VNI West

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Biodiversity Impact Assessment

FACT SHEET | AUGUST 2025
Application number SSI-72887208

VNI West proposes the construction, operation and ongoing maintenance of a 500kV double circuit overhead transmission line that would connect the high voltage electricity grids in NSW and Victoria. As part of the EIS for VNI West (NSW), a detailed assessment was undertaken of the potential biodiversity impacts of the project. The assessment considered impacts on native vegetation, threatened species and ecological communities across the project footprint. For more information, refer to **Chapter 7: Biodiversity Impact Assessment** and **Technical Paper 1: Biodiversity Development Assessment Report**.

Biodiversity impacts have been minimised, where possible, during project development through measures such as co-locating the transmission line route within existing areas of disturbance and minimising the need for native vegetation clearing. However, given the scale of the project, a number of biodiversity impacts were identified. Transgrid will continue to avoid and minimise impacts to biodiversity values during detailed design and further construction planning where practicable.

How the assessment was carried out

The biodiversity assessment was carried out in accordance with the Secretary's Environmental Assessment Requirements (SEARs), the Biodiversity Assessment Method (BAM), and applicable biodiversity guidelines and legislation.

It included desktop investigations, seasonal field surveys, and mapping of ecological values throughout the project footprint and surrounding areas. It considered native vegetation, threatened species, ecological communities, and potential biodiversity impacts during construction and operation.

The assessment approach included:

- applying the BAM and using the NSW Government BAM calculator to determine offset requirements
- conducting desktop reviews of databases and aerial imagery
- undertaking extensive seasonal flora and fauna surveys, including targeted surveys for threatened species
- validating vegetation mapping in the field and assessing vegetation integrity and habitat quality
- assessing habitat suitability and connectivity for key species and communities
- identifying direct and indirect impacts, including edge effects, prescribed impacts, and impacts on groundwater dependent ecosystems and aquatic habitats
- assessing serious and irreversible impacts (SAII) and matters of national environmental significance
- consulting with the NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW) on survey methods and clearance approaches
- identifying mitigation, management and offset measures for unavoidable biodiversity impacts.

The EIS outlines:

- native vegetation, threatened species, and high-value ecological areas
- the scale of native vegetation clearing required for the project
- impacts on habitat connectivity and wildlife movement across the landscape
- impacts to aquatic ecosystems from construction, including new and upgraded watercourse crossings
- indirect impacts from construction, including noise, lighting, dust, and weed spread
- assessment of cumulative biodiversity impacts in combination with other infrastructure projects
- limited long-term biodiversity impacts during operation, mostly related to vegetation management
- mitigation, monitoring and biodiversity offset strategies to address residual impacts in line with relevant policies.

Image: Southern Bell Frog located during surveys at the Edward River in March 2024.

Key findings from the EIS assessment

Construction impacts

Native vegetation and habitat

To support the development of transmission line infrsatructure, up to 1,432 hectares of native vegetation and habitat may need to be affected by construction, including areas of clearing. No clearing is proposed within Murray Valley National Park or Southwest Woodland Nature Reserve.

Threatened ecological communities and species

Localised impacts to native vegetation and habitat may affect up to six threatened ecological communities, 27 threatened plant species and 18 threatened animal species, such as the critically endangered Plains-wanderer. Where field surveys couldn't be undertaken, species presence was conservatively assumed based on suitable habitat identified through mapping and desktop assessment.

Indirect habitat impacts identified

The project may lead to edge effects, noise and dust impacts, increased weed and pest spread, and a reduction in habitat quality adjacent to the construction area.

Aquatic ecosystems

Construction may temporarily affect nearby aquatic habitats due to erosion, sediment and water quality changes. Impacts will be minimised by implementing standard environmental management measuress and protecting nearby vegetation and habitat.

Groundwater dependent ecosystems

Construction of the project is unlikely to pose a significant risk to groundwater dependent ecosystems because:

- there are no mapped groundwater dependent ecosystems close to the proposed Dinawan substation expansion locations; and
- transmission line construction would only disturb small areas, with any potential impacts on groundwater ecosystems expected to be temporary and localised.

Impacts on Commonwealth listed species

Based on the potential extent of biodiversity direct and indirect impacts and likelihood of presence, two EPBC Act-listed communities, five threatened flora and three threatened fauna species were identified as likely to be significantly impacted or have potential for significant in some locations.

Operational impacts

Operational impacts to be managed

Ongoing vegetation management and infrastructure operation may influence local habitats, including the potential for some fragmentation and increased risks to fauna collision. While some changes to vegetation connectivity may occur, the project has been designed to minimise these effects by limiting vegetation clearance wherever possible.

Aquatic impacts from infrastructure crossings

Potential impacts to aquatic species and habitats during operation would generally be limited to changes to waterways from waterway crossings and water quality impacts from sedimentation or accidental spills.

Mitigation measures

During detailed design and preconstruction, sensitive biodiversity areas will be avoided and/or minimised where feasible when finalising the locations for project infrastructure.

A biodiversity management sub-plan will outline areas where vegetation removal and habitat disturbance are necessary. It will also establish 'no go' zones to protect key features like retained vegetation, hollow-bearing trees, nests and other habitats during construction as well as 'special biodiversity protection zones' to protect specific flora and fauna species.

Ongoing assessments and field investigations will verify species presence and potential impacts, which could lead to adjustments in construction methods or equipment used.

A biosecurity management plan will be developed to address risks during construction, including protocols for cleaning vehicles, machinery, clothing, and boots to prevent the spread of pathogens, weeds and plant materials.

Project personnel will receive inductions, toolbox talks and targeted training on biodiversity protocols.

Pre-clearing surveys will be completed and wildlife relocated if required within proposed vegetation clearing areas. These surveys will identify fauna that may need relocation, mark out any biodiversity exclusion zones and ensure nest boxes are in place.

Areas of cleared vegetation will be offset in line with the project's biodiversity offset strategy. Further details are provided on the next page.

Biodiversity offsets

Major infrastructure projects generally require biodiversity offsets to compensate for residual and unavoidable impacts on biodiversity caused by the project. If we can't provide enough compensation for biodiversity within the immediate project area, then it may be 'offset' in a different location with similar habitat and flora and fauna species. This may include parcels of land put forward for conservation measures by private landowners.

Biodiversity offsets are set out by the NSW Government under the Biodiversity Offset Scheme.

The biodiversity offset strategy for VNI West includes three primary options to fulfil credit obligations:

- creating Biodiversity Stewardship Agreements on local land, including Transgrid-owned or third-party private land
- purchasing and retiring biodiversity credits from the biodiversity credit register
- making contributions to the Biodiversity Conservation Fund.

The final offset requirements, strategy and proposed delivery approach will be confirmed following approval of the project, during detailed design and once the final construction area is confirmed.

Image: Slender Darling Pea showing distinctive lines in petals.

Image: Endangered adult female Plains Wanderer.

Image: Individual of the Mossgiel Daisy with white flowers

Image: Individual of the Chariot Wheels.

Next steps

You have the opportunity to review and comment on the EIS via submission to the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure (DPHI) during August 2025. Electronic copies of the EIS are available via:

- DPHI Major Projects website: https://www.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/major-projects
- VNI West (NSW) project website: www.transgrid.com.au/vniw

Following the EIS Exhibition period, Transgrid will produce a Submissions Report to formally respond to community and stakeholder feedback received during exhibition.

For more information on the VNI West EIS, please scan the QR code, or visit www.transgrid.com.au/vniw.

Connect with us

Transgrid is committed to working with landowners and communities throughout the delivery of VNI West.
Please connect with us for more information.

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