VicGrid

Western Renewable Energy Zone

Updated May 2026

The 2025 Victorian Transmission Plan proposed a renewable energy zone with two sections in western Victoria. The eastern section is located between Stawell and Donald, and the western section is located north of Horsham, between Dooen and Hopetoun.

The Minister for Energy and Resources has formally declared the zone, with the following boundary adjustments made to the eastern section:

- We moved the boundary inward near Grampians (Gariwerd) National Park, Wimmera River and areas of high biodiversity value.
- We excluded from the zone sensitive ridgelines and areas of high biodiversity to the east of the zone, near Kara Kara National Park.
- We excluded Morrl Morrl Nature Conservation Reserve.
- We excluded a small area overlapping with the Joel Joel Nature Conservation Reserve.

Figure 1: Western Renewable Energy Zone location

What is a renewable energy zone?

Renewable energy zones are areas identified as the best places to host wind, solar and battery storage projects.

Renewable energy zones will:

- Help coordinate renewable energy projects and reduce the need for unnecessary transmission infrastructure
- Enable VicGrid to set clearer rules around how projects gain access to the grid, including expectations for how developers engage with communities
- Provide more certainty about how and where renewable energy projects are developed
- Unlock new economic benefits for regional communities and Traditional Owners

The 2025 Victorian Transmission Plan proposed six renewable energy zones in regional Victoria. The Victorian Government has now declared five of these zones, with some changes to proposed boundaries. You can learn more about each of the renewable energy zones at **vicgrid.com.au/transmission-planning/renewable-energy-zones**

The introduction of renewable energy zones doesn't alter what is allowed to occur on land under existing land use zones or overlays, such as the Farming Zone or Rural Activity Zone.

All proposed projects will continue to be subject to existing planning and environmental controls, including approval processes under the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* and *Environment Effects Act 1978*.

VicGrid

VICTORIA State Government

The Western Renewable Energy Zone

The declared Western Renewable Energy Zone includes parts of the Northern Grampians, Yarriambiack, Hindmarsh and Buloke local government areas. There are two sections to the zone, an eastern and a western.

The zone is within the Registered Aboriginal Party boundaries of Barengi Gadjin Land Council and Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation, and across areas of Country to the east that do not have a formally recognised Traditional Owner Group.

Changes to the zone over time

Following feedback on the draft 2025 Victorian Transmission Plan, the western section of the zone was expanded. This was in response to stakeholders calling for more flexibility and capacity to support viable renewable energy projects.

In response to consultation on this zone as part of the declaration process, some areas of high cultural and biodiversity values were excluded from the eastern section. As these areas are not suitable for generation, their removal will not affect renewable energy investment in this zone.

Renewable energy project developers must talk to landholders to get permission to build renewable generation projects on their land. Landholders can choose whether or not to host a wind, solar or battery project.

Landholders who choose to host projects will receive financial payments and other benefits negotiated directly with the developer.

Project developers will also work with neighbouring properties to address impacts and negotiate financial benefits.

How decisions will be made about new renewable energy projects in this zone

The Victorian Government is setting new rules to manage how renewable energy projects, such as wind and solar farms, gain access to the state's transmission network.

Under the current open access regime, developers can connect their projects almost anywhere on the transmission network, as long as they meet technical and environmental planning requirements.

Under the new approach, known as the Victorian Access Regime, developers will need to apply for access and VicGrid will oversee a competitive process to decide which projects can connect within each zone.

Each zone will have a set limit on how much new renewable energy can be connected. We are proposing to set access limits that reflect how much electricity the network can carry at a given time, based on current infrastructure and planned upgrades.

In determining how much of the access limit is allocated, we will consider:

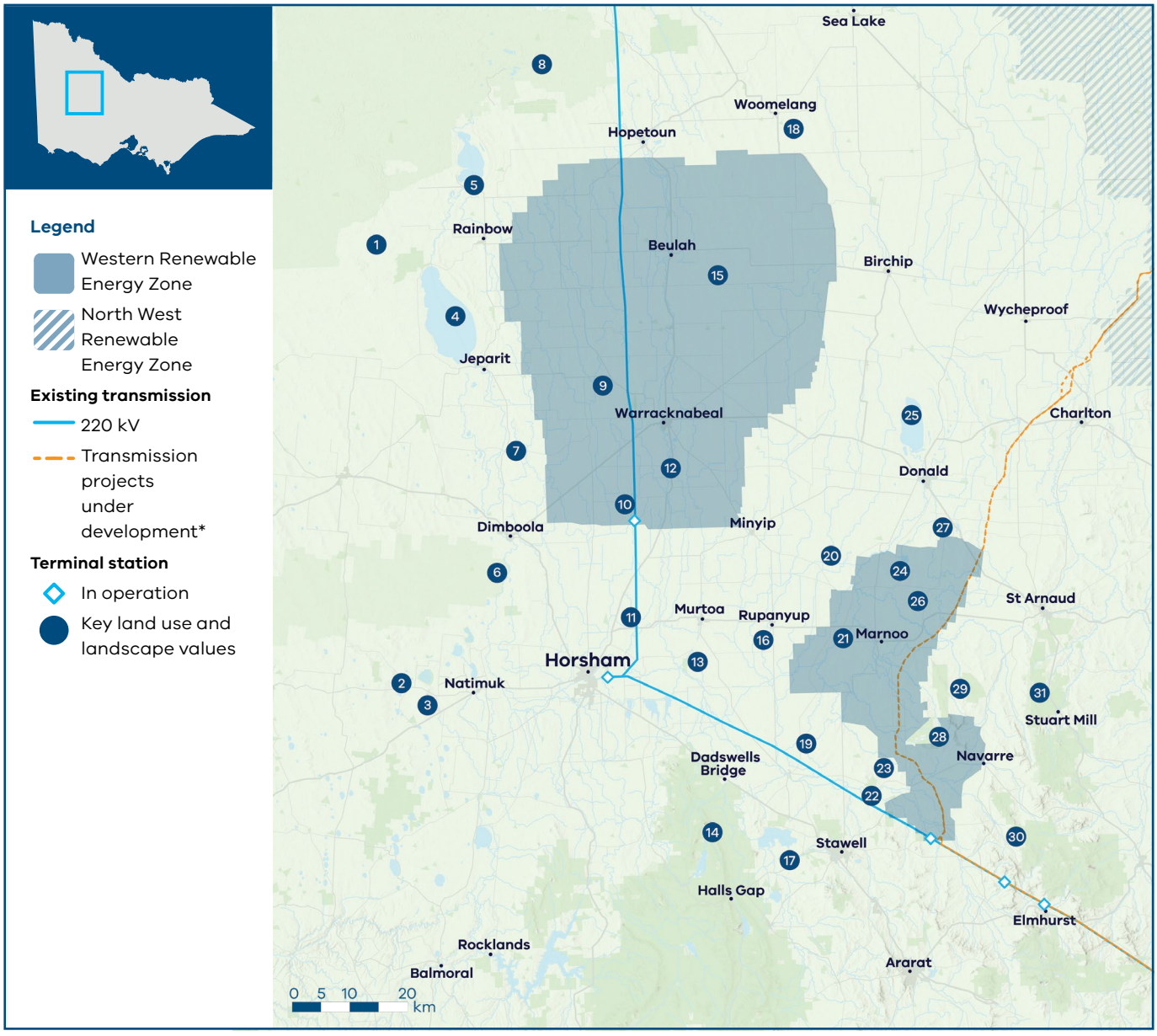
- The amount of electricity Victoria needs to generate to meet increasing demand
- The size of the zone and the density of projects
- Whether developers are meeting expectations for landholder, community and Traditional Owner engagement, and adding social value through initiatives and economic development

This process will ensure Victoria produces enough energy to meet demand, while minimising the impact on communities, Traditional Owners, agriculture and the environment.

How to read the map

The map in Figure 2 shows the Western Renewable Energy Zone, including some of the significant land use and landscape values that influenced its location, size and shape. The identified values in the region are a sub-set only and do not represent all of the values present. For detailed descriptions of the labelled land use and landscape values, see page 5.

Figure 2: The Western Renewable Energy Zone



*The map shows transmission projects under development, including transmission projects defined as 'Committed and Anticipated' or 'Actionable' under the Australian Energy Market Operator's 2024 Integrated System Plan. This map displays proposed alignments for Victoria to New South Wales Interconnector West (VNI West) and Western Renewables Link (WRL). The VNI Preferred Easement is not the final or approved easement for the VNI West Project. Based on the results and findings of the technical studies, the easement is subject to change throughout the EES process.

Key land use and landscape values

1. **Biodiversity/community:** Big Desert State Forest
2. **Biodiversity/cultural:** Multiple parks, reserves and wetlands, including protected biodiversity areas, home to native flora and fauna
3. **Cultural/biodiversity/community:** Mount Arapiles-Tooan State park (Dyurrite Cultural Landscape) – significant landscape with high cultural, biodiversity and tourism values for the region
4. **Biodiversity/cultural:** Lake Hindmarsh and surrounding areas of sensitivity
5. **Biodiversity:** Lake Albacutya Ramsar-listed wetland
6. **Biodiversity/community:** Little Desert National Park
7. **Biodiversity/cultural:** Wimmera River and surrounding areas of sensitivity
8. **Biodiversity/cultural/community:** Wyperfeld National Park
9. **Mining:** Heavy mineral sands deposits
10. **Biodiversity:** Protected biodiversity area
11. **Mining:** Mining tenement and mineral sands deposits
12. **Biodiversity/cultural:** Yarriambiack Creek and surrounding areas of sensitivity
13. **Biodiversity:** Barrabool Flora and Fauna Reserve and Marma State Forest, including protected biodiversity area, home to native flora and fauna
14. **Biodiversity/cultural/community:** The Grampians (Gariwerd Cultural Landscape) National Park – significant landform and landscape with high cultural, community and biodiversity values, including significant viewpoints of the region
15. **Agriculture:** Significant broadacre cropping across this region has potential to be compatible with co-locating renewable energy infrastructure in appropriate locations
16. **Mining:** Minerals retention licence
17. **Biodiversity:** Conservation reserves and wetlands, home to native flora and fauna
18. **Mining:** Heavy minerals sands deposits
19. **Mining:** Minerals retention licence
20. **Mining:** Mining licence application and retention licence
21. **Biodiversity/cultural:** Richardson River and surrounding areas of sensitivity
22. **Biodiversity/cultural:** Wimmera River and surrounding areas of sensitivity
23. **Biodiversity/cultural:** Glynwylln State Forest and surrounding remnant bushland and reserves connecting areas to the north-east, west and south-west towards Grampians (Gariwerd Cultural Landscape) National Park and home to native flora and fauna
24. **Biodiversity/cultural:** Wetlands including Lake Batyo Catyo and surrounding lakes
25. **Biodiversity/cultural:** Lake Buloke and surrounding areas of sensitivity
26. **Flooding risk:** Floodway and land subject to inundation
27. **Biodiversity/cultural:** Wetlands including Lake Cope Cope and Waltons Lakes
28. **Biodiversity/cultural:** Morrl Morrl Nature Conservation Reserve, protected biodiversity area for native flora and fauna
29. **Biodiversity/cultural:** Mount Bolangum and Big Tottington Nature Conservation Reserves, home to native flora and fauna
30. **Biodiversity/cultural:** Pyrenees State Forest and Landsborough Nature Conservation Reserve, home to native flora and fauna
31. **Biodiversity/cultural/community:** Kara Kara National Park

How feedback shaped the zone

We carefully considered all feedback, but not all community or industry requests have been acted on. The 2025 Victorian Transmission Plan and the renewable energy zone declarations reflect difficult choices, made by weighing up many factors to deliver a plan that best serves all Victorians. These decisions balance energy needs, land use, environmental impacts and community concern.

To shape the Western Renewable Energy Zone, we undertook engagement as part of the 2025 Victorian Transmission Plan development. This commenced in 2023 and was delivered across multiple consultation phases. Further engagement was then carried out as part of the renewable energy zone declaration process, between November 2025 and March 2026.

Renewable energy zones are broad strategic areas identified for potential development. We recognise that the declared zone includes sensitive areas that are not appropriate for development. These will be carefully considered in future project level planning, design and environmental assessment and planning approvals.

Below is a summary of previous consultation findings and how we have responded through the zone refinement. You can learn more at **vicgrid.com.au/transmission-planning/renewable-energy-zones**

What we heard as part of preparing the 2025 Victorian Transmission Plan

- Minimise impacts on agricultural land, particularly areas with highly productive soils
- Consider the impacts of renewable energy infrastructure on the use of advanced farming technology in the north-west
- Communities have had negative experiences with previous and planned generation and transmission development
- There is interest in understanding how renewable energy and transmission development could bring economic and social benefits to the region
- Concerns about potential impacts on Horsham Airport's expansion plans, and the importance of protecting the surrounding flight descending zone
- Protect biodiversity and the valued natural environments
- Protect significant landscapes in the south of the region, including the Grampians (Gariwerd Cultural Landscape) National Park and Mount Arapiles-Tooan (Dyurrite Cultural Landscape) State Park, and other important parks, reserves and conservation areas
- Concerns for potential flood risk and impacts on surface water flows
- Concerns about the combined impacts of competing land use, including the Victoria to New South Wales Interconnector West (VNI West) project, generator interest and mineral sands mining activities
- There are many landholders in the area that do not wish to host renewable energy infrastructure on their properties
- Support from industry and some landholders to expand the zone to allow more opportunities for the development of renewable energy projects, particularly in the western section

What we did as part of preparing the 2025 Victorian Transmission Plan

- Combined what were initially two separate zones into one, to provide more flexibility in where renewable energy projects, such as wind farms, can be developed
- Expanded the western section due to the need to provide greater opportunities for project developers to participate
- Avoided many sensitive landscapes and areas with important cultural, environmental and community values including Grampians (Gariwerd) National Park, Kara Kara National Park, Lake Buloke, the Wimmera River and natural conservation reserves around Stawell, Avoca and St Arnaud
- Committed to continuing to assess and seek feedback on important cultural, environmental and tourism values of the Grampians (Gariwerd Cultural Landscape) National Park and Mount Arapiles-Tooan (Dyurrite Cultural Landscape) State Park

While the expansion of the western section included more farmland, research has shown that dryland broadacre cropping and grazing may be more compatible with renewable energy infrastructure than other forms of farming. The research also notes that farms are unique and that the impacts on landholders may vary. These impacts will need to be carefully considered as part of any proposed project development.

What we heard as part of the renewable energy zone declaration consultation

- Strong community opposition in the zone, particularly in the eastern section
- Varied views on the compatibility of renewable energy infrastructure with broadacre farming
- Continued concerns about biodiversity impacts and the inclusion of high-value cultural and environmental areas, such as the Wimmera River and several conservation reserves
- Concerns that renewable energy infrastructure will increase bushfire risk and impact emergency response

What we did as part of the renewable energy zone declaration consultation

- Removed Joel Joel Nature Conservation Reserve, Morrl Morrl Nature Conservation Reserve and areas surrounding the Wimmera River from the zone
- Revised the zone to increase distance from environmentally and culturally significant landscapes

Detailed assessment of concerns relating to environment, agricultural, bushfire and social impacts will be considered at the project level through consultation, planning, design and environmental assessment and approvals.

What will it be like living in a renewable energy zone?

If you live in or near a renewable energy zone, you can expect to see the development of renewable energy infrastructure over time, including wind, solar and battery projects.

The development of projects is limited by the available space on the transmission network and only a small proportion of land is expected to be used. The vast majority of land will continue to support existing uses such as farming.

VicGrid will coordinate development of projects to reduce impacts on communities, landscapes and the environment, while all projects will still need to meet existing planning and environmental approval requirements.

Engagement and the delivery of social and economic value

Renewable energy zones will drive economic development in regional Victoria and enable new economic benefits over time through the Victorian Government's draft Renewable Energy Zone Community Benefits Plan.

The introduction of new Renewable Energy Zone Community Energy Funds will support initiatives that create benefits from the energy transition and improve energy and biodiversity outcomes in regions hosting renewable energy zones and new transmission infrastructure. These benefits will be in addition to any benefits provided directly by renewable energy developers.

Local decision-making that responds to local needs and priorities will be a cornerstone of these funds. Decisions about investments will be made in consultation with regional community reference groups, with broad community and industry representation.

The Renewable Energy Zone Community Benefits Plan is being developed and will be released once finalised. Learn more at **vicgrid.com.au/community/communitybenefits**

The Victorian Government will soon release the Community Engagement and Social Value Guidelines. The guidelines set out the minimum expectations of developers in how they engage with communities and create social value and economic benefits.

Developers will be expected to engage early and meaningfully with host landholders, neighbouring and nearby landholders, Traditional Owners and communities surrounding their project.

Developers will be expected to integrate feedback received from these groups into project design, including initiatives that support economic investment in the region, recognise impacts on communities and deliver community benefits.

What happens next

Declaring renewable energy zones is not the end of the process. Over the next 12 to 24 months, VicGrid will do the following:

- Finalise the rules that renewable energy and storage projects must follow to develop within a zone, including the requirement to meet the expectations that will be outlined in the Community Engagement and Social Values Guidelines.
- Set limits on how much new renewable energy generation can connect to the network within each zone.
- Work with existing projects seeking connection to the network to meet community expectations.
- Monitor the performance of projects who gain access and review if they are meeting the conditions of their connection agreement.
- Support the creation of community energy funds and work with communities on how those funds are spent.
- Continue planning the necessary transmission projects, and work with generation and storage projects to coordinate their infrastructure and minimise environmental and community impacts.

Throughout these steps, we will continue to engage with communities, landholders, Traditional Owners, industry and local government. The feedback captured to date will continue to help shape these processes as Victoria progresses towards a coordinated and fair energy transition.

You can learn more about the new rules and guidelines that will enable this work at **vicgrid.com.au/industry/access-and-connections**

Contact us

Phone: 1800 418 341

Email: enquiries@vicgrid.com.au

Deaf, hearing or speech impaired? Please contact the National Relay Service on 133 677 or **communications.gov.au/accesshub/nrs**

Need an interpreter? Contact Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) on 131 450 (within Australia) or visit **tisnational.gov.au**

Disclaimer: The information in this document is current at the time of printing, may be subject to change and should not be relied upon. Please visit **vicgrid.com.au** for the latest updates.

Stay up to date and subscribe to our newsletter.