government and industry through meetings, briefings, workshops and targeted consultation on issues such as public liability insurance.

Feedback strongly supported the focus on early, genuine engagement and social value. We made

changes to the guidelines to improve outcomes for communities, landholders, neighbours and Traditional Owners, while ensuring projects can meet Victoria's future energy needs.

Some feedback raised questions about how developers will be held to account, including assessment, monitoring and compliance. We are addressing this through the development of the Victorian Access Regime and will provide more detail in future documentation.

The sections below summarise the main changes.

Structure and clarity



What we heard

Feedback called for the guidelines to:

- Clarify whether they apply to certain project types, such as storage projects and projects connecting to the distribution network
- Make clear that they represent the Victorian Government's minimum expectations for developers, including how these expectations will be enforced
- Focus more on expected engagement outcomes, not just processes



What we did

The guidelines have been updated to:

- Clarify who the guidelines are for
- Introduce outcomes for communities, landholders, neighbours and Traditional Owners
- Combine related expectations to improve clarity while maintaining – and in some cases strengthening – the overall intent of each of the expectations

Engaging with communities and local government surrounding the project (section 1)



What we heard

Feedback called for the guidelines to:

- Clarify how communities are defined and who needs to be engaged
- Consider the impacts of consultation fatigue
- Provide clearer guidance on engagement tools, activities and the need for locally accessible staff
- Clarify expectations for developers to respect community members' requests regarding contact
- Include clear expectations for engagement with local government
- Recognise the role of local governments in planning and community engagement



What we did

The guidelines have been updated to:

- Include a definition for the term 'community' and provide guidance on how projects should identify their surrounding community
- Strengthen a number of the expectations for early, transparent and meaningful engagement, including the integration of feedback
- Include new expectations to:
 - Encourage coordinated engagement to reduce consultation fatigue
 - Expect developers to respect community members' requests on whether they would like to be contacted
- Clarify expectations of early engagement with local government
- Clarify the role of local government in project planning and engagement

Engaging with host landholders, neighbours and nearby landholders (section 1)



What we heard

Feedback called for the guidelines to:

- Clarify the meaning of 'fair and reasonable' in relation to landholder agreements
- Balance the needs of landholders and developers regarding the use of non-disclosure agreements
- Improve transparency about what landholders and neighbours can and cannot influence
- Allow for more control and flexibility for landholders during project development
- Support landholders and neighbours to have appropriate influence on decisions that affect them



What we did

The guidelines have been updated to:

- Strengthen landholder engagement expectations to:
 - Support early provision of project information
 - Improve protections around information sharing
 - Strengthen end-of-life and financial safeguard provisions
- Strengthen neighbour engagement expectations to:
 - Support early provision of relevant project information
 - Clarify expectations for developers to address concerns in project design and delivery
- Include guidance on identifying neighbouring and nearby landholders

New minimum expectation for landholder public liability (section 1 and appendix B)



What we heard

Feedback called for the guidelines to:

- Provide more certainty about liability and financial risk for landholders and neighbouring landholders, including in events like fire or flooding and accidental damage outside of their control
- Consider broader industry conversations regarding this issue and the potential for a nationally consistent approach



What we did

The guidelines have been updated to:

- Include a new public liability expectation that landholders and neighbouring landholders are not exposed to increased liability from projects
- Provide further guidance to support developers in meeting this expectation, including:
 - Limiting what developers can claim from landholders
 - Requiring written commitment to eligible landholders
 - Confirming their insurers honour this commitment

Engaging with Traditional Owners (section 2)



What we heard

Feedback called for the guidelines to:

- Prioritise and strengthen requirements that support self-determined processes and genuine partnerships
- Support capacity building and resourcing for Traditional Owner groups
- Provide clearer guidance and resources for developers regarding Traditional Owner rights and best-practice approaches for engaging with Traditional Owners



What we did

The guidelines have been updated to:

- Emphasise self-determined engagement and agreement-making
- Reorganise expectations into two clear themes:
 - Self-determined engagement and agreement-making
 - Respectful and informed engagement
- Consolidate related expectations into stronger overarching expectations
- Expand expectations to clarify:
 - Early engagement
 - Clear influence
 - Flexible resourcing
 - Cultural competency
 - Embedding Traditional Owner knowledge in project design and delivery
- Include additional guidance on terminology and the rights of Traditional Owners

Creating social value and economic benefits (section 3)



What we heard

Feedback called for the guidelines to:

- Provide clearer guidance on budget setting, including dollar-value considerations, to support transparency, benchmarking and fair negotiation while retaining flexibility
- Strengthen the role of Traditional Owners and communities in decisions about benefits



What we did

The guidelines have been updated to:

- Clarify that further analysis and targeted engagement are being undertaken to inform future guidance on dollar-value considerations as part of the Renewable Energy Zone Community Benefits Plan
- Note that this plan will be published before the Victorian Access Regime takes effect
- Strengthen expectations to work with Traditional Owners and communities in designing benefits

Contact us



Phone: 1800 418 341

Email: vicgrid@deeca.vic.gov.au

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