

VNI West is a proposed 500kV double-circuit transmission line connecting the energy grids of NSW and Victoria. As part of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) being prepared, a detailed assessment will be undertaken to identify and assess the potential impacts of the project in relation to Aboriginal heritage.



What is an Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Assessment Report?

As part of the EIS, both the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Assessment and the non-Aboriginal Heritage Assessment work together to provide a more comprehensive view of the cultural values of the study area.

Aboriginal cultural heritage consists of any places and objects of significance to Aboriginal people relating to their traditions, observances, lore, customs, beliefs and history. The Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Assessment Report (ACHAR) identifies and assesses the potential impacts of the project in relation to Aboriginal cultural heritage values and sites within the study area and is being prepared as part of the EIS in accordance with the Guide to investigating, assessing and report on Aboriginal cultural heritage in NSW (OEH, 2011).

What have we heard from the community?

Feedback expressed by the community so far has indicated a strong presence of Aboriginal cultural heritage sites and artefacts in the region with specific reference to certain sites near the proposed alignment of the transmission line.



Example of scarring on a black box in the eastern end of study area.

We also continue to better understand issues through direct engagement with Aboriginal peoples via Local Aboriginal Land Councils, Traditional Owners and knowledge holders to discuss heritage matters and undertake cultural walkthroughs on Country.

How is the assessment carried out?

The preparation of the ACHAR involves the following:
conducting a search of the Aboriginal Heritage Information Management System (AHIMS) for recorded sites within the vicinity of the project

- reviewing heritage registers and schedules, local histories and archaeological reports
- preparing a predictive model for the Aboriginal archaeological record of the project footprint to identify potentially sensitive areas for further investigation. This is based on previously recorded AHIMS sites and archaeological investigations, topography, land disturbance and land use
- undertaking detailed surveys and test excavations along the length of the project footprint
- engaging with Aboriginal stakeholders and other knowledge holders
- assessing potential direct and indirect impacts on Aboriginal heritage, including consideration of relevant cultural values associated with the area
- recommending mitigation and management measures to minimise potential impacts.

Transgrid aims to avoid impacts to heritage as a first principle through actions such as refinement of the alignment or tower locations. Where impacts cannot be avoided, surface artefacts and subsurface deposits will be salvaged as a measure to mitigate.



Potential impacts identified to date

Direct impacts

These relate to direct harm or disturbance to potential surface and/or subsurface heritage items within the project footprint as a result of vegetation clearing, construction of transmission line structures, substations and associated temporary or permanent infrastructure including access tracks.

Indirect impacts

These relate to impacts that may result in a loss of heritage value such as impacts on the views to and from heritage items.

Construction

Potential impacts during construction include the risk of impacting previously unrecorded Aboriginal heritage sites. This could occur during earthworks and excavations associated with the construction of access tracks, work compounds, transmission line structures, substation expansion and ancillary activities.

Post construction impacts to heritage items

During construction any identified Aboriginal heritage features or items of significance within the transmission line easement will be mapped and recorded to reduce the potential for impacts during maintenance activities.

Operation

During operation, there is the potential for impacts on Aboriginal sites while carrying out maintenance activities such as access track and vegetation maintenance or transmission line works. It is anticipated the potential for impacts when carrying out these activities would be low. The potential for impacts will be minimised through implementation of standard Transgrid protocols (such as establishing no-go zones near known Aboriginal heritage sites) during maintenance activities.

How are these impacts minimised?

The project will develop a Heritage Management Plan (HMP) in consultation with the project's Registered Aboriginal Parties (RAPs). The HMP will be included in VNI West (NSW)'s Construction Environment Management Plan and will outline potential mitigation measures to minimise impacts to heritage sites during construction. Mitigation measures would likely include:

- avoiding identified Aboriginal sites wherever possible, through detailed design/tower location placement and construction methodology
- training all construction workers in cultural heritage awareness and informing them of heritage significance within and adjacent to project work sites
- additional desktop and field assessments of previously unassessed areas, where required
- implementation of an Unexpected Finds Protocol
- collection, salvage, mapping and recording of heritage artefacts
- appropriate storage of retrieved archaeological materials in consultation with RAPs and other relevant Traditional Owners.

Next steps

There will be ongoing opportunities for the community to provide input throughout the development of the EIS. Once all the technical assessments have been completed the EIS is placed on public exhibition. During this time, the community members will be able to view the EIS and all supporting studies and provide written submissions on the project to the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure.



For more information on Transgrid's commitment to reconciliation, please scan the QR code or visit <https://www.transgrid.com.au/community/cultural-heritage-and-reconciliation/>

Connect with us

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



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