Watta Wella Renewable Energy Project

Social Impact Assessment

Final

June 2025

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Social Impact Assessment

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Prepared by
Umwelt (Australia) Pty Limited

On behalf of
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Executive Summary

The proposed Watta Wella Renewable Energy Project (the Project) by RES Australia Pty Ltd (RES) (the proponent), comprises the construction and development of a large-scale wind farm and a Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) facility in north-western Victoria, approximately 16 kilometres (km) north-east of Stawell within the Northern Grampians Shire Council.

Following referral of the Project under the *Environment Effects Act 1978* (EE Act) and the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) in 2022, the Project received a 'controlled action' under the EPBC Act and a 'no EES' decision under the EE Act, with the condition to produce an Environment Report to address Matters of National Environmental Significance (MNES) under a bilateral assessment.

The Social Impact Assessment (SIA) has been prepared by Umwelt to satisfy the requirements set out within the 'Scope for the Environment Report under the EPBC Act Bilateral (Assessment) Agreement 2014 and EE Act' (the Scoping Document) (dated May 2023, Department of Transport and Planning (DTP) Impact Assessment Unit). The Scoping Document outlined the need to consider the social and economic impacts (both positive and negative) of the proposed project at local, regional, state and national level.

The Project includes the development of a renewable energy facility comprising of up to 45 wind turbine generators (WTGs) with a maximum capacity of approximately 360 megawatts (MW) and a turbine tip height of up to 255 m. A Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) facility with a storage capacity of up to 400 MW/1,600 MWh, a substation for both the wind farm and BESS and an operations and maintenance (O&M) facility will also be developed. Two overhead 220 kV lines will connect both the wind farm substation and BESS substation to the existing AusNet operated Bulgana Terminal Station to connect into the national electricity market (NEM).

The Project Area consists of the total area within the Project, an area comprising approximately 4,850 ha. If approved, the Project's wind farm construction is expected to commence construction in late 2027, with commissioning of the Project expected in early 2030. The wind farm will require approximately 260 workers during construction, with the BESS requiring a further 120 construction workers. The cumulative construction workforce is not expected to exceed the peak of 260 workers at any given time. Operation is anticipated to require up to 20 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff, up to ten (10) FTE for the wind component and the BESS component.

The SIA has been prepared in accordance with the Scoping Document for the Environment Report and has identified the social and economic impacts (both positive and negative) of the proposed project at local, regional, state and national levels. Social impacts include all issues associated with a renewable energy project that may affect local and regional communities, both directly and indirectly in a positive or negative way. The impacts can be perceived or physical and can be felt by individuals, families, social groups, workplaces, and other segments of the community. Social impacts are changes which occur to communities (because of a project) and may relate to impacts on quality and way of life, health, safety and well-being, livelihoods or economic prospects, access to cultural resources, community services, infrastructure, and social values (DELWP, 2021).

The methodology adopted in this study is based on the Victorian Ministerial guidelines for assessment of environmental effects (the guideline's suggested approach is summarised in **Figure 2.1**). In the absence of more specific Victorian guidance on SIA methodology, the SIA has been developed to reflect best practice as outlined by the International Association for Impact Assessment (IAIA, 2015). As confirmed through clarifications with DTP and the Department of Climate Change, the Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW) following the issue of the Scoping Document for the Environment Report, detailed economic modelling to support the SIA was not required. Instead, the economic baseline data and impact assessment component is based on secondary review and analysis of existing publicly available information.

The community capitals analysis evaluates the local challenges and opportunities within the project context by examining various forms of community capital, including social, human, economic, and environmental capitals. The capitals analysis has indicated that the project may disrupt existing social networks and community cohesion, leading to potential social fragmentation; that there may be a shortage of skilled labour required for the project; the local economy may face challenges such as increased competition for resources; and the project may result in a number of environmental impacts that may lead to indirect social impacts on natural capital.

However, the project is expected to contribute significantly to the local and regional economy through local employment, procurement and training opportunities for both indigenous and non-indigenous residents; and in promoting more sustainable practices.

This social assessment has included the compilation of a social baseline profile, consolidation of community consultation outcomes undertaken by RES to inform the assessment of and evaluation of Project related social impacts and opportunities, and has provided a framework for social impact management planning. The impact evaluation has been undertaken to inform and support the refinement of Project design and plans to reduce negative Project impacts and achieve greater positive Project benefits and social outcomes.

Positive social impacts ranked as high following the implementation of enhancement measures include:

- Livelihood benefits for local businesses and service providers
- Enhancement of social infrastructure within the social locality through the Community Benefit Program and Shared Benefit Scheme
- Livelihood benefits for landholders hosting project infrastructure
- Enhanced community/public safety through road and access track upgrades for fire/flood emergency responders.
- Livelihood benefits associated with employment and training opportunities for residents within the social locality
- Increased energy availability and affordability
- Livelihood, cultural value and participation outcomes for First Nations community members.

Negative social impacts ranked of medium significance following mitigation include:

- Reduced sense of place due to industrialisation of the landscape and altered landscape character
- Loss of cultural value and connection

- Reduced access to housing and short-term accommodation due to incoming construction workforce demand (low-income households)
- Psychosocial impacts (stress, anxiety, uncertainty) related to Project assessment.
- Reduced access to local services and infrastructure due to incoming construction workforce e.g., GP, health services
- Social amenity impacts during construction and operation (Host Landholders & Neighbouring Landholders- specifically those more sensitive to noise)
- Reduced visual amenity given presence of wind turbines (Host Landholders & Neighbouring Landholders)
- Real or perceived potential devaluation of land and property.

Further detail on how such impacts (positive and negative) are likely to affect different stakeholder groups is also outlined in **Table 6.1.**

RES has made a range of changes to the Project design since site selection to reduce impacts where possible, through WTG placement, relocation of access roads and applied avoidance buffers with specific threatened species or communities (see the Environment Report for more details of avoidance and minimisation through the design development). A range of mitigation and enhancement measures have also been identified to further avoid or reduce negative impacts or to enhance the benefits of the Project at the local and regional community level.

Several social strategies have been put in place to assist in mitigating identified negative impacts and to enhance positive impacts. The continued evolution of these strategies will extend through and beyond the construction phase and include updating the project's Community Engagement Strategy; further development of the Community Benefit Sharing Program (CBP) to ensure that local benefits and community value is enhanced; and ensuring that social impact management approaches are integrated in relevant environmental management plans. Project Neighbours and Community Members will have the opportunity to contribute to the design of the benefit sharing program and oversee Project construction through participation in a Community Consultative Committee (CCC) which will be established should the Project be approved.

Given that Australia currently has a shortage of housing and low unemployment, particularly in regional areas, it is further recommended that an Accommodation, Employment and Procurement Strategy (AEPS) be developed. Such a strategy would ensure that appropriate accommodation solutions are available for the project workforce and that local employment opportunities are prioritised. RES Projects have successfully utilised local workforces, on a number of their Projects in other LGAs, and consequently are committed to maximising local benefits where possible. Such a strategy would also consider procurement practices that support local businesses and suppliers.

The Watta Wella Renewable Energy Project would contribute to the region's renewable energy capacity while providing economic and social benefits to local communities. The Project has been designed with consideration of potential social impacts; and mitigation and enhancement measures have been proposed to address impacts of moderate to high significance. Given that Project sentiment is mixed, it therefore is essential that ongoing stakeholder engagement and monitoring is undertaken to ensure the project's success and to maximise its positive contributions to the community.

Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Definition
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AEMO	Australian Energy Market Operator
BAMP	Bat and Avifauna Management Plan
BESS	Battery Energy Storage System
BGLC	Barengi Gadjin Land Council
BPA	Bushfire Prone Area
CBP	Community Benefit Program
CCC	Community Consultative Committee
CEC	Clean Energy Council
CEMP	Construction Environmental Management Plan
CFA	Country Fire Authority
CHMP	Cultural Heritage Management Plan
CMA	Catchment Management Authority
CPI	Consumer Price Index
CSEP	Community and Stakeholder Engagement Plan
CTMP	Construction Traffic Management Plan
DELWP	Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (former)
DEECA	Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (current)
DFFH	Department of Families, Fairness and Housing
DFID	U.K. Department for International Development
DNV	Det Norske Veritas
DPE	Department of Planning (NSW, former)
DTP	Department of Transport and Planning
EE Act	*Environment Effects Act 1978*
EMI	Electromagnetic Interference
EMP	Emergency Management Plan
EPBC Act	*Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*
FAQ	Frequently Asked Questions
FTE	Full Time Equivalent
GW	Gigawatt
Ha	Hectare
IAIA	International Association for Impact Assessment
IAP2	International Association for Public Participation
ICA	Insurance Council of Australia
ISP	Integrated System Plan
km	Kilometre
kV	Kilovolt

Abbreviation	Definition
LALC	Local Aboriginal Land Council
LGA	Local Government Area
LVIA	Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment
MNES	Matters of National Environmental Significance
MW	Megawatts
MWdc	Megawatt direct current
MWh	Megawatt hour
O&M	Operations and maintenance
OSOM	Oversized-overmass (vehicles)
PHIDU	Public Health Information Development Unit
RAPs	Registered Aboriginal Parties
REZ	Renewable Energy Zone
RMP	Risk Management Plan
SAL	Suburb and Locality
SBS	Shared Benefit Scheme
SEIFA	Socio-Economic Indexes of Area
TMP	Traffic Management Plan
TIA	Traffic Impact Assessment
TMP	Traffic Management Plan
WRL	Western Renewable Link
WSMREC	Wimmera Southern Mallee Regional Energy Collaboration
WTG	Wind turbine generators

Glossary

Term	Definition
Assessment Area	Proposed disturbance footprint plus 100 metre buffer around each turbine, 25 metre buffer along each side of all access tracks/reticulation and 50 metre buffer around all other infrastructure as applied in the Biodiversity Assessment (Planning Report) (EHP 2025).
Benefit Sharing	Benefit sharing aims to distribute benefits generated by a project between the Proponent and the community through mutually agreed opportunities such as funding or sponsoring local community initiatives, programs or projects.
BESS facility	Battery energy storage system facility with an energy storage capacity of 400 MW / 1,600 MWh, occupying approximately 12 hectares and comprising battery energy storage units, power conditioning systems, a substation utility area and an operation and maintenance facility area.
BESS Transmission Line	A 220 kilovolt transmission line between the Project BESS facility and the existing Bulgana Terminal Station. The transmission line will be approximately 1.3 kilometres and have a 60 metre wide easement.
Construction buffer	The area required in addition to the operation footprint of the Project infrastructure, to enable construction to occur. This comprises a conservative 'buffer' allowance alongside the Project infrastructure for construction works area e.g. laydown areas, topsoil stockpiles, material and equipment laydown areas, drainage and erosion and sediment controls etc.
Disturbance footprint	The footprint of all Project infrastructure plus the construction buffer , which represents the total area of ground disturbance for the Project. All vegetation within the disturbance footprint is assumed to be impacted and areas outside of the operation footprint of Project infrastructure (hard stands and access tracks) will be rehabilitated following construction completion. The disturbance footprint (construction) represents 4.5 percent (205 hectares for the wind farm site and 13.8 hectares for the BESS facility) of the total Project Area.
Operation footprint	The footprint (area) of the operational Project infrastructure, including the wind turbine hard stands, access tracks, substation, O&M and BESS hand stands, transmission and met mast tower foundations. The operation footprint represents 1.6 percent (67 hectares for the wind farm site and 12 hectares for the battery energy storage system facility of the total Project Area.
Project	The Watta Wella Renewable Energy Project. The Project includes the construction, operation and decommissioning of a wind farm with capacity of up to 360 MW, BESS facility with a storage capacity of up to 400 megawatts / 1,600 megawatt-hours and 220 kV transmissions lines with associated infrastructure.
Project Area	The total area of the allotments on which the Project would be developed, which typically follows the cadastral boundaries of the allotment. The Project Area covers an area of approximately 4,850 hectares but the disturbance footprint of the Project is only a fraction of this amount.

Term	Definition
Social Locality	The term 'social locality' or 'area of social influence' is commonly used in SIA practice. There is no fixed meaning or predefined geographic boundary to a social locality (e.g., the local suburb, or 'within 500 m'). Instead, the scale of the social locality should be established on a case-by-case basis, having regard to the nature of the project and its impacts (DPE, 2023).
Wind farm substation	The wind farm substation will connect the energy generated by the WTGs to the National Energy Market at Bulgana Terminal Station. The substation would be located north-east of Joel Joel Nature Conservation Reserve and occupy an area of approximately four hectares.
Wind farm transmission line	A 220 kV transmission line between the wind farm substation and the Bulgana Terminal Station. The transmission line will be approximately 2.4 kilometres and have a 60 metre wide easement.

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1.0 Introduction

The proposed Watta Wella Renewable Energy Project (the Project) by RES Australia Pty Ltd (RES) (the proponent), comprises the construction and development of a large-scale wind farm and a Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) facility in north-western Victoria, approximately 16 kilometres (km) north-east of Stawell within the Northern Grampians Shire Council.

Following referral of the Project under the *Environment Effects Act 1978* (EE Act) and the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) in 2022, the Project received a 'controlled action' under the EPBC Act and a 'no EES' decision under the EE Act, with the condition to produce an Environment Report to address Matters of National Environmental Significance (MNES) under a bilateral assessment.

This Social Impact Assessment (SIA) report has been prepared by Umwelt to satisfy the requirements set out within the 'Scope for the Environment Report under the EPBC Act Bilateral (Assessment) Agreement 2014 and EE Act' (the Scoping Document) (dated May 2023, DTP Impact Assessment Unit). The Scoping Document outlined the need to consider:

"Social and economic impacts (both positive and negative) of the proposed project at local, regional, state and national levels."

The Environment Report will inform the Project approval in line with:

- the Commonwealth Department of Climate Change, Energy, Environment and Water (DCCEEW) under the EPBC Act for MNES, and
- the Department of Transport and Planning (DTP) and the Minister for Planning's assessment of the Planning Permit Application for the Project under the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*.

1.1 Project Overview

The Project involves development of a renewable energy facility comprising a wind farm, Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) facility and associated infrastructure. Overhead transmission lines would connect the on-site substations to the existing AusNet-operated Bulgana Terminal Station. Electricity would then be exported to the transmission network via an existing 220 kV transmission line.

The Project includes:

- Up to 45 wind turbine generators (WTGs) with a maximum capacity of approximately 360 megawatts (MW) and a turbine tip height of up to 255 m.
- A BESS facility with a storage capacity of up to 400 MW/1,600 MWh including a BESS, substation utility area and operations and maintenance (O&M) facility.
- Two overhead 220 kV connections from both the wind farm substation and BESS substation to the existing Bulgana Terminal Station.
- Underground cabling for wind turbine reticulation throughout the wind farm site connecting all turbines to the wind farm substation.

- Ancillary infrastructure including on-site substations for both the wind farm and BESS respectively, internal access tracks throughout the Project Area, an O&M facility and construction compound area for each Project component and wind turbine hardstand areas.
- Temporary infrastructure including concrete batching plants, laydown areas, construction site facilities and potentially onsite borrow pits (subject to further investigations and separate approval).
- The Project Area consists of the total area within the Project, an area comprising approximately 4,850 hectares (ha). The operation footprint represents 1.6 percent (67 ha for the wind farm site and 12 ha for the BESS facility) of the total Project Area.
- The Project's wind farm construction is expected to commence construction in late 2027, with commissioning of the Project expected in early 2030.

The start date for the Project's BESS component is not yet determined. However, RES estimates that it will be staged, to avoid increasing the peak workforce and overlapping of peak wind farm construction.

Construction workforce numbers and timing has been informed by information provided by RES and will require a peak of 260 workers for the proposed wind farm and up to 120 employees for the BESS facility. The cumulative workforce for the wind farm and BESS facility is not expected to exceed 260 workers at any given time. In operation, it is anticipated that a workforce of up to 20 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff will be required, ten (10) FTE for the wind component and ten (10) FTE for the BESS component (refer to Section 3.0 of the Environment Report for a detailed description of Project components and construction, operation and decommissioning activities).

1.2 Project Design Changes

Since the referrals were submitted and a decision was issued under the EE Act and EPBC Act in 2022, the Project's design has been refined based on engagement with local landholders, outcomes of key technical studies and notably due to completion of civil design of the infrastructure, providing more detailed 'disturbance area' estimates for access tracks, hardstands, cable trenches etc on site. **Table 1.1** summarises these refinements.

In refining the Project design, efforts have been made to avoid and minimise negative impacts on ecological features, landholders and existing farming operations, nearby neighbours, and the broader community. This includes balancing the need to avoid and minimise impacts on both ecological features and agricultural land and reflect a continual design response to technical findings and outcomes of engagement.

Table 1.1 Project Design Changes and Associated Stakeholder Feedback

Referral (2022)	Stakeholder Feedback	Current (December 2024)
Up to 47 wind turbines generators (WTGs) with a generation capacity of ~376 megawatts (MW) and a turbine tip height up to 255 metres (m).	Landholder feedback	1. Up to 45 wind turbine generators (WTGs) with a maximum capacity of approximately 360 MW and a turbine tip height of up to 255 m. Noise compliance was achieved for the updated 45 turbine final layout.
	Neighbours concerned about environmental impact of wind farm	2. Removal of two WTGs to the south/south-west of Joel Joel Nature Conservation Reserve due to landholder agreement change. Beneficial environmental outcome reducing turbine numbers in proximity to JJ NCR.
		3. No dwellings (involved) were located within 1 km of a proposed turbine, therefore, compliance was achieved with the Planning Guidelines in respect of noise.
Up to 170 ha of solar photovoltaic (PV) panels on single axis tracker tables, utilising either single or bifacial solar panels with a generation capacity of up to 85 MW direct current of electricity (MWdc)	Community opposition to the solar farm	4. Solar farm component completely removed for community opposition and commercial reasons. The removal of the solar farm has a beneficial environmental outcome by avoiding impacts on native vegetation in the area. Additionally, it has a beneficial cultural heritage outcome by avoiding sensitive areas adjacent to the Wimmera River.
A BESS may be established as a standalone development with potential to be owned and operated separately to the wind farm. The BESS has a storage capacity of up to 400 MW / 1,400 MWh of storage capacity (4 hours at 400 MW).	Concern from neighbours and landholders about potential noise impact of the BESS	5. The BESS remains part of the Project. No change in size to the BESS but it has been relocated further east in order to provide greater separation from the nearest dwelling and to achieve noise compliance and reduce visual impact.
On-site substations for both the wind farm, solar and BESS (220 kilovolt (kV) / 33 kV)		6. Removal of the solar farm and associated substation. Two substations remain within the Project, one for the wind farm and BESS. The wind farm substation was relocated as it was occupying land required for future expansion requirements of the Bulgana Terminal Station (by AusNet). Land availability is also limited around the existing terminal station due to the extent of flood prone areas. The final design wind farm substation includes noise mitigation in the form of a barrier to achieve compliance at the nearest dwelling.

Referral (2022)	Stakeholder Feedback	Current (December 2024)
Overhead 220 kV connection from both the wind farm and BESS to the existing Bulgana substation.		7. An overhead 220 kV connection from the wind farm substation and BESS to the existing Bulgana Terminal Station remain but are very short in length. The transmission route and length are pending final design detail of VNI west and WRL transmission projects. However, an indicative 2.4 km (wind farm) and 1.3 km (BESS facility) of overhead lines are proposed.
Turbine location	Discussions and feedback from neighbours concerned by shadow flicker and noise Neighbour concerned about proximity of turbines to areas of importance on their land (Shearing sheds, mustering points, vegetated areas with lots of birds) Neighbour concerned about proximity of turbines to bushland areas and impact on bird species	8. Relocation of specific turbines to minimise potential for shadow flicker and noise impacts on neighbouring properties. 9. Turbines have been relocated as far away as practical from these areas of concern. 10. 300 m turbine free buffer applied to significant bushland areas like Watta Wella Bushland Reserve and Joel Joel Nature Conservation Reserve for Swift Parrot.
Project Footprint	Neighbours concerned about environmental impact of wind farm	11. Significant reduction in overall disturbance footprint of the Project, including reducing impacts on sensitive flora and fauna.
Site access and tracks	Neighbours along Vineyard Road concerned for wildlife and impact to neighbours on Vineyard Road	12. Removal of access tracks along Vineyard Road to avoid the use of this road entirely and relocation of access tracks into the adjacent parallel paddocks to avoid need to remove roadside native vegetation.
	Feedback from BGLC regarding relocation of Access Track; and to avoid impacts to cultural heritage (both tangible and intangible)	13. Relocation of Access Track between T9 & T11 to avoid cultural heritage values.
Batch Plant	Neighbours along Vineyard Road concerned about dust and noise from batch plant	14. Relocation of western concrete batch plant away from Vineyard Road

Referral (2022)	Stakeholder Feedback	Current (December 2024)
Native Vegetation, Reserves, Threatened Species & Communities	Joel Joel Nature Conservation Reserve and Watta Wella Reserve within the Project Area were identified as High Value Foraging Habitat for Swift Parrot	15. Consolidation of reticulation cables with access tracks to reduce footprint. 16. Relocation of access track outside of Vineyard Road and some other existing roads, to move into paddocks, avoiding the need to remove existing native vegetation along roadsides. 17. Reducing construction buffers where possible especially in native vegetation or threatened species/community areas. 18. BESS relocation to the far east of the Project Area provided minimal native vegetation impact due to open paddock location and further from a Reserve. 19. Repositioning turbine hardstands, laydowns or tracks where possible to avoid trees / native vegetation, golden sun moth habitat and elfin leek orchid. 20. Mitigation development to ensure TPZs and no-go areas to commit to retaining vegetation outside the Disturbance Footprint. 21. Design refinements from July to December 2024 reduced native vegetation impacts by approximately 43%. 22. Further review of the Referral Design highlighted the risks associated with the BESS and electrical substations being located within the Bushfire Management Overlay (BMO) around Joel Joel Nature Conservation Reserve (JJNCR).
Hydrology and waterways		23. A 100 m buffer from major waterways including the Wimmera River and a 40 m buffer from other named waterways and creeks was recommended to avoid the placement of Project infrastructure within proximity to the waterways and corresponding sensitive areas. 24. Avoidance of Project infrastructure located within the 1% AEP where possible. Relocation of early BESS and substation designs due to flood interactions, or mitigation recommended with freeboard levels proposed. Turbine hardstands relocated in areas to avoid 1% AEP.
Electro-Magnetic Interference (EMI)		25. Turbines T29 and T30 were relocated outside of the recently established NBN Stawell Navarre Link easement to avoid EMI where possible from electrical infrastructure associated with the Project, to limit impacts on local radio, TV and internet users.

Source: RES, 2025

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Social Impact Assessment Requirements

This SIA has been prepared in accordance with the Scoping Document for the Environment Report and has identified the social and economic impacts (both positive and negative) of the proposed project at local, regional, state and national levels. This has addressed the following required aspects:

- Insights into social and economic impacts based on public consultation (refer to **Section 5.0**).
- Employment opportunities expected to be generated by the project (refer to **Section 5.5.1**).
- Projected short-term and long-term social and economic costs and benefits of the project compared with no project (refer to **Section 5.0**) and the basis for these.
- Social and economic costs and benefits of feasible alternatives (refer to **Section 7.0**).

Social impacts in the context of SIAs include all issues associated with a renewable energy project that may affect local and regional communities, both directly and indirectly in a positive or negative way. The impacts can be perceived or physical and can be felt by individuals, families, social groups, workplaces, and other segments of the community.

Social impacts are changes which occur to communities (as a result of the project) and may relate to impacts on quality and way of life, health, safety and well-being, livelihoods or economic prospects, access to cultural resources, community services, infrastructure, and social values (DELWP, 2021).

The methodology adopted in this study is based on the Victorian Ministerial guidelines for assessment of environmental effects (the guideline's suggested approach is summarised in **Figure 2.1**). In the absence of more specific Victorian guidance on SIA methodology, this SIA has been developed to reflect best practice as outlined by the International Association for Impact Assessment (IAIA, 2015).

As confirmed through clarifications with DTP and DCCEEW following the issue of the Scoping Document for the Environment Report, detailed economic modelling to support the SIA was not required. Instead, the economic baseline data and impact assessment component is based on secondary review and analysis of existing publicly available information only.

Figure 2.1 Social Impact Assessment Methodology and Purpose

Source: Umwelt 2022, Adapted from (Department of Sustainability and Environment, 2006).

The following sections describe the SIA phases in further detail.

2.2 Defining the Social Locality/Area of Social Influence

The term 'social locality' or 'area of social influence' is commonly used in SIA practice. There is no fixed meaning or predefined geographic boundary to a social locality (e.g., the local suburb, or 'within 500 m'). Instead, the scale of the social locality should be established on a case-by-case basis, having regard to the nature of the project and its impacts (DPE, 2023). For further direction, the social locality is defined by:

- **The scale and nature of the project;** its associated activities including ancillary works and infrastructure; potential direct and indirect impacts.
- **Who may be affected by the project and how they may be affected;** their social, cultural and demographic characteristics; their relevant interests and values; the things that differentiate groups (such as cultural diversity) as well as things that they have in common.

- **Whether any vulnerable or marginalised people may be affected by the project;** including people on low incomes; people living with disabilities, chronic medical conditions or in poor health requiring access to services; culturally and linguistically diverse communities; people who are homeless or in insecure housing.
- **Built or natural features on or near the project that could be affected,** and the intangible values that people may associate with these features, such as a sense of place or belonging, rural character, community cohesion, connection to Country and cultural heritage.
- **Relevant social, cultural, demographic trends or social change processes** occurring now or in the past near the project site and in the broader region, including how people have felt or experienced these changes; community resilience; different trends and patterns around issues like rental affordability, employment, shifting land uses, or population and demographic; or experiences of extreme weather and natural hazards.
- **The history of the proposed project and the area,** and any similar experiences people near the project have had, including change prior to, or created by, the planning assessment process; how people have reacted to early discussions; and how these discussions and other experiences have affected the broader community; and the traditional First Nation use of the place, recent history of the place and people and any ongoing traumas.

In defining the Social Locality for the Project, statistical areas prescribed by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), as well as the land tenure composition of properties in or nearby the Project Site, have also been considered, as outlined in **Table 2.1.** The primary communities of interest that comprise the Social Locality for the purposes of this assessment are mapped in **Figure 2.2** and **Figure 2.3.**

Table 2.1 Social Locality Description and Justification

Area	Location/ Population	Reason for Inclusion and Level of Analysis
The North West Victoria Region, equivalent to the North West SA4.	• 155,568	• The regional scale is included and analysed in relation to region-wide trends and community aspirations. It provides a higher-level evaluation of over-arching social and economic trends.
The host local government area (LGA) of Northern Grampians Shire Council LGA.	• 11,948	• This is the main focus of analysis in the social baseline. It provides an LGA-level assessment of key social and economic trends and community values and aspirations.
The host Suburb and Localities (SAL)	• Joel Joel:17 • Joel South: 26 • Concongella:14 • Greens Creek: 52	• The host SALs contain the Project site. These SALs are likely to experience the most direct and highest order impacts. Due to the smaller population sizes, these localities are analysed at the LGA level.
Surrounding localities and population sizes	• Navarre: 99 • Marnoo: 99 • Tulkara: 9 • Landsborough:200 • Landsborough West: 49 • Glenorchy: 131 • Morrl Morrl[1]	• Surrounding localities are likely to experience some direct Project impacts and are host to key communities of interest. These localities are considered to understand localised community attributes and potential Project effects.
Key townships within an hour's drive that have the potential to service the Project	• Stawell: 6,220 • St Arnaud: 2,318 • Halls Gap: 495 Great Western: 425	These SALs have been identified as key service centres for the project due to their proximity to the project site and their relative population sizes. These key townships are likely to provide accommodation and services and therefore are likely to experience increased employment and procurement opportunities and boost in the local economy. However will also see an increase in demand for services during construction, increased traffic and potential disruption to community and way of life.

[1] No information can be provided because the area selected had no people or a very low population in the 2021 Census.

Area	Location/ Population		Reason for Inclusion and Level of Analysis
Larger townships (SAL) within 60 minutes and secondary order (population between 5,000 and 10,000 people)	• Horsham: 15,134 • Ararat: 8,500 • Maryborough: 8,160		These settlements are included due to their physical proximity which indicates that they may be most likely to be impacted by the Project, and more likely to provide services or accommodation to support the Project. The larger settlements of Horsham, Ararat and Maryborough are likely to serve as higher-order townships with a greater density of businesses, services and infrastructure such as accommodation which may be utilised to house the Project workforce during construction.
The haulage routes from the Port of Geelong or Port of Portland to the Project	• Port of Geelong • Langon Street • Corio Quay Road • Princes Highway • Princes Freeway • Hamilton Highway • Fyansford-Gheringhap Road • Midland Highway • Albert Street / Skipton Street / Creswick Road • Western Freeway • Warrayatkin Road • Pyrenees Highway • Ararat - St Arnaud Road • Wright Street / Joel Joel Road • Joel South Road • Landsborough Road	• Port of Portland • Madeira Packet Road • Henty Highway • Portland-Nelson Road • Cashmore Road • Woolsthorpe-Heywood Road • Hamilton-Port Fairy Road • Spencer Road • Penshurst-Warrnambool Road • Hamilton Highway • Glenelg Highway • Willaura-Wickliffe Road • Maroona-Glenthompson Road / Pyrenees Highway • Mortlake-Ararat Road / Pyrenees Highway • Pyrenees Highway • Ararat - St Arnaud Road	Localised traffic impacts may be experienced by road users and residents and businesses immediately abutting the haulage route.

Area	Location/ Population	Reason for Inclusion and Level of Analysis
Nearby Projects that are either proposed, in-construction and operating projects that have the capacity to contribute to cumulative impacts	• Bulgana Green Power Hub wind farm (in operation) located directly south of the Project site and which has some overlap with the proposed Project. • Crowlands Wind Farm (in operation) located approximately 10 km to the east of the Project site. • Ararat Wind Farm (in operation) located approximately 15 km to the south of the Project site. • Stawell Solar Farm (approved) located approximately nine km west of the Project site • Joel Joel BESS (approved) located directly adjacent to southeast of Project site near Bulgana Terminal Station.	Nearby projects are mapped and analysed as they have the potential to generate cumulative impacts related to noise, visual, sense of place, access to housing and services and loss of biodiversity.

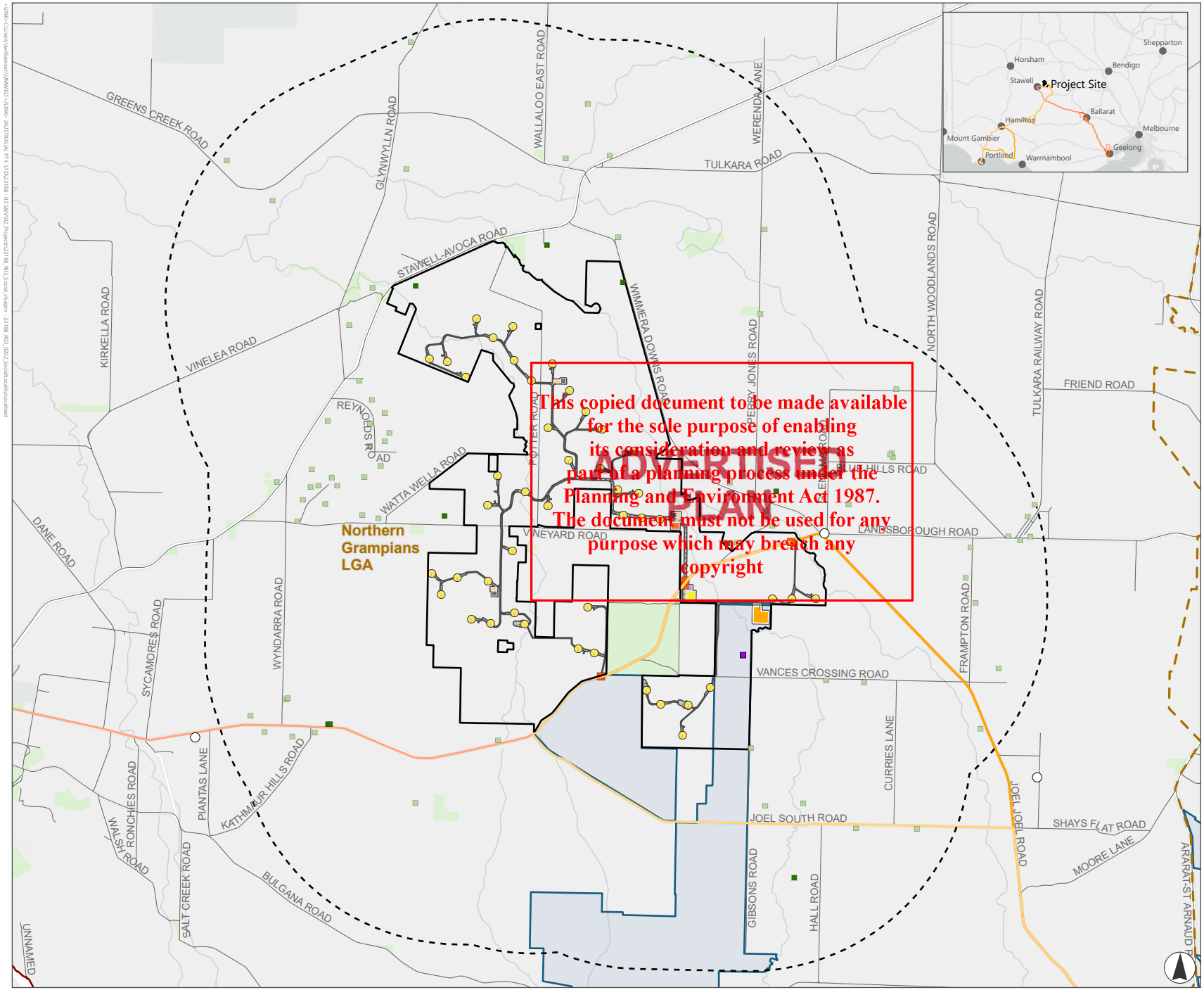
Residents within 5 km of the Project boundary	• 16 properties within 1 km to 2 km of the Project that will be visually impacted (WAX Design, 2025).
	• 65 dwellings within 5 km:
	  ○ Nine dwellings associated with the Project (2 within the boundary and 7 outside)
	  ○ 56 non-associated dwellings
		Neighbouring residents and landholders within 5 km are most likely to experience localised impacts related to traffic, noise, visual and social amenity changes.

Transmission line	• The project will connect both the wind farm and BESS substation to the two overhead 220 kV connections to the existing Bulgana Terminal Station.	The transmission infrastructure may affect the visual appeal of the area, however, it will also improve the stability and reliability of the local energy supply, potentially lowering energy costs through increased efficiency.
Key areas of ecological value	• Joel Joel Nature Conservation Reserve • Watta Wella Bushland Reserve • Wimmera River Frontage	The project is located adjacent or near to several areas of high-quality remnant vegetation (Ecology & Heritage Partners, 2025). These areas are home to ecological species of high community value such as the Swift Parrot.

Source: © Umwelt, 2025; RES, 2025 (ABS, 2021)

FIGURE 2.2

Social Locality - Localised



Legend

- Bulgana Terminal Station
- Associated Dwelling
- Non-associated Dwelling
- Township
- Roads
- Principal Freight Network
- Project Site Boundary (5km buffer)
- Project Site Boundary
- Wind Farm Operating
- Local Government Area
- Parks and Reserves

Haulage Route Options

- Port of Geelong Blade Haulage Route
- Port of Geelong Tower Haulage Route
- Port of Portland Blade Haulage Route
- Port of Portland Tower Haulage Route

Project Layout

- Access Points
- Turbine
- Access Tracks
- BESS Substation
- Concrete Batch Plant
- Construction Compound
- Laydown Area
- Operation & Maintenance
- Substation Area
- Disturbance Footprint

0 2.5 5

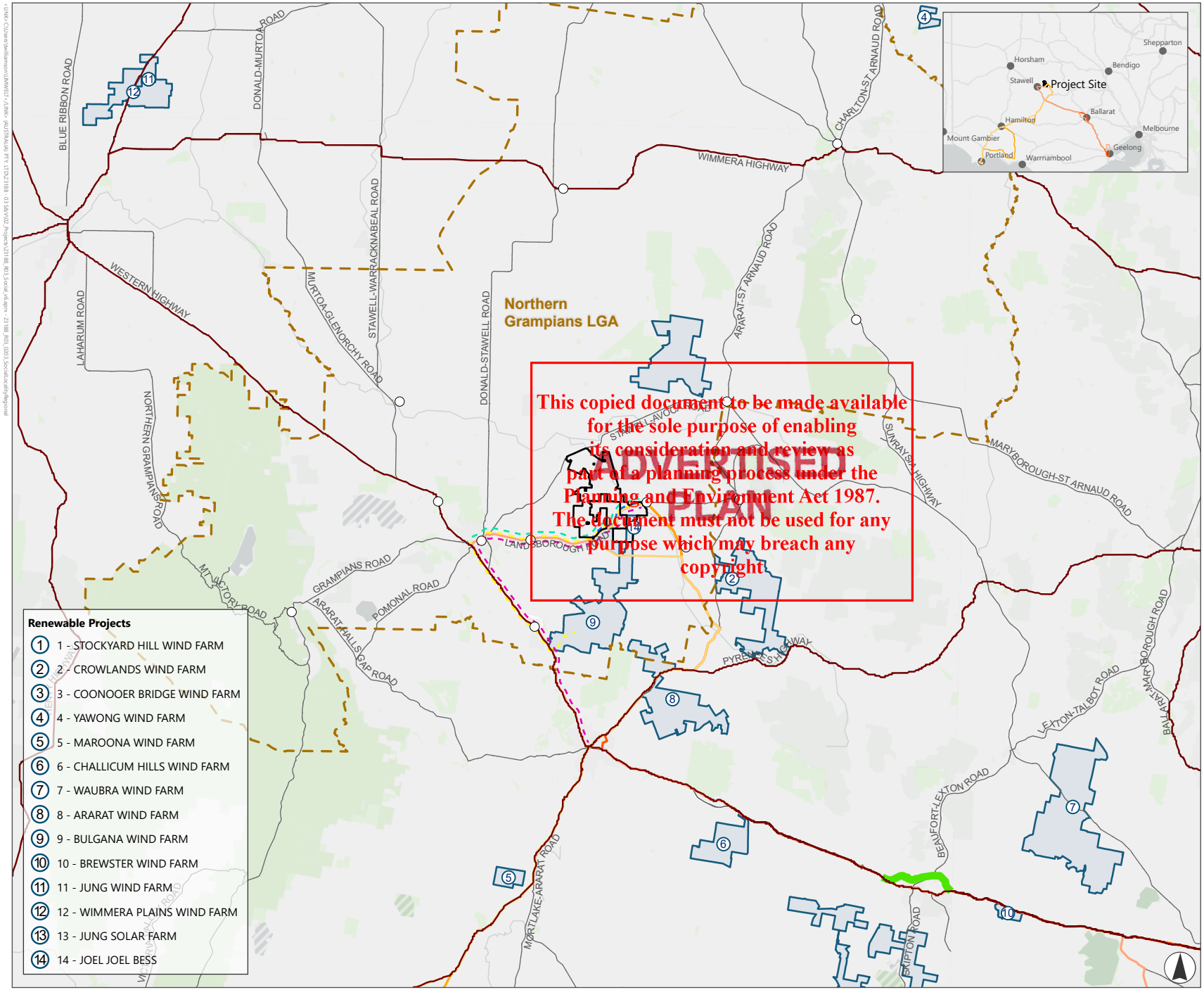
Kilometres

Scale 1:120,000 at A4
GDA2020 MGA Zone 54

Image Source: ESRI Basemap (2023) | **Data Source:** ABS (2023)

FIGURE 2.3

Social Locality - Regional



Renewable Projects

1. 1 - STOCKYARD HILL WIND FARM
2. 2 - CROWLANDS WIND FARM
3. 3 - COONOOER BRIDGE WIND FARM
4. 4 - YAWONG WIND FARM
5. 5 - MAROONA WIND FARM
6. 6 - CHALLICUM HILLS WIND FARM
7. 7 - WAUBRA WIND FARM
8. 8 - ARARAT WIND FARM
9. 9 - BULGANA WIND FARM
10. 10 - BREWSTER WIND FARM
11. 11 - JUNG WIND FARM
12. 12 - WIMMERA PLAINS WIND FARM
13. 13 - JUNG SOLAR FARM
14. 14 - JOEL JOEL BESS

Legend

- Bulgana Terminal Station
- Township
- Roads
- Principal Freight Network
- PFN Road - planned
- Project Site Boundary
- Local Government Area
- Parks and Reserves

Transport Routes

- Project General Construction Materials Route
- Project Quarry Material Qoute
- Project Site Water Route
- Project Staff Travel Route

Haulage Route Options

- Port of Geelong Blade Haulage Route
- Port of Geelong Tower Haulage Route
- Port of Portland Blade Haulage Route
- Port of Portland Tower Haulage Route

0 10 20

Kilometres

Scale 1:650,000 at A4
GDA2020 MGA Zone 54

Image Source: ESRI Basemap (2023) | **Data Source:** ABS (2023)

The area of social influence may extend beyond these boundaries at subsequent stages of Project planning and assessment, to include locations where construction contractor workforces may be sourced and where materials may be supplied for the Project.

2.3 Social and Economic Baseline Profile

A social and economic baseline profile gathers knowledge from both primary and secondary data sources to increase understanding of the existing social environment in which a project is proposed, and of potentially affected communities. The baseline profile is a foundational component of SIA, as it provides the basis from which social impacts associated with the Project may be predicted, assessed, monitored, and managed over time.

2.3.1 Sustainable Livelihoods Approach – Community Capitals

To understand the communities of interest to the Project and to evaluate their resilience and adaptive capacity to change, this baseline has applied the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach or 'community capitals' analysis (U.K. Department for International Development [DFID] 1999).

The DFID (1999) approach draws on broad categories of community capitals as a fundamental basis to identifying and further enhancing community capacity and resilience. This methodology has been further developed by Coakes and Sadler (2011) to reflect the seven capitals approach - human, social, natural, political, cultural, physical, and economic. The vulnerability of each capital area can be assessed through the selection of a suite of socio-economic indicators specific to each capital area to assess a community's vulnerability to change, or conversely adaptive capacity. Elements of each capital area are further outlined in **Figure 2.4.**

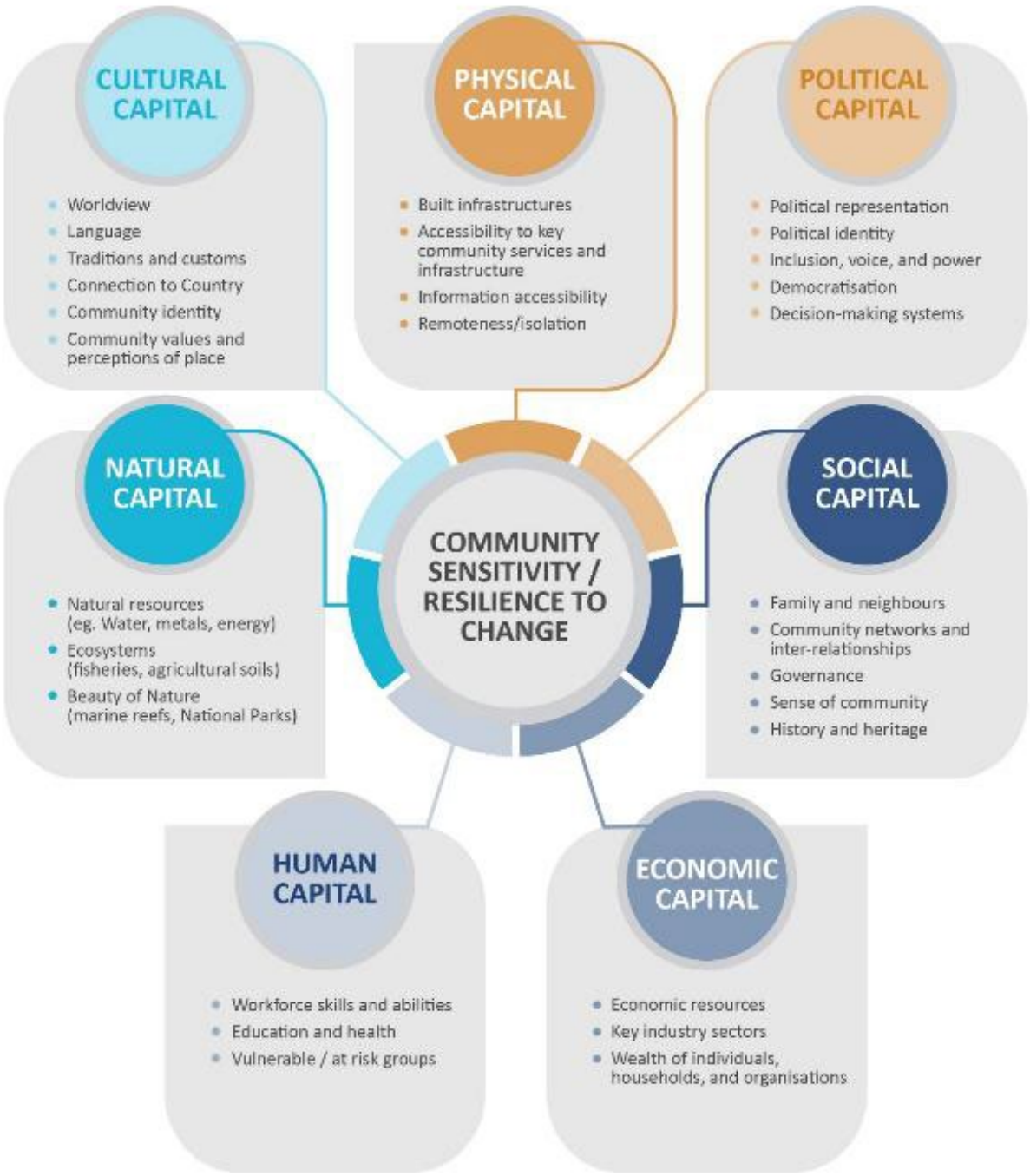


Figure 2.4 Capitals Framework

Source: Umwelt, 2024. Adapted from Coakes and Sadler, 2011.

2.3.2 Social and Economic Profiling

The social baseline has provided a comprehensive summary of the key characteristics of the social locality relevant to the Project, to obtain a detailed understanding of the social and economic context in which the project is based to inform impact prediction.

To gain an understanding of the demographic characteristics and composition of communities within the social locality, and to ascertain how the Project may affect people, socio-economic and demographic data have been gathered and summarised from the ABS Census (2021) and the Social Health Atlas of Australia (PHIDU, 2020), as well as through review of local media, relevant literature and regional and local government plans and strategies. Where possible, such data has been validated through engagement with key stakeholders.

Appendix A contains the community profile dataset that has been used to inform the social baseline. The data sources analysed and key indicators of interest, including a brief explanation of their relevance to the Project, are outlined in **Table 2.2.**

Table 2.2 Social and Economic Baseline Data Sources

Key Questions	Data Source	Indicators of Interest

• What is the demographic composition of the community?
• What is the proportion of the population that is vulnerable to the proposed Project/change?
• What skills exist in the region? Are there relevant skill sets to enable the local and regional population to capitalise on employment opportunities during construction/operations?
• Is the Project going to be of value to the local/regional community?
• Are there any groups that will require a particular engagement approach to facilitate their involvement and participation (i.e., languages or cultural/ educational barriers, vulnerabilities)?
• Are there any specific social trends evident in the region?
	• ABS Census 2021:
	  ○ Victoria.
	  ○ North West SA4.
	  ○ Northern Grampians LGA.
	  ○ Suburbs and Localities identified in
	• Realestate investor
	• REMPLAN
		• Current population and trends.
		• Median age and age distribution.
		• Unemployment rate.
		• Key industries of employment.
		• Educational attainment.
		• Ownership and tenure of private dwellings.
		• Weekly household income.
		• Proportion of vulnerable groups (unemployed, low-income families, elderly, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders).
		• Cost of living (rental and mortgage payments).

• What is the socio-economic status of the community?
• What is the level of advantage / disadvantage in the community?
	• ABS Census 2021:
	  ○ Victoria.
	  ○ North West SA4.
	  ○ Northern Grampians LGA.
	  ○ Suburbs and Localities identified in Figure 2.2.
		• Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage, 2021.
		• Index of Economic Resources, 2021.
		• Index of Education and Occupation, 2021.

• What is the level of health in the community? • What are the main risk factors?	• Social Health Atlas of Australia (PHIDU, 2023). ○ Northern Grampians LGA.	• Chronic diseases. • Risk factors. • Premature death.

Key Questions	Data Source	Indicators of Interest
• What has been the response of the community to similar Projects in the region? • How supportive or not are community residents of renewable energy projects? • Have community residents expressed concerns regarding current electricity prices?	• Local Media review. • Submissions reports (comparable projects).	• Level of support for renewable projects. • Number of articles relating to renewable projects. • Community sentiment regarding wind farms.
• What are the Council's key priority areas? • Is the proposed Project aligned with the Council's strategic plan? • Are community values, concerns and/or aspirations documented in the Community Strategic Plan? • How does the proposed Project fit within the broader regional and state planning energy strategy?	• Government strategic plans or policies.	• Support for and awareness of renewable/ solar energy in the community. • Number of solar energy and renewables projects in the region.
• What are the attitudes and perspectives of local and regional residents – are they likely to be supportive of the Project? • What are the key concerns of the community in relation to the Project? • Are there any strategies on how to manage the impacts of the Project? • To what extent will the Project support the community? • Does the Project align with community values, aspirations, needs?	• Community and Stakeholder Engagement.	• Knowledge of the Project. • Level of support for the project. • Community sentiment towards renewable infrastructure and energy. • Concerns related to the Project.

Source: Umwelt, 2025.

2.4 Stakeholder Identification and Engagement

SIA involves the participation and collaboration of people that may have an interest in, or those that are affected by, a project. Utilising both the Ministerial guidelines for assessment of environmental effects under the *Environment Effects Act 1978 (2006)* and Burdge (2004) as guidance, stakeholders may be affected groups or individuals that:

- live, work, or recreate near the Project
- have an interest in the proposed action or change
- use or value a resource associated with the Project
- are affected by the Project e.g., may be required to relocate because of the project.

2.4.1 Key Stakeholders

Both Umwelt and RES have identified key stakeholders as including:

- Landholders**:** there are 11 landowners within the Project site, all of whom have signed Option to Lease Agreements.
- **Traditional Owners**: the Registered Aboriginal Party is Barengi Gadjin Land Council (BGLC) and representatives of the Wotjobaluk peoples.
- **Project neighbours**: this includes Landholders with property immediately adjacent to the Project Area; users of local roads and infrastructure near/adjacent to the Project Area; and any other stakeholders living, working, or who are regularly within 5 km of the Project.
- **The wider community**: this includes any person, group, or business who lives/is based within, or has a connection to the geographic area surrounding the proposed Project site, within an approximate radius of 20 km. This includes the communities of Stawell, Landsborough, Landsborough West, Concongella, Great Western, Navarre, Joel Joel and Joel South.

The level of engagement has been determined using the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Public Participation Spectrum (IAP2, n.d.). The Spectrum delineates five distinct levels of public participation:

- **Inform:** Providing balanced and objective information to stakeholders.
- **Consult:** Obtaining stakeholder feedback.
- **Involve:** Actively involving stakeholders in the decision-making process.
- **Collaborate:** Partnering with stakeholders to develop solutions
- **Empower:** Handing decision-making power to stakeholders.

A breakdown of stakeholders and their potential interest or concern is presented in **Table 2.3.** .

Table 2.3 Stakeholder Identification

Stakeholder Group	Level of Engagement (IAP2)	Potential Interest and/or Concern
Host Landholders	Collaborate	Accessibility, social amenity, land acquisition, livelihoods, and personal advantage/ disadvantage.
Proximal Landholders	Involve	Accessibility, land use conflict, social amenity, personal advantage/ disadvantage.
Traditional Owners and RAP	Collaborate	First Nations rights and interests, native title, cultural heritage (tangible and intangible), and land access, development opportunities and social and economic benefits.
State and Local Government	Involve	Cumulative impacts, land use/ intergenerational equity, community or public perceptions, opportunities for collaboration, economic benefits, local infrastructure, and services.
Environmental Groups	Consult	Cumulative impacts, land use/ intergenerational equity, climate change adaptation, ecological/ environmental impacts.
Community & Special Interest Groups	Consult	Cumulative impacts, land use/ intergenerational equity, local benefit, impact on heritage or tourism, climate change adaptation, community and economic changes.
Network service providers (existing and future) (Ausnet & AEMO)	Involve	Cumulative impacts, connection of proposed wind farm to existing electricity grid.
State and federal agencies (DTP, DEECA, DCCEEW, EPA, Parks Vic, CFA, AEMO, Civil Aviation and Safety Authority, Regional Development Australia, Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner, emergency service departments, Office of the Registrar of the Aboriginal Land Rights Act, National Native Title Tribunal, Wimmera CMA)	Involve	Protection and enhancement of environmental, heritage and social values in the Project Area, local and regional surrounds. Risks and impacts associated with the Project construction and operation on a range of assets and values including: air services, fire, emergency service provision and bushfire risk, impacts to environmental values such as reserves, waterways, and threatened species or communities. Impacts to cultural heritage tangible and intangible values. Regulator interest in acceptability of environmental, social and heritage impacts against regulatory criteria and guidance, to inform project approvals.

Stakeholder Group	Level of Engagement (IAP2)	Potential Interest and/or Concern
Local Businesses & Service Providers – Accommodation, Education, Emergency Services, Employment & Training, Health	Consult	Cumulative impacts, demand and capacity, opportunities for collaboration, economic benefits, community and economic changes, local infrastructure, and services.
Broader Community	Inform	Cumulative impacts, potential change to sense of community / community cohesion, climate change adaptation, local benefit, local infrastructure, and services.
Local Media	Inform	Cumulative impacts, opportunities for collaboration, community or public perceptions, local benefits, community and economic changes.
National / state / local media	Inform	Community discontent / protests, safety concerns, environment or heritage impacts, project milestones

Source: RES, 2025.

2.4.2 Community Engagement

RES has been engaging with the community since 2019, with records of this engagement recorded in a dedicated stakeholder management system. A comprehensive list of engagement activities, as documented by RES is summarised in the project's CSEP, and attached in **Appendix B.**

The engagement of stakeholders has included a combination of:

- **Information provision**: to improve knowledge and awareness of RES, its activities, the Project, key issues/impacts as they arise and how these are being addressed.
- **Consultation and engagement**: to facilitate stakeholder involvement in the identification of issues/impacts, areas of interest/concern and strategies to address the issues raised, including identification of opportunities to provide local community benefits.

Table 2.4 outlines stakeholders that have participated in engagement activities to date, including a breakdown by stakeholder group. The mechanisms that have been used to engage are also documented. Although efforts were made to document all interactions, not every interaction was recorded during the Project's assessment phase. RES has undertaken a comprehensive engagement program that has been guided by the Project CSEP (refer to **Appendix B**).

Table 2.4 Stakeholders Consulted During Project Development (pre-planning) and the SIA

Stakeholder Group	Number of Stakeholders	Mechanism	Number Engaged
Host Landholder	16 (reduced to 11[2])	Personal meetings Community Information Session Emails Phone Calls	**341 Interactions** 22 meetings 17 attended information sessions 55 emails 243 phone calls
Proximal Landholders	138 neighbours contacted 81 properties participated	Meetings[3] Community Information Session Neighbour Shared Benefit Scheme Survey Phone Calls* Emails* Letters*	**992 Interactions** 11 meetings 32 attended information sessions 63 phone calls 12 survey responses 255 emails 620 letters 15 registered for Neighbour Shared Benefit Scheme
Broader Community	153	Community Information Session Phone Calls* Emails* Letters*	**204 Interactions** 15 attended Information Sessions 5 phone calls 111 emails 72 letters
Local Government	28	Meetings Project Briefings Emails Phone Calls	**65 Interactions** 8 meetings 3 Councillor Briefings 50 emails 2 phone calls
First Nation Rightsholders	11	Meeting Phone call Email	**73 Interactions** 7 meetings 2 sponsorships 7 phone calls 57 emails
Community and environmental groups	87	Meeting Email Survey	**114 Interactions** 5 meetings 14 survey responses 8 sponsorships 1 Volunteering event 106 emails
Local businesses	28	Email Community Information Session Phone call	**57 interactions** 44 emails 12 attended community info sessions

[2] Number of Host Landholders reduced due to changes in land required for the Project i.e. reduced footprint.

[3] Meetings were restricted during 2021/22 due to COVID restrictions

Stakeholder Group	Number of Stakeholders	Mechanism	Number Engaged
			1 phone call
Local Media	3 publications 2 newspapers	Media releases Advertisement	2 Media releases 4 Advertisements
Emergency Services	7	Email Phone Call Community Information Session	**18 interactions** 9 emails 3 phone calls 6 attended community info sessions
Proximal Project Developers	9	Meetings and workshops	**9 interactions** 7 emails 2 meetings

Source: RES, 2025
* website, factsheets, 1800 number, dedicated email address, FAQ's

Consultation data was collected over seven community information sessions (held between May 2022 to February 2025) as well as outcomes of an online survey distributed by RES between July 2023 and October 2024. The results reflect the perspectives a sample of 153 stakeholders who attended the community information sessions. There were 35 completed surveys. These outcomes are further detailed in **Section 5.0.**

RES's engagement process commenced in 2019, with the identification of key individuals and groups for consultation and relationship building. To further enhance accessibility to the Project team, a phone number, and email contact were established, ensuring community members could easily reach the project team with any Project queries or concerns (RES, n.d.). A project website was also launched providing detailed information on the project, engagement activities, technical assessments and its associated benefits, including sponsorship opportunities.

Engagement with Barengi Gadjin Land Council (BGLC) has involved multiple in-person meetings, emails, phone calls and a cultural induction for the project team to build an understanding of their cultural and community ties. These engagement activities have centred around relationship building and understanding long term aspirations and benefits and providing support to the group e.g. RES sponsored website upgrades for BGLC.

Engagement with host landholders, project neighbours and proximal landholders has been extensive and remains ongoing, ensuring that those living closest to the development receive regular updates, opportunities for consultation, and direct responses to their concerns. Host landholders have been engaged through regular face-to-face meetings and monthly email updates.

Engagement with the broader community has also extended beyond direct communication, with RES sponsoring and participating in local events, including but not limited to the Woodchopping Championships at the Stawell Show in 2023, 2024 and 2025. Other sponsorships have included race name sponsorship of the Stawell Harness Racing club, roof repairs for Joel Joel Public Hall, replacement of sun shelters for Stawell Golf Bowls Club, titanium sponsors of the Navarre Football Netball Club, electronic scoreboards for the Stawell Golf Bowls Club, renovations for Landsborough Bowls Club, security system for the Stawell Golf Club and seating for outdoor cooking program and classroom at Landsborough Primary School (RES, 2025). In August 2023, RES staff also used their volunteer leave to participate in a tree planting day with the Concongella Landcare Group and Project Platypus as part of a restoration project along a creek line close to the Project site.

2.5 Social Impact Evaluation

According to the International Association for Impact Assessment (Vanclay et al., 2015), social impacts can be grouped according to several categories and may involve changes to people's way of life, community, accessibility, culture, health and well-being, surroundings, livelihoods, and decision-making systems as shown in **Figure 2.5**.

Figure 2.5 Social Impact Categories

Source: (Vanclay et al., 2015)

The SIA uses the impact categories listed above and evaluates impacts – both positive and negative – based on their significance. The significance assessment has been undertaken using the significance matrix provided in the NSW Guideline (DPE, 2023) and shown in **Table 2.5** which considers social impact magnitude and likelihood, as well as key characteristics of impact (extent, duration, intensity or scale, sensitivity or importance and level of concern or interest). The NSW Guideline is considered the best available SIA methodology in Australia and is based on international guidance. The level of perceived interest or concern in relation to each impact, has been assigned from the perspective of the affected stakeholder group, based on analysis of RES' engagement outcomes.

The social significance matrix (refer to **Table 2.5**) is then used to determine an overall significance of social impact as 'low', 'medium', 'high' or 'very high'. **Table 2.6** and

Table 2.7 contain further details regarding magnitude and likelihood classifications. Both positive and negative impacts are rated using this methodology.

Table 2.5 Social Impact Significance Matrix

Likelihood level	Magnitude level: 1 Minimal	2 Minor	3 Moderate	4 Major	5 Transformational
A Almost Certain	Medium	Medium	High	Very High	Very High
B Likely	Low	Medium	High	High	Very High
C Possible	Low	Medium	Medium	High	High
D Unlikely	Low	Low	Medium	Medium	High
E Very Unlikely	Low	Low	Low	Medium	Medium

Source: (DPE, 2023).

Table 2.6 Defining the Magnitude Levels for Social Impacts

Magnitude level	Meaning
Transformational	Substantial change experienced in community wellbeing, livelihood, infrastructure, services, health, and/or heritage values; permanent displacement or addition of at least 20% of a community.
Major	Substantial deterioration/improvement to something that people value highly, either lasting for an indefinite time, or affecting many people in a widespread area.
Moderate	Noticeable deterioration/improvement to something that people value highly, either lasting for an extensive time, or affecting a group of people.
Minor	Mild deterioration/improvement, for a reasonably short time, for a small number of people who are generally adaptable and not vulnerable.
Minimal	Little noticeable change experienced by people in the locality.

Source: (DPE, 2023).

Table 2.7 Defining Likelihood Levels for Social Impacts

	Meaning
Almost certain	Definite or almost definitely expected (e.g. has happened on similar projects)
Likely	High probability
Possible	Medium probability
Unlikely	Low probability
Very Unlikely	Improbable or remote probability

Source: (DPE, 2023).

2.6 Development of Mitigation and Enhancement Measures

During the impact assessment process, mitigation measures and enhancement strategies have been identified through stakeholder engagement and expert knowledge and are proposed to avoid, minimise, or offset potential negative impacts while maximising project benefits.

Following the identification of management measures, a residual impact rating is provided that predicts the likely remaining level of social impact (post consideration of relevant management measures).

2.7 Assessment Limitations

The following assessment limitations are noted:

- The views of the community represented throughout the report are based on the sample of community members and stakeholders consulted by RES as outlined above, and do not represent the views of the entire community. They also represent the community sentiment at a point in time, during the period of consultation for the Project and are expected to vary.
- The SIA has been informed by material collected from secondary data sources and community engagement. It is assumed that secondary data sources contain valid and representative data.
- RES has been responsible for undertaking engagement for the Project. This data has been reviewed and analysed to inform the identification and evaluation of social impacts.
- Engagement with First Nations representatives has been undertaken by RES and Tardis (the Project's heritage consultant) to inform the development of the Cultural Heritage Management Plan (CHMP). Engagement outcomes have also been reviewed to inform the design and SIA.
- The Project and associated engagement program activities have been underway for a considerable period of time and consequently community attitudes and perspectives associated with the Project may have changed.
- The SIA provides a high-level evaluation of the economic impacts related to the Project. Detailed economic modelling was not considered necessary in consultation with key government agencies.

3.0 Social and Economic Baseline

This section provides insights from both primary and secondary data sources to understand the existing social environment in which the project is proposed, and potentially affected communities.

3.1 Development Context

This section outlines the context in which the proposed Project is based, including consideration of key policy settings and other project developments occurring within the Social Locality.

3.1.1 Policy Setting

3.1.1.1 Victoria Renewable Energy Policy

The Victorian Climate Change Act 2017 (VCC Act) provides Victoria with a legislative foundation to manage climate change risks, maximise the opportunities that arise from decisive action, and drive a transition towards a climate-resilient community and economy. Under the VCC Act, Victoria has legally enshrined GHG emission reductions targets.

The Climate Change and Energy Legislation Amendment (Renewable Energy and Storage targets) Bill 2023 (the climate change amendment) amended the CC Act to legislate revised targets to reduce Victoria's emissions:

- 28–33 % below 2005 levels by 2025
- 45–50 % below 2005 levels by 2030
- 75–80 % below 2005 levels by 2035
- Net-zero emissions by 2045.

This change was driven by recognition that state emissions in 2020 decreased to almost 30% below 2005 levels, achieving and exceeding the 2020 emissions reductions target of 15–20% below 2005 levels (DEECA, 2023).

The VCC Act also introduced policy objectives and guiding principles embedding the consideration of climate change in government decision making.

Victoria's Climate Change Strategy provides a roadmap for achieving these targets, including an energy pledge by the Victorian Government to accelerate Victoria's transition to a 'clean and efficient energy future' (DEECA, 2023).

- As for the national climate change targets, the Project will contribute a significant amount of renewable energy into the NEM, reducing the reliance on fossil fuel energy sources and in turn reducing the associated GHG emissions to help achieve the Victorian emission reduction targets (DEECA, 2023).

3.1.1.2 Victoria's Climate Change Strategy

The Victorian Government has developed the Victoria's Climate Change Strategy (2021), which outlines the States first of a five yearly roadmap to assist in achieving net-zero emissions and a climate resilient Victoria by 2045. The Government has legislated ambitious, but achievable emission reduction targets of; 28–33% by 2025; 45–50% by 2030; 75–80% by 2040.

To achieve these emissions reduction targets Victoria's Climate Change Strategy includes actions to:

- transition our state to a clean energy future that create jobs, cut costs for households and businesses and strengthen our energy system
- invest in innovative technologies, such as zero emissions vehicles and hydrogen, and partner with businesses and communities to set Victoria up for their adoption
- recognise and safeguard the role of our natural environment in reducing emissions, and ensure our farmers are well placed to embrace new technologies and practices that reduce emissions
- support Victorian businesses and communities to cut emissions and thrive in a net-zero emissions future.

3.1.1.3 Victoria's Renewable Energy Zones

In November 2020, the Victorian Government committed $540 million to establish six Renewable Energy Zones (REZs), including one in Western Victoria. This REZ extends from near Ballarat towards Horsham and includes network upgrades to increase capacity and improve system strength for generators (DELWP, 2021). Key projects within this REZ are:

1. Western Renewables Link (WRL): A proposed 190 km 500kV double-circuit overhead transmission line from Bulgana Terminal Station to Sydenham in Melbourne's northwest.
2. Victoria to New South Wales Interconnector West (VNI West): A proposed high capacity 500 kV double-circuit overhead transmission line connecting WRL in Victoria to Project EnergyConnect in New South Wales.

VicGrid has conducted a statewide strategic land use assessment to identify suitable areas for future renewable energy development, aiming to minimize land use conflicts and protect significant values. The assessment has identified a study area with three tiers indicating suitability for investigation. The Project is in a Tier 2 area, which has moderate-high opportunity and low-moderate constraints.

As part of the 2025 Victorian Transmission Plan, VicGrid will further refine the study area into specific zones, prioritizing investigations according to tiers. The declared REZs will benefit communities and energy developers by improving coordination of infrastructure projects to minimize social and environmental impacts. The Project will contribute to renewable energy development in Victoria, helping to meet the State's greenhouse gas emissions targets and providing a secure and sustainable long-term energy supply.

The 2025 Draft Victorian Transmission Plan was released in May 2025 for public consultation, just prior to this submission. Seven proposed onshore renewable energy zones (REZs) have been identified in the plan and were chosen for their suitability to host renewable energy projects, taking into account feedback from communities, landholders, Traditional Owners, the quality of wind and solar resources, existing land uses and how projects can connect to the grid. The Project lies within the draft proposed Grampians Wimmera REZ, north of Stawell (VicGrid, 2025).

3.1.1.4 Development of Wind Energy Facilities in Victoria

The *Policy and Planning Guidelines for Development of Wind Energy Facilities* in Victoria 2023 set out a framework to provide a consistent and balanced approach to assist the assessment of wind energy projects; a set of consistent operational performance standards to inform the assessment and operation of a wind energy facility project; guidance as to how planning permit application requirements might be met; and a framework for the regulation of wind turbine noise.

The guidelines provide a framework to ensure proposals for wind energy facilities are thoroughly assessed, including other considerations and approvals required in the process (DTP, 2023). The *Wind Energy Guidelines* highly recommend pre-application consultation to identify and understand stakeholder concerns and to obtain information and feedback on existing conditions and potential issues to address in relation to a project.

3.1.1.5 Clean Economy Workforce Development Strategy

The *Clean Economy Workforce Development Strategy* 2023–2033 (Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions, 2023) is a 10-year framework designed to prepare the workforce for a net-zero future by 2045. The framework recognises that Victoria requires skilled individuals to support its transition to a clean economy. It establishes training pathways to meet the increasing demand for skills. The strategy highlights five strategic priorities: a targeted skills model, flexible education and training, and improved workforce planning and attraction.

The framework recognises the challenges in the demand for new jobs the opportunities for reskilling within the state. Projections on the renewable energy transition estimate around 10,000 additional jobs per year from now until 2030. The provision of new employment opportunities associated with the clean energy transition will in turn promote the supply of education and training to provide economic and workforce benefits to local communities.

3.1.1.6 Local Policies and Strategic Plans

Table 3.1 provides an overview of key local and strategic plans and policies of relevance to the Social Locality.

Table 3.1 Strategic and Governance Plans

Policy	Description / Relevance to Project
Wimmera Southern Mallee Regional Growth Plan (Victorian Government, 2014)	The Regional Growth Plan outlines a regional approach to land use planning in the Wimmera Southern Mallee. It covers the municipalities of Hindmarsh, Horsham, Northern Grampians, West Wimmera and Yarriambiack and identifies opportunities for encouraging and accommodating growth and managing change over the next 30 years from the endorsement of the Plan and into 2041. Principles in the Plan relevant to the proposed Project include: • Diversity of the regional economy – identifying renewable energy as a potential future growth industry. • Climate change and extreme events – careful management of new land use to not compromise environmental assets. The Plan states that renewable energy can assist in diversifying the economy. It notes that opportunities for wind generation may exist given the sparse population distribution in rural areas. However, turbines should be located to minimise the impact on important identified landscapes and residential uses (Victorian Government, 2014). Stawell is identified as the second largest urban centre in the region with potential to grow as a service base and potential development of industrial land.
Northern Grampians Shire Council – Economic Development Strategy and Action Plan 2021–2031 (Northern Grampians Shire Council, 2021)	The Action Plan was developed to recognise and respond to opportunities and challenges for the region. The strategy pursues five, ten-year strategic directions: • To be the rural region of choice. • To grow the economic capacity and engagement of our own people. • To develop iconic destinations and healthy environments. • To be a magnet for innovation and investment. • To attract investment in enabling infrastructure. 1. Economic Growth is one the strategies listed to enhance the region. Within this, the Strategy identifies the promotion of renewable energy infrastructure due to the area's favourable environmental conditions for renewable energy source as a key strategic goal.
Northern Grampians Shire Council – Renewable Energy Transition Action Plan DRAFT (Northern Grampians Shire Council, 2023)	The Transition Action Plan aims to ensure that the development of renewable energy in the region adds to the current economic and social prosperity of the community. The Plan states the need to obtain a social license to gain the approval and acceptance from the community to further renewable energy projects. The Plan currently remains as a draft as council is still receiving feedback from community members and businesses about the renewable energy landscape in the Shire.

Policy	Description / Relevance to Project
Northern Grampians Shire Council-Council Plan 2021–2025 (Northern Grampians Shire Council, 2024)	• The Northern Grampians Shire Council Plan 2021–2025, which was revised in 2024, emphasises renewable energy as a key component of its strategic objectives. Here are the highlights related to renewable energy: • Promotion of Renewable Energy Initiatives: Encouraging the adoption of renewable energy technologies. • Improving Energy Efficiency: Implementing measures to enhance energy efficiency across the region. • Reducing Carbon Emissions: Taking steps to lower carbon emissions, contributing to a greener environment. • These efforts aim to create a sustainable, resilient community while also fostering economic growth and environmental stewardship.

Source: (Northern Grampians Shire Council, 2022; Northern Grampians Shire Council, 2021; Northern Grampians Shire Council, 2021; Northern Grampians Shire Council, 2023; Victorian Government, 2014)

3.1.2 Community Perceptions of Renewable Energy

An analysis of relevant local, state and national media articles was conducted to understand the current context and community outlook towards 'renewable energy' in the 'North West Region', 'Northern Grampians', 'Watta Wella' and 'Wimmera Southern Mallee region'. To date, there has been limited news reporting on the Watta Wella Renewable Energy Project. As **Table 3.2** outlines, a proportion of media articles highlight a lack of trust towards renewable energy proponents in the region and a lack of community engagement. Such concerns are largely directed at the larger transmission projects e.g. AusNet's Western Renewables Link (WRL) and AEMO's VNI West transmission project (which both join at Bulgana Terminal Station adjacent to the proposed Project). Positive sentiment relates to a desire to transition away from fossil fuels and meeting net zero targets. **Table 3.2** provides a summary of relevant articles.

Table 3.2 Media Review

Media Article	Description
"Victoria's biggest battery becomes first project through new renewables fast track"- Renew Economy, 2024	The article discusses the approval of Victoria's largest battery project, the Joel Joel Battery Energy Storage Project, which is the first to go through the state's new fast-tracked renewables approval process. This 350 MW, 700 MWh project, developed by ACEnergy, aims to provide critical grid services and support Victoria's renewable energy targets. Community sentiment towards the project was mixed. While the project is seen as a positive step towards cleaner and more reliable energy, some critics argue that the fast-tracked approval process may overlook the concerns of farmers and regional communities. The streamlined process is intended to accelerate the development of renewable projects, which is crucial for meeting the state's ambitious energy goals (Vorrath, 2024).

Media Article	Description
"Farmers for Climate Action finds most regional residents impacted by renewables are supportive"- ABC News, 2024	A recent survey by Farmers for Climate Action reveals strong support for renewable energy projects among regional residents. The survey, which included 1,000 participants from renewable energy zones across Victoria, found that 70% of respondents are in favour of clean energy projects on farmland. Community sentiment is largely positive, with many seeing renewable projects as beneficial for local economies and the environment. However, there are calls for more thorough consultation processes to ensure that the needs and concerns of all community members are addressed (Long & King, 2024).
"'Everyone's against it': the powerline dispute in one of Victoria's most marginal electorates"- The Guardian, 2022	The article highlights the electorate of Ripon in Victoria (The electorate in which the current Project is based) as politically vulnerable. Liberal MP Louise Staley held the seat by just 15 votes in 2018. A redistribution made it marginally a Labor seat. Martha Haylett (ALP) currently holds the seat. The transmission line has been advertised as a positive project to help the region meet renewable energy targets though the community have opposed the transmission line due to "residents who say the towers will affect their ability to grow potatoes and will negatively affect land value, liveability and tourism" (McGlone, 2022).
"VicGrid promises 'answers' after turbulent public meeting over proposed powerlines"- ABC News, 2023	The article highlights the lack of information provided by AEMO to residents and landholders regarding the transmission line's option 5 which runs north through the Northern Grampians Shire. The article refers to "appalled" farmers who feel there has been a lack of transparency and "straight answers" from AEMO about the Victorian to New South Wales Interconnector West (VNI West). The article reported that a meeting was held with VicGrid, with the Northern Grampians Shire Council expressing concerns surrounding how the meeting was facilitated (Andrew Kelso, 2023).
"New Wimmera Southern Mallee Development group united to deliver for community"- The Weekly Advertiser, 2023	The article highlights the launch of the Wimmera Southern Mallee Development group in 2023, formerly known as the Wimmera Development Association. This group has introduced a five-year strategic plan focusing on three pillars: enabling growth, removing barriers, and building resilience. The plan aims to boost regional population growth, support the transition to a low-emissions economy, and enhance business and community sustainability. Regional leaders have expressed optimism about the potential for significant investment in renewable energy, housing, and job opportunities. However, there are concerns about addressing local challenges such as housing shortages and access to healthcare and childcare (Grimble, New Wimmera Southern Mallee Development group united to deliver for community, 2023).
"AusNet shows where power transmission network will weave through western Victoria" – ABC News, 2021	The article discusses AusNet's plan to build a high-voltage power transmission network across western Victoria. Here are the key points, with a focus on renewable energy: • **Project Overview:** The Western Victoria Transmission Network Project aims to connect renewable energy sources near Stawell to Melbourne. • **Route Details:** AusNet has released a map showing potential corridors for the powerlines, with multiple routes under consideration between Ballarat and Melbourne.

Media Article	Description
	• **Community Concerns:** There is significant community resistance due to the potential impact on the landscape and local properties. • **Renewable Energy Connection:** The project will link renewable energy sources to the power grid, supporting the transition to cleaner energy. • **Consultation Process:** AusNet plans to engage with the community through consultation groups and feedback sessions to address concerns and gather input. (Martin, Johnson, & Jane Bell, 2021).
"RES edges ahead with plans for huge wind, solar and battery storage hub in Victoria"- Renew Economy, 2022	The article highlights RES's plans for a renewable energy facility and the preliminary details around the wind, solar and battery aspects of the proposed Watta Wella Renewable Energy Project. The article summaries the possible biodiversity and cultural heritage issues surrounding proposed land including cumulative impacts for species such as the Swift Parrot, Powerful Owl, Barking Owl and Eastern Wing Bat. Aside from these potential effects the overall environmental impact of the project is "unlikely to have the significance or complexity to warrant an environment effects statement" (Vorrath, 2022).
"Bulgana Wind Farm near Great Western gets Northern Grampians council approval"- ABC News, 2015	The article highlights community feedback on the Bulgana Wind Farm located adjacent to the proposed Watta Wella Renewable Energy Project, which previously received 10 objections relating to visual impacts, property values and removal of native vegetation. The Mayor highlighted that issues had been addressed and that the wind farm was a "gigantic project" for the community (ABC News, 2015).

Source: Umwelt, 2025

3.1.3 Cumulative Development – Proximal Projects

The North West region hosts multiple renewable energy projects, some of which are well established, with one wind farm in operation since 2003 (Challicum Wind Farm).

As renewable projects increase in number and scale, so may community and stakeholder concerns, with visual and noise amenity two of the most cited impacts raised by objectors for onshore wind farms. Positive sentiment relates largely to the local employment and procurement opportunities associated with wind farm developments, particularly in the construction phase, as well as benefits to local communities through increased social investment.

Table 3.3 and **Table 3.4** highlights a number of project developments within 50 km of the Watta Wella Renewable Energy Project which are proposed or currently approved and operating. While other projects may be underway, only those where public data is available have been reported.

Table 3.3 Proximal Proposed Projects

Name	Approximate Distance to the Project (Straight line)	Status[4]	Description	Potential Cumulative Issues
Western Renewables Link – AEMO	Connection at Bulgana Terminal	Preparation of EES	AEMO has proposed a 190 km high-voltage overhead transmission line from the Sydenham Terminal Station to Bulgana Terminal Station. The project is proposed to include: • A 220 kV double circuit overhead line from Bulgana to a new terminal station north of Ballarat. • A 500 kV double circuit overhead line from a new terminal station north of Ballarat to a new terminal station at North Sydenham. • 300 jobs during construction. • Project is anticipated to be operational by 2027.	Cumulative impact is **possible** due to geographical proximity and potential for minimal overlapping construction timelines. Potential cumulative impacts such as strain on short term accommodation, health services, consultation fatigue, visual impacts and traffic impacts due to the proximity of renewable energy projects and timing of development overlapping with the Watta Wella Renewable Energy Project.
VNI West (Vic to NSW Interconnector West) - AEMO	Connection at Bulgana Terminal Station	EES underway to accompany it's planning application submission in 2025	VNI West is a proposed new high capacity 500 kV double-circuit overhead transmission line.	
Navarre Green Power Hub - Neon	23 km	Scoping Phase	• 400 MW wind farm. • 150FTE construction • 10FTE operational • 24 month construction.	Cumulative impacts are unlikely because the construction periods are very unlikely to overlap given the projects current assessment phases.
Campbells Bridge Wind Farm - RWE	31 km	Scoping Phase	• 145 wind turbines • 1,000 MW	

Source: (DTP, 2025)

[4] Status as of February 2025

Table 3.4 Currently Approved or Operating Proximal Renewable Energy Projects – within 50 km

Name	Approximate Distance to the Project (Straight line)	Description	Potential cumulative issues
Bulgana Green Power Hub – Neoen	Directly adjacent Southeast	56 wind turbines, total generation of 194 MW, completed construction in 2019. 20 MW battery storage facility completed in 2021.	Cumulative impacts **are likely** due to the proximity to Watta Wella Renewable Energy Project. They include visual amenity, sense of place, sense of community, noise, and health and wellbeing (perceived and/or real).
Joel Joel BESS	Directly adjacent to Project Area boundary to southeast (near Bulgana Terminal Station)	Approved (not operational) 350 MW battery	
Stawell Solar Farm – ACEnergy	16 km West	5 MW solar farm, an approved project by council.	Cumulative impacts are **unlikely** due to the distance between projects and the small scale of the Stawell Solar Farm.
Crowlands Wind Farm – Pacific Hydro	20 km Southeast	39 wind turbines, 79.95 MW capacity. Construction finished in December 2018.	Cumulative impacts are **possible** due to the proximity of the Crowlands Wind Farm to Watta Wella Renewable Energy Project**.** Impacts may include visual and rural amenity, sense of place, and sense of community due to a feeling of 'encroachment' from multiple wind farms in the region.
Ararat Wind Farm – RES	27 km	75 wind turbines, 240 MW capacity.	Cumulative impacts are **possible** due to the proximity of the Ararat Wind Farm to Watta Wella Renewable Energy Project. Impacts may include changes to rural amenity, sense of place, and sense of community due to a feeling of 'encroachment' from multiple wind farms in the region.
Ledcourt Solar Farm – ACEnergy	33 km West	5 MW, an approved project by council.	Cumulative impacts are **unlikely** due to the distance between projects and the small scale of the Ledcourt Solar Farm.
Challicum Hills Wind Farm – Pacific Hydro	42 km South	52.5 MW wind farm with 35 turbines. Completed in August 2003.	Cumulative impacts to sense of community and visual impact are **unlikely** due to the distance between projects and long-term nature of the Challicum Hills Wind Farm.
Maroona Wind Farm – Fezero, Renew Power Group and ProVentum	46 km South	2 turbine wind farm, completed in January 2018 with a total capacity of 6.9 MW.	Cumulative impacts are **unlikely** due to the distance between projects and the small scale of the Maroona Wind Farm.

Source: (DTP, 2025)

Other proximal developments that are proposed within 50 km of the Project site are listed below in **Table 3.5**.

Table 3.5 Other Significant Projects within 50 km of Project Site

Name	Approximate Distance to the Project (Straight line)	Description	Cumulative Impact
East Grampians rural pipeline – Grampians Wimmera Mallee Water (GWMWater)	25 km South	Construction of a pipeline network to provide a secure stock and domestic water supply to landowners living in the climate stressed region of eastern Grampians, western Victoria. The proposed pipeline network will connect Lake Fyans to the existing Ararat water main and consist of a trunk line (~400 km), distribution lines (~1,000 km), fourteen pump stations (20 m x 30 m), an open storage space (20 m x 20 m), a storage tank (1 ML), air and scour valves, power line extensions and, connections to landholders. Referral approved in 2017.	Cumulative impacts **are unlikely** due to construction for the pipeline being currently underway

Source: (GWMWater, 2025)

4.0 Community Capitals Analysis

This section outlines key characteristics of the social locality by community capital area. Further detail of each capital can be found in **Appendix A.**

4.1.1 Local Challenges and Opportunities

Table 4.1 summarises challenges and opportunities currently being experienced across the Social Locality as determined from the social baseline profile research and through community consultation. Where relevant these challenges and opportunities have been drawn upon to inform the social impact assessment SIA in **Section 5.0**.

Table 4.1 Local Challenges and Opportunities

Challenges	Capital	Opportunities
• The Federal MP has previously stated concerns surrounding the move towards renewable energy and changing from agriculture land uses. • The State MP (Martha Haylett - ALP) was elected following a redistribution at the last election. The seat is marginal. Historically the seat has been held by the National Party. • Significant existing community and state opposition and concern surrounding transmission lines.	**Political**	• The State government has designated the Western REZ and Tier 1 investigation area (Vic Transmission Plan, 2024) as an area appropriate for significant investment in the future of renewable energy in the area. • Northern Grampians Shire Council is developing a Renewable Energy Transition Action Plan providing opportunity to recognise and benefit from the significant regional economic growth enabled by renewable projects.
• Importance of visual amenity for tourism increases the significance of visual impacts. • Prevalence of National Parks and other important ecosystems including threatened and endangered species may increase the significance of environmental impacts. • Construction and operation of wind farms may present a collision risk to the Swift Parrot. • Increase in prevalence of natural disasters across the region including bushfires and floods.	**Natural**	• Rich in natural resources, cultural and heritage assets, including highly productive agricultural land and vast mineral resources. This presents an opportunity for renewable energy developers to contribute to the region's existing strengths. • An area of significant agricultural productivity and strength, with capacity for symbiosis between agriculture and renewable energy e.g. largely cleared land for agriculture provides suitable low ecological impact land for wind farms, whilst wind farm operations can work harmoniously with farming practices. • Opportunity for the project to support biodiversity through offsets and revegetation initiatives.

Challenges	Capital	Opportunities
• Aging population and declining population, predominately within retiree and empty nester years, reduces the capacity for local job creation and procurement opportunities. • Growing social and economic disadvantage increases the area's vulnerability to economic shocks and reduces community resilience. • Skills shortage in the region reduces capacity for local job creation. • The Northern Grampians is within the lowest 20% of LGAs in Victoria in terms of socio-economic disadvantage • Higher prevalence of people with chronic health conditions increases vulnerability to reduced access to health services.	**Human**	• Certificate of attainment in key fields of study such as engineering and related technologies enhances the upskilling capacity of residents within the LGA creating opportunities for local procurement and employment in the wind farm construction workforce. • Employment opportunities from renewable energy projects will attract a younger population helping to balance the current demographics and enable opportunities for economic growth.
• Generally lower feelings of personal safety in the LGA due to increasing rates of crime • Strong community opposition to other renewable energy projects and transmission projects is causing stress and anxiety. • Long-term place attachment of long-term residents is often associated with higher levels of anxiety or opposition when places change.	**Social**	• A more cohesive and involved community likely to have stronger community ties and mutual support systems. • Strong community values and pride highlighting the opportunity to collaborate with the local community.
• Competition for regional funding. • Strong economic agricultural ties and reliance, increasing vulnerability to economic or climatic shocks. • Lower unemployment indicating a tighter labour market.	**Economic**	• Mining industry is the greatest contributor to economic output in the region, with potential for overlapping skills and business outputs that can support the Project. • Strong tourism sector associated with historic value of the land. • Strategic economic plans aligning with boosting tourism. • Higher rate of unemployment could lead to increased potential for local workforce. • Rise in renewable energy projects emerging across the region. • The region has emerging innovation and research capacity. • Opportunities for economic growth at regional and local levels due to renewable energy development.

Challenges	Capital	Opportunities
• Lack of housing to support incoming population associated with construction of large projects. • Limited public transport. • Vulnerability to natural disasters. • Low access to tertiary educational facilities.	**Physical**	• Stawell, St Arnaud, Horsham and Ararat are service centres for rural and regional areas proximal to the proposed project. • Upgrades to transport routes to support heavy vehicles as the region will see an increase in construction if the new Western Renewable Link and Victoria NSW Interconnector West transmission projects are approved.
• Growth in population can potentially change community culture.	**Cultural**	• Friendly regional culture and community. • Strong European history associated with agriculture and mining industries. • Strong First Nations leadership through Barengi Gadjin Land Council (BGLC).

Sources: (REMPLAN, 2021; Northern Grampians Shire Council, 2021; ABS, 2021; ABS, 2023; Northern Grampians Shire Council, 2022; Northern Grampians Shire Council, 2021).

5.0 Perceived and Predicted Social Impacts

This section provides an evaluation of the social impacts identified in relation to the Project. To inform impact evaluation, consideration is given to outcomes of RES' engagement, outcomes from other relevant SIA studies, social research, outcomes of Project technical studies and the expertise of the SIA team.

The significance of each social impact is then established, using the significance matrix outlined in the NSW Guideline (DPE, 2023) which considers social impact likelihood and magnitude dimensions (extent, duration, intensity or scale, sensitivity or importance and level of concern or interest) for both positive and negative impacts.

5.1 Social Impacts Identified through Stakeholder Consultation

As has been highlighted in **Section 2.4.2** and **Table 2.4,** RES has undertaken a range of engagement with stakeholders across the Project assessment phase. With approximately 1400 recorded interactions across the Project phases, data collected has been used to inform the evaluation of social impacts, highlighting the key social impact matters of relevance to those consulted.

Stakeholders raised a variety of positive impacts relating to the Project with themes relating to establishment of a community benefit fund; opportunities for local employment and procurement during construction; support for the renewable energy transition and intergenerational equity associated with reduced reliance on fossil fuels, as well as livelihood benefits associated with reduced energy prices. The benefits to landholders hosting Project infrastructure, was seen to 'future proof' existing farming operations, through the provision of host landholder agreements; and from a wider community perspective, there was significant interest in the development of the Community Benefit Sharing Program which has three components including the community benefit fund, Neighbour Shared Benefit Scheme (SBS) and First Nations Values Sharing to facilitate positive impacts for local residents, First Nations communities and more vulnerable groups.

Figure 5.1 summaries the potential project benefits identified by stakeholders during consultation. These benefits focussed on enhancing the local community through community benefit funds such as the CBP, increased local employment and procurement, the broader impact the project will have on the renewable energy transition and reduced energy prices.

In relation to stakeholder concerns relating to the Project (refer to **Figure 5.2**), issues focused on change to sense of place as a result of visual and other amenity issues; public safety related to increased Project related traffic on rural roads and potential fire risk and access for emergency responders, should a fire event occur; reduced access to housing and short-term accommodation for the construction workforce; as well as clearing of areas of important environmental value to the community for Project infrastructure and access roads.

From a livelihood perspective, while benefits to host landholders and the broader community have been identified, concerns also related to the impact on agricultural activities, such as aerial spraying, coexistence with wind farm operations, and potential property devaluation. The cumulative effects related to concurrent development of other projects in the region was also noted particularly in relation to traffic, housing, and amenity. The issues noted are consistent with those voiced by community stakeholders, in other wind farm developments in Victoria and more broadly across the country.

Table 5.1 provides a summary of the positive and negative impacts relating to the Project by social impact category as outlined in the Ministerial guidelines for assessment of Environmental Effects (DTP, 2023).

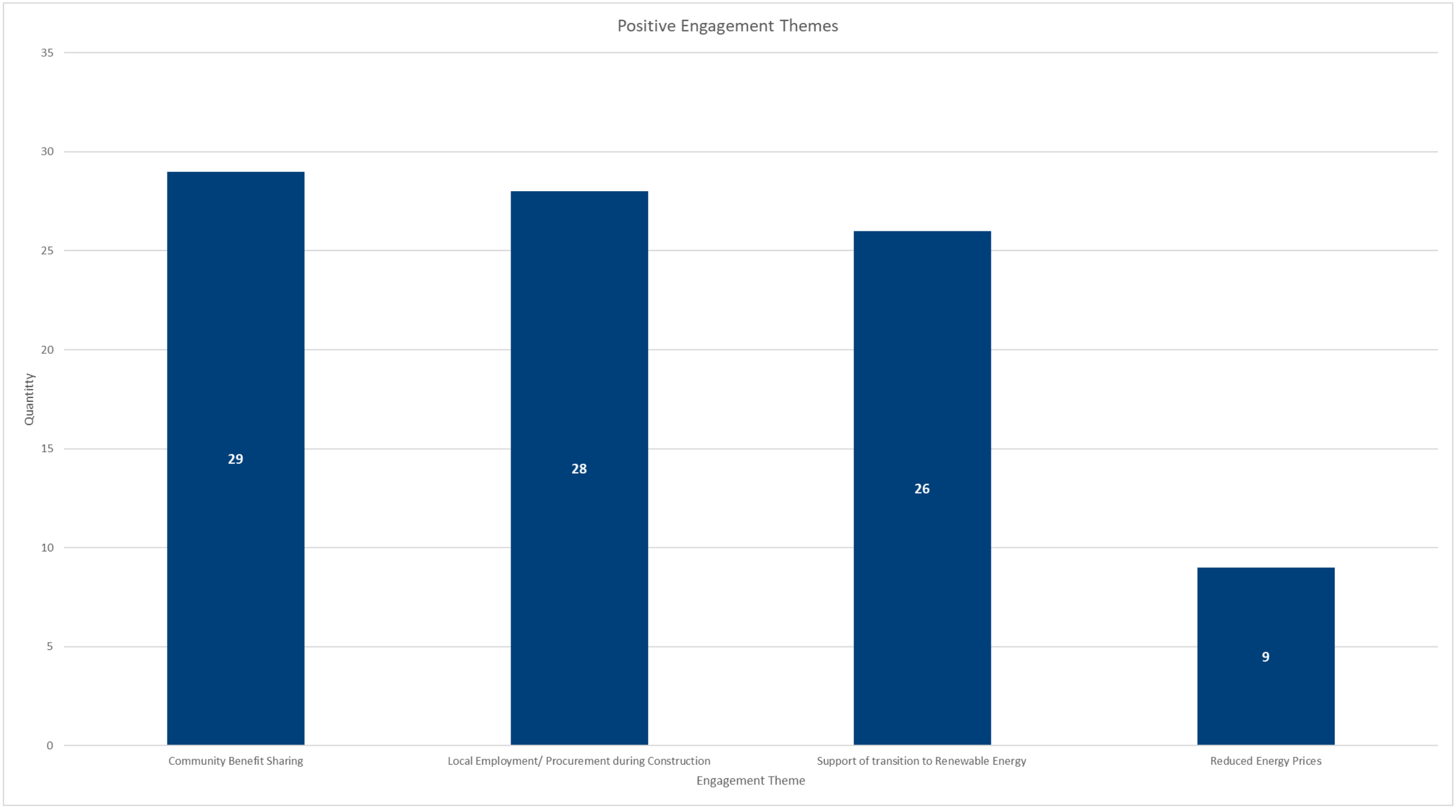


Figure 5.1 Project Benefits Identified through Engagement[5]

Source: RES, 2025 (n=153).

[5] Attendees of the February 2025 Community Information Sessions have been categorised as community members because the provided data was not detailed enough

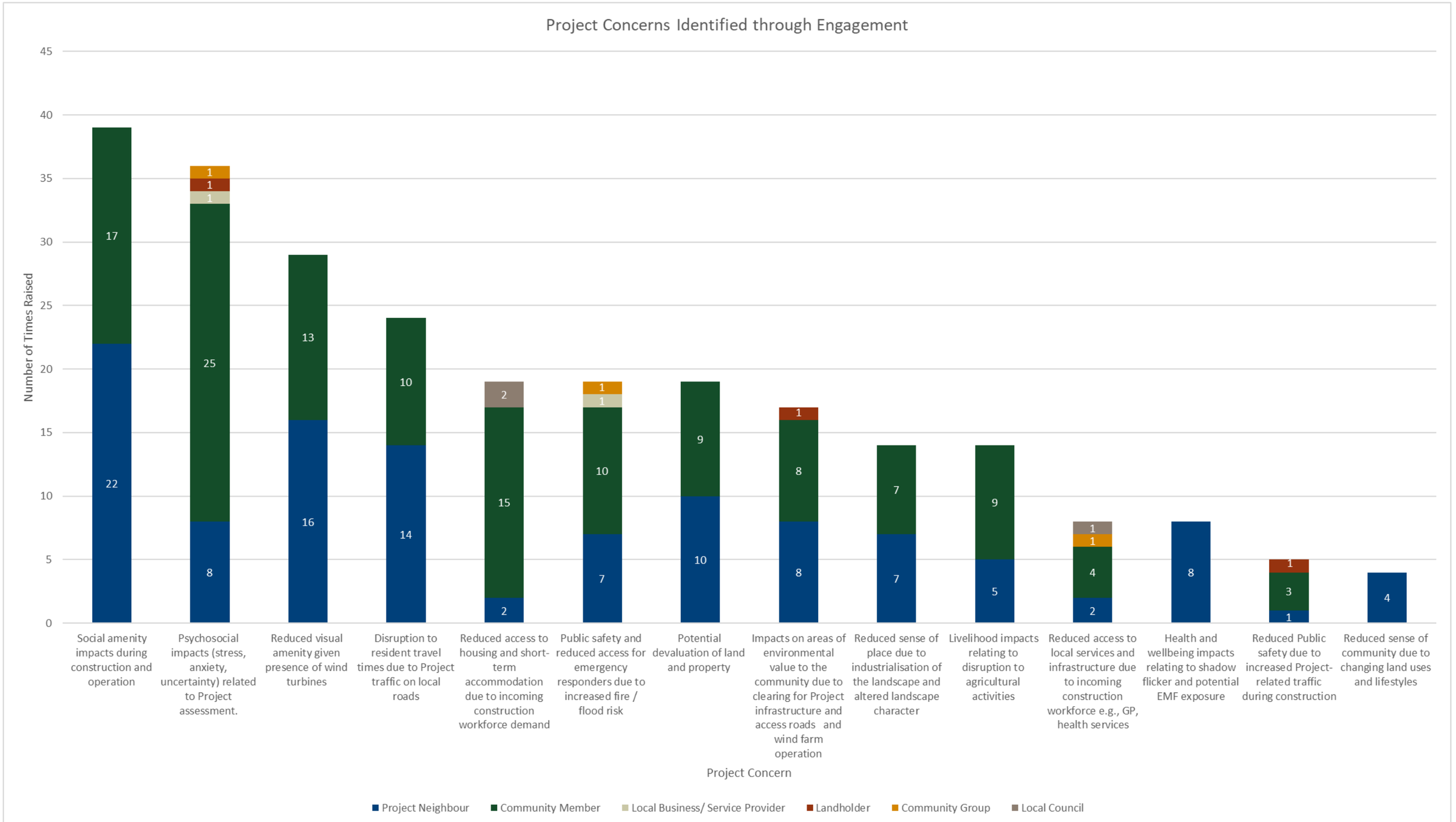


Figure 5.2 Project Concerns Identified through Engagement

Source: RES,2025 (no=153).

Table 5.1 Social Impact by Impact Category Matrix

Impact	Community, Way of Life and Culture	Accessibility	Health and Well-being	Livelihoods and personal and property rights	Surroundings	Decision-making and political systems
Livelihood, cultural value and participation outcomes for First Nations community members						
Livelihood benefits associated with employment and training opportunities for residents within the social locality						
Livelihood benefits for local businesses and service providers						
Livelihood benefits for landholders hosting project infrastructure						
Livelihood benefits for proximal landholders through Neighbour shared benefits						
Increased energy availability and affordability						
Enhancement of social infrastructure within the social locality through the Community Benefit Program						
Enhanced community/public safety through road and access track upgrades for fire/flood emergency responders.						
Intergenerational equity (greater fairness/justice) due to renewable energy development and climate mitigation						
Reduced sense of place due to industrialisation of the landscape and altered landscape character						
Reduced sense of community due to changing land uses and lifestyles						
Loss of cultural value and connection						
Reduced public safety due to increased Project-related traffic during construction						
Disruption to resident travel times due to Project traffic on local roads						
Reduced access to housing and short-term accommodation due to incoming construction workforce demand						

Impact	Community, Way of Life and Culture	Accessibility	Health and Well-being	Livelihoods and personal and property rights	Surroundings	Decision-making and political systems
Reduced access to local services and infrastructure due to incoming construction workforce e.g., GP, health services						
Public safety and reduced access for emergency responders due to increased fire / flood risk						
Altered communication reception due to presence of project infrastructure						
Potential devaluation of land and property						
Livelihood impacts relating to disruption to agricultural activities						
Reduced visual amenity given presence of wind turbines						
Social amenity impacts during construction and operation						
Impacts on areas of environmental value to the community due to clearing for Project infrastructure and access roads and wind farm operation						
Psychosocial impacts (stress, anxiety, uncertainty) related to Project assessment.						
Health and wellbeing impacts relating to shadow flicker and potential EMF exposure						

Source: Umwelt, 2025.

*. Pink = negative. Green = positive.

Community members engaged in relation to the Project were also asked to indicate existing challenges in their local community. As outlined in **Table 4.1,** key challenges related to population decline, an ageing population, a lack of local employment and educational opportunities, cost of living and lower wages, a lack of housing, addressing climate change impacts, and response to natural disasters (given the region has been impacted quite considerably in recent years by fire and flood). Given the above, the Project has the opportunity to contribute positively to some of the key community issues/needs identified.

The following sections provide further details on the social impacts identified.

5.2 Way of Life, Community and Culture

Impacts relating to way of life, community, and culture refer to how people live, work, play, and interact with one another on a daily basis; effects on community composition, character, resilience, and cohesion; and impacts on shared beliefs, customs, and connection to Country.

5.2.1 Change to Sense of Place

Large-scale projects have the potential to change a community's place identity or place attachment. Place-identity relates to the dimensions of self that develop through interaction with the environment via beliefs, preferences, feelings and values. When change is proposed to a place, it can be perceived as a 'disruption' or 'threat' and can be met with opposition and anxiety in some instances. Where change is perceived as being in keeping with place values, it may be met with support (Carlisle et al., 2014).

The Northern Grampians Shire Community Vision 2041, developed by Council, articulates the connection of community to their natural environment and those with whom they live, work and recreate, as reflected in the following local community sentiment:

> *"The location and natural beauty of the National Park and farmland connects me to this region"*
>
> *"The spirit of the people and good nature; their wants and eagerness to better themselves and their town".*

The impact of the introduction of wind turbines and transmission lines was frequently raised as a concern by community members. Many families have lived in the area for years, valuing the quiet and rural nature of the locality and the agrarian and natural landscape character. The proposed industrialisation of the landscape was considered a substantial change, with visual impacts particularly seen as a key driver of a change in sense of place and place attachment.

> *"I live [proximal to the Project site] and this has been my home for 28 years. It is on a quiet road in an area that is peaceful and attractive and has abundant wildlife." – Neighbouring Landholder*
>
> *"These are long-term industrial fixtures [wind turbines] – the plan for them is short sighted." – Neighbouring Landholder.*
>
> *"What about my grandchildren? They won't know what a natural landscape looks like if it becomes industrial with wind farms" – Neighbouring Landholder*

The Landscape Character and Probable Visual Effect Assessment (LVIA) (WAX Design, 2025) has suggested that the degree of visual change likely to be experienced by local landholders varies from substantial to the north and northeast, through to moderate in the south and southwest, and minor through the regional locality at distances greater than ten (10) kilometres.

The assessment also notes that the existing landscape currently has wind turbines from other operational wind farms and transmission infrastructure surrounding the area, which has already diversified the landscape from a purely agricultural setting. The Victorian government has designated the area as suitable for renewable energy projects. The associated infrastructure including the BESS, substation and transmission lines will provide localised visual impacts within their immediate site localities. It has been proposed however, that local ridgelines and existing vegetation will assist in reducing visual effects.

Given additional wind farm development in the region, impacts on sense of place were further heightened for local residents, through their lived experience of other development.

5.2.2 Change in Agricultural Identity and Practices

The introduction of the Project was also seen by some stakeholders to impact the identity of the community, as an agricultural area. While some stakeholders, saw this change in land use as changing the sense of community within the locality, others, such as host landholders, felt that their farming activities could co-exist with wind farm operations.

A key concern for many neighbouring landholders and community members was the impact of the Project on agricultural land and associated activities, with a strong belief that the Project would be using prime agricultural land that should be better used for grazing purposes. For many community members, the proposed Project, and other nearby Projects, represent a threat to a much-valued community history of agricultural production and way of life, for some across many generations.

> *"We hold significant concerns about the impact the proposed Project will have on current farming operations as well as on our lifestyle residing here." – Neighbouring Landholder.*

As discussed in **Section 4.0** and further detailed in **Appendix A**, the Northern Grampians LGA has a long history of agricultural land uses and large and productive land holdings. In fact, 13.2% of the population is employed in farming activities. As stated in the Agricultural Impact Assessment (RMCG, 2025), the Project Site is currently used for dryland mixed farming, predominantly sheep for wool and meat (estimated to be 30% wool: 70% prime lamb), and cropping; mostly cereals for grain and hay. Some cattle grazing and cropping growing oil seeds, vetch and pasture seed also occurs. Farm sizes within the project site range between 1,000 ha and 3,000 ha. The average area of holding of farm businesses across the wider district is 780 ha. The Wind Farm Project site is classed as 'medium' agricultural capability which is suited to relatively low to medium value agricultural uses such as livestock grazing or cropping for cereals and hay production. The Project is likely to take a maximum of 75 ha of land out of agricultural production within the Project site, with the estimated loss in value of agricultural production from the Project site representing approximately 0.1% of the district agricultural value.

Related to this concern was the disruption that may be experienced by landholders because of construction activities on their own, and neighbouring properties. Some community members raised previous experiences of poor etiquette by contractors, and concerns about contractors entering properties without proper consent or prior notice, as well as leaving gates open. Stakeholders explained that construction and operation of the Project could reduce land access, constrain use of their properties or harm their livestock:

"I need [to have] an access point [to part of land included in Project area]. I also need an exclusion zone to protect livestock [from the wind turbines]" – Host Landholder

"[Negative impacts of the Project] Also any potential loss of agricultural production near or on site" – Community Member

In contrast to these concerns, there is increasing evidence that sheep grazing, and renewable energy can co-exist. Farmers for Climate Action released a report in 2022 acknowledging the potential for positive and 'symbiotic' relationships between farming and renewable energy. In particular, the report highlighted the capacity for renewable energy to generate alternative income streams for host landholders that can assist in mitigating volatility in income streams, climatic conditions, commodity prices and farm output (Farmers for Climate Action, 2022), a benefit that has been highlighted in the assessment.

The Project site will continue to be used to graze sheep between wind turbines with limited reductions in agricultural productivity anticipated. To address concerns about land access, soil contamination and contractor behaviour, RES will work with local landholders to communicate construction schedules in advance and to directly address any potential issues as they arise. The Community Consultative Committee (CCC) will provide an opportunity for neighbours to work with contractors to reduce impact and ensure that community concerns are well understood and addressed.

5.2.3 Reduced Social Cohesion

Given that the impacts of the project are not evenly distributed, the presence of the Project was also seen to be influencing relationships at the local community level, reducing community cohesion and for some having a negative impact on health and wellbeing.

"It's causing issues between neighbours and friends." - Neighbouring Landholder

"I moved here for the peace and serenity, the wildlife, the quiet road, and the relative isolation. These are all being threatened by the proposed project, which in turn will have a huge negative effect on my wellbeing." - Neighbouring Landholder

RES has put a Neighbour Shared Benefit Scheme in place for proximal landholders as a means of working with local neighbours to minimize the impacts of the Project at the local level and to compensate residents for likely inconvenience, particularly during construction. However, with any Project, some stakeholders are likely to receive greater benefits than others.

5.2.4 Loss of Aboriginal Culture and Connection

This impact area refers to impacts relating to shared beliefs, customs, practices, obligations, values and stories and connections to Country, land, waterways, places and buildings. It also considers Aboriginal engagement, participation, and generation of economic and social benefits.

As outlined in **Appendix A**, Barengi Gadjin Land Council (BGLC) is the Prescribed Body Corporate that represents Traditional Owners from the Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergaia and Jupagulk peoples, as outlined in the Native Title Act. BGLC is the Federally recognised authority to speak on behalf of the Wotjobaluk peoples and the only body in the region with the legislative authority to make legal decisions about cultural heritage.

RES has been engaging with BGLC on the Project since 2021. Engagement activities have included extensive cultural heritage surveys (2021 & 2022), site visits (May & November 2023) and regular meetings with BGLC's Cultural Heritage and Engagement Teams (2021–2025), including a Cultural Induction for RES' Project Team and visit to BGLC's native nursery Dalki Garringa (August 2023).

During engagement BGLC were interested in understanding impacts and access to tangible and intangible cultural heritage including the Wimmera River, which holds deep cultural significance for the Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergaia, and Jupagulk peoples.

Given the cultural value of the river and BGLC's concerns over the location and impact of turbines in proximity to the river. A site visit was arranged in November 2023 including representatives from BGLC and Wotjobaluk Elders. RES presented the proposed turbine sites near the river, allowing the Elders to gain a clearer sense of their location and proximity. More recently, Feedback from BGLC regarding relocation of particular access tracks has also been noted, resulting in these tracks being relocated to avoid impacts on cultural values and heritage. Further impacts on tangible Aboriginal cultural heritage and its management is further discussed in Section 11.4 of the Planning Report.

Concerns were also raised in relation to government and industry practice of engaging with Traditional owners, given BGLC's previous experience and lack of consultation; as well as outlining barriers to their involvement given Land Council capacity issues e.g., staffing and resources, to afford effective engagement with proponents. A key focus for BGLC is ensuring that First Nations community members stay involved in Land Council activities, such as the drafting of the Renewable Energy Roadmap, and that members are informed of proposed renewable energy projects and associated social and economic opportunities. In regard to employment, BGLC raised concerns that the Project had the potential to draw First Nations employees from existing businesses, and the Local Aboriginal Land Council (LALC) itself, creating challenges for local organisations to find and retain First Nations staff within the locality.

Since 2021, RES and BGLC have communicated through multiple consultation mechanisms, including in-person and online meetings, site visits, email exchanges, and telephone communications, have been undertaken. **Table 5.2** summaries meetings which have occurred between 2021 and 2025 and which have informed the CHMP, and the First Nations Benefit Sharing approach, centred around relationship building and understanding and focusing Benefit sharing on the key needs and aspirations of the community e.g. education and training scholarships for Aboriginal youth.

The BGLC and RES are currently developing a *Walking Together Statement* to ongoing engagement, benefit sharing and project participation and to formalise the process of value sharing between the parties.

Table 5.2 RES and BGLC Meeting Summary

Date	Type of Meeting	Subject of meeting
07/01/2021	In person meeting	CHMP consultation log to discuss initial desktop assessment
17/05/2021	In person meeting	CHMP consultation log to discuss results of standard assessment.
15/08/2022	Meeting	Discuss progress of the complex assessment
05/10/2022	Meeting	Meeting with BGLC's consultant Dr Moragh Mackay to discuss Renewable Energy Roadmap and benefit sharing ideas

Date	Type of Meeting	Subject of meeting
01/08/2023	Meeting	Meeting with BGLC and a Cultural Induction including a visit to Dalki Garringa Nursery
12/10/2023	Meeting	Meeting regarding the transmission route and CHMP
14/11/2023	In person meeting	Site visit with Elders and BGLC Representatives
10/12/2023	Meeting	Call with BGLC's Renewable Energy & Climate Projects person following site visit
11/12/2023	Meeting	Meeting re site walkover and benefit sharing idea
18/03/2024	Meeting	Conversation re Walking Together Statement
22/04/2024	Meeting	Meeting re Engagement and Value sharing agreements
19/02/2025	Meeting	WW Wind Farm Layout & Cultural Heritage
29/04/2025	Meeting	Discuss CHMP and request to move access track (from BGLC).

Source: RES Borealis Engagement Records

In relation to transmission development, VicGrid, under DEECA's Pupangarli Marnmarnepu 'Owning Our Future' Aboriginal Self-Determination Reform Strategy, is committed to partnering with Traditional Owners and other Aboriginal Victorians. The goal is to identify key considerations, concerns, benefits, and opportunities for Traditional Owners and Aboriginal communities. VicGrid aims to embed self-determination outcomes in its practices and ensure that Traditional Owners have a say in how their communities' benefit from infrastructure projects. Engagement methods and timelines will be co-led by Traditional Owners and government specialists to support Aboriginal decision-making, leadership, and self-governance. Potential partnering approaches include funding program managers for renewable energy and establishing an advisory group to provide advice to Traditional Owner groups (VicGrid, 2023).

5.3 Accessibility and Surroundings

This section refers to impacts affecting access to both physical (roads, tracks, utilities, communication) and social infrastructure (housing, health, education, recreation, emergency services etc) as a result of the Project.

5.3.1 Travel Disruption Due to Increased Project-Related Traffic during Construction

Concerns were commonly raised about the impact of construction traffic on existing road infrastructure, with respondents highlighting the need for road upgrades due to current road conditions and lack of suitability for heavy construction vehicles.

> *"[There is] considerable impact on local roads due to heavy traffic [associated with previous wind farm construction]" – Neighbouring Landholder*

> *"[We have had previous issues with other renewable developments] destroying roads." – Neighbouring Landholder*

Stakeholders raised concerns that local roads surrounding the proposed Project are currently unsealed and due to road condition and increased traffic, public safety could be reduced, with school children and movement of livestock (given the agricultural area) identified as particularly important to consider. Driving behaviour of contractors on other projects was also noted.

> *"The amount of traffic it's going to create on our usual quiet roads, I live on a quiet country road where the local kids play and ride their bikes. With the amount of traffic this is going to bring these kids may not be safe on their bikes."-Neighbouring Landholder*

> *"When moving [live]stock we are also concerned about their welfare with increased traffic to the area." – Neighbouring Landholder*

> *"Driving very fast down [construction traffic] the centre of the road causing serious corrugations." – Host Landholder.*

Social amenity issues for residents in proximity to the site and along the transport route were also raised, with some stakeholders concerned that increased traffic associated with the Project, had the potential to result in travel delays and reduced access for residents.

> *"Using the Vineyard Rd in front of my house. The traffic will cause extreme amounts of dust to enter my home"– Neighbouring Landholder*

> *"Some reduction in the use of Vineyard Road is helpful but making more changes to remove all use of Vineyard Road is desired" – Neighbouring Landholder*

> *"Short term disruption to traffic flow in local area during construction" – Community Member.*

RES have revisited the transport routes to and from the Project site in response to neighbour concerns, particularly in relation to traffic along Vineyard Road. As a result, proposed access tracks have been removed so that no project related traffic will access the site from Vineyard Road.

The Traffic Impact Assessment (TIA) (Access Traffic Consulting, 2025) has determined that during the construction of both the wind farm and BESS facility, heavy vehicle traffic will increase. The addition of the Project traffic from the peak wind farm construction will lead to an increase in daily traffic volumes of >5% on Ararat-Stawell, Stawell-Avoca, and Landsborough Roads, with the latter two roads also relevant to the BESS development.

Although it has been assessed that the existing configurations of these roads can provide adequate capacity for the additional traffic volumes generated by the Project, these increases may impact road users by increasing traffic and reducing safety due to the rise in OSOM (Over Size Over Mass) vehicles. Driver fatigue may also be a factor.

A Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) and a Driver Code of Conduct and Transport Management Plan (TMP) will be developed and implemented prior to construction. These plans should consider location of residences and schools along the transport route and ensure appropriate safeguards are in place to ensure community safety, in particular vulnerable groups such as children, and other landholders engaged in agricultural activities, to minimise traffic impacts.

Furthermore, as part of the CTMP, RES has committed to undertaking dilapidation studies which will ensure that local roads are returned to their original condition as required by their infrastructure agreement with Northern Grampians Council. The CCC will also provide an opportunity for community members and Council to consult with contractors to share concerns and ideas to minimise traffic impact to the community.

5.3.2 Reduced Access to Local Services due to Workforce Influx

The potential for population change associated with the incoming construction workforce is likely to place additional strain on local services within the social locality. The Project is expected to generate approximately 260 FTE jobs during peak construction for the wind farm component and up to 120 FTE jobs for the battery component. It is anticipated that approximately five to ten full-time equivalent staff would be required for each key Project component during operations.

RES developments have achieved a high proportion of local workforce during construction phase. For example, the Murra Wurra I Wind Farm (located 25 km north of Horsham) achieved 45% local employment for a peak construction workforce of 180 across the construction period (July 2018 to March 2019).

The unemployment rate, as of September 2024 in the Northern Grampians is 4.5%, with a relatively small local labour force. In 2021, 5.9% (304) of the labour force were employed in the construction industry.

As illustrated in **Figure 5.3**, the construction workforce for the wind farm is estimated to peak onsite in July 2028, requiring approximately 260 construction workers. In addition, the BESS component is estimated to require 150 construction workers during peak (refer to **Figure 5.4**). RES has assumed that construction of the BESS will take up to 1.5 years and will be staged to ensure that peak construction timings do not overlap with the wind farm. The projects are two separate projects and will be scheduled over separate timeframes, and while there may be some overlap, the overall peak workforce should not be greater than the peak construction workforce forecast for the wind farm.

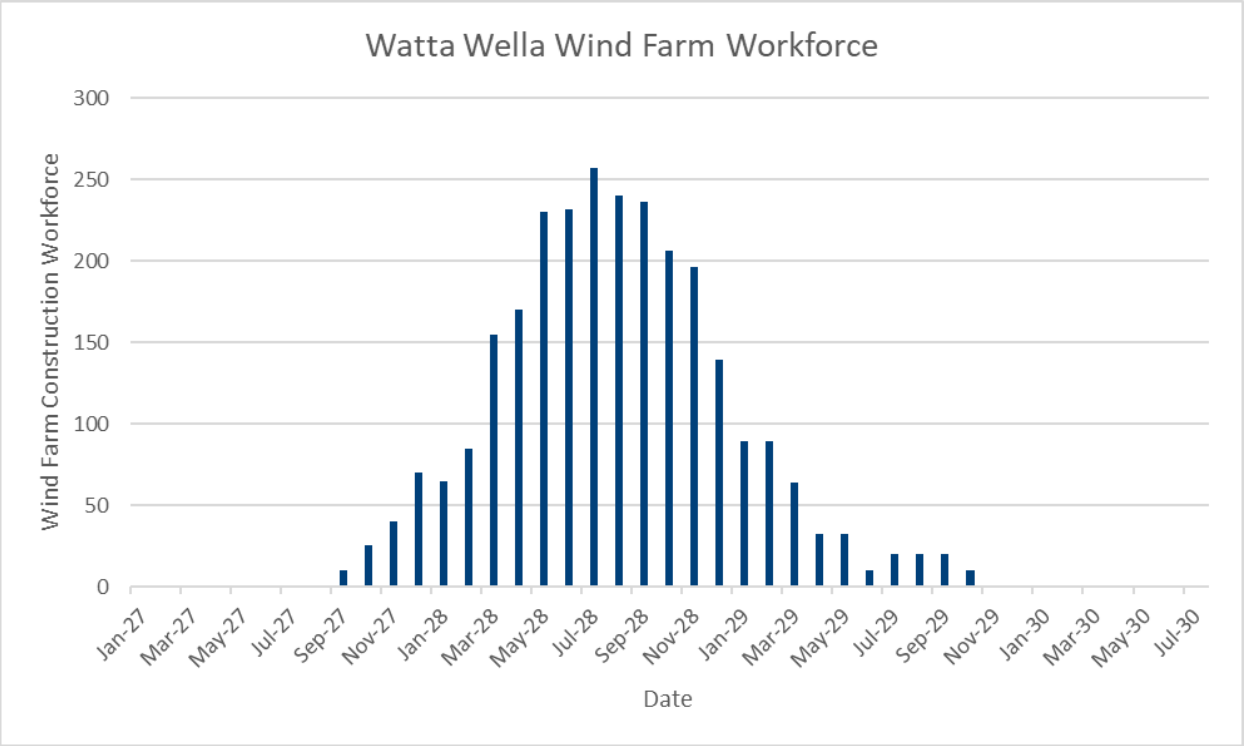


Figure 5.3 Watta Wella Wind Farm Construction Workforce Histogram

Source: RES, 2025.

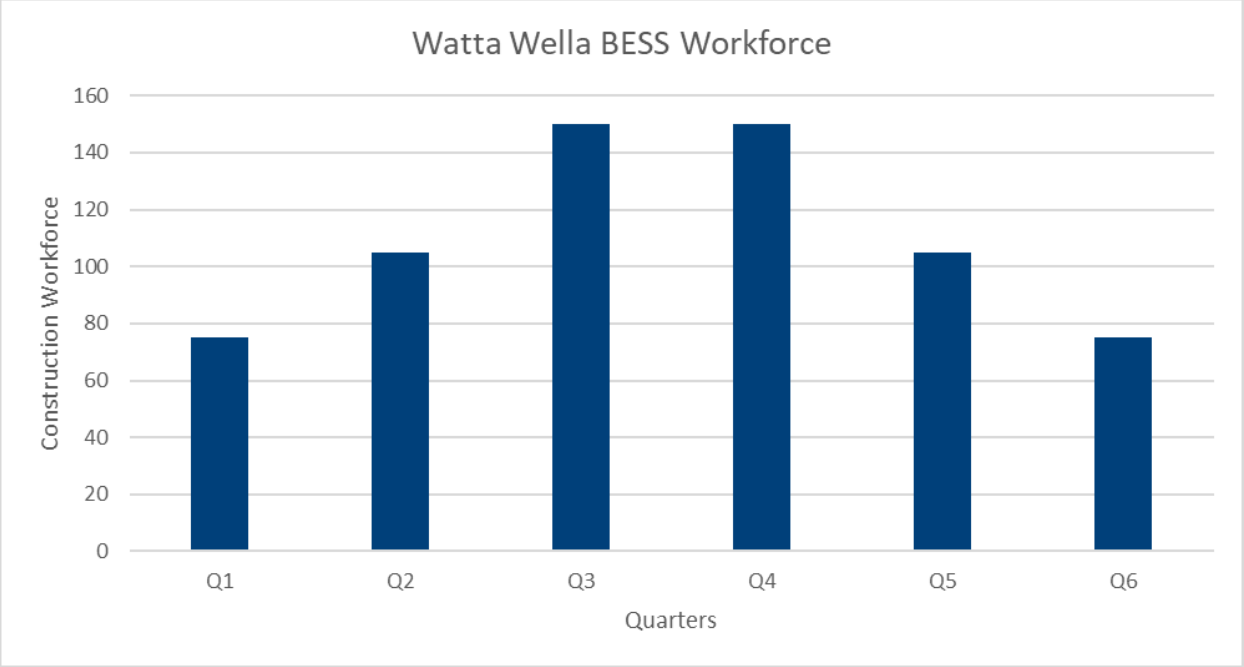


Figure 5.4 Watta Wella BESS Construction Workforce Histogram

Source: © Umwelt, 2025; RES, 2025

It is therefore likely that a proportion of the workforce will need to be sourced from within a one-hour drive time of the Project given existing workforce constraints. The three scenarios considered in **Table 5.3** are presented to estimate the likely population impact of the incoming construction workforce for each component of the Project across the Northern Grampians LGA, and subsequent impacts on local service provision. These scenarios include:

- **Scenario 1** – assumes 10% of the Project construction workforce will be sourced locally, and a total of 90% of the workforce will migrate to the area for the construction period.
- **Scenario 2** – assumes 20% of the Project construction workforce will be sourced locally, and a total of 80% of the workforce will migrate to the area for the construction period.
- **Scenario 3** – is considered an aspirational scenario of 40% local employment and 60% migration into the area. This scenario will be dependent upon appropriate strategies being put in place by RES to facilitate local employment and training.

Population change estimates are provided at an LGA level only given there is insufficient data available to accurately model how the incoming workforce (both construction and operational) will be distributed within specific communities in the LGA.

It should also be noted that the peak construction workforce (260 for Wind and 120 for BESS) has been used in the calculations in **Table 5.3** and represents the worst-case impact scenario. It also assumes that incoming workers would reside in the LGA for the entirety of the construction period for each Project component.

Table 5.3 Construction Workforce Population Change Estimates - All Scenarios

Scenario	Population of Northern Grampians: 11,948		
	Population Increase[6]	% Increase in Northern Grampians population	Number of local workers[7]
Wind Farm Component (260 peak)			
Scenario 1 (90% migration into LGAs/ 10% local employment)	234	2.0%	26
Scenario 2 (80% migration into LGAs/ 20% local employment)	208	1.7%	52
Scenario 3 (60% migration into the LGAs/ 40% local employment)	156	1.3%	104
BESS Component (120 peak)			
Scenario 1 (90% migration into LGAs/ 10% local employment)	108	0.9%	12
Scenario 2 (80% migration into LGAs/ 20% local employment)	96	0.8%	24
Scenario 3 (60% migration into the LGAs/ 40% local employment)	72	0.6%	48

Burdge (2004) suggests that any increase or decrease in population greater than 5% may be considered a significant population impact. Under the worst-case impact scenario, in which there is 90% migration of the construction workforce into the Northern Grampians LGA, there is a predicted 2.0% increase in population during peak wind farm construction and 0.9% during BESS construction.

While the Project alone will not have a significant population change across the Northern Grampians LGA, when considered in conjunction with the potential development of other projects in the Western REZ (as outlined in **Table 3.3**), greater population change may result. For instance, a 5% population change equates to an incoming project workforce of approximately 597 in the Northern Grampians LGA. Consequently, the impacts discussed below on local services, relate to cumulative rather than Project specific impacts.

[6] It is important to note that this population increase assumes workers would not be permanently relocating to the area and therefore does not consider the influx of families associated with the workforce.

[7] Based upon a peak of 250 FTE construction workers.

5.3.2.1 Reduced access to housing and short-term accommodation

In relation to the impacts on community services, access to housing and accommodation were most frequently noted during consultation; with housing availability and affordability considered key issues at both a regional and state level. There was also concern raised that further demand for housing may also significantly impact on other sectors, such as the health and tourism sectors, given competition for accommodation by workers and tourists/visitors to the area.

Impacts relating to access to housing were raised by those who feared that the influx of a construction workforce would lead to housing and accommodation shortages and increased rental prices. Rental vacancy rates in Stawell in January 2025 were 0.42% and 0.15% in Halls Gap compared to the overall LGA (which demonstrated a rental vacancy of 0.22%). Given this context, additional demand on housing is likely to further exacerbate housing stress, especially for those in lower income brackets. **Appendix A** further illustrates the lack of affordable and available housing in the social Locality and limited short-term accommodation, given that current accommodation providers have average occupancy rates of around 56%. As a number of stakeholders explained:

> *"There is currently a lack of housing in Stawell [in regard to housing incoming workforces]. Tourist accommodation is already at capacity and is estimated to run out by 2026" – Local Council*

> *"Concern about [construction] workers taking up housing when it's super limited already for existing residents." – Community Member.*

Such an issue has also been noted in local media, supporting comments made by the Council - "visitors were calling for four and five-star accommodation options – amid forecasts that showed demand would outstrip supply by 2026 without further investment" (Grimble, 2023). In this regard, accommodation options are being developed in both Great Western and Halls Gap to accommodate additional tourists/visitors.

Potential supply and availability of short-term accommodation facilities[8] within the LGA, as of January 2025, is outlined in **Table 5.4**. Halls Gap, as the main service centre for the Grampians National Park, has the greatest number of accommodation providers while Horsham has a greater number of rooms and sleeping capacity.

Table 5.4 Short-Term Accommodation Supply[9]

Suburb	Number of providers	Total number of rooms	Total sleeping capacity	Approximate Drive Time to the Project Site
Stawell	3	111	453	16 min
Halls Gap	33	1,066	5205	37 min
Horsham	1	133	396	59 min
Ararat	3	45	211	33 min
Total	**40**	**1,355**	**6,265**	**-**

Source: (ATDW, 2025).

[8] Short-term accommodation is classified as: hotels, motels, caravan camping, holiday parks, retreats and holiday houses.

[9] Please note, figures have been taken from the Australian Tourism Data Warehouse, which provides information derived from tourism operators providing the information. This is a conservative estimate of short-term accommodation availability.

While data on hotel and motel occupancy rates are not available, occupancy rates for Airbnbs can partially serve as a proxy for this information. In addition to short-term accommodation supply, as of May 2025, there were a total of 398 Airbnb properties listed in the Social Locality with an average occupancy rate of around 51.7% (refer to **Table 5.5**).

Table 5.5 Airbnb Accommodation Supply

Key Township	Total Available Listing	Average Occupancy [10]
Stawell	53	45.7%
Horsham	52	64.0%
Ararat	70	49.8%
Halls Gap	213	53.1%
Great Western	10	45.8%
Total	**398**	**51.7%**

Source: (AirDNA, 2025).

Analysis suggests approximately 1,355 short-term accommodation rooms and 398 Airbnb properties available across the Social Locality based on the databases reviewed. Using a 75% occupancy rate, to reflect seasonal peaks in demand, there are likely to be about 438 beds of short-term accommodation or Airbnb properties available on any given night. However, this does not consider the cumulative impacts of workforces associated with other project developments in the region. For example, the Western Renewable Link (WRL) Transmission Line is estimated to require a peak of 300 construction workforces which would further increase demand on service and accommodation providers in the LGA, however it should be noted that WRL is a linear project, with workers unlikely to be concentrated in only one area.

Given the extremely low rental vacancy rates (rental vacancy rates of 0.42% in Stawell and 0.22% across the Northern Grampians region (realestateinvestar, 2025), it is likely that any use of rental homes will constrain supply for locals and potentially increase rental prices.

The Future Growth Area Master Plan (Northern Grampians Shire Council, 2024), presents a significant opportunity for wind farm developers to collaborate with the Council to house their workforce. The plan aims to assess the suitability, housing yield, and staging for rezoning land in the 'future residential growth area' identified in the Stawell Structure Plan. The primary long-term growth area is located south of Stawell, with the potential to meet most of the town's greenfield development needs over the next 3–50 years. This 135 ha precinct could accommodate most of the population and housing growth within the Shire, making it an ideal location for key worker housing.

5.3.2.2 Reduced access to health services

Increased pressure on existing health services due to population change associated with the Project can impact accessibility of services for local residents and subsequently affect community health and well-being.

[10] Average occupancy rate from May 2024 to May 2025.

As identified in **Appendix A**, and common in many rural localities across the state, the provision of health service professionals in the region is low. Similarly, the LGA is characterised by an elderly and ageing population and higher than average proportions of the community with one or more chronic illnesses. Stawell's current loss of GPs has been highlighted in local news as a key issue (Gillian Aeria, 2023).

Incoming workforces may exacerbate this issue as non-resident construction workers compete for access to already constrained medical facilities. Furthermore, given the nature of construction activities, despite strict work, health and safety standards may present at health services with more complex or challenging cases (Erny-Albrecht, 2014).

Patient treatment has been seen to be challenged by a number of factors including lack of existing relationship with medical staff (which may result in low cooperation); the danger of drug interaction and/or unidentified allergy risks; and dissatisfaction with perceived 'small town' medical services (Erny-Albrecht, 2014). The Project may also have an impact over the 36-month construction period on emergency services, either through changes in demand, access and capacity. It is possible that a temporary population influx of construction workers may result in an elevated utilisation of emergency services and contribute to increased wait times for emergency departments.

Furthermore, approximately 5.5% of labourers and technicians experience a workplace related injury each year in Australia (Safe Work Australia, 2023). In applying this statistic to the Project, under a worst-case scenario (where all reported injuries require medical attention), approximately 14 workers per annum (based on peak workforce of 260 workers for the Wind Farm) over the 36-month construction period may need to access a local GP service and/or attend a hospital Emergency Department. A small proportion of the workforce may be local and thus already have an established GP relationship in place; however, this does not consider the potential cumulative effects of multiple projects, and access that may be required to allied health services to provide rehabilitation support post injury or other services.

The provision of an onsite medic or nurse for the workforce, may assist in alleviating demand on other community health services.

5.3.3 Communication Connectivity

Though not raised during consultation for this Project, the interference of wind farm developments on proximal communication towers has been raised in other wind farm projects, given the importance of communication networks in rural communities.

Det Norske Veritas (DNV) have assessed the impact of electromagnetic interference (EMI) (DNV, 2025) from the Project in relation to satellite signals impairing residents' ability to watch digital television, and impairing emergency services' ability to receive radio signals, mobile phones and wireless internet. The assessment found that dwellings located within and adjacent to the Project boundaries in the west and northwest would have an increased potential for EMI impacts, but such impacts were considered minor. This was also the case for infrastructure and services that rely on such networks, however it was suggested that any impact, although unlikely would be managed through consultation with the relevant service operators (DNV, 2025).

While the Project is located proximal to other wind farms, there may be possibility of an increased risk of EMI impacts on satellite signals and transmission signals, however, the assessment found that cumulative impacts to other services are not expected (DNV, 2025).

5.4 Impacts on Health and Well-being

This section refers to impacts on people's physical, mental, social and spiritual health and well-being. Community consultation identified potential increase in levels of anxiety and stress due to the uncertainty around Project timelines and the number of renewable energy projects in the area. Similarly, the increased strain on health services due to an incoming Project workforce population has the potential to impact health and well-being of local residents, as has been previously outlined in **Section 5.3.2.2**.

5.4.1 Health and Wellbeing Impacts Relating to Shadow Flicker and Potential EMF Exposure

The rotating blades of wind turbines can cast intermittent shadows to a person located in the shadow of the wind turbine – termed '*shadow flicker*'. Given wind turbines are tall structures, shadow flicker can be observed at considerable distances but usually only for a brief time (a matter of a few hours a year) at any given location. Even though this duration is brief, ongoing exposure to shadow flicker can cause annoyance and may lead to discomfort and potential health issues such as headaches and visual disturbances.

The repetitive nature of shadow flicker can also contribute to stress and anxiety, impacting the overall quality of life. *The Shadow Flicker Impact Assessment* (DNV, 2025) undertaken for the Project has concluded that seven (7) dwellings are expected to experience some shadow flicker, one predicted to experience shadow flicker above the recommended limit of 30hrs per year. Though mostly considered within acceptable limits, this impact may affect those neighbours who may be more sensitive.

Further concerns relating to wind turbine operation centre on the health and wellbeing impacts associated with electromagnetic fields (EMF), that may impact neighbouring and host landholders. EMFs are generated by the electrical components of wind turbines, including generators and transmission lines. While the levels of EMF produced by wind turbines are generally low, and within international safety guidelines, some individuals worry about potential long-term health effects. These concerns include possible links to headaches, sleep disturbances, and other health issues. The uncertainty and anxiety surrounding EMF exposure can also contribute to stress and negatively impact overall wellbeing.

Addressing these concerns through transparent communication, provision of ongoing research, and adherence to safety standards is critical to alleviate fears and ensure the health and safety of communities living in proximity to wind farms.

Management measures to be implemented to reduce such impacts during operations and construction, include:

- Implementation of Noise Management Plans.
- Reducing the annoyance of shadow flicker impacts through screening (vegetation or artificial) or selective turbine control and shutdown.
- Addressing perceptions of health impacts in providing further information in relation wind farms and health – in this regard, RES has information presented on their FAQ available on the Project website.

5.4.2 Mental Health and Well-being

Community members raised fears about cumulative project impacts and the feeling of being "surrounded by windfarms", with little choice or sense of control. This is a common theme in large infrastructure projects, where uncertainty, fear of the unknown and a sense of loss of control over surroundings and process can drive anxiety and stress (psychosocial impacts).

> *"Current angst in the community due to limited knowledge surrounding wind farm projects and the quantity of wind farms growing in the area" – Local Council.*

Edelstein and Vanclay (2024), outline that psychosocial impacts are the subset of social impacts arising from projects, disasters, and unwanted change that specifically relate to the mental health, psychological wellbeing, and emotions of people. Psychosocial impacts can dislodge people from their normal everyday life, alter the ways people understand and experience their world, disrupt their patterns of daily activities and accustomed behaviour, increase the level of stress, and diminish their psychological functioning.

Psychosocial impacts may range from feeling annoyed or inconvenienced through to debilitating conditions and trauma. The experience of psychosocial impacts may affect a person's health and wellbeing, and, especially where a person's coping resources are already strained by pre-existing conditions, may result in serious physical and mental health issues.

Psychosocial impacts can be experienced directly, as emotional and other psychosocial responses to air or water pollution, noise, or to changes in one's surroundings. They can also be secondary or tertiary, for example, the emotional and other psychosocial responses that arise from changes to one's health, sense of place, sense of safety and security, or to the actual or perceived value or liveability of their home.

As discussed in **Section 5.2.3**, tension between the supporters and opponents of a project can lead to intracommunity conflict, and to further psychosocial impacts. As one landholder noted:

> *"I am worried about the impacts this Project will have on my health (physical and mental) and lifestyle with regards to noise, increased road traffic, and loss of visual amenity, during both the construction and operational stages." – Neighbouring Landholder*

5.4.3 Public Safety Impacts Related to Fire and Flood Risk

Public safety impacts associated with fire or flood risk was considered a key issue by those consulted given previous natural disasters in the region. As outlined in , in December 2024 the Grampians National Park burned for three weeks, burning more than 76,000 Ha hectare of National park and farmland before it was contained. The fire caused evacuations in townships such as Halls Gap for several days.

In October 2022, the region also experienced severe flooding with townships such as Halls Gap, St Arnaud, Great Western, Navarre, Marnoo and Glenorchy heavily impacted. Particular issues in this regard related to the proximity of the turbines to residential dwellings, the proximity of the BESS to Joel Joel Reserve and development of fire safety and emergency plans, given other experiences in the region. As has been noted in **Section 1.2** (Project design refinements), the BESS has been relocated further away from the Reserve in response to these concerns.

> *"There is a need for good water storage for firefighting close to the BESS as the Bulgana firefighting water storage was too far away during an incident during construction [of the Bulgana Wind Farm]" – Neighbouring Landholder*

The *Risk Management Plan (RMP) (including Fire Safety Study)* (Fire Risk Consultants, 2025) has concluded that the Project is located within a Bushfire Prone Area (BPA), and even though the proposed site has not previously been impacted by large bushfires, bushfires can occur under elevated fire danger conditions in this landscape.

The RMP also assessed the fire risk for the Project's construction and operation phase and concluded that wind turbines and the BESS Unit can present fire risks if not designed, constructed, commissioned and operated effectively. The risks assessed included electrical hazards, project components such as the BESS igniting, spreading of offsite fires, leaking of dangerous goods, and response times for emergency personal.

The fire risk assessment indicates that the development can occur in the landscape and is not likely to increase the risk of both bush fire and grass fires to surrounding communities, farming assets and other infrastructure. Mitigation measures to reduce the overall fire risk as outlined in the report include:

- Installation of static water supply tanks spread across the Project including the BESS area that complies with the CFA Guidelines and Fire hydrant installations.
- Provision of fire breaks around the base of the wind turbines, BESS, substations and the operations and maintenance area.
- Installation of smoke detection and fire suppression systems within the nacelle.
- Installation of fire safety systems within the BESS enclosures that are based on the manufacturer specifications.
- Provision of access tracks including overtaking bays.
- Ongoing maintenance programs for the life of the Project in accordance with the relevant Standards or manufacturer specifications.
- In line with the above section, some of the Project infrastructure and layout is also located within a flood risk area. The Hydrology and Flood Report (Afflux Consulting, 2025) states that the Project would be unlikely to have major impacts on surface waterflood flow through the region or have significant impact on proximal infrastructure, with both the wind turbines and BESS assessed as having minor risk of flood impacts which can be managed through ensuring design changes such as increased freeboard height of the BESS and design changes to the foundations and footings of turbines. Appropriate river crossing designs (ensuring safety compliance) will be completed as a secondary consent for a Works on Waterway Permit with the Wimmera Catchment Management Authority (CMA), whilst detailed design of culverts and drainage for the Project will be completed post-approval to avoid and minimise impact to existing hydrologic and hydraulic regimes.
- RES has updated the Project to introduce up to 48 km of new access tracks and upgrade existing local roads providing improved access within the Project Area and around the nearby Nature Conservation Reserves, which will aid in emergency and maintenance access for fire services and help create additional fire breaks.
- The Project has also been designed in compliance with the CFA guidelines including placement of water tanks near all site access points which will improve water availability for fire fighting in the Project locality.

5.5 Livelihoods and Personal and Property Rights

This section refers to impacts on livelihoods of individuals, households and businesses as a result of the Project. It also refers to how the project may enhance or detract from local and/or regional economic opportunities through employment, training, and supply chain activities.

5.5.1 Local Procurement, Employment and Training Opportunities

Stakeholders expressed enthusiasm and support for local employment and local procurement opportunities that may be associated with the Project.

Representatives of a number of local businesses have attended community sessions, contacted RES directly and expressed interest in servicing or working on the Project, with two completing the RES Community Benefits and Local Business Survey and a further 28 signing up to express interest in the Project and to receive updates.

> *"Grampians has a large number of project managers, engineers, operators, labourers and equipment at our disposal. A local job like this would not create any limitations" – Local Business.*

5.5.1.1 Local employment and training

As highlighted in **Appendix A**, the Northern Grampians Shire is characterised by high levels of socio-economic disadvantage, with the LGA falling in the 2nd decile of the ABS Index. The LGA population exhibits a lower attainment of bachelor's degrees in comparison to the State (5% compared to 12%). Further, the *Northern Grampians Shire Council's Economic Development Strategy and Action Plan* (Northern Grampians Shire Council, 2021) outlines the high number of families at or below the poverty line (30%). This regional economic and social context provides both challenges and opportunities in relation to the Project.

On the one hand, low levels of educational attainment and training in the community make sourcing suitably skilled local employees challenging. In contrast, high levels of disadvantage present opportunities for targeted training and education programs to support local social benefits for disadvantaged communities. *The Economic Development Strategy and Action Plan* (2021) highlights this opportunity, identifying how opportunities that provide skilled jobs and training would overall enhance social connectedness and economic and social well-being in the region.

The Clean Energy Council (2022) outlines that key careers in large-scale wind farm construction include trades and technicians, labourers, and construction workers. In the Northern Grampians LGA, there are 611 (11.8%) people employed as technicians and trades workers, 897 (17.4%) as labourers, and 304 (5.9%) in the construction industry, who may have qualifications suited to the proposed wind farm construction workforce. Additionally, the region has 304 individuals with tertiary education in architecture and building, and 730 with education in engineering and technology, further enhancing the LGA's ability to source skilled workers.

> *"It would be nice if you could train up locals for construction and maintenance jobs" – Community Member.*

As has been highlighted in **Section 5.3.2**, RES has a soundtrack record in working with relevant

stakeholders to maximise local employment in Project construction phases, and in the current project is committed to maximising local employment where possible. Construction workforce jobs are also likely to result in a number of indirect jobs, creating economic stimulus in other parts of the local and regional economy.

5.5.1.2 Local procurement

There is also an opportunity for local businesses to benefit from procurement opportunities, especially if an Accommodation, Employment and Procurement Strategy is developed to focus initiatives. Manufacturing is the third largest industry of employment in the Northern Grampians LGA and the second largest industry of employment in Stawell. In the Northern Grampians LGA, there are 36 manufacturing businesses and 138 construction businesses.

The Northern Grampians *Economic Development Strategy and Action Plan* (2021) has identified renewable energy transition as a key driver of economic change and an opportunity to diversify the region's economy. This is a particularly beneficial opportunity given the cumulative advantages of several renewable energy and transmission projects occurring in the region, creating opportunities for economic growth and diversification.

Beyond direct employment and procurement, increased economic production or new investment adds directly to the strength of the economy and creates indirect jobs (as noted above), in turn generating additional economic activity. The initial increase in activity generates other business opportunities as the new activity purchases the materials and services it needs to operate. In addition, extra jobs provide income to households, creating a second source of growth in demand for goods and services. The successive waves of increased economic activity work their way through the economy. As a result, the Project is likely to generate positive flow-on impacts to local businesses such as accommodation providers, catering services, entertainment, landscaping, biodiversity management, transport services and road maintenance and management businesses.

RES has previously delivered significant local employment and procurement benefits through its project near Horsham in Western Victoria, Murra Warra I & II. The Murra Warra Wind Farm II project was projected to create over 400 full-time jobs during its two-year construction phase and provide ongoing employment opportunities once operational. It is projected that the project will contribute approximately $40M across the Wimmera region. This economic boost is expected to continue with the construction of Murra Warra II (RES, 2020), with similar outcomes relevant for the current Project.

5.5.2 Creating Community Value through Community Benefit Program

The payment of the Neighbour SBS to impacted landholders, as well as leasing arrangements with host landholders, presents an opportunity to increase the financial resilience of impacted landholders and result in livelihood benefits. As outlined in **Section 5.2.2,** these payments can support ongoing agricultural activities and help diversify income streams, providing additional financial support.

The costs and benefits of Projects are rarely evenly distributed. As has been noted earlier in this section, some stakeholder may receive a greater share of the benefits, while others may experience greater levels of impact. Where stakeholders feel decision making and funding amounts are unfair or inequitable, this can drive conflict between neighbours and impact community cohesion and sense of community. As several stakeholders noted:

> *"Landholders are bribed with large payments while neighbours receive little benefit" – Neighbouring Landholder*

"Share the benefits of the Project to all nearby landowners/residents as we are all going to be directly affected by this Project" – Neighbouring Landholder.

Currently the Community Benefit Program and Neighbour SBS is based on a minimum investment of $1,000/MW or $360,000 per annum over the 35 years of the Project, equating to around $10 million across the Project's operation. To date[11] there have been 15 neighbours who have registered for the Neighbour SBS.

Neighbouring landholders within 5 kms of final turbine locations will also be eligible for a one-off construction impact payment, in addition to annual payments under a Neighbour SBS (further outlined in **Appendix C)**.

Large-scale infrastructure developments, such as wind farms, often contribute to local infrastructure upgrades, including road improvements, community services and facilities. Community benefit sharing in the context of the renewable energy sector in Australia relates to the establishment of an integrated model within projects to share the rewards of the development proactively and purposefully with local communities (CEC, 2019). Outcomes of such a model are seen to contribute positively to the development and sustainability of a region and are often viewed favourably by local communities, particularly if spend is targeted in the local communities/localities where most impacts relating to a project may be experienced.

RES has committed to the development of a Community Consultative Committee (CCC) post approval, which will be comprised of representatives from the community and Council and will be empowered to define how the CBP and Neighbour SBS will be distributed, as well as provide input into the final project design. The CCC will also work with construction contractors to minimise impacts to the local community during the construction of the Project. RES have received three EOI's for membership on the CCC to date, as well as Council representative nominations. Some examples of suggestions provided by community members to date are outlined in **Table 7.1**,and include a focus on supporting local not-for-profit organisations such as the CFA, funding local initiatives and infrastructure and educational opportunities.

As has been previously noted, the development of benefit sharing programs was a positive outcome raised by many stakeholders in relation to the Project. As one stakeholder noted:

"RES can help negate this feeling [anger about more wind turbines] in the community by providing wide ranging and obvious benefits to the local community through generous support of community organisations and sponsorship and grants." – Community Member

Throughout the Project assessment, RES has also sponsored 14 local initiatives to date, including the Stawell Show, Landsborough Primary School and Stawell Agricultural Society.

5.5.3 Property and Land Devaluation

Some stakeholders raised concerns about the potential for the Project to reduce the value of their property, citing concerns about their economic security. Other concerns related to impacts on land rates and the flow-on effect to neighbouring landholders.

"What about the future of the farming land? These things [wind turbines] decrease land rates and property values." – Neighbouring Landholder

[11] As of March 2025

"[The negative impacts are] Increase in Council Rates due to increased land value if towers are on your property. Decrease in land value for neighbouring land holders." – Community Member

"Smaller farmers lose their buying power when they do not get grants/ funding [from the developer]. Are developers paying the going rate for land?" – Neighbouring Landholder

"The decrease in property value is also a big concern for me and my family going forward." – Neighbouring Landholder.

Nationwide, neighbouring landholders to renewable energy projects often express concerns about the potential impact of project infrastructure on their property values (Office of the National Wind Farm Commissioner, 2020). Research commissioned by the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage in 2016 indicated that wind farms are unlikely to significantly affect the value of rural properties used for agricultural purposes (Urbis, 2019). Hicks et al (2018) also found that wind farms do not appear to have any long-term impact on property prices, although the market can be suppressed during the construction phase. Factors such as supply and demand, proximity to amenities, and location desirability play significant roles in property valuation, with property value increases also observed in some regions coinciding with the introduction of renewable energy projects, suggesting some potential positive economic effects associated with such developments (Clean Energy Council, 2025).

Further, in relation to the potential for increased insurance premiums, the Insurance Council of Australia (ICA) reports that insurers do not have specific concerns related to neighbouring clean energy infrastructure. At present, the ICA is unaware of any instances where insurers have been unable to provide coverage or have increased premiums due to the presence of renewable energy projects on adjacent properties (Clean Energy Council, 2025).

Perceived impacts in relation to property devaluation and increased insurance premiums have also been identified during engagement. To provide further information on these issues, RES has included a section in its Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) that provides outcomes of studies undertaken on the impact of wind farms on property values. During the February 2025 Community Information Sessions RES distributed hard copies of the CEC's Factsheets on property values and insurance. Consequently, RES is encouraged to continue to communicate openly and provide clear, evidence-based information in relation to this issue.

5.5.4 Increased Energy Availability and Affordability

The Project, in contributing to Victoria's renewable energy targets, will increase renewable energy availability and affordability for residents across the State. Both wind and solar projects are increasing Australia's renewable energy capacity, supporting more stable and affordable energy prices.

Across Victoria, renewable energy sources like wind can significantly impact wholesale electricity prices, especially during periods of high generation. When renewable generation exceeds demand, prices can drop to $0 or even become negative due to the surplus. Victoria's pipeline of renewable energy sources, both wind and solar, are increasing Australia's energy capacity, supporting more stable and affordable energy prices and delivering long-term savings for electricity users (DECCA, 2025).

5.6 Surroundings

Impacts to people's surroundings refer to changes that the Project may have on a community's experience of the landscape, environmental assets, and resources and/or ecosystem services. This can include people's amenity, their access to and use of the natural and built environment, and the aesthetic value of their surrounds.

5.6.1 Visual Impacts of Wind Turbines

The impact of wind turbines on visual amenity in regional areas was a commonly raised concern and was closely aligned with the impact previously noted in relation to changes to sense of place.

In relation to visual amenity, community members outlined that the Project would reduce their enjoyment of the natural environment/surroundings and would alter the landscape character. Stakeholders, particularly neighbouring landholders, used words such as '*unsightly*' and '*unattractive*' to describe the look of wind turbines.

> *"My house will sit higher [235 m above sea level] than the turbines [looking down onto the wind farm]. I am happy to look at one [wind turbine] 10 km away but not in my backyard." – Neighbouring Landholder*

> *"What is RES going to be doing to support properties like ours on the west side of the towers to block the visual impact of the towers given that the towers on the Watta Wella road will have a huge impact given the size of these towers on the scenic amenity on this side of the wind farm." – Neighbouring Landholder*

> *"Visibility is always a concern to neighbours and given the importance of this region as a natural asset to the tourism industry it is best to keep the infrastructure hidden from view as much as practicable." –Community Member*

> *"Consider visual amenity (e.g. not impacting sight lines to key geographical features such as the Grampians and many key peaks in these ranges)." – Community Member.*

Given development of other projects in the region, visual impact was considered to be further exacerbated. Some community members referred specifically to the Bulgana Wind Farm, which is located immediately adjacent to the proposed Project site; using the established wind farm as a reference point and suggesting that the turbines in the proposed Project would be significantly higher and therefore more visually impactful. Community members referred to '*feeling surrounded*' by wind turbines and raised concerns about the proximity of different projects.

> *"There are lots of wind farms spoiling the landscape. Developers need to develop smaller, less intrusive technologies [regarding size and height of wind turbines]" – Neighbouring Landholder*

> *"There is a feeling in the area that we are being swamped by [wind] turbines and that the visual amenity of the area is being negatively affected by the numerous established windfarms. It will be difficult to overcome this situation as more windfarms mean more turbines." – Community Member*

The LVIA (WAX Design, 2025) states that the Project site is located on the floodplain of the Wimmera River. Surrounding the floodplain are several local ridgelines associated with the eastern escarpment of the Great Dividing Range. Surrounding the site and within the assessment area are the existing wind turbines of Bulgana, Ararat and Crowlands Wind Farms. The presence of these wind farms provides an existing land use and infrastructure context. According to the *LVIA* (2025) while a substantial change to the baseline visual character of the area is expected due to the addition of the current Project's wind turbines, there will be minimal visual impact to the local community due to the natural landscapes ridgelines and existing vegetation reducing the visual impact at distances greater than 15 km.

The *LVIA* (2025) selected five[12] viewpoints to assess the degree of visual change because of the Project. The assessment results found that for three of the viewpoints[13] there would be moderate changes to the area's surroundings that are distinguishable, but the underlying landscape visual character would be retained. Two viewpoints[14] were assessed to have substantial changes which would obstruct existing views from those areas and alter the existing landscape's visual character. However, according to the *LVIA* (2025), the landscapes have the capacity to mitigate and absorb these visual effects.

Furthermore, a Probable Visual Effect Assessment on Residential Properties (WAX Design, 2025) was also undertaken to determine the visual impact for properties within 1–2 km radius of the Project. To note, this assessment considered the worst case of no existing vegetation screening around their properties. There were 16 non-associated landholders and property owners within this radius. Eight (8) properties were determined to have substantial[15] visual impact because of the Project, six (6) properties would have a moderate[16] increasing to substantial visual impact, and two (2) properties would have a moderate visual impact. RES are committed to working with property owners experiencing moderate or higher visual impacts to agree on suitable vegetation screening plans within their properties, for implementation during the construction period to assist in mitigating impacts to an acceptable level.

When discussing visual impacts, shadow flicker is also a key issue often raised in relation to wind farm development and was noted by only a small number of community members during engagement. This has been discussed in **Section 5.4.1**.

It is evident from engagement and a review of other projects underway within the locality, that the development of multiple projects is resulting in residents' experiencing cumulative impacts; and while visual impacts may be considered subjective (depending upon the viewshed), from a social perspective this has the potential to significantly affect sense of place as noted in **Section 5.2.1** for some landholders.

[12] Viewpoints selected were representative, publicly accessible, adjacent to areas of private land ownership, most highly impacted viewpoints where a large proportion of the wind farm and associated infrastructure is visible.

[13] Big Hill lookout, Stawell; Stawell Donald Road; and Settlement of Bulgana

[14] Stawell Avoca Road, Greens Creek; and Northeast of Joel Joel

[15] Substantial change in view: which may involve partial obstruction of existing view or alteration of character and composition through the introduction of new elements. Composition of the view will alter. View character may be partially changed through the introduction of features.

[16] Moderate change in view: change will be distinguishable from the surroundings whilst composition and underlying landscape visual character will be retained.

5.6.2 Social Amenity

5.6.2.1 Social Amenity Impacts During Construction

Stakeholders highlighted concerns about the impact to the social amenity of the area due to construction. These impacts related to noise, vibration, dust and traffic associated with construction activities. Discussions with neighbouring landholders suggested that dust resulting from construction was a concern due to the proximity of their houses.

> *"The traffic will cause extreme amounts of dust to enter my home. Where I'm trying to start a family. I've been inside houses at [Redacted] and seen first-hand the amount of build-up it creates. It was disgusting and unliveable."- Neighbouring Landholders*

Some community members noted that they had moved to the region for the quiet and rural nature of the area and felt they would be heavily impacted by multiple construction periods due to the Project being sequentially constructed. Amenity impacts may also be experienced in a compounding manner, whereby residents may be exposed to multiple impacts - noise, vibration, dust and traffic - associated with Project activities.

Though dust impacts have not been technically assessed, the Proponent intends to manage dust impacts via the Environmental Management Plan. In relation to dust, strategies such as covering truck loads, road sealing and/or use of water carts on gravel roads, will assist in reducing dust impacts. In relation to noise, monitoring can be undertaken to ensure that noise levels are in line with industry standards.

Generally, providing local residents with detailed information relating to construction activities and scheduling, reducing hours of construction to minimise impacts at certain hours of the day and days of the week, may also assist in reducing impacts for near neighbours. Community members will have the opportunity to work with contractors to minimise construction impacts through the CCC.

5.6.2.2 Noise impacts due to wind turbine operation

The operational noise of wind turbines was a concern raised by community members, with many referring to their lived experience of existing impacts from other nearby wind farms.

> *"[There is a] significant increase in noise pollution due to the wind farm[s in the area]." – Neighbouring Landholder*

> *"Noise is also a factor; we live on the land because it's quiet and we don't want to hear the noise that comes with wind turbines." – Neighbouring Landholder*

> *"We have disliked the noise produced by the wind turbines [from previously constructed wind farms]" – Neighbouring Landholder*

> *"We also get too much background noise from the turbines on a regular basis." – Community Member*

> *"…ongoing disruption to the local community through noise are the main concerns." – Community Member.*

> *"It will ruin our peaceful enjoyment of our property due to the unsightly view and the noise, I may not have purchased my property if I had known this would be constructed right behind my property."- Neighbouring Landholder*

A *Noise Assessment* (Marshall Day Acoustics, 2025) has been undertaken to assess the operational noise from the proposed wind turbines, the substation and the BESS, with the assessment concluding that noise levels can achieve base (minimum) noise limits and are within the noise standard limits required of wind farms at noise sensitive receivers (dwellings), noting a separate noise limit exists for associated and non-associated dwellings.

The assessment also evaluated the cumulative noise levels from the substation, BESS, and surrounding industry, including the existing Bulgana Terminal Station and BESS, as well as the proposed Joel Joel BESS. The results indicate that the cumulative noise levels are expected to comply with the noise limits.

As mentioned in the Environmental Noise Assessment by Marshall Day Acoustics (2025), of wind farms are to comply with regulation 131C of the EP Regulations. RES also has an obligation to discharge its general environmental duty under the EP Act to minimise the risk of harm to human health and the environment because of noise impacts from the Project. Despite the *Environmental Noise Assessment,* stating that operational noise limits will comply with legal standards, host and neighbouring landholders may still be impacted by the introduction of noise from the turbines in an agricultural region.

5.6.3 Impacts on Environmental Values of Importance to the Community

The impact of height of the wind turbines on bird health was raised commonly by community members, with 17 people raising impacts on flora and fauna as a key concern during community information sessions. Impacts on wedgetail eagles, swift parrots and other birds were of particular concern. One neighbouring landholder noted that they had identified four Wedgetail eagle nesting pairs in close proximity to the Project site. Similar concerns were raised by Host Landholders regarding the endangered Swift Parrot that could be affected by wind turbine operations.

> *"Ever since the Bulgana wind farm has been built and running (which I objected to because of the real threat to the Wedge-tail Eagle) the noticeable drop off in numbers of these magnificent native Raptors has been significant!! Now we have another Wind farm proposal North of and adjoining Bulgana. When is enough, enough to protect our natural environment??? Are we just going to keep on putting these bird killers along their natural breeding grounds until we have none left!! It is past time to put a stop to this disgraceful onslaught!!" – Neighbouring Landholder*

> *"[I am concerned about] Loss of remnant habitat during the construction phase" – Community Member.*

The Biodiversity Assessment (Ecology & Heritage Partners, 2025) outlines the existing and proposed uses within and in proximity to the Project site also referred to as the Assessment Area[17]. The report provides further information on 13 listed threatened species and ecological communities as outlined in the *Scope for the Environment Report under EPBC Act Bilateral (Assessment) Agreement 2014 and EE Act: Watta Wella Renewable Energy Project (DTP 2023).* These threatened species are generally considered of high value and importance to the community.

[17] Due to the size of the Project Site, the native vegetation assessment (including the detailed habitat hectares assessment) was only undertaken within the proposed impact footprint, but included a 100 metre buffer around each turbine, a 25 metre buffer along each side of all tracks and reticulation, and a 50 metre buffer around all other infrastructure.

The Biodiversity Assessment concludes that the Project site is largely modified due to historic and current agricultural practices, dominated by crops like wheat, canola, and barley, and non-indigenous grasses and weeds. Native vegetation is present in scattered tree stands, roadside reserves, creek lines, and secondary grasslands. The disturbance footprint will impact on 15.360 ha of native vegetation, including 13.852 ha of remnant patches, 32 large trees in patches, and 27 scattered trees (19 large and 8 small). The removal of 17.367 ha of confirmed habitat for Golden Sun Moth is considered a significant impact, however offsets will be provided locally for this species.

Although there will be no direct impact to High Value Fauna Habitat (HVFH) for the Swift Parrot, there is potential for turbine collision impacts without mitigation measures. A National Recovery Plan has been developed for Swift Parrot Bird and an Avifauna Management Plan (BAMP) produced for the Project which provides site-specific mitigation measures for Swift Parrot and other threatened avifauna assessed.

The Project design has prioritised the infrastructure layout avoiding the highest quality areas of native vegetation and suitable habitat for threatened species. This has been achieved by micro-siting the development footprint where possible to minimise impacts to native vegetation in areas containing larger high-quality stands of eucalypt forest, large hollow-bearing trees, secondary grasslands providing habitat for key fauna, and in proximity to riparian areas, with the footprint mostly impacting lower quality vegetation (often secondary grasslands), with low species diversity.

The Project will have an Offset Management Strategy which will outline the implementation of monitoring and reporting activities proposed at the offset sites/s.

5.6.4 Increased Intergenerational Equity due to Climate Mitigation

A positive impact of the Project acknowledged by members of the community was the contribution that the Project makes in transitioning away from traditional energy sources such as fossil fuels, reducing carbon emissions and the impact of greenhouse gas emissions on the surrounding environment.

In this regard, some community members also expressed excitement and support for the Project and welcomed opportunities for the Project to change their community and way of life. Many recognised that the transition to renewable energy was inevitable, was important and that the Project was a positive opportunity for the region, reducing reliance on a carbon intensive industry. Stakeholder responses included:

> *"Good to keep things [renewable energy] going]" – Neighbouring Landholder*
>
> *"No [negative impacts] - very supportive of these alternative energy projects." – Community Member*
>
> *"Any attempt to reduce greenhouse gas must be positive" – Community Member.*
>
> *"Assuming the prime intention is to grow the nation's renewable energy capacity and thus reduce emissions, I would only add that this cannot take place too quickly. As an environmental scientist responding to the data, this [renewable energy transition] must be a national priority. Every element of our society, from health to education to economy, is built on a functioning ecosystem which, in turn, is completely dependent upon a stable climate. If this Project can be demonstrated to reduce emissions, then it will provide arguably positive impacts to the whole of our society into the foreseeable future. The reported issues [from renewable energy projects] only demonstrate small scale thinking and an absence of growth mindsets where challenge to the status quo is welcomed as a way of improving our*

understanding and position. This [renewable energy] transition to net zero, or even better, carbon positive, cannot come too quickly." – Community Member.

Specifically, the Watta Wella project will offset close to 800,000 tonnes of CO2 per year and generate enough energy to power close to 200,000 homes (Clean Energy Council & Farmers for Climate Action, 2024).

5.7 Decision-making Systems

Impacts on decision-making systems includes the extent to which people can have a say in decisions that affect their lives, and have access to complaint, remedy and grievance mechanisms (IAIA, 2015). It also refers to the degree to which people feel they have sufficient information and opportunity to provide meaningful input to decisions that affect them, their families, households and communities.

5.7.1 Consultation Fatigue and Uncertainty Regarding Project Development in the Region

A common theme identified through engagement was the potential for consultation fatigue and levels of stress and anxiety associated with Project uncertainty. Such feelings appeared particularly relevant for communities located in proximity to current and proposed renewable energy projects.

Kubler-Ross (1969) has developed a model which refers to the emotional stages that individuals may experience when confronted with a significant change. The stages associated with the Kübler-Ross Change Curve are often not experienced in a structured sequence or progress in a linear fashion. Individuals may find themselves revisiting stages multiple times as they navigate through change. For example, some may experience shock, characterised by disbelief and numbness as they confront change. Common responses may include "This can't be happening, what now?" This experience can be disorienting, leaving people feeling paralysed or struggling to fully understand the implications of the shift and can also result in disengagement from engagement processes. If community members are having to deal with multiple development within their region, then such effects may be significantly magnified.

Devine-Wright (2009) has also outlined how communities may respond to change when new developments disrupt emotional attachments and threaten place-related identity processes. There are mechanisms that can be utilised by project proponents to better acknowledge a community's sense of community and lessen the perception of the Project as an external 'other'. This includes providing transparent and timely information about the project that acknowledges the stages of psychological response to place change, and which focuses on place-based community benefits to be generated due to the Project; providing opportunities for community members and Project representatives to discuss impacts and how these will be effectively managed and enhanced.

In addition, a lack of information about a project or projects can also affect the ability of stakeholders to conceptualise and respond to proposed changes, making it difficult to comprehend outcomes.

> *"We have only recently purchased our property and were not aware that this Project was in planning. We feel that in the future it could possibly affect the value and growth of our property." – Neighbouring Landholder.*

> *"There is currently distrust throughout the community [towards renewable energy projects] due to the renewable energy transmission line and lack of communication [regarding development information]" – Neighbouring Landholder*

"There are multiple [renewable energy] projects in the area. There needs to be a 'traffic light system' to communicate to the community what [development] stage of the project is at. This needs to be a collaboration between all wind farms in the region" – Local Council.

Stakeholders raised that the number of renewable energy and transmission projects in the area were heightening levels of uncertainty among community residents, with a clear request for further information around the likely scale of development within their locality and the broader REZ.

"Current angst in the community due to limited knowledge surrounding wind farm projects and the quantity of wind farms growing in the area" – Local Council

"More powerlines [Transmission Line] up to NSW? How many more renewable energy projects are going to be put [proposed] in this REZ? We prefer just solar [farms]" – Neighbouring Landholder

"The biggest issue is getting direct or straight answers from proponents…take the latest Windfarm at Bulgana…built with no connection to or infrastructure to connect to main 220 kV transmission line and now they have caused community's dissent with a now proposed new transmission line to Melbourne…as one example…poorly managed and communicated…a joke really" – Community Member.

Distributive equity issues were also noted, with a view that rural regions were bearing the brunt of impacts to power the cities.

"Why can't we wait until you [RES or other developer] develop a better technology that's smaller, less intrusive and not long-term industrial fixtures. The plan for them [wind farms] is short-sighted. No one knows what the future holds. Why can't you put solar panels on houses in the city [Melbourne] instead?" – Neighbouring Landholder.

There is a desire at the community level for renewable energy developers to work more collaboratively to address cumulative impacts of their Projects, similar to what has been undertaken in other parts of Australia by the mining industry. Scheduling of construction activities and more collective strategies to address housing and accommodation issues are just some of the key cumulative impacts requiring a more strategic focus and assessment.

RES is a member of the Wimmera Southern Mallee Regional Energy Collaboration (WSMREC) – a collaboration of renewable energy developers, VicGrid, AusNet Services AEMO and other groups such as BGLC, DEECA, Nexa Advisory, Nine Creeks Consulting, RE-Alliance and Regional Development Victoria. This group has co-designed the Collaboration Framework that establishes the necessary structure and commitments for energy businesses to work together with the Wimmera Southern Mallee communities. This partnership aims to ensure long-term community benefits and serves as a model for other communities across Australia, with a strong focus on the region's people (The Energy Charter, 2025).

6.0 Social Impact Evaluation and Mitigation

This section summarises the technical and perceived social impacts (positive and negative) that may be experienced by different stakeholders due to anticipated changes associated with the Project.

Social impact evaluation has been informed by a consideration of the social baseline conditions in which the Project is located, engagement with key stakeholders undertaken by RES throughout the Project, relevant social research and other social assessment studies, outcomes of the relevant technical assessments and expert assessment.

Social impacts have been categorised in line with the relevant social impact categories outlined in the assessment methodology and have applied likelihood and magnitude dimensions relevant to social impact practice.

A suite of mitigation and enhancement measures have been identified to avoid or reduce negative impacts or to enhance the benefits of the Project at the local and regional community level. RES has also made changes to the project design to reduce impacts where possible, through WTG placement and reduction and increased environmental protections.

Key mitigation and enhancement measures also incorporate environmental management initiatives and plans and include RES' commitment to the development of a Community Benefit Program (CBP) and Neighbour SBS applied at a near neighbour and community level, to support community development within the Northern Grampians LGA. Residents have had the opportunity to contribute to the design of the benefit sharing programs and a Community Consultative Committee (CCC) will be established to prioritise and oversee social investment activities.

Table 6.1 Social Impact Significance and Management

Project Aspect	Social Impact Description	Extent / Affected Parties	Duration	Nature	Perceived Significance[18]	Significance Rating[19]			Mitigation or Enhancement	Residual Significance[20]
				+/-		L	M	S		
Project Development, operation and during decommissioning	Livelihood benefits for local businesses and service providers	Local businesses	C, O & D	**Positive**	H	B	3	H	AEPS- explicitly focuses on building the capacity for local employees and businesses to be involved in the Project & where appropriate, create opportunities for local accommodation providers to benefit from housing of the Project's construction workforce. Establishment of the CCC to assist in advertising opportunities to the community	H
Project Development, Construction and Operation	Enhancement of social infrastructure within the social locality through the Community Benefit Program and Neighbour SBS	Local Community	P, C & O	**Positive**	H	B	3	H	Ongoing sponsorship of local community groups, clubs and projects. Establishment of the CCC to advise on allocation of CPB and Neighbour SBS funds	H

[18] Level of concern or interest from the perspective of the affected party (L = Low, M = Medium, H = High).

[19] L = Likelihood (A: Almost Certain, B: Likely, C: Possible, D: Unlikely, E: Very Unlikely); M = Magnitude (1: Minimal, 2: Minor, 3: Moderate, 4: Major, 5: Transformational); S = Significance rating (L: Low, M: Medium, H: High, VH: Very High).

[20] Residual significance post mitigation measure (L = Low, M = Medium, H = High).

*Green shading represents positive impact significance, with darker green indicating very high significance and lighter green indicating low significance. Blue shading represents negative impacts, with darker blue indicating very high significance and lighter blue indicating low significance.

Project Aspect	Social Impact Description	Extent / Affected Parties	Duration	Nature	Perceived Significance[18]	Significance Rating[19]			Mitigation or Enhancement	Residual Significance[20]
				+/-		L	M	S		
Host Landholder Agreements	Livelihood benefits for landholders hosting project infrastructure	Host landholders	C, O	**Positive**	H	B	3	H	Deliver transparently applied Host Landholder Agreements	H
Project Construction and Operation	Enhanced community/public safety through road and access track upgrades for fire/flood emergency responders.	Emergency Responders Host Landholder Neighbouring Landholders	C,O	**Positive**	H	B	3	H	Construction of up to 48 km of new access tracks and upgrade of existing local roads	H
Project Establishment and Operation	Increased energy availability and affordability	Broader community	O	**Positive**	M	B	3	H	Operation of the Project	H
First Nations Benefit Fund	Livelihood, cultural value and participation outcomes for First Nations community members	Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples BGLC	C, O & D	**Positive**	M	B	3	H	Ongoing consultation with BGLC to further develop training and upskilling and procurement opportunities to maximise local benefit, and to inform First Nation Values Sharing. AEPS- to also consider First Nations employment targets	H
Project Development and Operation	Intergenerational equity (greater fairness/justice) due to renewable energy development and climate mitigation	Local Community	O	**Positive**	H	B	3	H	Operation of the Project	M

Project Aspect	Social Impact Description	Extent / Affected Parties	Duration	Nature	Perceived Significance[18]	Significance Rating[19]			Mitigation or Enhancement	Residual Significance[20]
				+/-		L	M	S		
Construction	Livelihood benefits associated with employment and training opportunities for residents within the social locality	Local businesses Local Community	C, O & D	**Positive**	M	C	3	M	AEPS- explicitly focuses on building the capacity for local employees and businesses to be involved in the Project	H
Neighbour Shared Benefit Scheme	Livelihood benefits for proximal landholders through Neighbour SBS	Neighbouring landholders	C, O	**Positive**	H	B	2	M	Deliver transparently applied Neighbour SBS	M
Project construction and operations	Reduced sense of place due to industrialisation of the landscape and altered landscape character	Neighbouring Landholders	C, O & D	**Negative**	H	B	3	H	Project Design Changes (1-3, 8-10) Vegetation screening for properties with moderate to high visual impacts Implementation of a SBS with a focus on place-making initiatives Implementation of the Neighbour SBS Establishment of the CCC	M
		Host Landholders (residing on their property)			H	A	3	H		
Land and heritage	Loss of cultural value and connection	Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples BGLC	C, O & D	**Negative**	H	B	3	H	Project Design Change (13) CHMP- including avoidance of areas of high cultural value All turbines are located 100m from Wimmera River (major river) and at least 30m from Six and Seven Mile Creek resulting in minor interaction with the culturally sensitive area.	L

Project Aspect	Social Impact Description	Extent / Affected Parties	Duration	Nature	Perceived Significance[18]	Significance Rating[19]			Mitigation or Enhancement	Residual Significance[20]
				+/-		L	M	S		
									Project surveys providing opportunities to identify and protect cultural heritage previously unknown CSEP, to guide ongoing involvement of the BGLC in the decision-making process. First Nations Benefit Scheme	
Construction workforce	Reduced access to housing and short-term accommodation due to incoming construction workforce demand	Broader Community Accommodation providers Visitors and tourists Tourism providers	C	**Negative**	H	C	3	M	AEPS -to identify measures to ensure there is sufficient accommodation for the required workforce, taking into consideration the cumulative impacts associated with other developments in the region occurring concurrently.	M
		Low-income households	C	**Negative**	H	C	4	H		M
Project assessment, determination and establishment	Psychosocial impacts (stress, anxiety, uncertainty) related to Project assessment.	Neighbouring Landholders Local Community	P, C	**Negative**	H	B	3	H	CSEP- continued information provision. Further, RES may work with other developers and the State Government to address cumulative impacts Ongoing collaboration as part of the WSMREC Establishment of the CCC	M

Project Aspect	Social Impact Description	Extent / Affected Parties	Duration	Nature	Perceived Significance[18]	Significance Rating[19]			Mitigation or Enhancement	Residual Significance[20]
				+/-		L	M	S		
Construction workforce	Reduced access to local services and infrastructure due to incoming construction workforce e.g., GP, health services	Local community	C	**Negative**	**L**	B	3	**H**	Onsite nurse/ medic CBP- Implementation of RES' contributions to local medical and health initiatives through the CBF	**M**
Construction	Social amenity impacts during construction and operation	Host Landholders Neighbouring Landholders- specifically those more sensitive to noise	C	**Negative**	**H**	B	3	**H**	Project Design Changes (1-3, 5, 8-10, 11, 12 14) CMP- specifies working hours to be within certain hours and not on weekends to minimise disruption to social amenity. CSEP- Keep community informed of working hours and any potential change, temporarily or permanent, relating to the construction schedule. EMP, CMP, OMP Establishment of the CCC Implementation of a complaints and feedback mechanism	**M**
		Road Users around the site	C		**H**	C	3	**M**		**L**
Land Use, wind turbines and ancillary infrastructure	Reduced visual amenity given presence of wind turbines	Host Landholders Neighbouring Landholders	C, O	**Negative**	**H**	B	3	**H**	Neighbour SBS Vegetation screening in consultation with landholders.	**M**
		Local community	C, O	**Negative**	**H**	C	2	**M**		**L**

Project Aspect	Social Impact Description	Extent / Affected Parties	Duration	Nature	Perceived Significance[18]	Significance Rating[19]			Mitigation or Enhancement	Residual Significance[20]
				+/-		L	M	S		
Land Use	Real or perceived potential devaluation of land and property	Neighbouring Landholders	C, O	**Negative**	**M**	D	3	M	Neighbour SBS Ongoing consultation with proximal landholders in relation to property values Establishment of the CCC	**M**
Project operations	Health and wellbeing impacts relating to shadow flicker and potential EMF exposure	Neighbouring Landholders (particularly those more sensitive)	O	**Negative**	**L**	C	3	M	Project Design Changes (25)	**L**
Construction Traffic	Reduced Public safety due to increased Project-related traffic during construction	Local community Local road users	C, O	**Negative**	**H**	C	3	M	CTMP- RES will return the road to their documented preconstruction condition after development. TMP CSEP- including notification of peak construction traffic times to residents along the transport route Establishment of the CCC	**L**
Construction, operation and decommissioning	Reduced sense of community due to changing land uses and lifestyles	Host landholders	C, O & D	**Negative**	**H**	C	3	M	Host Landholder Agreement CMP Deliver contractor training and policies surrounding access to host landholder properties and associated protocols to safeguard and reduce impacts on existing agricultural practices.	**L**

Project Aspect	Social Impact Description	Extent / Affected Parties	Duration	Nature	Perceived Significance[18]	Significance Rating[19]			Mitigation or Enhancement	Residual Significance[20]
				+/-		L	M	S		
Construction, operation and decommissioning	Livelihood impacts relating to disruption to agricultural activities	Host Landholders Neighbouring Landholder	C, O	**Negative**	**M**	C	2	**M**	Host Landholder Agreement Neighbour SBS	**L**
Community Benefit Program	Distributive inequity of Project benefits.	Local community Local businesses Neighbouring Landholders	C,O	**Negative**	**H**	C	3	**M**	Transparently applied neighbour SBS and community benefit fund through a CBP prepared in consultation with community members. Establishment of the CCC to provide feedback on benefit sharing programs	**L**
Consultation	Project development may increase stress and anxiety for community members who feel uncertain about their future and changes to their community	Local community Host Landholders Neighbouring Landholders	P, C	**Negative**	**M**	C	3	**M**	CSEP- Transparent, timely and accessible information provision from RES Complaints and feedback register CBP	**L**
Wind turbines and ancillary infrastructure	Public safety and reduced access for emergency responders due to increased fire / flood risk	Local Community CFA RFS	C, O	**Negative**	**L**	D	3	**M**	Project Design Changes (23-24) RMP (including Fire Safety Study) which aligns with the CFA Guideline. Fire safety training to the Project's workforce to support in first responding to potential fire occurrences.	**L**

Project Aspect	Social Impact Description	Extent / Affected Parties	Duration	Nature	Perceived Significance[18]	Significance Rating[19]			Mitigation or Enhancement	Residual Significance[20]
				+/-		L	M	S		
Project development and operation	Impacts on areas of environmental value to the community due to clearing for Project infrastructure and access roads and wind farm operation	Local Community Environmental groups	C, O	**Negative**	**M**	C	3	**M**	Project Design Changes (8-10, 11, 15-22) Responsive design to outcomes of environmental and particularly ecological surveys to prioritise avoidance of native vegetation and threatened species. BAMP- including bird-specific mitigation measures. EMP and CEMP Establishment of the CCC	**L**
Wind turbines and ancillary infrastructure	Reduced communications connectivity due to interference to infrastructure reliant on satellite signals	Host landholders Neighbouring Landholders	O	**Negative**	**L**	D	2	**L**	Consultation throughout the construction and operation of the Project with relevant service providers as indicated in the EMI report. A complaints management process and register will be established to allow any stakeholders impacted by EMI interference to raise concerns and have their concerns addressed. Establishment of the CCC	**L**

7.0 Social Impact Management Planning

This section provides further detail on the strategies to mitigate construction and operational related social impacts of the Watta Wella Wind Farm and BESS Project. These have been developed in line with relevant guidance, such as the community engagement and benefit sharing guidance prepared for VRET2 (2021) and relevant social impact management practice. These include:

- Community and Stakeholder Engagement Plan (CSEP).
- Community Benefit Program, which comprises:
  - Community Benefit Fund and Sponsorships
  - Neighbour Shared Benefit Scheme
  - First Nations Benefit Sharing Program.
- Development of an Accommodation, Employment and Procurement Strategy is recommended to ensure effective management of social impacts associated with workforce housing and accommodation and enhancement of local employment and procurement opportunities.
- Further detail on each of these strategies is provided below.

7.1 Community and Stakeholder Engagement Plan (CSEP)

A CSEP outlines the approach, strategy, and implementation of stakeholder engagement for projects. RES has developed a CSEP which has guided the engagement approach and objectives for the Project, including the identification of key stakeholders, and engagement mechanisms to inform and engage with key stakeholders.

As signatories to the Clean Energy Council's Best Practice Charter for Renewable Energy Projects, RES is committed to engaging respectfully with communities, being sensitive to cultural values and making a positive contribution to the regions where it operates.

There is a need for a CSEP to be prepared for each stage of the proposed Project: planning, early works, construction, operation and decommissioning. The CSEP will provide opportunities for key stakeholders to provide feedback on management plan development and mechanisms for involvement in subsequent Project phases.

7.2 Community Benefit Program

Community benefit sharing in the context of the renewable energy sector in Australia relates to the establishment of an integrated model within projects to share the rewards of the development proactively and purposefully with local communities (Clean Energy Council, 2019). Outcomes of such a model are seen to contribute positively at a local community level and more broadly to the development and sustainability of a region.

The Clean Energy Council of Australia (CEC, 2019) outlines the key components to be considered in developing a Benefit Sharing Scheme for renewable energy projects, which includes:

- Establishment of benefit sharing objectives in partnership and consultation with community representatives – 'defining benefit'.
- Undertaking research and engagement to better understand community need, interests, and ideas to inform strategy development.
- Build local networks and relationships.
- Assess, refine, and decide on key components, parameters, criteria, and governance arrangements.
- Establish the strategy and implementation.
- Develop a governance and administration framework in collaboration with key stakeholders and members of the community.
- Monitor and evaluate for continuous improvement.

RES has developed a Community Benefit Program which includes a Community Benefit Fund and a Neighbour Shared Benefit Scheme for the Project which is in alignment with the CEC's guidance. The strategy has been informed and benefits enhanced through engagement with the community and other stakeholders.

A CCC will be established and empowered to decide the Community Benefit Programs' priorities, make decisions on scopes of work and monitor and evaluate project outcomes. RES will provide the necessary training for CCC members (further detailed in **Section 7.2.2**).

A summary of some of the community identified suggestions for enhancement is provided in **Table 7.1.**

Table 7.1 Community-Identified Enhancement Strategies

Community-Identified Strategy / Opportunity
• Funding to increase road safety through sealing unsealed roads. • Upgrades to public facilities such as the local park, community centre, swimming pool, emergency housing and communications infrastructure. • Support and involvement in the Stawell Gift Footrace. • Native tree planting to screen infrastructure from general community view. • Supporting local not for profit organisations such as the CFA, sporting and community groups, e.g., Stawell Community Garden, Project Platypus, Landcare, etc. • Support for First Nations initiatives including training and education scholarships. • Ongoing engagement, including community surveys and in-person consultation. • A 'traffic light system' showing project progress of all renewable energy projects in the region. • Creation of an independent body which will listen to concerns of the community and have no conflicts of interest. • Support for development of educational programs with schools, social clubs, sport and seniors groups relating to sustainable renewable energy technologies. • Employment and training/upskilling of local people. • Preferencing local businesses for procurement during construction. • Discounted energy prices. • Training and collaboration with local emergency service providers on Emergency Management Plans.

Source: RES, 2025

As outlined in **Section 5.5.2,** the CBP (in development) will provide $1,000 p/MW or up to $360,000 per annum that will be contributed over the 35 years of the Project, equating to at least $10 million across the Project's operations. The Project's Community Benefit Program will include two main elements:

- A Neighbour's Shared Benefit Scheme, focussed on delivering benefits to the Project's closest neighbours (within 5 km) and those most directly affected by Project activities.
- A dedicated Community Benefit Fund, focussed on support and funding of broader community initiatives or programs at the local and regional level, that considers community ideas for community investment initiatives.

7.2.1 Neighbour Shared Benefit Scheme

Neighbour Shared Benefit Schemes (SBS) are a mechanism for RES to ensure that long term local benefits are delivered from the renewable energy transition to regional communities.

A Neighbour SBS provides a framework for making direct annual payments to neighbours of a RES renewable energy project. Owners of qualifying properties may be eligible to receive annual benefit payment throughout the Project's operating life. **Appendix C** outlines the Neighbour SBS poster presented to the community during the February 2025 community information sessions. To date[21] 15 neighbours have registered for the Neighbour SBS and provided feedback.

The Neighbour SBS will be indexed annually for CPI with eligibility transfer to any future property owners in the event of a change of property ownership. While dependent on the final layout, RES estimate around 70 neighbouring properties will be eligible for a payment under the scheme. The neighbours who live closest to the final locations of WTGs will be eligible to receive the greatest financial benefit, if they choose to 'opt into' the scheme (refer to **Figure 7.2)**.

Further details of the neighbour SBS, including detailed eligibility criteria and instructions on how to register have been made available on the Shared Benefit Scheme website for the Project. In addition to annual payments, neighbours within 5 km of final WTGs locations will be eligible for a one-off construction impact payment.

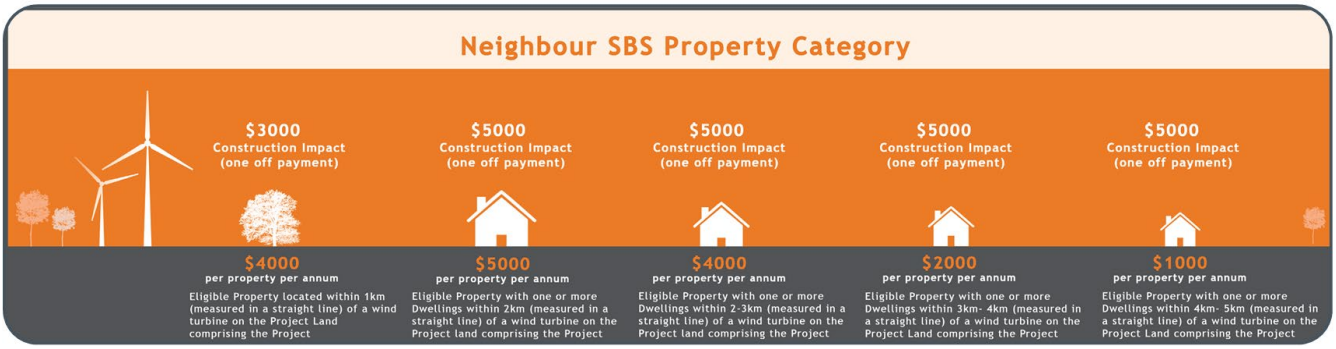


Figure 7.1 Neighbour SBS Property Category

Source: (RES, 2025)

[21] 24th March 2025

7.2.2 Community Consultive Committee

To enhance community engagement, RES will establish a Community Consultative Committee (CCC) should the project receive planning approval. The CCC will include community members and Council representative and, upon project approval, will work with the Project Team to ensure open communication and structured discussions throughout development, construction, and early operations.

This committee will also explore opportunities for wider benefit sharing including how the Community Benefit Program will be managed and distributed between the Community Benefit Fund and Neighbour Shared Benefit Scheme.

As outlined in the Terms of Reference, the role of the RES CCC is to:

- Facilitate structured and productive communication between the Project team and the community about the Project;
- Encourage community participation in decision making processes throughout project planning and construction, including benefit sharing development;
- Share information and important updates about the projects to increase community understanding.
- The CCC will consist of stakeholder groups which may be most impacted, and may include:
- First Nations groups
- Employment support agencies seeking job opportunities
- Community groups of relevance in the social locality
- Local environmental interest/volunteer groups
- Landowners and neighbours.
- Further details regarding the CCC can be found on the Watta Wella Project website: https://wattawella-renewableenergy.com.au/benefits/

7.2.3 First Nations Value Sharing

- During the engagement process, RES and the BGLC engagement team commenced discussions on First Nations Value Sharing. These discussions have guided both the value sharing initiatives and opportunities for ongoing collaboration between BGLC and RES for the Watta Wella Project.
- The First Nations Value Fund is expected to contribute a minimum of $7 million over the life of the project and would support BGLC and First Nations communities through initiatives that promote economic development, cultural values and self-determination.
- The '*Walking Together Statement*', being developed in consultation with BGLC, will address both benefit sharing and project participation. The statement aims to foster collaboration and mutual respect between the parties, with a draft already shared with RES by BGLC. Further discussions will be undertaken once cultural heritage impacts are more clearly defined to ensure project alignment with BGLC's preferences and requirements.
- Additionally, RES has an innovative RAP that outlines its commitments to leading practices in First Nations engagement and benefit sharing.

7.3 Accommodation, Employment and Procurement Strategy

To directly address and respond to the social impacts and opportunities of the Project as they relate to construction workforce matters, RES proposes to develop, and then implement, an Accommodation, Employment and Procurement Strategy prior to construction of the Project. Similar strategies have been developed for other renewable energy project in Victoria. The Strategy should consider efforts to maximise local employment and procurement opportunities and manage impacts on the local housing/accommodation market.

The Strategy, as it relates to workforce accommodation, should:

- be developed in consultation with local stakeholders such as Council and service providers.
- Identify measures to ensure there is sufficient accommodation for the required workforce, taking into consideration the cumulative impacts associated with other developments in the region within the same timeframe.
- Focus on measures to ensure there is sufficient accommodation for the workforce associated with the construction phase of the Project, such as considering whether it is appropriate to disperse workers across multiple locations/towns and across numerous accommodation providers, or by sourcing long-term accommodation as early as possible in the lead up to construction.
- Include a program to monitor, review and evaluate the effectiveness of the measures during construction.

Relating to local participation planning (employment, training, and procurement), the Strategy should also contain initiatives to maximise local employment and sourcing for the Project's construction and operational needs, such as consideration of:

- Options for prioritising the employment of local workers.
- Supplier and servicing opportunities for local businesses.
- Assessment of existing capabilities within the Social Locality and the potential for the Project to contribute to building capacity in new areas i.e., up-skilling, re-skilling, and training opportunities for local people.
- Jobs, supplier, and servicing opportunities that target partnerships with local social enterprises.
- Development of mechanisms for local businesses, job seekers and services to register their capabilities and interest in working with the Project.
- Setting actionable targets and goals.

8.0 Conclusion

The SIA has documented the social baseline, social impacts and social impact management and enhancement measures associated with the Watta Wella Renewable Energy Project and forms part of the Environment Report for the Project.

This SIA has included the compilation of a social and economic baseline profile for the Project, consolidation of community and stakeholder consultation outcomes to inform the assessment of social impacts and opportunities, and has presented fit-for-purpose management, mitigation or enhancement measures associated with each social impact.

The impact evaluation has been undertaken to inform and support the refinement of Project design and plans to reduce negative impacts and achieve greater positive benefits and social outcomes for the Project.

RES has commenced and continues to implement several social impact management measures to address the social impacts of the Project and to enhance the benefits to the community. These include:

- Continued development of a Community Benefit Program.
- Continued development of a Neighbour Shared Benefit Scheme.
- Establishment of a CCC with open advertisement of an EOI to the community to get involved
- Preparation and execution of a 'Walking Together Statement', CHMP, and First Nations Values Sharing in collaboration with BGLC
- Commitment to continual information provision and community engagement through an updated CSEP to inform consultation required for relevant management plans.
- Communication of the measures to be implemented within management plans in line with specialist studies.

It is further recommended that an Accommodation, Employment and Procurement Strategy be developed. This strategy should ensure that appropriate accommodation solutions are available for the project workforce and that local employment opportunities are prioritised. RES have successfully achieved high local employment targets in previous projects and are committing to maximising local employment and training where possible. Such a strategy will also consider procurement practices to support local businesses and suppliers.

The CSEP will guide Project communication, particularly around the implementation of management plans and measures developed in response to specialist studies, and the delivery of CBP including the CBF and Neighbour SBS. Effective implementation of the CSEP will assist in strengthening stakeholder relationships through consistent and transparent communication.

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Appendix A

Community Profile

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A.1 Community Capitals Analysis

Political Capital

Political capital refers to the structures and capabilities in place to influence change, to ensure representation in formal governance structures and/or involvement in democratic decision making.

Table A.1 Political Boundaries in the Social Locality

Political Boundary	Description
Federal Electorate	The Northern Grampians LGA is within the Electorate of Mallee. It includes parts of the Northern Grampians, and the seat is held by Anne Webster a representative of The Nationals - first elected in 2019 and re-elected in 2025. Anne Webster has previously shown negative sentiment towards renewable energy, stating during an interview that "*they [solar farms] don't work in the dark, and neither do our wind farms.*" (Renew Economy, 2021).
State Electorate	Electoral boundaries in Victoria changed on Tuesday 1 November 2022. The Northern Grampians Shire LGA is located within the Ripon District electorate. Ripon is considered the most marginal electorate in the State. The member for Ripon is Martha Haylett for the Australian Labor Party (VEC, n.d.). Haylett's political priorities include growing opportunities for young people, strengthening education and employment outcomes, and fixing roads across the Ripon electorate (Parliament of Victoria, n.d.). Historically the electorate has shifted between the Australian Labour Party and the Liberal Party. Haylett has previously expressed opposition to the Western Renewables Link project, and has been actively consulting various stakeholders regarding this Project and outlining her commitment to understanding and addressing community concerns (Haylett, 2022)
Local Government	Northern Grampians Shire Council formed in 1995 and is comprised of the former Shire of Stawell, City of Stawell, Town of St Arnaud and Shire of Kara Kara. The Mayor is Karen Hyslop who was elected for the 2024-2025 term. The next council elections will be held in 2028 (Northern Grampians Shire Council, n.d.).
Aboriginal Land Council	The Project is within the Barengi Gadjin Land Council's (BGCL) land. They are the Prescribed Body Corporate for the Wotjobaluk claim area, as outlined in the Native Title Act, giving BGCL Federally recognised authority to speak on behalf of the Wotjobaluk peoples and the only body in the region with the legislative authority to make legal decisions about cultural heritage. The BGLC has 3 levels of Federal recognition - Native Title (2005), ILUA (2005) and Settlement Act (2022). BGLC is the trustee for the Native Title rights and interest of the Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergai and Japagulk peoples, collectively known as the Wotjobaluk peoples as recognised in the Consent Determination on 13 December 2005 (Barengi Gadjin Land Council, 2023).

Source: (Northern Grampians Shire Council, n.d.; Haylett, 2022; Renew Economy, 2023)

A.2 Natural Capital

Natural capital refers to the natural assets and resources that contribute to community sustainability. Natural capital can include resources such as minerals, land, forests, and waterways, which provide benefit to the community, as well as environmental assets that provide social, cultural, or recreational value.

Table A.2 Natural Capital

Key Feature	Description
Project site existing land use	The Project Site is currently used for dryland mixed farming, predominantly sheep for wool and meat (estimated to be 30 percent wool and 70 percent prime lamb) and cropping; mostly cereals for grain and hay. Some cattle grazing and cultivating oil seed crops, vetch and pasture seed also occurs. The Victorian Land Use Information System indicates that the Project site and surrounding land is all classified as 'mixed farming and grazing'.
The project is located adjacent or has immediately within serval areas of high-quality remnant vegetation	Several areas of high-quality remnant vegetation are present within or immediately adjacent to the Project Area including Joel Joel Nature Conservation Reserve (NCR), Watta Wella Bushland Reserve and the Wimmera River Water Frontage. These areas have been known to be habitat for the Swift Parrot which is a Critically Endangered species under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act).
Strong agricultural land use in the region	The Wimmera Southern Mallee Regional Growth Plan highlights the region's strength in the agricultural sector with broadacre cropping and grazing the most widespread land uses (Victorian Government, 2014). Similarly, the Northern Grampians LGA highlights agriculture as a key part of the region's history and character. The LGA was the first settled by sheep and cattle pioneers who discovered the region's premium pastoral land and grazing conditions (Northern Grampians Shire Council, n.d.).
Rich gold reserves in the Stawell Gold Mine	Stawell Gold Mine is located approximately 70 km southeast of Horsham and 2 km east of the Stawell CBD. Stawell Gold Mine has operated at its current location since 1981 and has involved the progressive mining of gold in a series of open pits and extensive underground workings and encompass an approximate area of 380 ha. The Gold Mine is the largest in Victoria (Stawell Gold Mine Victoria, 2020) and is considered a popular historic attraction, with viewing available along Reefs Road as well as at the observatory area which visitors can listen to audio commentary about the mine (Grampians Point, n.d.).
Northern Grampians known for natural attractions, towns and villages.	The Northern Grampians area contains iconic natural attractions such as the Grampians (Gariwerd) National Park, Halls Gap hiking trails and gold mining. The Northern Grampians National Park contains the Mt Difficult Range, Mt Stapylton and Mt Zero. The National Parks have strong Aboriginal heritage as the walks contain Aboriginal Rock Art (Parks Victoria, n.d.). The Kooyoora State National Park (80 km from the Project) is one of six Aboriginal Title parks in Central West Victoria, jointly managed by the Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation and Parks Victoria and located east of St Arnaud. The State Park has magnificent views, a rich variety of plants and wildlife and stunning granite boulders. Kooyoora State Park protects some of north-central Victoria's outstanding natural feature (Parks Victoria, n.d.).

Key Feature	Description
Regional vulnerability to climate change	Victoria's climate has changed over recent decades, becoming hotter and drier, and these trends are projected to continue. The Northern Grampians has experienced nine natural disasters in six years between 2009–2019 (Northern Grampians Shire Council, 2021). The region is prone to bushfires, especially during the hot, dry summer months. Significant fires have occurred in the past, causing damage to property and the environment. In December 2024 the Grampians National Park burned for three weeks, burning more than 76,000 Ha hectare of national park and farmland before it was contained. The fire caused evacuations in townships such as Halls Gap for several days (Mayers & Bell, 2025). A significant rain band passed through the Grampians Region overnight on13 October 2022, bringing heavy rainfall that continued into 14 October 2022. This event resulted in flash flooding across a number of areas, including the Grampians in townships such as Halls Gap, St Arnaud, Great Western, Navarre, Marnoo and Glenorchy heavily impacted.

Source: (Parks Victoria, n.d.; Northern Grampians Shire Council, 2021; Mayers & Bell, 2025; Grampians Point, n.d.; DCCEEW, 2024; Northern Grampians Shire Council, 2022)

A.3 Human Capital

The level of human capital within a community is assessed by considering population size, age distribution, education and skills, general population health and the prevalence of vulnerable groups within the community.

Table A.3 Human Capital

Key Characteristics	Description
A declining, elderly and aging population in the region	In 2021, the Social Locality is characterised by higher median ages than the State median age of 38 years. Stuart Mill SAL was the oldest population with a median age of 57 years when compared to Victoria and other SALs that ranged from median ages of 44 to 57. As demonstrated in **Figure A.1**the populations in both St Arnaud and Stawell are projected to decrease significantly from 2016 to 2036. Both St Arnaud and Stawell, within an hour's drive of the Project, are likely to supply services, accommodation, and local employment. The Wimmera Southern Mallee region has the oldest regional population in Victoria. The region's older population has been highlighted in the Wimmera Southern Mallee Regional Growth Plan (2014) as driver of population loss and old age mortality. The largest age cohort in 2021 was those aged 60 years and older, accounting for 35.2% of the total population (REMPLAN, 2021).
Lower levels of high school educational attainment	As of the 2021 census, the Social Locality demonstrated comparatively lower levels of year 12 attainment when compared to the State (60%). The township of Marnoo had the highest proportion of people with year 10 or equivalent (30%) as their highest level of educational attainment, while the Northern Grampians LGA and North West SA4 had similar rates (20% and 21%), higher than the State (13%). The lower levels of formal education attainment in the area can be attributed to the high levels of agricultural industry in the region and an older population.
Lower attainment of a bachelor's degree level education, with high focus in human services fields of study.	The Social Locality had generally lower attainment of a bachelor's degree or higher when compared to the State (12%) as of 2021. The townships varied between 0% and 7% attainment with Halls Gaps having the highest attainment at 11%. The LGA and North West SA4 had similar attainment rates (5% and 6% respectively).
Higher levels of certificate attainment focused in the engineering and related technologies	The Social Locality demonstrates higher levels of vocational training certificate attainment when compared to the State (14%) as of 2021. Navarre SAL had the highest attainment (26%).
A less transient and more stable community	The proportion of the population in the Social Locality living at the same address 5 years ago at the time of the 2021 Census was higher when compared to the State (51.2%) except for Halls Gap SAL (39.4%). Stuart Mill SAL had the least transient population with 70.5% at the same address 5 years ago. The LGA (57.6%) and SA4 (54.5%) also had higher levels of stable communities.

Key Characteristics	Description
Higher prevalence of people with chronic long-term health conditions	The Social Locality demonstrates higher proportions of people experiencing 3 or more long-term health conditions when compared to State as of 2021 (2.9%) . The high prevalence of chronic health conditions demonstrates more vulnerable groups within the population which require medical services.
Higher levels of socio-disadvantage in the Social Locality	The Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage (IRSD) is a general socio-economic index that summarises a range of information about the economic and social conditions of people and households within an area. IRSD only includes measures of relative disadvantage. As **Figure A.1** illustrates, the Social Locality is characterised by substantially higher levels of disadvantage than the broader population of the State. Low deciles indicate many households with low income or many people without qualifications and many people in low skilled occupations. The LGA was within the 2nd decile[22] indicating overall greater levels of disadvantage across the population. Marnoo SAL had the highest decile ranking (8) indicating lower levels of disadvantage in the township. It should be noted that no comparison can be made between LGAs and SALs on ranking, as rankings are only comparative within each geographic classification.
Higher proportion of people with a profound or severe disability in the Northern Grampians LGA	The Northern Grampians LGA has a higher proportion of people with a profound or severe disability when compared to the State (7.7% compared to 6.1%) and a higher proportion of people enrolled in the National Disability Insurance Scheme (3.0 per 100 compared to 2.2 per 100 across Australia).

Source: (PHIDU, 2023; ABS, 2021; ABS, 2021; REMPLAN, 2021)

[22] Deciles divide a distribution into ten equal groups. In the case of SEIFA, the distribution of scores is divided into ten equal sized groups. The lowest scoring 10% of areas are given a decile number of 1, the second-lowest 10% of areas are given a decile number of 2 and so on, up to the highest 10% of areas which are given a decile number of 10.

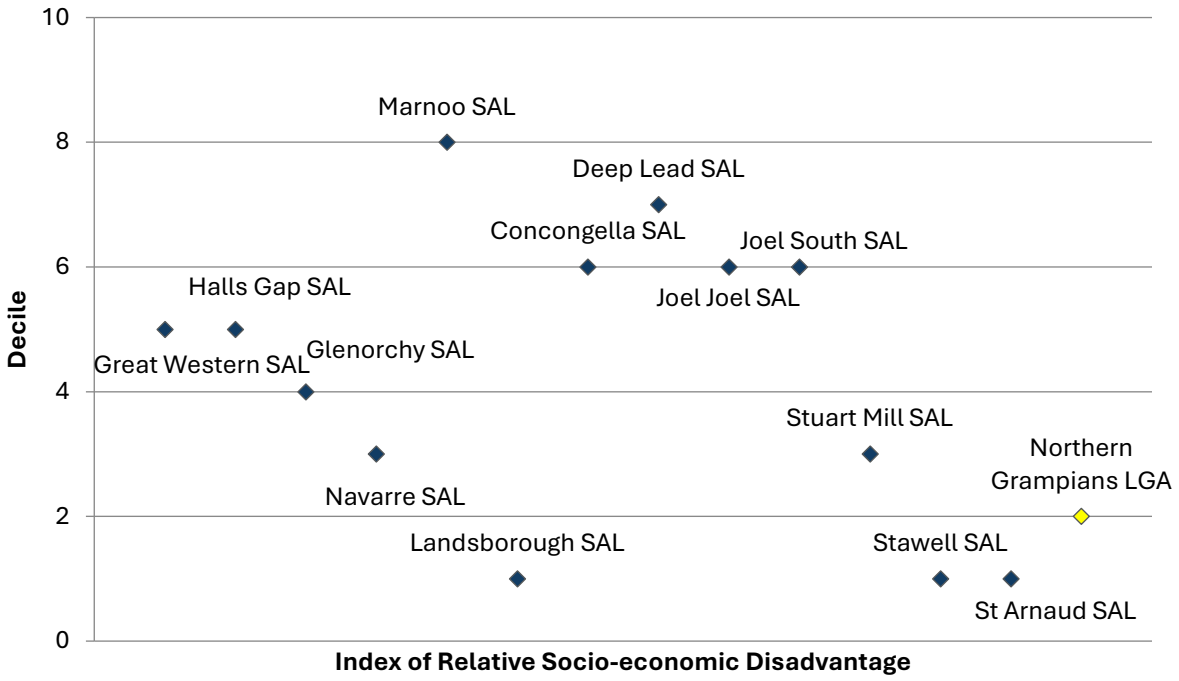

Figure A.1 Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage

Source: (ABS, 2021).

A.4 Social Capital

Various indicators can be used to examine and assess social capital. Such indicators may include the level of volunteering, population mobility, crime rates, and the demographic composition of the community. The following provides a summary of the key characteristics of the study areas from a social capital perspective.

Table A.4 Social Capital

Key Characteristics	Description
Higher levels of social cohesion	The Social Locality demonstrates higher rates of volunteering when compared to the State, which can be an indicator of social cohesion. Stuart Mill SAL had the largest proportion of the population who volunteered (38.5%) with the LGA (17.3%) and SA4 (16.0%) being lower than the township but above the State average (10.9%) in 2021.
Higher rate of lone person households with projections to increase into 2036	When compared to the State (26%) there is a higher rate of lone person households in the Social Locality. This can be attributed to the older and aging population. The proportion of lone person households is projected to continue to increase into 2036 (refer to **Figure A.2**).

Key Characteristics	Description
A more homogeneous population	The region demonstrates a more homogeneous population with both the Northern Grampians LGA and the North West Victoria Region having lower language diversity, with only 9.1% and 8.9% of households speaking a language other than English, compared to 27.6% in the State as of 2021. This is also reflected in the high proportion of Australian-born residents in the Northern Grampians LGA (81.2%) and North West Region SA4 (80.6%), compared to the State (65.0%).
Increasing rates of criminal activity	Criminal incidents in the Northern Grampians LGA in the year ending September 2024 had increased by 15.1%. Furthermore, the rate of criminal incidents per 100, 000 population was greater in the Northern Grampians at 6,970.6 compared to the State at 6,195.1 (Crime Statistics Agency, 2024). Stawell, St Arnaud and Halls Gaps were listed as the top three suburbs for criminal incidents.

Source: (ABS, 2021; Crime Statistics Agency, 2024)

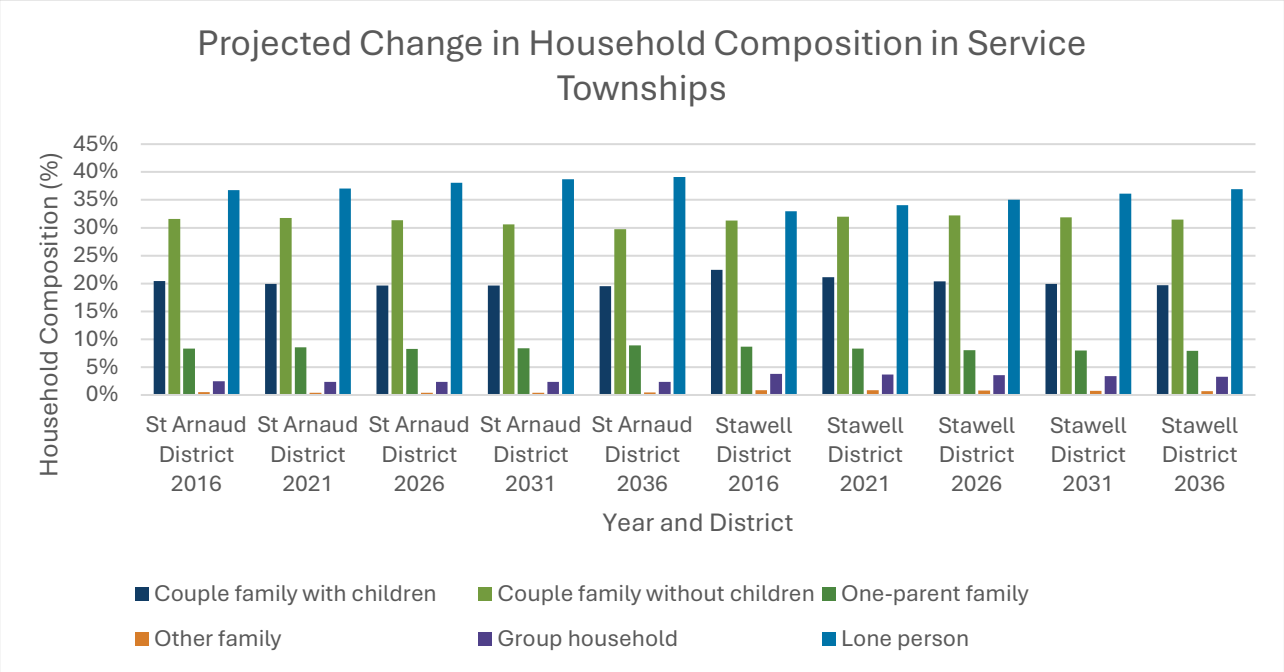

Figure A.2 Projected Change in Household Composition in Service Townships 2016–2036

Source: (Invest Victoria, 2019).

A.5 Economic Capital

Examining a community's economic capital involves consideration of several indicators, including industry and employment distribution, workforce participation and unemployment, income levels and cost of living pressures, such as weekly rent or mortgage repayments.

Table A.5 Economic Capital

Key Characteristics	Description
Stawell as a service township for the Northern Grampians	Stawell, located in the Northern Grampians, is a critical economic hub within the region. It boasts the highest employment rates, underscoring its role as a service township. The town's economic significance is driven by a diverse array of essential services, including: • **Medical Services**: Comprehensive healthcare facilities that cater to the local and surrounding populations. • **Community Centres**: Venues that support various social and recreational activities. • **Government Services**: Administrative offices providing essential public services. • **Retail Spaces**: A variety of shops and businesses that contribute to the local economy. • **Community and Tourist Events**: Regularly hosted events that attract visitors and stimulate economic activity. These factors collectively contribute to Stawell's substantial economic impact, making it an important part of the Northern Grampians.
Mining industry sector the greatest economic contributor to the region. **Health care and social assistance the greatest contributor to employment.**	The Mining industry sector makes the greatest contribution to economic output in the region, which at $428.2m accounts for 22.16% of total output (REMPLAN, 2021). Despite this, the mining sector accounts for just 5.3% of jobs in the region in comparison to health care and social assistance, representing 19.1% of total employment and top employer of the region.
Lower levels of labour force participation with generally lower rates of unemployment	The Social Locality had lower proportions of the population in the labour force when compared to the State at the time of the 2021 Census (62.4%). The township of Navarre SAL had the lowest rate (43.5%), the service centres of Stawell SAL (52.0%) and St Arnaud SAL (47.8%), Northern Grampians LGA (52.9%) and the North West SA4 region (55.9%) were below the State rate (62.4%) as of 2021. This is likely to be due to the older population in the Social Locality. **Figure A.3** illustrates the Northern Grampians LGA current unemployment rates from September 2020 to 2024. There has been a general increase in unemployment rates with the LGA sitting at 4.5% in September 2024 which is marginally greater than the State at 4.2%.

Key Characteristics	Description
High market concentration in the townships with strong agriculture, forestry and fishing industries.	Prominent industry sectors include wool, broad acre grazing, cereal cropping, viticulture, olive growing, tourism, gold mining, manufacturing, textiles, retail trade, health and community services, Landcare and catchment management and professional services. Industry is generally concentrated in the key townships of Stawell and St Arnaud, where retail and commercial operations are mainly of a local service nature (REMPLAN, 2021).
Competitive advantage for businesses within the agriculture, forestry and fishing industry.	The *Economic Development Strategy and Action Plan* (2021) highlights the location of the LGA as an asset for business as it contributes to creating a competitive advantage with supply and distribution costs as they are located along a main freight transport route. Jobs in agriculture are around four times greater in Northern Grampians than the national average; a reflection of the Shire's productive agricultural landscape. In 2022 there were 447 agriculture, forestry and fishing businesses in the Northern Grampians with the industry growing by 17 businesses since 2021. The Horsham Regional Livestock Exchange is a business, located 70 km from the Project, plays a crucial role in the local economy and is one of the primary livestock selling centres in regional Victoria. Operational since 1999 and open weekly, it stands as Victoria's fourth-largest sheep and lamb market. As the major livestock selling centre in the Wimmera, it attracts vendors from as far as the SA border and southern NSW.
Lower median household incomes across the Social Locality	The median household income in the Social Locality ($814- $1,474) was lower when compared to the State ($1,759) in 2021, with Great Western SAL ($1,474) having the highest household income of the townships and Navarre SAL ($814) having the lowest. Northern Grampians LGA had a median household income of $1,124.
Lower median mortgage repayments and lower proportions of the population in mortgage stress[23]	The Social Locality monthly mortgage repayments were lower when compared to the State in 2021. As of 2021, the township of Marnoo SAL had the lowest median monthly mortgage repayments of the Social Locality ($633). The service townships of Stawell SAL ($973), St Arnaud SAL ($867) had relatively lower repayments with lower proportion of the population in mortgage stress (7.0% and 8.4%) compared to the State (15.5%).

[23] Owner with mortgage households with mortgage repayments greater than 30% of household income.

Key Characteristics	Description
Decreasing house prices in the service townships and Northern Grampians LGA	As of December 2024, median house prices in had generally decreased over the past 12 months in the key townships. • Stawell: $312, 500, -4.2% • Ararat: $350,000, -7.9% • Horsham: $380,000, -5.0% The exception is St Arnuad which had increased by 3.8% to $290, 000 (realestate.com, 2025). Though overall median house prices in the social locality were lower when compared to median sales prices in regional Victoria at $595,000 (REIV, 2025). Regional Victoria's housing prices dropped 2.8% in 2024. Industry experts say it has created a buyers' market, with first homebuyers benefiting from reduced investor demand (Lawrence, 2024). The Northern Grampians LGA median monthly mortgage repayment in 2021 was $1,038 with the average house price $280,000 (DELWP, 2021)
Higher proportion of welfare-dependent families within the Social Locality	As of June 2023, 5.0% of the Northern Grampians LGA were low income welfare-dependent families, which was higher compared to the State (3.8%) (PHIDU, 2023).
Low access to economic resources	The Index of Economic Resources (IER) focuses on the financial aspects of relative socio-economic advantage and disadvantage, by summarising variables related to income and housing. IER excludes education and occupation variables as they are not direct measures of economic resources. **Figure A.4** illustrates the LGA's and SALs' access to economic resources. The relatively low score of the SALs excluding Marnoo SAL indicates a relative lack of access to economic resources. Areas with low IER scores have lower incomes, many households paying low rent and few households with high income. It should be noted that no comparison can be made between LGAs and SALs on ranking, as rankings are only comparative within each geographic classification.

Source: (ABS, 2021; REMPLAN, 2021; SALM, 2024; ABS, 2021; Northern Grampians Shire Council, 2021)

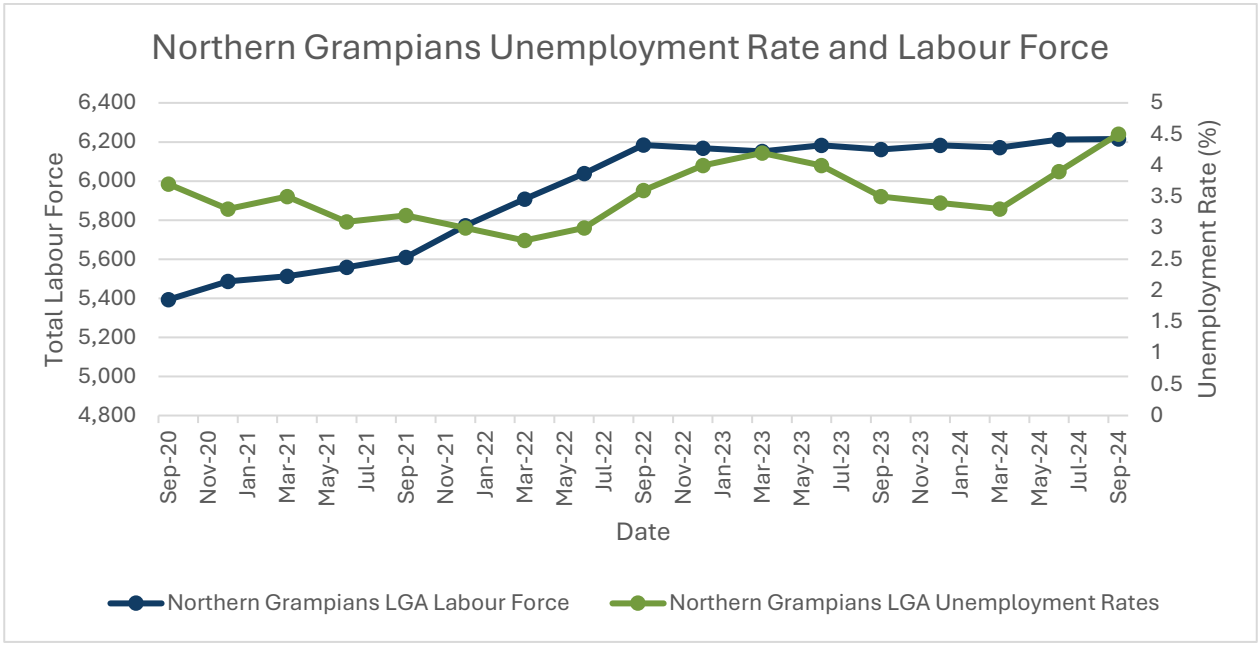

Figure A.3 Northern Grampians LGA Unemployment Rates and Labour Force

Source: (SALM, 2024)

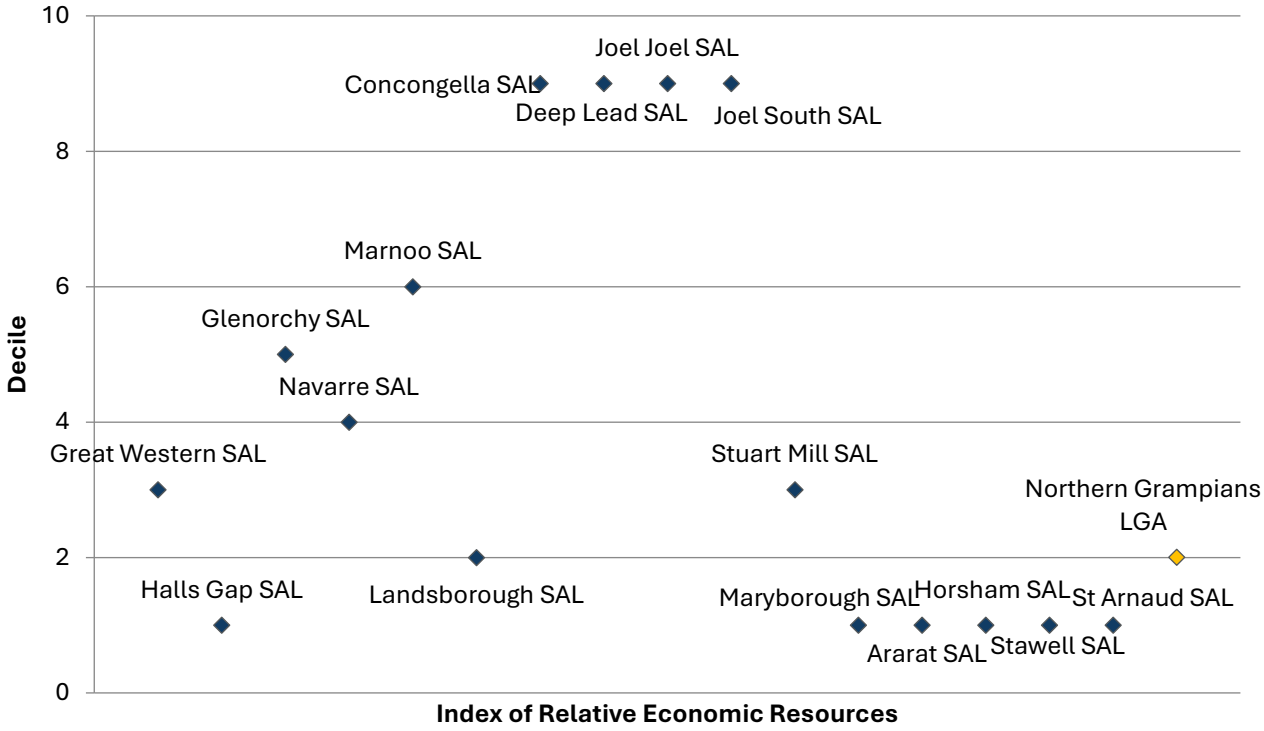

Figure A.4 Index of Relative Economic Resources

Source: (ABS, 2021).

A.6 Physical Capital

Physical or built capital includes provision of infrastructure and services to the community. Within this capital area it is important to consider the type, quality, and degree of access to public, built and community infrastructure (including amenities, services, and utilities) as well as housing.

Table A.6 Physical Capital

Key Characteristics	Description
Well-connected through transport routes	Northern Grampians is located centrally within Victoria, with direct access to key national transport routes including the Western Highway which links Melbourne to the Mallee and Wimmera regions, and to South Australia. This creates direct access to a range of raw commodities, as well as interstate and international markets (Northern Grampians Shire Council, 2021). Investments to upgrades of major roads to better support heavy load vehicles and safety have been completed (Northern Grampians Shire Council, 2021). The Northern Grampians Capital Works Program (Northern Grampians Shire Council, 2020) upgrades are designed to increase the safety, functionality, and efficiency of the existing network while reducing risk to the public. The following roads to be upgraded near the Project site as a part of the scheduled civic works: • Bridge strengthening and new guardrails along Landsborough Road (runs through the Project site). • Reinforcement pipe. Treat exposed area. Replace Guardrail along Wyndarra Road (5 km west from Project site). • Upgrade small culvert and floodway, renewal of single cell culverts and end walls along Willaring Road (20 km from Project site).
Stawell Aerodrome	Airports are located at Stawell (24-hour sealed airport with instrument panel) and St Arnaud, and national gauge railway connects Stawell to Adelaide, Melbourne, Geelong and Portland. The Stawell Aerodrome is a major emergency base and is the key regional fire-fighting base for the Country Fire Authority (CFA) (DECCA, 2016) airport caters for the general aviation needs of the region and is home to many aviation-related businesses, such as waterbombing, aircraft maintenance and restoration, crop spraying, flying instruction, charter, and recreational flight services (Northern Grampians Shire Council, 2021). The Council has outlined plans to find further investment for opportunities relating to the airport to fund further construction stages.

Key Characteristics	Description
AusNet and AEMO Transmission Line	The current transmission line proximal to the Project site is the AusNet 220 kV transmission network which connects into the Bulgana Terminal Station to the south of the Project. **Table A.3** further details the proposal for a new transmission line known as the Western Renewables Link (WRL) which will be connected at the Bulgana Terminal Station to further support the Western Victoria Renewable Energy Zone (REZ). VNI West project will also link up with Bulgana Terminal Station as another high voltage line connecting the most north-western regions of Vic and areas of NSW into Bulgana to connect on to WRL into Melbourne.
High proportion of dwellings owned outright	The Social Locality has a higher proportion of dwellings owned outright when compared to the State (32.2%). The townships of Stuart Mill SAL (71.1%), Marnoo SAL (71.7%) and Navarre SAL (62.8%) were the highest of the townships. This correlates to the more stable community living at the same address for 5 years or more at the time of the 2021 Census and is typical of rural locations.
Low level of available short-term accommodation	As of December 2024, the townships of Stawell, Horsham, Ararat, Halls Gap, and Great Western collectively offered 449 Airbnb listings. These listings experienced average occupancy rates ranging from 49.1% to 64.8% between January 2022 and December 2024, according to AirDNA (2024). In January 2025, the combined accommodation landscape across Stawell, Horsham, Ararat and Halls Gap included 40 providers, offering a total of 1,355 rooms.
Limited rental availability	The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) defines affordable lettings as rental housing that is priced to ensure that households with very low to moderate incomes spend no more than a certain percentage of their income on rent. This helps ensure that these households have enough money left for other essentials like food, medicine, clothing, and transport. In the Northern Grampians LGA, there were 26 =lettings which were considered affordable by DFFH, this equated to 70.3% of total available rentals in the LGA (DFFH, 2024). As of January 2025, rental stock and availability across the key townships were as follows: • Stawell: 13 rentals available, 0.42% vacancy rate • Halls Gap: 1 rentals available, 0.15% vacancy rate • Horsham: 46 rentals available, 0.6% vacancy rate • Ararat: 30 rentals available, 0.72% vacancy rate • Great Western: 0 rentals available, NA vacancy rate Vacancy rates were lower when compared to the State at 0.93%.

Key Characteristics	Description
Greater need for social and affordable housing	The Northern Grampians LGA has a higher proportion of people renting in social housing than the State (3.3% compared to 2.5%). The Council in 2021 signed a contract to increase social housing through a staged housing development that will deliver various types of housing. Council says the development will be constructed over a five-year period at an allotment on the corner of Sloane Street and Cahill Road in Stawell (Inside Local Government, 2021). The Labour Government previously invested $4.5 million to build 20 homes in Stawell for singles, couples and families facing homelessness in 2021. In Stawell, four homes are under construction - two one-bedroom and two two-bedroom homes – with a further 16 one-bedroom townhouses in planning (Premier of Victoria, 2021). St Arnaud currently has the Alexander Miller Memorial Home and Wintringham Housing which provides the townships population with affordable and accessible housing (Wintringham, n.d.).
Stawell and St Arnaud service centres to the region	The townships of Stawell and St Arnaud are service centres for the region providing access to primary and secondary schools, public facilities and health facilities including a district hospital, these service the rural towns in the north of Northern Grampians LGA.
Low accessibility to tertiary educational options	The closest TAFE and University to Stawell SAL is located in Horsham, approximately a 49-minute drive away. The distance to The University of Melbourne is approximately 2.5 hour drive, prompting those looking to enter tertiary education to move out of the Social Locality to access further education opportunities.
Lower access to health care professionals	The Northern Grampians LGA has a lower proportion of GPs and Nurses per 100,000 people in comparison to the State demonstrating lower access to health professionals. Local news highlighted the shortage, "*Stawell loses three GPs in two months amid rural doctor shortage, contract dispute*" (Gillian Aeria, 2023) and "*RDA urgers Grampians Health to be flexible over doctor contracts in Stawell*" (Gillian Aeria, 2023). The article states the loss of GPs puts residents at risk as other regional health clinics are already at full capacity and appointments are hard to come by. Retention of health care practitioners is low in regional areas, with the council Economic Development Strategy highlighting the need to provide the community with better healthcare delivery and improve overall health of the population (Northern Grampians Shire Council, 2021).

Source: (DECCA, 2016; DELWP, 2021; DFFH, 2024; Northern Grampians Shire Council, 2020; Northern Grampians Shire Council, 2021; ABS, 2021; realestate.com, 2025)

A.7 Cultural Capital

Cultural capital refers to underlying factors that provide human societies with the means to adapt to their environment. It includes the way people know and understand their place within the world. It may also refer to the extent to which the local culture, traditions, or language, may promote or hinder well-being, social inclusion, and development (IAIA, 2015). This section provides a summary of the key characteristics of the Social Locality from a cultural capital perspective.

Table A.7 Cultural Capital

Key Characteristics	Description
Strong Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Culture	The Wotjobaluk peoples are the Traditional Owners of the Project Area. On 13 December 2005, the Federal Court made its first determination that native title exists in south-eastern Australia. This recognised the native title of the Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergaia and Jupagulk People of the Wotjobaluk Nations (WJJWJ People) in certain areas of the Wimmera and Southern Mallee. This was a 'consent determination' under the Native Title Act 1993 (Cwth), where all parties to the claim agreed to Federal Court orders recognising native title (Victorian Government, 2023). The Barengi Gadjin Land Council (BGLC) is the Federally recognised authority to speak on behalf of the Wotjobaluk peoples and the only body in the region with the legislative authority to make legal decisions about cultural heritage. Budja Budja is the Traditional Aboriginal name for Halls Gap. The Grampians area was traditionally known as Gariwerd, a central place to the dreaming of Aboriginal Peoples particularly the Djab Wurrung and the Jardwadjali Traditional Owners (Budja Budja Aboriginal Co-operative, n.d.). Budja Budja Aboriginal Cooperative is an initiative of the local Djab Wurrung Aboriginal Community and services the region encompassing Ararat, Stawell, Halls Gap and Gariwerd, Dunkeld, Mortlake, Dadswell Bridge and St Arnaud and all areas in-between.
Rich First Nations Australian Culture	The richness of First Nations cultural heritage within Northern Grampians sets the region apart. Between 80–90% of Victoria's Aboriginal rock art is located within the Grampians. Bunjil's Shelter in the Black Range Scenic Reserve near Stawell is the only known rock art painting of Bunjil, and widely regarded as one of the most significant cultural sites in southeastern Australia. Bunjil was the main Dreaming Being of south-eastern Australia and was known as the sky-being for the Wotjobaluk (Buck, 2019). Brambuk, the National Park and Cultural Centre, an iconic award-winning park information and cultural centre celebrates the region's rich First Nation cultural heritage (Northern Grampians Shire Council, 2021).
Low language diversity	The Social Locality had a lower proportion of households where a non-English language is used than the State (30.2%). The Social Locality predominately speak English with less than 10% across all of the Social Locality speaking another language at home.

Key Characteristics	Description
Cultural pride of colonial history	Stawell has a rich colonial history, showcased through the Stawell Cultural Heritage Trail. This self-guided driving or walking tour highlights notable buildings and historical sites, offering an introduction to the community's past (MelbournePlaygrounds, n.d.). Similarly, St Arnaud features a significant European history, with development from the 1850s to the early 1900s shaping the town as it stands today (Victorian Collections, n.d.).
Host of Australia's richest footrace	The Stawell Gift race is a historic footrace which has been held in all but five years since 1878 and is one the world's most famous and prestigious footraces. Every Easter thousands of runners and athletics fans from all over Australia and all points of the globe make the annual pilgrimage to Central Park, the professional running mecca, in the tiny historic gold-mining town of Stawell. With a prize pool of $60,000, the Strickland Family Women's Gift and the Powercor Stawell Gift are the nation's highest prize money events for short distance races and attracts first class Australian and International athletes. The history of the race can be viewed at Stawell Gift Hall of Fame in Central Park, Stawell. It is considered an integral part of the region's history (Stawell Gift, 2023).

Source: (Stawell Gift, 2023; MelbournePlaygrounds, n.d.; Northern Grampians Shire Council, n.d.; Budja Budja Aboriginal Co-operative, n.d.; Victorian Government, 2023)

A.8 Community Profile Dataset

Table A.8 Community Capitals Data

Indicators	Great Western SAL	Halls Gap SAL	Stawell SAL	St Arnaud SAL	Northern Grampians Shire Council LGA	North West Victoria (North West SA4)	Victoria
Year	2021	2021	2021	2021	2021	2021	2021
Human Capital							
Population	425	495	6,220	2,318	11,948	155,568	6,503,491
Median Age	52	44	47	52	49	44	38
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people (% of population)	1.9%	3.5%	1.8%	2.1%	1.7%	3.0%	1.0%
Highest educational attainment- Year 10 (%)	14%	14%	20%	22%	20%	21%	13%
Highest educational Attainment- Year 12 (%)	42%	53%	37%	28%	35%	34%	60%
Bachelor's degree highest level of non-schooling attainment (%)	5%	11%	5%	4%	5%	6%	12%
Certificate/ s highest level of non- schooling attainment (%)	26%	17%	18%	18%	19%	18%	14%
Proportion of the population with chronic diseases[24]	4.5%	2.6%	5.4%	5.4%	4.9%	4.4%	2.9%
SEIFA education occupation	3	7	1	1	1	-	-

[24] 3 of more long-term health conditions

Indicators	Great Western SAL	Halls Gap SAL	Stawell SAL	St Arnaud SAL	Northern Grampians Shire Council LGA	North West Victoria (North West SA4)	Victoria
Social Capital							
Proportion of the population who have done voluntary work in the past 12 months	19.1%	20.6%	13.7%	19.9%	17.3%	16.0%	10.9%
Family Household	65%	57%	61%	55%	62%	66%	70%
Group Household	0%	6%	3%	2%	3%	3%	4%
Lone person Household	34%	38%	35%	43%	35%	31%	26%
Proportion of the population living at a different address 1 year ago	8.2%	20.6%	10.3%	9.1%	9.8%	11.1%	14.2%
Proportion of the population living at a different address 5 years ago	28.9%	43.0%	30.4%	25.9%	27.7%	31.1%	37.7%
Proportion of the population living at the same address 5 years ago	59.8%	39.4%	55.2%	59.8%	57.6%	54.5%	51.2%
SEIFA- Socio-economic Disadvantage	5	5	1	1	2	-	-
Cultural Capital							
Birth Place: Australia (%)	83.3%	70.9%	79.9%	85.2%	81.2%	80.6%	65.0%
Birth Place: Elsewhere (%)	9.2%	17.0%	11.0%	6.3%	9.2%	11.3%	30.0%

Indicators	Great Western SAL	Halls Gap SAL	Stawell SAL	St Arnaud SAL	Northern Grampians Shire Council LGA	North West Victoria (North West SA4)	Victoria
Proportion of households where a non-English language is used (%)	4.9%	9.2%	7.5%	2.8%	5.6%	9.7%	30.2%
Economic Capital							
Median total household income ($)	1,474	1,196	1,127	920	1,124	1,274	1,759
Labour force participation	57.3%	59.4%	52.0%	47.8%	52.9%	55.9%	62.4%
Work full time	54.9%	44.7%	54.0%	51.8%	54.2%	56.5%	56.2%
Work Part time	30.0%	37.2%	34.3%	37.0%	34.2%	32.4%	32.3%
Unemployed	3.3%	4.3%	4.3%	3.9%	3.7%	4.0%	5.0%
Median Mortgage repayments ($/month)	1,231	1,300	973	867	975	1,098	1,859
Median rent ($/week)	200	250	210	188	200	231	370
Median rent as a proportion of median household income (%)	13.6%	20.9%	18.6%	20.4%	17.8%	18.1%	21.0%
Proportion of the population in Mortgage Stress	10.%	17.6%	7.0%	8.4%	8.7%	8.9%	15.5%
Proportion of the population in rental stress	0.0%	30.0%	26.8%	27.5%	26.5%	26.9%	30.9%
Herfindahl Index of Industrial Diversity	0.0604	0.1580	0.0275	0.0266	0.0208	0.01447	0.0104
Index of economic resources	3	1	1	1	2	-	-

Indicators	Great Western SAL	Halls Gap SAL	Stawell SAL	St Arnaud SAL	Northern Grampians Shire Council LGA	North West Victoria (North West SA4)	Victoria
Physical Capital							
Travel to work by car	57%	39%	65%	68%	63%	65%	50%
Total Dwellings	205	417	2,890	1,203	5,778	68,593	2,688,261
Total Occupied Dwellings	182	184	2,584	1,042	4,903	60,251	2,390,232
% of total occupied dwellings	88.9%	44.1%	89.4%	86.6%	84.9%	87.8%	88.9%
Average people per household	2.2	2	2.2	2	2.2	2.3	2.5
Proportion of dwellings owned outright (%)	47.8%	41.8%	44.5%	49.0%	48.1%	41.3%	32.2%
Proportion of private dwellings owned with a mortgage (%)	33.0%	18.5%	27.3%	27.4%	26.9%	29.1%	36.1%
Proportion of private dwellings being rented (%)	9.3%	32.6%	25.0%	19.9%	20.1%	24.6%	28.5%
Rates of GPs per 100, 000 people	-	-	-	-	101.0	-	127.3
Rate of Nurses per 100,000 people	-	-	-	-	1,144.3	-	1150.3

Source: ABS, 2021; PHIDU, 2023

Table A.9 Top 3 Occupations and Industries of Employment

Indicators		Stawell SAL	St Arnaud SAL	Northern Grampians Shire Council LGA	North Western Victoria (North West SA4)	Victoria
Year		2021	2021	2021	2021	2021
Top 3 Occupations	1	Labourers: 20.2%	Labourers: 19.2%	Managers: 18.3%	Managers: 18.3%	Professionals: 25.0%
	2	Community and Personal Service Workers: 16.8%	Community and Personal Service Workers: 16.0%	Labourers: 17.4%	Labourers: 14.9%	Managers: 14.0%
	3	Technicians and Trades Workers: 12.2%	Managers: 13.6%	Community and Personal Service Workers: 14.9%	Professionals: 14.9%	Technicians and Trades Workers: 12.6%
Top 3 Industries of Employment	1	Health Care and Social Assistance: 20.2%	Health Care and Social Assistance: 19.2%	Health Care and Social Assistance: 17.7%	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing: 16.6%	Health Care and Social Assistance: 14.1%
	2	Manufacturing: 15.5%	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing: 15.2%	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing: 13.2%	Health Care and Social Assistance: 15.3%	Construction: 9.4%
	3	Retail Trade: 9.0%	Retail Trade: 12.3%	Manufacturing: 11.4%	Retail Trade; 9.2%	Retail Trade: 9.4%

Source: ABS, 2021

Table A.10 Number of Businesses by Industry and Year in Northern Grampians LGA

Number of Businesses by Industry	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	456	471	465	460	447
Mining	3	3	3	7	13
Manufacturing	30	35	37	38	36
Electricity, gas, water and waste services	8	10	7	11	7
Construction	140	142	130	136	148
Wholesale trade	24	25	32	27	29
Retail trade	69	66	63	70	76
Accommodation and food services	82	74	79	77	82
Transport, postal and warehousing	61	60	62	61	57
Information media and telecommunications	5	5	5	3	3
Financial and insurance services	18	17	13	13	20
Rental, hiring and real estate services	66	68	63	68	76
Professional, scientific and technical services	58	57	51	53	54
Administrative and support services	26	24	23	23	28
Public administration and safety	-	-	3	3	-
Education and training	5	5	5	3	9
Health care and social assistance	23	31	24	27	31
Arts and recreation services	13	16	21	23	24
Other services	41	46	43	45	58

Source: ABS, 2021

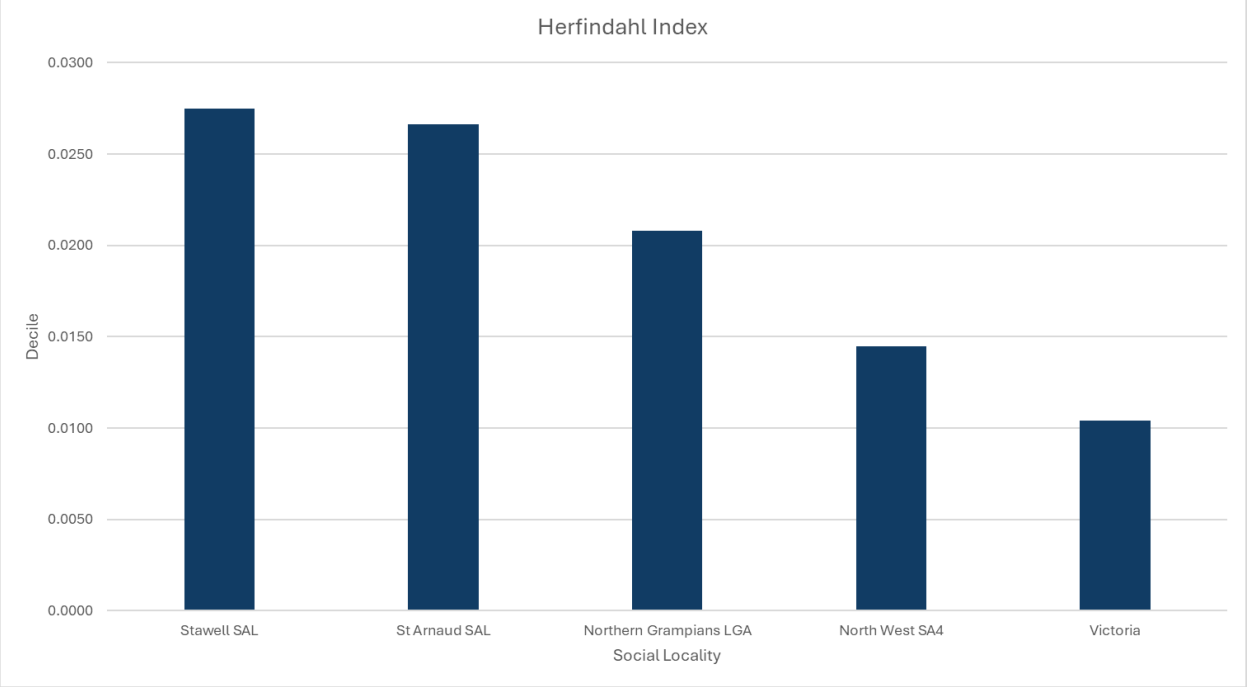

Figure A.5 Herfindahl Index

Source: ABS, 2021

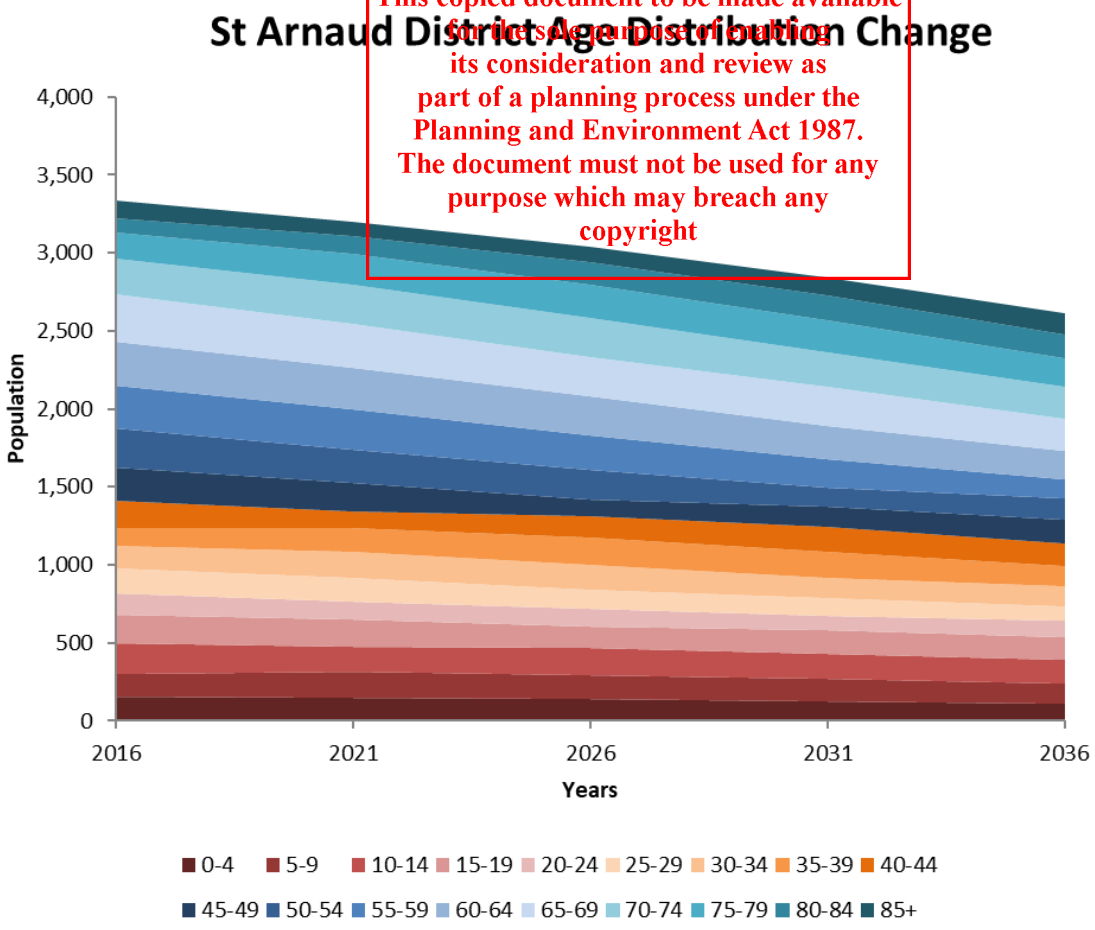

Figure A.6 St Arnaud District Age Distribution Projections 2016–2036

Source: (Invest Victoria, 2019).

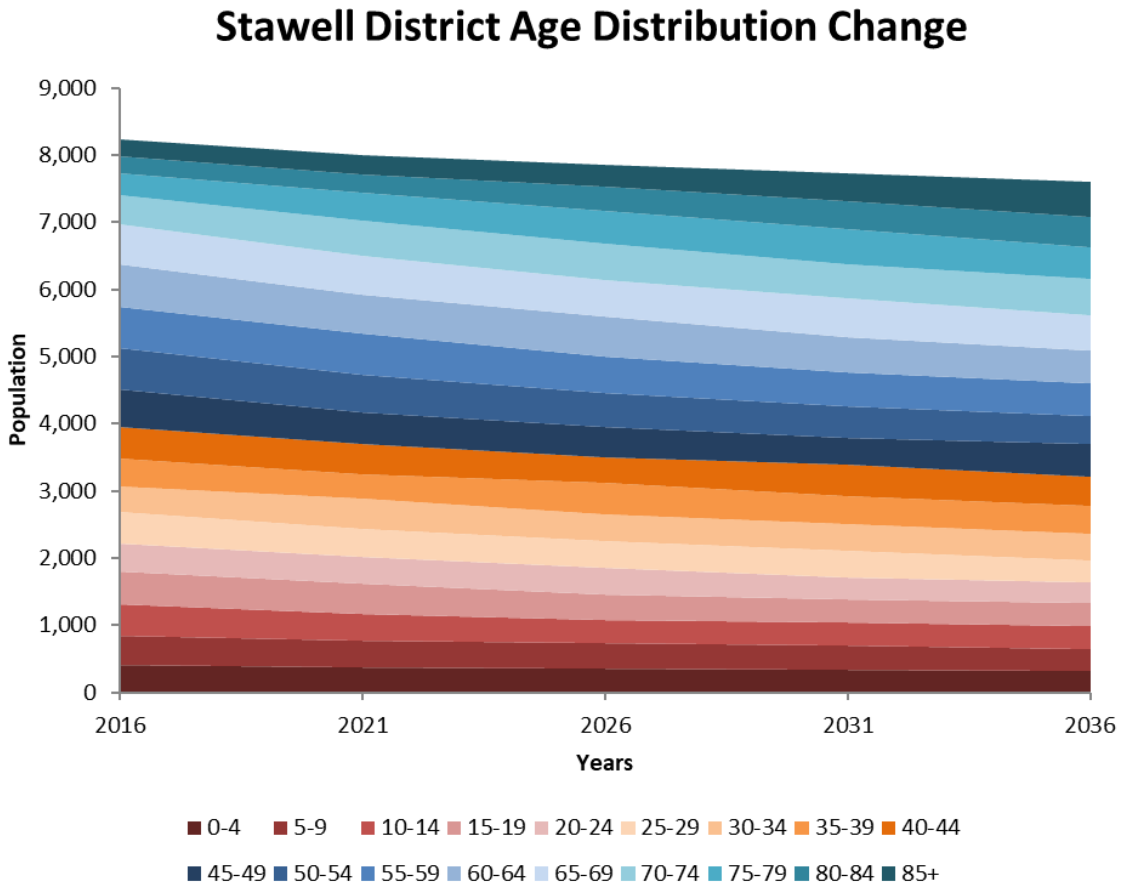

Figure A.7 Stawell District Age Distribution Projections 2016–2036

Source: (Invest Victoria, 2019).

Appendix B

Community and Stakeholder Engagement Plan (CSEP)

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Community and Stakeholder Engagement Plan

Watta Wella Renewable Energy Project

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Date	17/03/2025
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In planning for Australia's clean energy future, RES acknowledges its rich history. We pay our respects to the Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jardwadjali, Wergaia and Jupagalk Peoples (often collectively referred to as the Wotjobaluk Nations) as the Traditional Custodians of the Country on which the Watta Wella Renewable Energy Project is proposed. We recognise their ongoing connection to land and waterways, and pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

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Acronyms and abbreviations

Name	Description
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AEMO	Australian Energy Market Operator
BESS	Battery Energy Storage System
BGLC	Barengi Gadjin Aboriginal Land Council
CCC	Community Consultative Committee
CEC	Clean Energy Council
CFA	Country Fire Authority
CHMP	Cultural Heritage Management PLan
CPI	Consumer Price Index
CSEP	Community and Stakeholder Engagement Plan
CRM	Customer Relationship Management
DTP	Department of Transport and Planning
DCCEEW	Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (Commonwealth)
DEECA	Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (Victoria)
DTP	Department of Transport and Planning
EE Act	Environmental Effects Act 1978
EES	Environmental Effects Statement
EPBC Act	Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999
EPA	Environmental Protection Authority
FAQs	Frequently Asked Questions
FFG Act	Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988
GW	Gigawatt
IAP2	International Association for Public Participation
LGA	Local Government Area
MW	Megawatt
P&E Act	Planning and Environment Act 1987
PPS	Public Participation Strategy
RAP	Registered Aboriginal Party
RDA	Regional Development Australia
RES	RES Australia Pty Ltd (the Proponent)
REZ	Renewable Energy Zone
VIC	Victoria

VNI West	Victoria New South Wales Interconnector West
WRL	Western Renewables Link

Definitions

Name	Description
Landholders	Landholders are defined as owners of land that RES has an interest in, or is pursuing an interest in, for the purposes of development, access, transmission etc..
Neighbours	For the purpose of this PLAN, the Project's neighbours are considered to be: Landholders with property immediately adjacent to the project site; Users of local roads and infrastructure near/adjacent to the project site; Any other stakeholders living, working, or who are regularly within 5km of the project.
Community	For the purposes of this Plan, the community is defined as any person, group, or business who lives/is based within, or has a connection to the geographic area surrounding the proposed project site, within an approximate radius of 20km. This includes the communities of: • Stawell • Joel Joel • Joel south • Greens Creek • Landsborough • Landsborough West • Concongella • Great Western • Navarre
Area of Social Influence	The area of social influence (or social locality) is an identified area where potential social impact has been identified based on the unique qualities of the project, community and context of the development.
Borealis	Stakeholder management database
The Project	The Watta Wella Renewable Energy Project
The Plan	The Community and Stakeholder Engagement Plan

1 Introduction

The proposed Watta WellaRenewable Energy Project by RES in Australia (RES) (the proponent), comprises the construction and development of a large-scale wind farm and battery energy storage system (BESS) in western Victoria, approximately 16 (km) north-east of Stawell.

The project will generate up to 360 MW and deliver renewable, low-cost energy to the national grid, and contribute to the Victorian Government's 65% renewable energy target by 2030 and net-zero emissions target by 2050.

While wind farms provide clean renewable energy, valuable community investment, economic diversity and local jobs they often receive a mixed response from the community. Effective, considered community engagement is fundamental to generate community support for renewable energy development projects. In RES' experience, early, ongoing and transparent engagement and a clear benefit sharing approach are crucial components to fostering social licence for a renewable energy project.

1.1 About RES

RES entered the Australian market in 2004 and now employs over 180 people and has offices in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and multiple regional locations. RES is engaged in all technologies: wind, solar and storage and offers development, construction and asset management services across Australia.

RES manages a portfolio of 2.5GW of renewable assets in Australia. This includes some of the largest wind farms in the southern hemisphere: Murra Warra Wind Farm and Dundonnell Wind Farm as well as Emerald Solar Park; one of the first solar farms commissioned in Australia.

With an industry-wide reputation for identifying innovative solutions to problems that reduce risk, cost and allow projects to progress, RES' exceptional was recently acknowledged with the Clean Energy Council's innovation Award 2022 and Diversity & Inclusion Award 2022, as well as the Asset Management Award 2022 at the Wind Investment Awards.

RES is the world's largest independent renewable energy company and is active in onshore and offshore wind, solar, energy storage, green hydrogen, transmission and distribution. As an industry innovator for over 40 years, RES has delivered more than 27GW of renewable energy projects across the globe and supports an operational asset portfolio exceeding 41GW worldwide for a large client base.

1.2 Document review and update

RES recognises the importance of early and ongoing community and stakeholder participation throughout a project's lifecycle and aims to build trusting relationships between the project team, the community and broader region. This Plan was prepared as part of RES's ongoing commitment to best practice engagement within the industry (as referenced by the Clean Energy Council's Best Practice Charter).

Version 1.0 of the Plan was prepared as part of the Project's EES and EPBC Submissions. Version 2.0 has been updated in preparation for the Planning Application.

This Plan will be reviewed every twelve months throughout the life of the project and be updated as required to address:

- stakeholder feedback and subsequent changes to the project
- changes in the construction program

- changes to stakeholder and community needs
- changes to stakeholder and community information requirements
- lessons learned from the community engagement process over the life of the project.

1.3 Objectives

This Plan outlines the approach, strategy and implementation of stakeholder and community consultation during the development and construction phases of the project.

Community engagement anticipated by this Plan will be utilised to inform:

- Planning approval in the form of Ministerial planning permit application/s or a Planning Scheme Amendment for the Project made pursuant to the Planning and Environment Act 1987 (VIC).
- Referrals made pursuant to the Environment Effects Act 1978 (EE Act) (VIC) and the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act) (Cth).

As signatories to the Clean Energy Council's Best Practice Charter for Renewable Energy Projects, RES is committed to engaging respectfully with communities, being sensitive to cultural values and making a positive contribution to the regions where it operates.

This Plan aims to establish proactive communication and engagement with stakeholders and the community enabling their feedback or concerns to be clearly understood and integrated into project decision making.

Effective, considered community engagement is fundamental to generating community support for renewable energy development projects. In RES' experience, early and ongoing transparent engagement and a clear benefit sharing approach are crucial components to fostering social license for a renewable energy project.

The specific objectives of this Plan are to:

- Build and maintain strong relationships with local stakeholders to establish a socially sustainable project.
- Facilitate early engagement with local stakeholders to understand potential social and environmental impacts and opportunities that may arise from the Project.
- Guide and support a strategic and coordinated approach to engagement, including specific tools, timeframes and responsibilities during the planning and assessment phase of the Project. A separate Plan will be prepared for construction and decommissioning phases of the project.
- Support the understanding of local context and identify key stakeholders, including vulnerable community groups, stakeholder expectations and project alignment with local aspirations.
- Facilitate the genuine involvement of stakeholders in the planning and assessment process and develop effective and meaningful responses, as far as practicable, to any identified impacts.
- Ensure that community and stakeholder inputs are effectively integrated into the technical, environmental, and planning assessments for the Project and, as far as practicable, to inform refinements to project design and to support the overall development of the Project.
- Collaborate with identified stakeholders on potential local benefit sharing opportunities to ensure they are co-designed, targeted, and appropriate to the Project's operating context.
- Meet and exceed (as far as practicable) regulatory requirements for public, stakeholder and community consultation.

- Facilitate early engagement with identified Traditional Owners to maximise opportunity for the Project to be developed in a culturally sensitive way, considering any tangible and intangible heritage values relevant to the project site and to support a focus on the avoidance of potential impacts to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage.

1.4 Project Overview

The Project consists of the development, construction and operation of a large-scale wind, solar and Battery Energy Storage System (BESS)facility across approximately 4,850 hectares of land in western Victoria (VIC), Australia. Sections of the Project are located adjacent to the Joel Joel Nature Conservation Reserve located to the south. Land within and adjacent to the project site is predominantly associated with agricultural practices, primarily used for dryland mixed farming of sheep, cattle grazing and cropping. The Project is in the vicinity of a number of other proposed or operating wind farm projects in the region

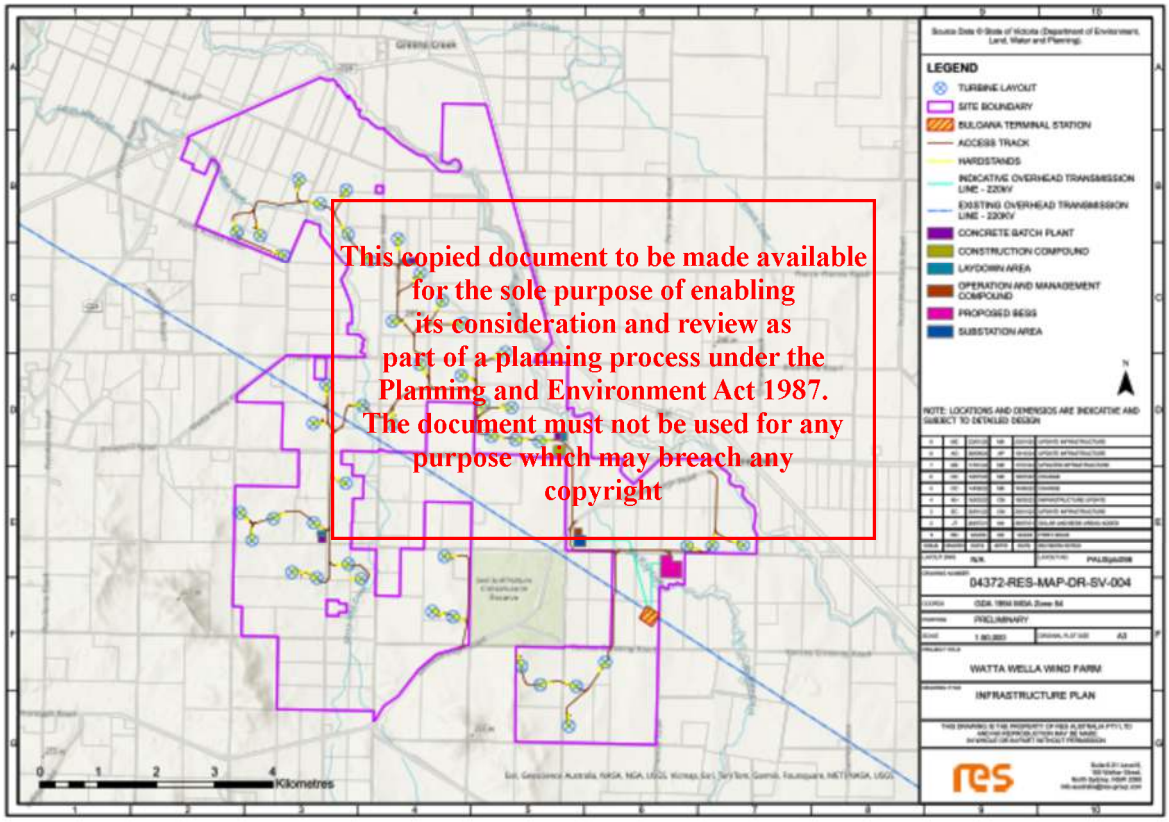

Figure 1 Project Area

The project will indicatively consist of:

- Up to 45 wind turbines, approximately 255 meters in height (blade tip), with a total capacity of up to 360 megawatt (MW)
- An alternating current (AC) coupled Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) with up to 480 containerised battery units with an independent connection to the grid, across approximately 12 hectares.
- Underground and above ground electrical reticulation.

- Temporary construction site offices, concrete batching plant, construction vehicle parking areas, and material laydown areas for the construction phase.
- An onsite switchyard for connection into the existing transmission lines that traverse the site, and a 220 kilovolt (kV) substation, operation and maintenance facility, storage facilities, and vehicle parking areas.
- Access tracks for construction and maintenance of the turbines will be constructed to link all turbines to access points throughout the project site.

The final configuration of the Project will be subject to the planning and environmental approval processes.

The site will primarily be accessed from Landsborough Road. Preliminary transport route assessments have identified potential site access routes from the east of the project area, travelling along Joel Joel Road and Landsborough Road. This route has been suggested as it follows similar routes used for construction of the nearby Bulgana and Crowlands wind farms. Various road upgrades may need to take place for project construction to take place and these are being investigated concurrently.

The road upgrade requirements will also be informed by ongoing engagement with the local (Northern Grampians Shire Council) and state road authorities (Department of Transport and Main Roads), as informed by the updated and final designs for the Project.

The project is expected to deliver the following local and statewide benefits:

encourage around $600 million investment in Western Victoria

create up to 200 new construction jobs and around 20 long-term jobs to operate the facility

deliver up to 360MW of new, low-cost renewable energy capacity to help achieve the state's renewable energy goals and contribute to Australia's transition to renewable energy

generate enough clean, affordable energy to power close to 200,000 average Victorian homes a year

provide host Landholders with a new income source, improving the local economy

establish a Community Benefit Funds of up to $10 million, co-designed by community stakeholders, to provide direct and targeted benefits

reduce up to 1 million tonnes of CO2 emissions.

1.4.1 Transmission and connection

The Project will connect to the Bulgana terminal station, which is located adjacent to the project. Connection to the existing grid is reliant on completion of AusNet's Western Renewables Link Project which is scheduled for completion in June 2027.

1.5 The approvals process

1.5.1 Planning Pathway

Following the submission of the Environmental Effects Statement Referral in August 2022 (under the *Environment Effects Act 1978)*, the Minister determined that the Watta Wella Renewable energy project does not require and EES, but that it will be subject to certain conditions. The conditions require RES to prepare an Environmental Report focusing on:

- Biodiversity impacts (birds and bats, native vegetation and waterways)
- Mitigation of biodiversity impacts
- Collative effects from existing wind farms in the region
- The Environmental Report needs to be accepted by the Minister before a planning permit application can be made.

Following the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPB*C Act 1999*) Referral, also lodged in August, the Minister determined that the Watta Wella Renewable Energy Project will require formal assessment and approval under the EPBC Act. The decision is based on the presence and potential impact on listed threatened species and communities or migratory species within the project area.

The EPBC act approval is required before a planning permit can be made.

Following the outcome of the Environmental Effects Statement (EES) Referral and the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (EPBC) Referral in August 2022, comprehensive assessments have been completed to identify the potential impacts of the Project and how they can be avoided, remedied, or mitigated.

As part of this work, various meetings were held with landholders, project neighbours, local government bodies and conservation organisations. As a result, a number of turbines were moved to avoid impacts to threatened species and native vegetation.

A Ministerial planning permit application for the Project will be lodged with the Victorian Minister for Planning and will be assessed against the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*. Through this process the Department of Transport and Planning (DTP) will coordinate engagement with statutory stakeholders to inform the outcome of the application process, and to inform any conditions of approval (if granted).

Under the requirements of the EPBC Act, the public will have opportunity to comment on the EPBC referral application lodged by RES for the Project.

1.5.2 State Policy Setting

Victoria's current renewable energy targets legislated in the Renewable Energy (Jobs and Investment) Act 2017 are 25% by 2020 (achieved), 40% by 2025 and 50% by 2030. The State government has recently announced an intention to legislate targets of 65% by 2030 and 95% by 2035. Energy storage targets have also been announced of at least 2.6GW storage capacity by 2030 and 6.3 GW by 2035.

In November 2020, the Victorian Government announced plans for significant investment in the development and establishment of six Renewable Energy Zones (REZs), including the Western Victoria REZ. In February 2021, the Renewable Energy Zones Development Plan Directions paper was release as a plan to unlock 10 GW of new renewable energy capacity in Victoria, taking the total capacity across Victorian REZs to 16 GW.

VicGrid has been established by the Victorian Government to deliver the first Victorian Transmission Plan (VTP) by 31 July 2025, which will set the long-term strategic vision for the development of the state's Renewable Energy Zone. Victorian Transmission Plan Guidelines for developing the VTP and the draft REZ Community Benefit Plan were released for public comment in mid-2024, the final plan is due in April 2025.

2 Community Engagement Approach

2.1 Increased stakeholder expectations

Community and stakeholders' expectations regarding involvement in the decision-making process for infrastructure projects continue to rise. In many cases, this stretches far beyond traditional consultation topics of site locations, environmental management, and impact mitigation to incorporate advanced concepts such as climate change, increasing social value and benefit-sharing.

The Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner's 2022 recommendations for community consultation for renewable energy projects suggest that:

> *"Effective community consultation and engagement is essential for large-scale renewable energy and transmission projects to gain widespread support and earn the 'social license' to operate within the community. To be effective in community engagement, it is vital to actually 'engage the community' and involve the community wherever possible in the design and execution of programs related to the project (but not the project itself)."*

The report also states that "community opposition has contributed to the delay, cancellation or mothballing of more than $20 billion of infrastructure projects in the last decade."

In recent years the establishment, growth and success of not-for-profit activist-based organisations such as GetUp, 350.org, Friends of the Earth, Quit Coal, the Australian Youth Climate Coalition and counterAct demonstrates that community campaigns can deliver significant disruption and change.

Together, community and government initiatives have resulted in increased stakeholder involvement and empowerment across all stages of the project lifecycle.

Jacobs and Simetrica's 2020 thought leadership paper, Before and beyond the build, A blueprint for creating enduring social value at scale through infrastructure investments, traces changes in community expectations over time, stating that "in 2020, we expect more from our private sector business leaders and hold companies to higher standards relating to their social impact and contribution to social value."

These expectations mean that effective engagement is critical to good stakeholder management.

2.2 IAP2 approach

RES recognises the importance of early and ongoing community and stakeholder participation throughout a project's lifecycle and aims to build trusting relationships between the project team, the community and broader region.

RES in Australia has a dedicated community engagement team, comprising specialists trained in best practice methodologies under the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2).

The IAP2 Federation has developed the Public Participation Spectrum (PPS) to assist in defining the community's role in any public participation process. The PPS identifies stakeholders in respect to their impact on project decision making – from low to high – and determines an appropriate engagement response – inform, consult, involve, collaborate, empower – as shown in Figure 2.

The Undertaking Engagement Guidelines for State Significant Projects (NSW Government, 2022) states that the IAP2 core values and the IAP2 public participation spectrum should inform all engagement strategies.

INCREASING IMPACT ON THE DECISION

	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influencedthe decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice and innovationin formulatng solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.

Figure 2: IAP2 public participation spectrum

2.3 Engagement principles

RES' commitment to best practice stakeholder engagement aligns with our company values of passion, accountability, collaboration and excellence and our vision to be a Power for Good – creating a future where everyone has access to affordable zero carbon energy.

As a founding signatory of the Clean Energy Council's (CEC) Best Practice Charter for Renewable Energy Development 2018, we believe in effective, clear and transparent community engagement. Our engagement principles follow the IAP2 spectrum and reflect our experience implementing DPE's Undertaking Engagement Guidelines for State Significant Projects.

RES is committed to the following:

Figure 3: Engagement principles

RES has a dedicated and experienced team which can draw on its learnings from other projects in Australia to establish respectful relationships with local communities. RES aims to foster social licence to plan, construct and operate projects, striving for best practice, and early engagement with communities to develop an understanding of the community and the project's stakeholders. We understand that no two communities are the same and our investment in early engagement allows us to tailor our communications approach to the community we are working

in. In turn, this supports the ability for communities and local stakeholders to participate in and inform project planning and development. RES acknowledges that a robust community and stakeholder engagement process can further inform the assessment process and project technical studies to bring about positive project and community outcomes.

RES's engagement approach is based on the following commitments:

Keeping the community informed throughout the pre-planning development phase of the Project. Providing clear and timely information on how and when they can participate in decision making and the level of influence their feedback has on the project.

Allowing the views of local stakeholders to inform project planning and design (as far as practicable) and listening and responding to any concerns raised.

Providing access to up-to-date information on project progress and demonstrate (where applicable) how the design of the Project has been adapted to take account of community participation and the findings of feasibility studies.

Use learnings from all projects to inform future engagement activities as part of our commitment to continuous improvement.

Other key documents that will guide RES' approach include:

- *CEC's Best Practice Charter (CEC, August 2021)*
- *CEC Community Engagement Guidelines for the Australian Wind Industry (CEC, June 2018)*
- *Community Engagement and Benefit Sharing in Renewable Energy Development in Victoria (July 2021)*
- *Development of Wind Energy Facilities in Victoria – Policy and Planning Guidelines (DEWLP, November 2021)*
- Leading Practice Principles: First Nations and Renewable Energy Projects (CEC/KPMG 2024)
- RES's Power for Good Report (RES, 2022 & 2023)

2.4 Engagement Scope

Engagement scope refers to project elements that a stakeholder can influence (negotiables) and those that have already been decided (non-negotiable). The following table provides indicative elements of the engagement scope, subject to change as the project progresses and evolves. The engagement scope assists in the development of key messages and communications with stakeholders.

Table 1: Engagement scope

What has already been decided (non-negotiables)	What stakeholder can influence (negotiables)
Government requirements including approvals pathway	Neighbour shared benefit scheme (voluntary participation)
Site location and size	Type of and structure of community benefits (Community Consultative Committee)

Energy generation (expressed as MW) Turbine height and number	Funding for community sponsorships and benefits Location of infrastructure (within feasibility parameters) Neighbour agreements Mitigation measures for various impacts Community values Construction impacts (Community Consultative Committee)

3 Engagement Strategy

3.1 Stakeholder identification

The Plan design enables community members (especially impacted stakeholders) to be part of the project planning and development process with opportunities to ask questions and engage in a meaningful way. The following table maps stakeholder groups, individual stakeholders and their relevant interests and concerns.

Table 2: Stakeholder groups

Stakeholder group	Stakeholders	Level of engagement (IAP2)	Level of Interest	Level of Influence	Potential interests and concerns
Host Landholders	Landholders with the potential to host infrastructure, have already been engaged regarding infrastructure hosting options or have agreed to host infrastructure	Collaborate	High	High	Individual consultation, access to private land, noise, visual amenity, health and safety, construction disruption, remuneration
Immediate neighbours	Neighbouring dwellings within a 5 km radius of a potential turbine location	Involve	High	Medium	Individual consultation, noise, visual amenity, property values, health and safety, impact of construction, traffic
Surrounding community	Community members who live outside the 5 km radius of a potential turbine site within an approximate distance of 10 km	Inform	Medium	Medium	Community consultation, community wellbeing, economic benefits / impacts, impacts of construction traffic, health and safety, visual amenity, land use
First Nations Rightsholdrs	Barengi Gadjin Aboriginal Land Council, Traditional Owners	Collaborate	High	High	Community consultation, impact on Aboriginal social, historical, scientific and aesthetic objects or values, economic benefits / impacts, impacts of construction traffic, health and safety

Local community organisations and businesses, Special interest groups	List in CRM	Consult	Medium	Medium	Community consultation, community wellbeing, business opportunities, social and economic impacts, environmental impacts, local Indigenous and European heritage objects and values
Local council, state and federal elected members	Northern Grampians Shire Council, Councillors	Involve	High	High	Community consultation, community wellbeing, impact on local residents and businesses, economic benefits, impacts on local roads and infrastructure
State and federal agencies	DTP, DEECA, DCCEEW, EPA, Parks Vic, CFA, AEMO, Civil Aviation and Safety Authority, Regional Development Australia, Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner, emergency service departments, Office of the Registrar of the Aboriginal Land Rights Act, National Native Title Tribunal	Involve	High	High	Community consultation, project approval, regulatory compliance, environmental impact
Local schools, religious organisations, clubs	List in CRM	Consult	Low	Low	Community wellbeing, economic benefits, community involvement and events, local sponsorship
Local media	Stawell Times and Weekly Advertiser, ABC Radio	Inform	Medium	Low	Community discontent / protests, safety concerns, environment or heritage impacts, project milestones
National / state / local media	National and state newspapers, radio and television	Inform	Medium	Low	Community discontent / protests, safety concerns, environment or heritage impacts, project milestones

Utilities	Electricity and gas, Water, Telecommunications providers, NBN	Consult	Medium	Low	Stakeholder consultation, project approval, regulatory compliance, environmental impact, signal interference.
Industry	Construction industry, freight industry, agriculture, retail, transport	Consult	High	Medium	Stakeholder consultation, environmental impact, impact of construction, traffic

3.2 Community profile and demographics

The Project is located within the Northern Grampians Shire Council Local Government Area (LGA) in central-western Victoria. The LGA has approximately 11,948 residents across 5,918 square kilometres and is 220 kms north-east of Melbourne and 500 kms north-west of Adelaide.

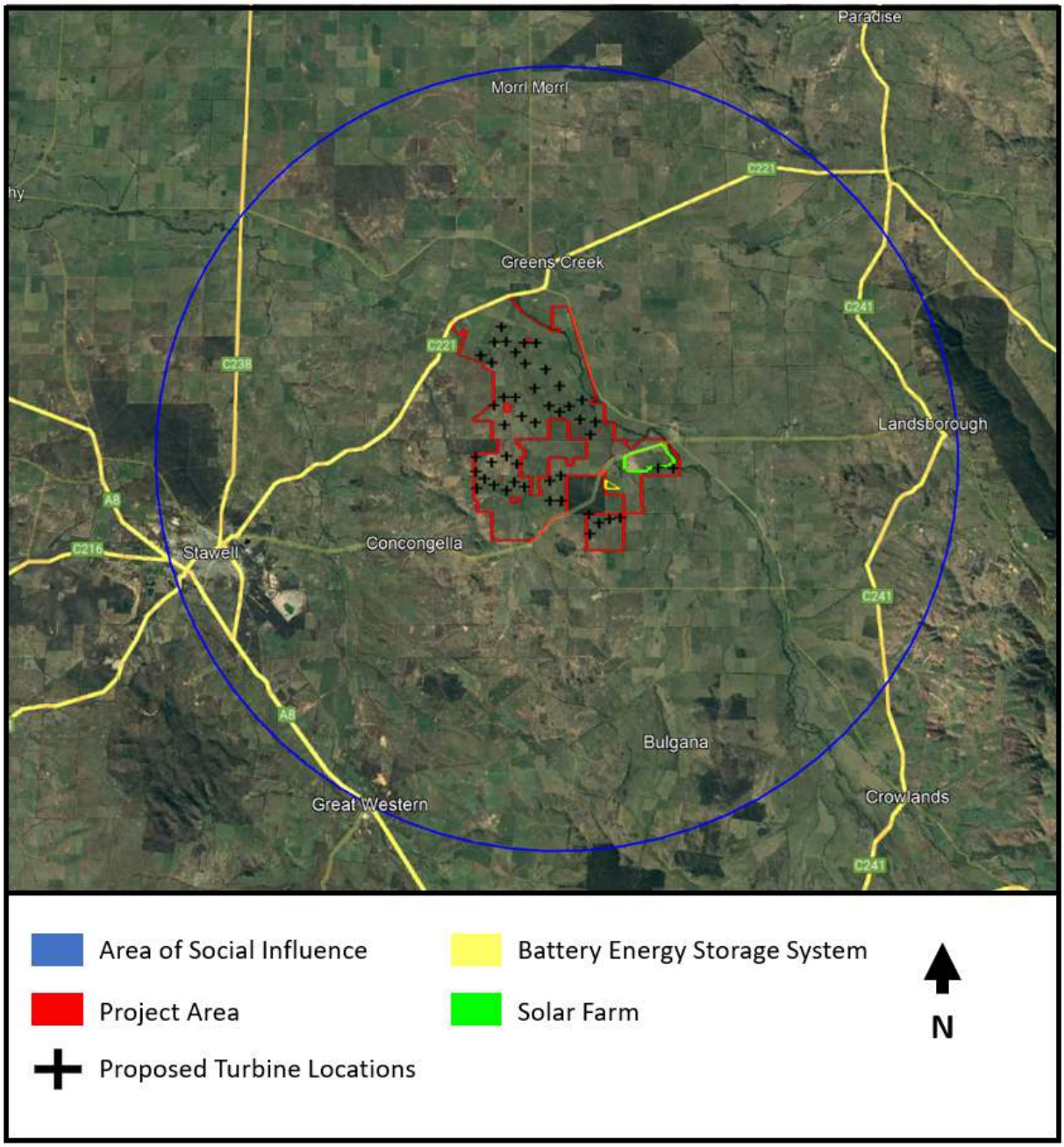

Figure 4: Area of Social Influence Map

Northern Grampians supports 5,395 jobs and has an annual economic output of $2,331 billion. The Mining industry makes the greatest economic output in the region $477.5 million (20.49%). However, Health Care and Social Assistance is the region's largest employer with 1032 jobs (19% of total employment). Other prominent industry sectors include wool, broad acre grazing, cereal cropping, viticulture, olive growing, tourism, manufacturing, textiles, retail trade, landcare and catchment management and professional services. Stawell and St Arnaud are the key townships that service the region's needs for shopping, business and commercial services and host other activities including brick making, meat processing, steel fabrication, feed production, supply and service of farm machinery and small service industry.

In recent years there has been a focus on renewable energy, including the approval and construction of Neoen's large-scale Bulgana Green Power Hub, which is located adjacent to the Watta Wella project site and within the Northern Grampians Shire Council area.

Northern Grampians' major towns are Stawell in the south and St Arnaud in the north, both are service centres for surrounding rural communities. Smaller townships include Great Western, Halls Gap, Glenorchy, Navarre, Marnoo and Stuart Mill. The corporate office for the Northern Grampians Shire Council is located in Stawell.

Stawell is also home to Australia's oldest and richest short-distance running race – the Stawell Gift, which is held on Easter Monday.

Table 3: Population centres and townships closest to the Project (ABS 2021)

Town Name	Population	Distance (km)	Direction	Access road
Stawell	6220	16	SW	Landsborough Road/Stawell-Avoca Rd
Concongella	146	3.5	SW	Landsborough Rd
Greens Creek	52	3.6	Host location	Greens Creek Rd/Stawell-Avoca Rd/Wimmera Downs Rd
Joel Joel/Joel South	43	1-5	Host location	Landsborough Rd/Joel Joel Rd/Wimmera Downs Rd/Joel S Rd
Landsborough West	49	5.5	E	Landsborough Rd
Landsborough	200	12	E	Landsborough Rd
Bulgana	19	9	S	Joel S Road
Campbells Bridge	21	12	NW	Greens Creek Rd
Germania	17	12	W	Stawell Avoca Rd / Donald Stawell Rd
Great Western	425	14	SW	Western Hwy
Deep Lead	210	17	W	Deep Lead Rd / Western Hwy
Navarre	99	17	NE	Stawell Avoca Rd
Glenorchy	131	23	NW	Greens Creek Rd
Marnoo/Marnoo East & West	110	32	NE	Donald Stawell Rd

Stuart Mill	78	36	NE	Stawell Avoca Rd
St Arnaud	2,318	48	NE	Stawell Avoca Rd / Ararat St Arnaud Rd
Halls Gap	495	35	SW	Grampians Rd

A major issue for the Northern Grampians region is its population is declining and aging and social and economic disadvantage is growing.

- The Northern Grampians region is in the 2nd decile of social disadvantage indicating many low income households.
- 52.9% of the population (over 15 years) is employed (10% lower than Victoria).
- 30% of families are at or below the poverty line.
- 4.5% are long-term unemployed.
- 37% of the community (over 15 years) is welfare dependent.
- 14% of 15—24-year-olds are neither working or studying (3% higher than the Grampians region and 5.3% higher than Victoria).
- 9% of children (0-5 years) are developmentally vulnerable in language skills (2% higher than Victoria).
- Only 33% of children complete year 12 (41% in Wider Grampians region and 54% across Victoria).
- 11.3% of workers earn $1,500 or more a week – employed across, Mining, Health Care, Public Administration and Safety, Agriculture and Education.
- 20.6% of workers earn less than $500 a week – across Retail, Accommodation and Food Services, Agriculture and Health Care & Social Assistance, which often include higher levels of part-time roles and casualisation.
- Rental Accommodation is in short supply, with a 0.17% vacancy rate, compared to 0.29% in Hamilton, 0.57% in Ararat, and 0.45% in Horsham.

The closest major community to the Project and where most "wider" community engagement activities will be centred is Stawell. With a population of 6220, Stawell contains the highest number of jobs in the LGA and can be characterised by the following demographics, summarised in **Error! Reference source not found.**:

- An older population than the VIC average, particularly in the suburbs proximal to the Projects.
- A higher Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) population than the Victorian average.
- A slightly higher unemployment rate in the North Grampians Shire LGA in comparison to VIC.
- High motor vehicle usage, particularly in the host suburb of Stawell, from which we can assume a high level of road use.
- A lover level of internet access from dwellings.
- A low level of residents born outside Australia; therefore, the community is not expected to be culturally and linguistically diverse.

3.2.1 Key priorities

In May 2021, Northern Grampians Shire Council released their Economic Development Strategy and Action Plan 2021 – 2031. The Plan identified 3 biggest challenges:

- Population decline and growing social and economic disadvantage, casuing workforce and skills shortages that are restraining the economy.
- Vulnerability to natural disasters and global market events, undermining consistend economic growth.
- Investment preparedness, signalling priorities and ensuring investment competitiveness.

The Plan identifies three long-term objectives and the KPI's to achieve them:

- Increased productivity and a prosperous future for all
- Sustained economic growth
- Investment in enabling infrastructure

By 2031 Council, together with the community, will work to achieve the following KPI's:

KPI 1: Population growth, from 11,400 to 14,400, by 2031.

KPI 2: Reduce the median age to equal the State (from 48 yrs. to 37 yrs).

KPI 3: Reduce youth disengaged in work or study by 5% (from 13% to 8% of youth disengaged, being equal to the State).

KPI 4: Reduce the percentage of developmentally vulnerable children by 2.5% (equal to the State).

KPI 5: Grow GRP year on year from a $730M economy to $920M (26% growth, equal to the State).

KPI 6: Reduce carbon emissions.

KPI 7: Increase (private and government) capital investment.

Council have engaged a consultant to assist in developing an Energy Transition Action Plan to to identify areas within local industry that could be scaled up to meet the needs of renewable developments in the region. The Watta Wella Project Team are working with the consultant to discuss maximising procurement and employment opportunities through the Project.

3.3 First Nations Communities

3.3.1 Traditional Owners

The area was first occupied by the Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergaia and Jupagulk peoples, collectively knowns as the Wotobaluk peoples.

Barengi Gadjin Land Council (BGLC) represents Traditional Owners from the Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergaia and Jupagulk peoples. BGLC is the Federally recognised authority to speak on behalf of the Wotjobaluk peoples and the only body in the region with the legislative authority to make legal decisions about cultural heritage. BGLC are the Prescribed Body Corporate for the Wotjobaluk claim area, as outlined in the Native Title Act, with legal authority and obligation to work on behalf of Traditional Owners. BGLC is a Registered Aboriginal Party, as appointed by the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council, under the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006.

On 13 December 2005, the Federal Court made its first determination that native title exists in south-eastern Australia, recognising the native title of the Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergaia and Jupagulk People of the Wotjobaluk Nations (WJJWJ People) in certain areas of the Wimmera and Southern Mallee. This was a 'consent determination' under the Native Title Act 1993 (Cwth), where all parties to the claim agreed to Federal Court orders recognising native title.

The 2005 native title settlement included:

- an Indigenous Land Use Agreement, recognising close ties to traditional lands and agreements to transfer culturally significant land parcels
- licensing arrangements for hunting, fishing, and gathering
- a consultation process for public land use
- a Cooperative Management Agreement over areas including parts of the Little Desert and Wyperfeld National Parks and Mount Arapiles-Tooan State Park, and funding for the Barengi Gadjin Land Council Aboriginal Corporation (BGLC) (the Prescribed Body Corporate that represents the WJJWJ People for native title purposes).

In 2013, the 2005 native title agreements were reviewed by the State and the BGLC. The review recommended that the State and the WJJWJ People consider future opportunities to enhance the 2005 agreements, such as by entering into a Recognition and Settlement Agreement (RSA) under the Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010 (Vic) (TOS Act). Negotiations towards a RSA began in 2017, agreements were signed in October 2022 and the RSA officially commenced on 13 December 2022.

The boundaries of the area extend approximately from Ouyen in the north to Ararat in the south, and from the South Australian-Victorian border in the west to Donald in the east (as shown in figure 5).

The Agreement area is bordered generally by:
the Eastern Maar native title consent determination area to the south
the Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Recognition and Settlement Agreement area to the south-east.

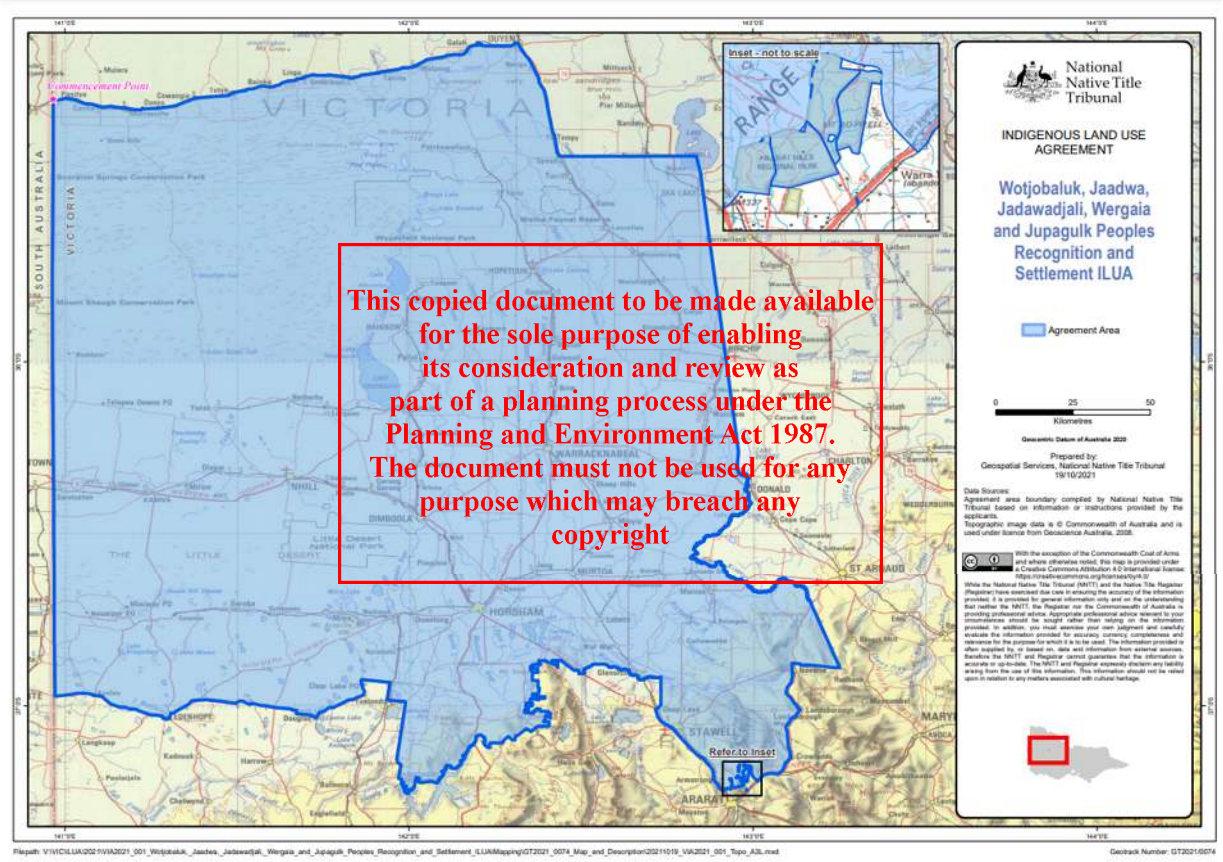

Figure 5: Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergaia and Jupagulk Recognition and Settlement Agreement Map

More information on the RSA and BGLC's activities is available on their website - https://www.bglc.com.au/

3.3.2 Cultural engagement

The Gariwerd (Grampians) Region is rich in cultural heritage with 80-90% of Victoria's Aboriginal rock art located in the region, including Bunjil's Shelter in the Black Range Scenic Reserve near Stawell, which is one of the most significant Aboriginal cultural sites in south eastern Australia.

RES commenced engagement with Barengi Gadjin Aboriginal Land Council in 2020, early in the feasibility phase of the project. Initial engagement focused on building an understanding of any areas of tangible or intangible cultural

sensitivity or value within the Project area. An inital desktop assessment was undertaken by RES Cultural Heritage Consultant, Tardis Archaeology. This was followed by cultural surveys and sub-surface testing with Tardis and BGLC's Cultural Heritage team, as part of the complex assessment and the development of a Cultural Heritage Management Plan (CHMP) in alignment with the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006 (Vic) and the Aboriginal Heritage Regulations 2018 (Vic).

These discussions and assessments revealed a number of registered Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Sensitivity sites within the Project area as well as a number of artefacts, particularly along waterways. The Wimmera River was identified as an area with high cultural value to the BGLC community. In November 2023, a site visit was conducted with representatives from BGLC and Wotjobaluk Elders to show the distance of proposed turbines from the Wimmera River. These areas and ongoing discussions will be captured as part of the projects Cultural Heritage Management Plan.

The project team visited BGLC's Horsham offices in August 2023 to undertake a cultural induction with the BGLC team. BGLC presented their Renewable Energy Roadmap document which was developed in response to the region being designated as a Renewable Energy Zone (REZ).

Objectives of BGLC's RE Roadmap are -

1. Recognition of First Nations Rights and history

2. First Nations Leadership in decision making, ongoing management, environmental stewardship

3. Energy Security for members and local community - looking at virtual power plants, battery, behind the meter options

4. Community Benefits - local community is very young - 80% are 18 – 2. BGLC expressed interest in setting up a trust fund for Education/Scholarships which renewable energy projects could contribute to.

5. Diversified Revenue - self-determination, procurement opportunities

RES provided an update on the Watta Wella Project, layout, timing and consultation to date. Benefit Sharing/Partnership Ideas were discussed. BGLC were open to all ideas, and we agreed to continue the conversation and work towards a Walking Together Statement.

Following the site visit in November 2023, RES has had ongoing, frequent communication with BGLC's engagement team and has shared draft benefit sharing agreements for feedback. In February 2025, a meeting was held with the Cultural Heritage team and a visit to BGLC's Horsham office is planned for mid-2025 to continue discussions around Cultural Heritage Management and finalising the project's CHMP.

3.3.3 Cultural protocols

RES recognises that engagement with First Nations communities must reflect the unique rights of First Nations peoples under the United Nations Declarations on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). The right to self-determination, to be recognised as distinct peoples, to be free of discrimination and to exercise free, prior informed consent are all relevant to how RES engages with First Nations Rightsholders on renewable energy projects.

Culturally sensitive, place-based engagement that fosters genuine and positive relationships with First Nations rightsholders is critical to the success of RES' projects. These relationships enable our team to work collaboratively with First Nations Rightsholders to build mutual understanding and respect, and develop innovative ways to support economic sustainability and self-determination.

This is reflected in RES' company strategy which requires best in class engagement with First Nations communities to support social licence and community support for RES' projects. In June 2023, RES completed its first Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) which has embedded a strong ongoing framework for a more culturally safe and competent workplace that recognises and values First Nations cultures, histories, knowledge and rights. RES has committed to continuing to build on this great work with the launch of our Innovate RAP in February 2025.

RES' vision for reconciliation is a happier, safer, more successful workplace that provides equitable and tangible benefits for the self-determination of First Nations peoples, facilitating deeper impact from our work.

RES' First Nations engagement approach seeks to accord with the following industry/government guidelines:

- **CEC Best Practice Charter for Renewable Energy Projects** (RES is a founding signatory);
- **The CEC/KPMG First Nations Leading Practice Principles** (2024); and
- **First Nations Clean Energy Network Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Best Practice Principles for Clean Energy Projects** (2023)
- **Partnering with Indigenous Organisations for a sustainable environment (DEE, 2023)**
- **United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.**

RES engagement with the Wotjobaluk Peoples reflect that every person and group of people has the equal right to be treated without discrimination and enjoy human rights and fundamental freedoms.

- Enjoy their identities and cultures;
- Maintain and use of their languages;
- Continue and maintain their kinship ties; and
- Continue and maintain their distinctive spiritual, cultural and economic relationships with lands, waters and other resources with which they are connected under traditional laws and customs.

Basic Principles

Mutual Respect	Engagement with people from the Wotjobaluk Nations must: • establish positive relationships through listening to and respecting First Peoples' views. • acknowledge the Wotjobaluk Nations as the Traditional Owners. Acknowledging Traditional Owners is fundamental to creating respectful relationships. • Recognise Traditional Owners right to care for and speak for their Country. This includes the right to be actively consulted when projects or developments are proposed on Country. Such consultation often has mutually beneficial commercial outcomes.
Free, Prior and Informed Consent	• engagement with the people of the Wotjobaluk Nations representatives (BLGC) is in good faith. This means obtaining free, prior and informed consent during decision-making processes. • Free, prior and informed consent can only exist where there has been sufficient time for the People of the Wotjobaluk Nations to consider their options with legally correct information.

Beneficial Engagement	• deliver tangible benefits to the People of the Wotjobaluk Nations. Delivering tangible benefits furthers the creation of respectful and long-lasting relationships and prevents tokenistic gestures.
Intellectual Property Rights	• The People of the Wotjobaluk Nations are the absolute owners of their intellectual property. Free, prior and informed consent must be obtained from the People of the Wotjobaluk nations before using or reproducing Wotjobaluk People's knowledge, songlines, cultural heritage or expressions. BGLC as the representative body will facilitate this process on behalf of, with and at the direction of the Wotjobaluk Nations and their Board Directors. Parties must provide redress for any unauthorised use.
Language and Culture Promotion	• support BGLC to promote the use, revitalisation and development of the Wotjobaluk People's languages and cultures. • use names for communities, places and persons in language where the Wotjobaluk Nations have them.
Confidentiality	• respect that some information about Wotjobaluk Country and Culture (including Cultural Heritage) is confidential. Wherever the Wotjobaluk Peoples share sensitive information, recipients must ensure that it remains confidential.

RES is committed to continuing open and collaborative discussions with BGLC in alignment with their preferences and cultural protocols and in determining how they would like areas of Cultural Heritage to be protected and managed and working towards a Walking Together Statement that recognises BGLC's members rights and responsibilities to protect their County.

3.4 Impacts and Opportunities

RES is committed to building strong local relationships with key stakeholders and communities as part of their early planning and understands the importance of ensuring local participation and community input, to achieve positive local and regional community benefits.

RES is committed to working with the community and key stakeholders to identify environmental and social impacts associated with their proposed projects. Community feedback will allow RES to explore strategies to mitigate negative impacts and enhance positive impacts. RES will work to ensure that through the SIA and associated community engagement process, that community issues are well understood and are addressed, where possible, in project design and planning.

RES recognises that the siting of the projects may result in community and landscape impacts (both positive and negative) and that impacts may be experienced differently across stakeholder groups. RES will explore strategies to mitigate negative impacts and enhance positive impacts.

For the Watta Wella Renewable Energy Project, RES is committed to working with the local community to explore benefit sharing options and target areas for contribution. This approach will be informed by communication collaboration and will focus on meeting local needs as aspirations.

Across the global portfolio, RES is committed to supporting community schemes that demonstrate lasting impact and legacy.

RES is committed to local employment and procurement, where possible, and would work to ensure this commitment is reflected in the policies of the nominated Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) contractor. A community supplier register has been established and advertised by RES.

Where possible, construction workers for the project would be accommodated in towns within close proximity of the site.

RES aims to work with local property owners to allow for the ongoing use of the land for grazing or other existing agricultural activities. In this way, RES is interested to explore and promote new partnerships and models for complementary solar and wind energy with food production and agriculture, working with local farmers to support the co-existence of land uses.

3.5 Engagement tools and activities

We will tailor engagement according to individual stakeholder groups' needs and preferences, the type of information being conveyed and the level of feedback required.

The engagement of stakeholders will include a combination of:

- **Involvement:** to facilitate stakeholder involvement in the identification of issues/impacts, areas of interest/concern and strategies to address the issues raised. Furthermore, to understand community sentiment and track this over time as a risk mitigation tool.
- **Informing:** to improve knowledge and awareness of RES, its activities, the Project, and key issues/impacts as they arise.

Various methods will be used to involve the different stakeholder groups based on the type of information being conveyed, level of feedback required, understanding of stakeholder needs regarding engagement, and identified stakeholder engagement preferences identified in **Error! Reference source not found.** below. This will include existing or previous mechanisms utilised by RES as well as additional mechanisms.

Table 4: Engagement Mechanisms

Collateral	Description and purpose
Letters	• Letter of introduction • Letters to impacted residents (immediate neighbours and surrounding community) • Invitations to community drop-in sessions, pop-ups and other meetings
Surveys	• Impact assessment and benefit sharing development • Supplier database and contractor pre-qualification
Project updates	• Project introduction and overview • Regular updates about project development and construction

Media releases	• Major project milestones • Holding statement/s based on key messages addressing relevant issue or concern
Emails	• Email database compiled during early community engagement and scoping phase (updated regularly) • Targeted project update emails • Upcoming impacts (construction) • E-newsletters and invitations to events
Website	• Platform for the wider community engagement may include: • Project documentation, as relevant to the development application • Project overview • Interactive map • News stories and videos of project in the community • Construction updates • Fact sheets • Community Consultative Committee information and minutes, if applicable • Opportunities (e.g., employment, community benefits, etc) • Contact us • Feedback and complaint form
Fact sheets	• Draft and publish series of fact sheets, potentially covering: • Wind energy • Wind farms and renewable energy • Wind farms and the electricity grid • Wind farm visual and noise impacts • Wind farm health and safety • Wind farm construction • FAQs
Advertisements / flyers	• Invitations to community information sessions • Promote project opportunities such as community benefits • Notify of upcoming construction impacts
Social media	• Project milestones and updates • Good news stories

	• Photos
Project briefings	• Formal project briefings to key stakeholders and government agencies, including branded project PowerPoint deck
Personal meetings / interviews*	• Introduce the project and team • Listen to individual concerns, interests, issues and gather preliminary feedback, scope potential impacts and opportunities – including sensitivities – to inform mitigation strategies, key messages and engagement approach and build understanding of engagement preferences
Community information and feedback sessions	• Drop in/pop-up sessions to provide information, engage with community, answer questions • Information booth/stall at local events (eg, field days, shows)
Community Consultative Committee (CCC)	• Facilitate dialogue between community, stakeholders and the project team • Listen to concerns, interests, issues and feedback, scope potential impacts and opportunities to inform mitigation strategies, key messages and engagement approach and build understanding • Participate in the planning and development of the project • Promote project opportunities such as community benefits • Regular updates about project development and construction
Site tours	• Organised stakeholder tours of the project site • Introduce the project and team • Celebrate project milestones

*Personal meetings may include small groups, noting that the focus of these meetings is to understand and scope local concerns, interests, issues, and priorities, rather than provide information on the project.

The table below outlines the mechanisms that are planned to be used to engage the key stakeholder groups.

Table 5: Engagement tools and mechanisms

Key Stakeholder Group	Tools and mechanisms						
	Letters	Project updates / fact sheets	Media release	Emails / website	Project briefing	One-on-one meetings	Community sessions
Local Government				O	O	O	
State Government				O	O	O	
Federal Government						O	
Traditional Owners	O	O		O	O	O	O

Host landholders	o	o		o		o	o
Neighbours (within 5km)	o	o	o	o		o	o
Community groups		o	o	o	o		o
Wider community				o	o	o	
Local businesses		o	o	o		o	o
Local media		o	o	o			

3.6 Enquiry and complaints management

We have established a dedicated project phone number - 1800 118 737, email **info.wattawella@wattawella-renewableenergy.com.au** and website **https://www.wattawella-renewableenergy.com.au** to manage enquiries, feedback and complaints.

All contact through these channels – including enquiries, feedback and complaints – will be recorded and managed through a centralised Borealis database. Borealis will function as a CRM and also house contact details for email and newsletter subscribers.

The Community Engagement team will be responsible for managing enquiries and complaints, and logging the following information in the project database:

- contact's name and details
- nature of the enquiry/complaint
- response provided, action required and resolution timeframes
- closure of enquires and complaints.

All interactions with stakeholders or the community will be recorded promptly and consistently.

Enquiry and complaint response timeframes are provided in the table below.

Table 6: Response timeframe

Type of complaint	Response timeframe
Urgent complaints during construction phase (ie, safety worker behaviour, noise, etc)	Within 24 hours
All other complaints	Within 2 business days
Enquiries and feedback	Within 2 business days

3.7 Record Keeping and Stakeholder Database Management

A dedicated stakeholder database has been established using a secure, cloud-based Community Relationships Management (CRM) platform. The stakeholder database is used to track stakeholders, engagement events, and relevant information gained throughout the pre-planning and planning assessment

development phase for the project. This database includes a detailed register of communications, whereby team members record the contact details of stakeholders, summaries of each consultation or contact with the stakeholder, and any actions that may arise from these meetings and has e a mechanism to allow information to be stored confidentially, in accordance with the *Privacy Act 1988*. This database will be updated and maintained through the development phase of the project to ensure consistent tracking and recording of all community or stakeholder engagement activities and outcomes, with potential use and application for later stages of the project (as required and where practicable).

Information to be recorded includes:

- Activity details (including stakeholder engaged, attendees, time and place, mechanism used)
- Discussion points
- Summary of key outcomes, including any actions
- Stakeholder contact details
- Preferences for future engagement.

Following completion of engagement for each phase of development (e.g., pre and post approval), outcomes and data obtained will be collated and analysed to identify key impact themes and impact prioritisation. Identified issues or impacts may also be mapped to identify any spatial patterns.

3.8 Issues, risks and mitigation strategies

The table below identifies potential project risks, mitigation strategies and appropriate engagement channels to respond to stakeholder concerns

Table 7: Risk management strategies

Risk	Mitigation	Tools / channels
Visual and audible amenity: Community members object to the audible and visual impacts of wind turbines	Early engagement with residents and community members to provide open and honest information on the operational and visual impact of wind turbines	Recommended: Project website, fact sheets, targeted emails, newsletters, information sessions, complaints and feedback channels Optional: Social media, site tours and briefings, Community Consultative Committee
Organised community activist campaign: An organised community campaign opposes the project	Provide extensive information on the benefits of the project. Develop collateral to counter false or misleading information. Ensure media responses are prepared in advance to counter potential issues	Recommended: Project website, newsletters, media releases, information sessions, fact sheets Optional: Community benefits program, sponsorship program, social media, Community Consultative Committee
Access to information: Community members do not have access to adequate and accurate information to stay informed on the project's progress, potential impacts on health, safety, and the local environment	Provide extensive, clear and easy-to-understand information across a range of readily accessible mediums	Recommended: Project website, social media, fact sheets, media releases, newsletters, targeted mail and emails, information sessions, sponsorships Optional: Social media, site tours and briefings, website, Community Consultative Committee
Approval process and timing: Delays with published timelines for the project	Ensure that project teams provide an accurate forecast on the planning and construction of	Recommended: Project website, fact sheets, media releases, newsletters, targeted mail and emails, complaints and feedback channels

	turbines and update affected parties if variations occur	Optional: Community Consultative Committee, social media
Impact of construction on the community: Construction noise, dust and traffic impacts, poor worker behaviour or influx of workers in the area	Provide proactive updates to the community on upcoming construction work, its potential impacts and duration. Provide avenues for complaints and feedback. Seek to continually improve processes and show community where we have responded to their concerns. Build positive culture within the project team to show respect to the community and build goodwill.	Recommended: Project website, newsletters, targeted email, construction notices, complaints and feedback channels, project inductions that reinforce positive behaviour and respect for the community Optional: Face to face visits, phone calls, social media, information sessions, site tours and briefings, Community Consultative Committee members from local neighbourhood.
External influences: Uncontrollable influences, such as health emergencies, natural disasters, government policies, etc, which may impact engagement with stakeholders and community	Ensure engagement can continue online if face-to-face engagement is not possible. All communications will direct audiences to the project website for more information	Recommended: Project website, newsletters, targeted mail and emails. Optional: Word of mouth via stakeholders and Community Consultative Committee members, traditional advertising, media release

4 Key messages

The following key messages will inform all project collateral development and will support the project team to provide consistent, up-to-date and accurate information to project stakeholders.

As the project progresses beyond the scoping phase we will develop additional messages to provide detailed information relevant to future stages of the project lifecycle.

All messaging will be updated in response to stakeholder feedback.

4.1 About the project

The Project consists of the development, construction and operation of a large-scale wind, solar and Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) facility across approximately 4,850 hectares of land in western Victoria (VIC), Australia. Sections of the Project are located adjacent to the Joel Joel Nature Conservation Reserve located to the south. Land within and adjacent to the project site is predominantly associated with agricultural practices, primarily used for dryland mixed farming of sheep, cattle grazing and cropping. The Project is in the vicinity of a number of other proposed or operating wind farm projects in the region

The project will indicatively consist of:

- Up to 45 wind turbines, approximately 255 meters in height (blade tip), with a total capacity of up to 360 megawatt (MW)
- An alternating current (AC) coupled Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) with up to 480 containerised battery units with an independent connection to the grid, across approximately 12 hectares.
- Underground and above ground electrical reticulation.
- Temporary construction site offices, concrete batching plant, construction vehicle parking areas, and material laydown areas for the construction phase.
- An onsite switchyard for connection into the existing transmission lines that traverse the site, and a 220 kilovolt (kV) substation, operation and maintenance facility, storage facilities, and vehicle parking areas.
- Access tracks for construction and maintenance of the turbines will be constructed to link all turbines to access points throughout the project site.

The final configuration of the Project will be subject to the planning and environmental approval processes. The site will primarily be accessed from Landsborough Road. Preliminary transport route assessments have identified potential site access routes from the east of the project area, travelling along Joel Joel Road and Landsborough Road. This route has been suggested as it follows similar routes used for construction of the nearby Bulgana and Crowlands wind farms. Various road upgrades may need to take place for project construction to take place and these are being investigated concurrently.

The road upgrade requirements will also be informed by ongoing engagement with the local (Northern Grampians Shire Council) and state road authorities (Department of Transport and Main Roads), as informed by the updated and final designs for the Project.

4.2 About RES

RES entered the Australian market in 2004 and now employs over 180 people and has offices in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and multiple regional locations. RES is engaged in all technologies: wind, solar and storage and offers development, construction and asset management services across Australia.

RES manages a portfolio of 2.5GW of renewable assets in Australia. This includes some of the largest wind farms in the southern hemisphere: Murra Warra Wind Farm and Dulacca Wind Farm, as well as Emerald Solar Park; one of the first solar farms commissioned in Australia.

With an industry-wide reputation for identifying innovative solutions to problems that reduce risk, cost and allow projects to progress, RES' exceptional was recently acknowledged with the Clean Energy Council's innovation Award 2022 and Diversity & Inclusion Award 2023, as well as the Asset Management Award 2022 at the Wind Investment Awards.

RES is the world's largest independent renewable energy company and is active in onshore and offshore wind, solar, energy storage, green hydrogen, transmission and distribution. As an industry innovator for over 40 years, RES has delivered more than 27GW of renewable energy projects across the globe and supports an operational asset portfolio exceeding 41GW worldwide for a large client base.

4.3 Site selection process

The key factors contributing to the suitability of the project site to accommodate the proposed renewable energy facility include:

- Close proximity to the Bulgana Substation, which is being upgraded as part of the Western Renewables Link (WRL) transmission project.
- Excellent transport access with minimal impact to local roads and easy access to major roads.
- Gently undulating terrain which reduces the need for extensive civil ground preparations.
- Generous distance buffering (1.5km+) of wind turbines to the nearest non-involved dwellings.
- The Project site has historically been heavily cleared for agricultural purposes, making it easier to reduce environmental impacts and avoid unnecessary impacts.
- Complementary use of land with minimal impact on existing farming practices.
- Significant wind resource, evident by the number of nearby operational wind farms.

4.4 Approval's process

- RES is currently undertaking ongoing assessment of the Project in support of the Federal and State referrals that will be submitted in mid-2025. Ahead of this process RES undertook preliminary environmental and heritage assessments to understand both the potential impacts and opportunities the Project would presents to local communities and the environment.
- RES is seeking feedback on the Project from key stakeholders and local community members through the commencement of active engagement, including community information events. The information

gained from the community information events, along with impacts identified through more targeted community and stakeholder consultation, will feed into the planning and environmental application process for the Project.

- A Ministerial planning permit application/s or Planning Scheme Amendment for the Project will be lodged with the Victorian Minister for Planning and will be assessed against the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*. Through this process DTP will coordinate engagement with statutory stakeholders to inform the outcome of the application process, and to inform any conditions of approval (if granted).
- Should the Project requires an EES under the *Environment Effects Act 1978*, the public will have the opportunity to view the EES referral decision notice and Scoping Requirements issued by D, and once completed the EES will go on public exhibition for comment for a period of 20 to 30 business days.
- Under the requirements of the EPBC Act, the public will have opportunity to comment on the EPBC referral application lodged by RES for the Project. Pending the outcome of the referral process, RES may be required to secure environmental approval under the EPBC Act. Where the Project is determined to be a 'controlled action' it can be anticipated that a public submission process will apply to the approval process.
- Comprehensive assessments have been, and will continue to be, completed to identify the potential impacts of the Project. RES will continue to seek specialist environmental advice and take learnings from the industry on the best processes through which potential impacts from the Project can be avoided, remedied, or mitigated.
- The post-approval detailed design of the Project will be informed by these studies and the conditions of any environment and planning approval granted in respect of the Project (including any required additional assessment), to ensure that the potential impacts that may arise from the construction and operation of the Project are mitigated as far as reasonably and feasibly possible.
- Community engagement commenced in 2021, followed by seven community drop-in sessions held in Stawell in May 2022, October 2022 at Joel Joel Hall in June 2023 and in Stawell in February 2025. Ongoing consultation with the community is expected following planning approval. Community members have also received regular project updates and newsletters via email or post. The Project Team have held meetings and site visits with landholders and neighbours. The Project website is kept up to date with Project information and news. Community members can also sign up to receive updates via the website or contact the team via the dedicated hotline and email.

4.5 Project Benefits

The Project will provide a number of environmental and social benefits.

Environmental benefits:

- Minimal impact on the productivity of traditional farming practices, with ongoing agricultural use (to the extent practicable) anticipated within the wind farm and solar farm development areas.
- Site selection that has minimised the potential for environmental impacts associated with clearing, is located within low residential density, and reduced potential for impacts on local amenity.
- Land within the project site can be rehabilitated to its original condition and use at the end of the Project's operational life once all above ground infrastructure is removed.

- Wind farms have a smaller environmental footprint than comparative traditional forms of energy generation such as coal and gas.
- Additional fire breaks and improved access roads for firefighting.
- The Project will generate renewable energy to power up to 200,000 Victorian homes and offset up to 1 million tonnes of C02.
- Contribution to reaching the Victorian and Commonwealth legislated renewable energy generation targets.

Community benefits:

- RES is committed to developing a community benefit scheme once the Project is operational. This will provide ongoing funding to support local projects, community groups and organisations over the Project's lifetime. Finalisation of the structure of the benefit scheme remains subject to RES' ongoing engagement with the community.
- The Project will generate approximately 200 direct jobs during construction as well as indirect supply chain jobs. A number of full-time staff will be employed during the operation and maintenance phase of the Project (approximately 30 years) and medium-term contract jobs during any major maintenance activities. The peak construction and operational jobs will be subject to the final size and configuration of the Project, but an operations and maintenance team of approximately 20 staff is anticipated.
- Employment benefits from the Project will extend through local supply chains to fuel supply, vehicles servicing, plant and equipment hire, uniform suppliers, hotels/motels, cafes, restaurants, tradespeople and many other local businesses.
- Once operational, the project will provide annual income to host landholder and neighbour benefits to project neighbours. This additional income allows farmers diversify income streams to offset environmental impacts such as drought or flood.

4.6 Discussion topics for engagement throughout the phases

RES will address the following components of their stakeholder engagement program through the appropriate project planning and development phases:

- Consult with potentially affected stakeholders to identify the constraints and opportunities of the project area. Consultation could involve engagement on the values the wider community place on those attributes and should inform the siting and design process.
- Engage with the community in the identification of landscape values, as required by the Wind Energy: Visual Assessment Bulletin.
- Engage with landholders about the proposed project area, likely corridors for development, or preliminary turbine layouts, access routes and potential location of ancillary infrastructure (consider "associated properties" and "non-associated properties"). Listen to the community's concerns and suggestions. Discuss noise, visual impact, proposed siting and alternatives.
- Discuss issues for landholder agreement if project is approved including siting and micro-siting, access, compensation, responsibility for decommissioning and rehabilitation.
- Explore the suitability of establishing a Community Consultative Committee (CCC).

- Further collaborate with the community regarding solutions and management options for any key issues raised.
- Seek to reach an agreed position with relevant landholders.
- Consider opportunities for benefit sharing.

4.6.1 Referral Phase

The EES referral document requires proponents to outline consultation conducted to date on the Project (including activities and stakeholders) and any proposed future plans.

Pre-referral engagement is required to gauge and understand stakeholder issues/concerns/interests in relation to the Project; to identify possible strategies/solutions to address topics raised; and to then use this information gathered to proactively inform project design and planning for the EES referral.

In this regard, likely social impacts will be appropriately scoped and identified through consultation with potentially affected stakeholders and mitigation and enhancement options explored.

Proposed engagement activities to be undertaken in this phase need to be targeted at identifying perceived issues of concern and/or positive impacts in relation to the proposed projects, to be further considered in the iterative design of the Project.

Questions to include in the interview discussion guides, either via story boards and questionnaires at community events and/or community interviews, that are appropriate to this phase, will include topics relating to:

- Awareness and attitudes towards renewable energy and other industry development in the local or regional area
- Awareness and public perceptions of PES
- Potential issues, concerns or interests related to the Project
- Community values, identity, local needs, and aspirations
- Areas of value and use within and near the Project
- Sense of community in the area
- Potential sensitive receivers and/or vulnerable community groups
- Preferred engagement mechanisms, frequency, and content.

The information gathered in the referral phase will be used to inform subsequent project updates, assessment scope and engagement activities, by focusing on key social and environmental issues/impacts of importance to key stakeholder groups; and identifying project design refinements that may seek to avoid or minimise negative impacts and/or enhance positive impacts. This is an important step in the project development process and records of changes made will be retained for future reference.

4.6.2 Planning Approval Phase

Proposed engagement activities undertaken during Round 2 will be focused on responding to questions, concerns or issues that arose during the referral phase with environmental issues resolved and project refinements to be integrated where possible. Further, this round of engagement is an opportunity to further explore and validate the social issues, interests, and impacts that were identified during the referral phase. The planning program and preliminary insights or findings gathered through the various technical studies will also be further communicated during this phase, to assist in gathering feedback from key stakeholders and the wider community, on predicted project impacts (positive and negative).

Engagement in this phase, to inform the planning approval documentation (and potential EES), will focus on:

- Assessment of perceived issues, impacts and opportunities associated with the Project
- Existing capacity of local service provision and projected future demand
- Responding to, addressing, and integrating environmental and Project design matters raised during the scoping phase
- Potential strategies to address and respond to issues, impacts and opportunities
- Enhancement measures to improve collaboration between RES and community or stakeholders, including potential community investment and benefit-sharing opportunities.

5 Implementation Plan

RES will consult and engage with the local community and other stakeholders throughout the Project lifecycle, as outlined in the table below.

Table 8: Scoping and Development Phase Engagement

Timing	Objectives	Planned activities
Phase 1 – Referral phase		
(2021 - 2022)	• Identify and assess potential project sites • Finalise site selection and project feasibility • Identify and categorise stakeholders • Identify Landholders within 5-10km buffer, dependent on visual impact assessment • Make initial contact to introduce the project • Early engagement and relationship building with Traditional Owners	• Send introductory letters • Gather phone numbers, addresses and emails • Establish project CRM • Phone calls • face-to-face meetings • site visits • site surveys • Cultural Awareness Training
	• Conduct technical assessments • Draft Community Engagement Strategy • Identify opportunities for early feedback to inform technical studies: face-to-face and in situ engagement, and extent of stakeholder engagement (MPs, Aboriginal land councils, surveys, etc.)	• Establish project website, 1800 number, email address • One-on-one meetings and negotiations with affected Landholders and neighbours

	• Community engagement to introduce project • Establish relationships with identified stakeholders with strong interest and influence on project • Revise CSEP following community sessions • Build an understanding of local needs, aspirations and engagement preferences of key stakeholders • Finalise landholder agreements • Identify key stakeholders with an interest and influence on the project • Provide channels for stakeholders to contribute feedback • Provide project updates via established communication channels • Provide opportunities for engagement with project • Provide opportunities for stakeholders and community to raise concerns and provide feedback • Inform community on what aspects of the project can be influenced by the community • Build positive sentiment across local media, and with local community • Identify opportunities to build social licence • Co-design local benefit sharing opportunities with local community, neighbours, Traditional Owners	• Meeting with planning authority • Direct mail to community • Local newspaper advertising/Media release • One-on-one meetings and negotiations with Landholders • Host community information sessions – 3 sessions, May & October 2022 • Short term sponsorships • Promote information sessions and sponsorship opportunities on Council event pages • Fact sheets on issues of importance to community • Project updates newsletter/s • Online survey with questions on social values and visual aspects, landscape features, scenic quality and views to provide input for SIA, visual assessment and EES • Develop Community Benefits framework in collaboration with community • Website updates

August 2022	• Draft consultation outcomes and update CSEP as part of EES/EPBC	• Report to be prepared
August 2022	• Submit EES/EPBC	• Submit EES/EPBC
Phase 3 – Pre-Development Application		
2023 - 2025	• Update community on outcome of EES/EPBC • Provide ongoing communications and engagement • Proactively seek views and feedback of the community to inform the final design • Inform community on what aspects of the project can be influenced by the community • Provide channels for stakeholders to contribute feedback • Provide project updates via established communication channels • Provide opportunities for engagement with project • Provide opportunities for stakeholders and community to raise concerns and provide feedback • Inform community on what aspects of the project can be influenced by the community • Build positive sentiment across local media, and with local community • Co-design local benefit sharing opportunities with local community, neighbours and Traditional Owners • Maintain relationships with landholders and Traditional Owners	• Community newsletter • Community information sessions with plans for technical studies as per EES/EPBC outcomes – 4 sessions June 2023 & February 2025 • Short term sponsorships • Promote information sessions and sponsorship opportunities on Council event pages • Advertising/Media release • Demonstrate changes to project based on community feedback/technical studies • Community surveys seeking feedback on updates/changes to project • Update Project fact sheets • Website updates • Face-to-face visits • Phone calls or emails • Stakeholder meetings and/or briefings • Site visits/Cultural Induction/ Training

	• Brief local government staff before DA is finalised	
Planning Application – March/April 2025 **Public notification period**	• Update consultation outcomes and update CSEP as part of planning application • Submit planning application & Environment Report • Provide opportunity for community members to make submissions • Provide ongoing communications and engagement	• Submit planning application & Environment Report • Notification as per DTP instructions • Community newsletter or advertising • Website • Mailouts • Emails • Written responses
Post public notification (Date TBC)	• Draft engagement material to inform the community of key feedback and next steps • Continue to work with community neighbours and Traditional Owners to develop benefit schemes • Work with local businesses to set up a supplier register and build capability	• Community newsletter • Website updates • Phone call or emails to landowners • Surveys • Online and face to face meetings • Local supplier meetings/workshops
Project Determination		

Following Project Determination, RES will update the Plan to reflect project construction and operation phases.

Engagement in these phases provides an opportunity for RES to build trust and social licence with the community and stakeholders by understanding and responding to stakeholder issues/concerns/interests in relation to the project.

6 Consultation Summary & Outcomes

6.1 Summary of Stakeholders contacted

The table below provides a summary of some interactions the Project Team have had with key stakeholders and high level outcomes. Not all interactions have been captured in the CRM due to staff uptake of reporting requirements and number of calls/emails for some stakeholders. In person engagement was limited during 2020 – 2022 due to COVID-19 restrictions in Victoria.

Table 9: Summary of engagement & outcomes

Stakeholder Group	Mechanisms Used	Number Engaged	Outcomes
Host Landholders	**341 Interactions** 22 meetings 17 attended information sessions 55 emails 243 phone calls	16 reduced to 12	• Host Agreements. • Regular engagement phone calls and email updates. • Invitations to community information sessions, events and other meetings.
Proximal Landholders	**992 Interactions** 11 meetings[1] 32 attended Information Sessions 63 phone calls 255 emails 620 letters *website, factsheets, 1800 number, dedicated email address, FAQ's	138 neighbours contacted 81 properties informed 12 survey responses 12 registered for Neighbour Shared Benefit Scheme	• Letters/Emails and newsletters to residents (immediate neighbours and surrounding community). • Invitations to community information sessions, events and other meetings. • Community surveys to gather feedback on key concerns, benefit sharing, community values. • Visual impact assessments and photo montages to close neighbours. • Information and invitation to register for the Neighbour Shared Benefit Scheme. • Information and invitation to register for Community Consultative Committee. • Website, factsheets, 1800 number, dedicated email address, FAQ's.
Broader Community	**204 Interactions** 15 attended Information Sessions 5 phone calls	153 attendees	• Letters/Emails and newsletters to residents (immediate neighbours and surrounding community). • Invitations to community information sessions and events.

[1] In person meetings were restricted between 2021/22 due to COVID-19.

	111 emails 72 letters *website, factsheets, 1800 number, dedicated email address, FAQ's		• Community surveys to gather feedback on key concerns, benefit sharing, community values. • Sponsorships ($126,000 across 14 initiatves) and volunteering. • Information and invitation to register for Community Consultative Committee. • Website, factsheets, 1800 number, dedicated email address, FAQ's.
Local Government	**65 Interactions** 8 meetings 3 Councillor Briefings 50 emails 2 phone calls	28 Stakeholders	• Ongoing engagement with Northern Grampians Shire Council. • 3 x Councillor Briefings. • Meetings with Council consultant to explore support for local businesses through procurement. • Community information sessions, events and sponsorships advertised via Council website.
First Nation Rightsholders	**73 Interactions** 7 meetings 2 sponsorships 7 phone calls 57 emails	11 stakeholders	• Cultural Heritage Management Plan drafted and ongoing discussions. • Cultural Heritage Surveys and site visit with Elders. • Cultural Induction for Project Team. • Draft benefit sharing agreement/Walking Together Statement. • Draft Cultural Protocols guidelines • Sponsorships.
Community and environmental groups	**114 Interactions** 5 meetings 8 sponsorships 1 volunteering group 106 emails	86 stakeholders 14 survey responses	• Letters/Emails and newsletters. • Invitations to community information sessions and sponsorship of events. • Community surveys to gather feedback on key concerns, benefit sharing, community values. • Sponsorships ($126,000 across 14 initiatives) and volunteering. • Information and invitation to register for Community Consultative Committee. • Website, factsheets, 1800 number, dedicated email address, FAQ's.
Local businesses	**58 interactions** 44 emails	28 Stakeholders	• Support for local businesses through project spending on accommodation, catering, cafes, restaurants. • Letters/Emails and newsletters.

	12 attended community info sessions 1 phone call		• Invitations to community information sessions and sponsorship of events. • Community surveys to gather feedback on key concerns, benefit sharing, community values. • Meetings with Council consultant to explore support for local businesses through procurement. • Supplier survey and register. • Website, factsheets, 1800 number, dedicated email address, FAQ's.
Local Media	2 Media releases 4 Advertisements	3 publications 2 newspapers	• Media releases re sponsorships and volunteering opportunities • Advertising for community information sessions • Website, factsheets, 1800 number, dedicated email address, FAQ's.
Emergency Services	9 emails 5 phone calls 6 info session conversations		• Bushfire Management Plan • Engagement with CFA volunteers • Police notification of information sessions
Proximal Projects	Meetings and workshops		• Involvement in workshops with other local projects to share project information, engagement activities and challenges • Involvement in the Wimmera Southern Mallee Regional Energy Collaboration Group Workshops

Table 10: Summary of consultation events

Date	Event	Summary
December 2019	Council Meeting	Meeting with planning team - RES/Project introduction, map, timeline, planning
April 2020	Council Meeting	Meeting with planning team – Project update and timeline
August 2021	Community Newsletter	Unaddressed mailout to entire region – RES/Project introduction, map, timeline
April 2022	Council Meeting	Meeting with planning team – Project update, timeline, community engagement, planning
May 2022	Community Newsletter	Unaddressed mailout to entire region – RES/Project introduction, map, timeline, invite to community information sessions

May 2022	Community Information Sessions	50 attendees over two days – Project introduction, indicative layout, feedback and survey
May 2022	Council Meetings	Meeting with Renewable Energy Team and Consultant to discuss project and procurement opportunities
July 2022	Project update and Survey	Sent to all stakeholders in CRM – Project update and survey on community feedback and values
October 2022	Stawell Show Sponsorship and Information session	50 attendees – Project update, updated layout, results of initial assessments, feedback and survey
December 2022	Project Update	Sent to all stakeholders in CRM – EES Referral outcome, next steps
Feb 2023	Council Briefing	Council staff and Councillors – 9 attendees, Councillor introduction, Project update, EES Referral outcome, next steps
Feb 2023	Council Meeting	Project update meeting with Planning team
March 2023	Project Update and Survey	Sent to all stakeholders in CRM
June 2023	Project Update Letter/Email	Sent to all stakeholders in CRM – update on layout changes, invite to Community Information Sessions
July 2023	Community Information Sessions	30 attendees – Project update, results of initial assessments.
July 2023	Council Meeting	Meeting with Renewable Energy Team, Council's Renewable Energy Transition Plan
August 2023	Project update and Cultural Induction	Meeting with BGLC followed by visit to Dalki Garringa Native Nursery – Cultural Induction for Project Team
August 2023	Volunteering with Concongella Landcare	12 RES Staff spent the day planting trees with Concongella Landcare volunteers
October 2023	Stawell Show sponsorship	2 staff attended – sponsorship of Woodchopping Championship
November 2023	Site Visit with BGLC and Elders	Site visit with BGLC and Elders, visit to cultural sites and Wimmera River
January 2024	Project Update Letter/Email	Sent to all stakeholders in CRM – project update, planning application progress
February 2024	Council Meeting	Meeting with Council community funding team and other funding bodies to discuss opportunities to work together for greater impact
September 2024	Council /Councillor Briefing	Council staff and Councillors – 11 attendees - Project update, summary of project changes, community engagement to date, planning application progress
September 2024	Project update and Survey	Sent to all stakeholders in CRM - Project update and summary of project changes
October 2024	Stawell Show Sponsorship	2 staff attended – sponsorship of Woodchopping Championship and petting zoo

November 2024	Navarre Football Club Grand Final & Sponsors lunch	2 staff attended lunch and grand final
February 2025	Project update Letter/Email	Sent to all stakeholders in CRM - Project update invite to information sessions
February 2025	Community Information Sessions	23 attendees – Project update, summary of consultation and project layout changes, neighbour SBS and community benefits, results of impact assessments – noise, visual, transport
March 2025	Information Session summary update	Sent to all stakeholders in CRM – Summary of information sessions, link to posters

6.2 Project changes from stakeholder feedback

The following table provides some examples of changes that have been made to the Project layout and infrastructure following feedback from key stakeholders.

Table 11: Summary of project changes

Stakeholder Feedback	Project Change/Response
Landholder feedback	Reduced number of turbines from 47 - 45 to minimise impacts on community and ecology
Discussions and feedback from neighbours concerned by shadow flicker and noise	Relocation of turbines to minimise potential for shadow flicker and noise on neighbouring properties
Neighbours concerned about environmental impact of wind farm	Significant reduction in overall disturbance footprint of the Project, including impacts on sensitive flora and fauna
Neighbours along Vineyard Road concerned for wildlife and impact to neighbours on Vineyard Road	Removal of access tracks along Vineyard Road to avoid the use of this road entirely.
Concern from neighbours and landholders about potential noise impact of BESS	Relocation of BESS closer to Bulgana Terminal Station to reduce noise and visual impacts on neighbouring properties
Neighbours along Vineyard Road concerned about dust and noise from batch plant	Relocation of western concrete batch plant away from Vineyard Road
Neighbour concerned about proximity of turbines to areas of importance on their land (Shearing sheds, mustering points, vegetated areas with lots of birds)	Turbines have been relocated as far away as practical from these areas of concern.
Community opposition to solar farm	Removal of solar farm
Neighbour concerned about proximity of turbines to bushland areas and impact on bird species	300m turbine free buffer applied to significant bushland areas like Watta Wella Bushland Reserve and Joel Joel Nature Conservation Reserve

Landowner specific exclusion zones	Avoidance of particular areas within the project boundary due to landowner farming requirement or preference for avoidance areas
Landowner wanting reduced number of turbines due to impact on land	Removal of turbine off landowners property due to concerns around impact on agriculture

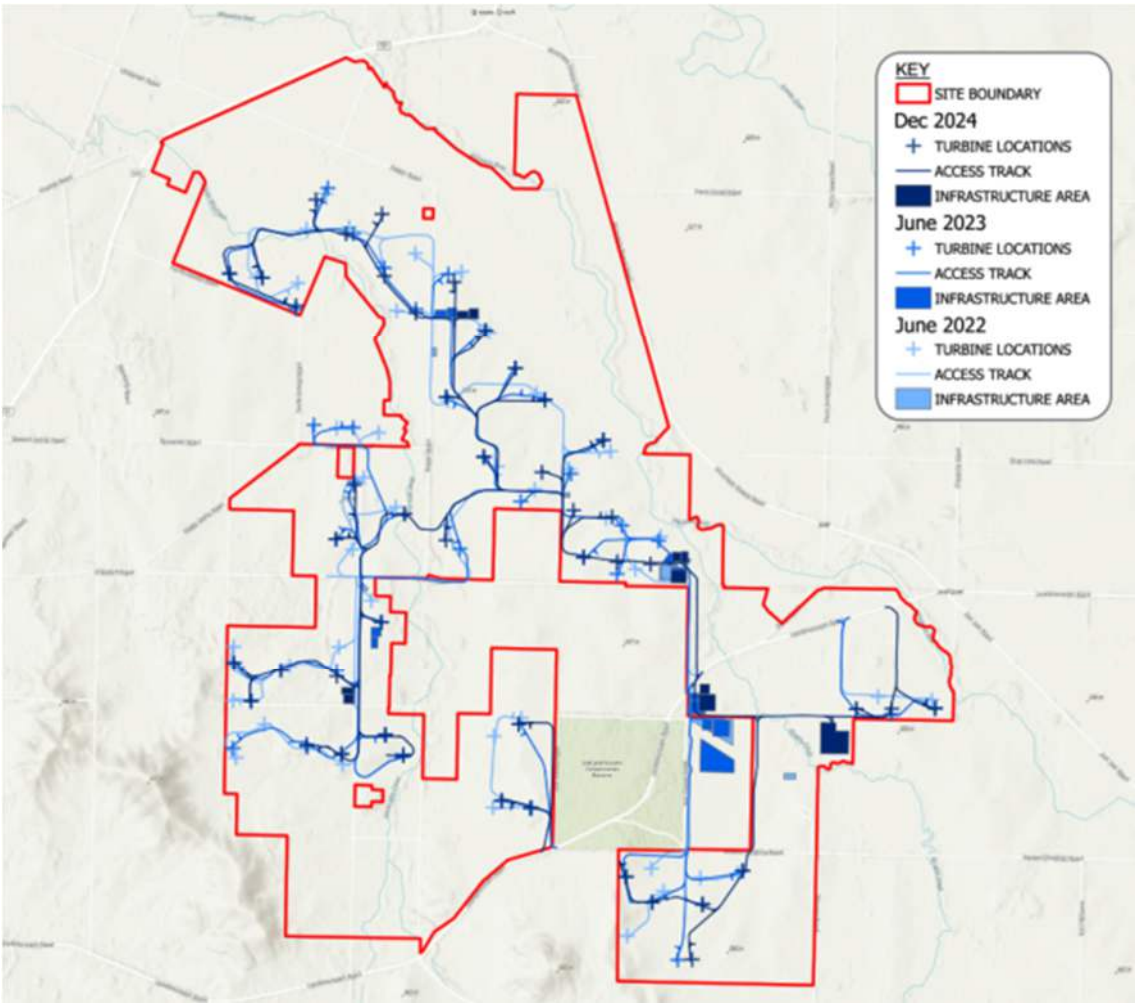

Figure 4: Project layout changes map

Appendix 1

Community Information Session Feedback

Info Session 1 & 2 - 27 & 28 May 2022

Venue: Shop 108, Stawell

Attendance: 50 attendees

Two informal drop-in sessions were held on 27 and 28 May to provide feedback regarding the preliminary technical assessments of the Project, as well as the proposed mitigation and enhancement measures under consideration to minimise negative and enhance positive impacts of the Project.

Fifty community members attended the sessions over the two days. Feedback received was varied, with some community members providing positive comments. There were some concerns, particularly from project neighbours, around visual impacts, noise, construction impacts, fire risk and land use. The Project Manager will follow up with these neighbours to provide photomontages and increased communication.

There were also enquires regarding community and neighbour benefit programs as well as employment and procurement opportunities. These opportunities will be investigated further through community surveys and work with particular interest groups.

Feedback from the sessions has been recorded in the Project CRM and has been used to inform the Social Impact Assessment and social licence strategies, as well as to understand the range of community views, concerns, interests and feedback provided on the Project to date.

Info Session 3 - 21 October 2022

Venue: Stawell Show - RES sponsored the 2022 Stawell Show and hosted an information booth at the show.

Attendance: 50 attendees

summary of concerns/queries:

Impact - 3 x visual, 1 x noise, 2 x Flora and Fauna, 1 x contractor behaviour 2 x construction impact

Benefits - 3 x Benefit Sharing/sponsorship, 2 x procurement, 1 x employment, 1 x energy prices

Neighbour 1 - concerns re visual impact and noise impact. Also concerned about the visual impact of transmission lines and lifespan of the project. Mentioned neighbouring projects. Action to send noise contour map.

Neighbour 2 - feedback re visual assessment, query re using a light aircraft for photos. Project team to follow up with consultant. Query why RES don't employ a local person for community engagement work.

Neighbour 3 - suggested support for local environment/landcare groups.

Neighbour 4 - supportive of the project

Neighbour 5 - supportive of the project

Community member 1 - concerns re Solar Farm and impact on Wimmera River and weather patterns.

Community member 2 - interest in PPA to reduce energy bills for local mine. Team to follow up.

Community member 3 - interested in supplying engineering, repair and fabrication for the project. Team to send Supplier Survey.

Community member 4 - Interested in employment opportunities.

Community member 5 - interested in Benefit Sharing. Team to send survey and energy prices.

Community member 6 - interested in Benefit Sharing (filled out survey). Team to follow up.

Community Member 7 - sponsorship enquiry. Team to follow up.

Councillor - suggested setting up a briefing with Councillors. Team to follow up.

Info Session 4 – 14 July 2023

Venue: Joel Joel Public Hall

Attendance: 20 attendees

summary of concerns/queries:

Impact: 7 x transmission, 4 x visual, 4 x noise, 1 x devaluation, 1 x land use, 1 x cumulative, 1 x flora & fauna, 1 x traffic, 2 x construction, 1 x water quality, 4 x fire risk

Benefits: 2 x benefit sharing, 4 x employment, 2 x procurement

Neighbour 1 - decommissioning queries, site layout, turbine size, noise, health risks, powerlines increasing frequencies, visual impact, water quality (dust?), prefer solar

Neighbour 2 - project neighbour, supportive of project and industry

Neighbour 3 - non-supportive project neighbour, part of anti-transmission group, concern re visual, fire, noise, health impacts, can hear Bulgana - wants turbines moved.

Neighbour 4 - visual, noise, construction, traffic impact & management, send traffic assessment info, queried visual impact assessment - concerned photos are adjusted to make impact look less, can hear Bulgana, worried about wedge tailed eagles, size of turbines, life of wind farms, property devaluation, turbines should be 10km away

Community member 1 - supplier - local equipment hire, earth-moving, thermal resistant sand for solar farm

Community member 2 - supplier - Grampians Excavations

Community member 3 - lives further north in Wallallo East - part of anti-transmission group - VNI West - particular concerns are fire, decommissioning, transmission lines

Community member 4 - lives further north in Rupanyup, concerned about closer projects (Campbells Bridge), asked about planning process, general project info

Community Member 5 - concerns around transmission lines particularly and fire risk, shared positive experience with Bulgana Wind Farm and fighting fires around that project

Landholder 1: biodiversity offset area, impact to airstrip, interruptions to radio/tv

Landholder 2 - timing and the grid issues

Landholder 3 - lack of communication re transmission has caused mistrust in the community

Info Session 5 – 15 July 2023

Venue: Joel Joel Public Hall

Attendance: 10 attendees

summary of concerns/queries:

Impact: Visual x 5, Noise x 1, Access x 1, property devaluation x 2, Land use x 2, cumulative x 1, Flora & Fauna x 2, Fire risk x 4, Accommodation x 1 Energy prices x 1

Benefit: Benefit sharing x 4

Neighbour 1- close to BESS/Substation location - concerned about visual, noise, wants compensation or RES to buy property.

Neighbour 2 - wants turbines moved, concerns around impact to wildlife, traffic, construction.

Neighbour 3 - unsupportive - ~~visual impact, land use, property devaluation.~~

Neighbour 4 - unsupportive - visual impact, land use, property devaluation, landfall tax?, thinks nuclear would be better, think landholders are bribed with large payments, neighbours receive little benefit - benefit schemes not enough.

Neighbour 5 – supportive, discussed volunteering opportunities, can hear Bulgana turbines at certain times.

Neighbour 6 – supportive, project layout, mentioned the positive experience fighting fires around BWF. Query re fire management of BESS and plans to reduce the risk. Agrees that the technology is getting better. There is a need for good water storage for firefighting close to the BESS. BWF water storage too far away.

Community Member 1 - lives further north (Campbells Bridge area), part of anti-transmission group, decommissioning bond, land use (doesn't believe landholders can still farm around turbines, spray crops etc), recycling, concerns around environmental impact - particularly with the amount of concrete required for turbines, fire risk, thinks nuclear would be better.

Council Rep 1 - concerns around accommodation (shared story of Thomas Meats building units for staff), interested in PPA's, fire risk/management, decommissioning (173 agreement), neighbour benefits - energy poverty and support on energy bills as a possible benefit sharing option, 1km buffer.

Info Session 6 – 14 February 2025

Venue: North Park Function Centre

Attendance: 11 attendees

summary of concerns/queries:

Impact: Visual x 1, noise x 3, Access x 3, property devaluation x 3, land use x 1, transport/traffic x 4, infrasound x 1, flora and fauna x 2, contractor behaviour/construction x 2, water access/use x 1, cohesion x 1, decision

making x 1, Fire risk x 5, dust x 2, insurance x 4, transmission x 4, 1 x nuclear.
Benefit: benefit sharing x 5

Neighbour 1 - more concerned about transmission lines than wind farm particularly in regard to fire risk and insurance. Neighbour SBS

Neighbour 2 - concern about construction impact, property devaluation, said he felt reassured about his concerns after receiving further information. Neighbour SBS

Neighbour 3 - concern about construction impact, property devaluation. Neighbour SBS

Neighbour 4 - neighbour benefit payments. Fire risk, stress to animals, blades falling off WTG's causing injury, health impacts, wildlife impact.
Neighbour 5 – wants closest turbines moved, concerned about fire, impact to wildlife, construction impact, stress and anxiety.

Neighbour 6 - Traffic, ecology, Transport, transmission lines, local supplier - interested in providing screening .

Community member 1 – queried pro's and cons of nuclear energy – provided with facsheeet.

Info Session 7 – 15 February 2025

Venue: North Park Function Centre

Attendance: 12 attendees

summary of concerns/queries:

Impact: 2 x visual, 1 x noise, 1 x flora and fauna, 1 x engagement process, 1 x fire risk, 1 x accommodation

Benefit: benefit sharing x 7, employment x 1

Neighbour 1 - Visual impact, neighbour benefit scheme. "I don't have a problem with renewables, but it will be visible from my property". Spoke about offgrid solar system.
Neighbour 2 - Supportive of the Project - keen on neighbour SBS, and employment - not concerned about visual or noise impact. Keen on any opportunity to upgrade local roads. mentioned accommodation shortages and Thomas meats approach.
Neighbour 3 – want closest turbine moved. Explained that it had been moved as far as possible under current constraint issues.
Neighbour 4 - Neighbour SBS. concerned about fire risk.
Neighbour 5 – Positive feedback about Neighbour SBS "isn't this wonderful"
Community member 1 - interested in community engagement process, any aggression or incidents.

Community Member 2 – "wider community is not that concerned about wind farms".

Appendix C

Neighbour Shared Benefit Scheme

umwelt

Community Benefits

WATTA WELLA RENEWABLE ENERGY PROJECT

power for good

NEIGHBOUR SHARED BENEFIT SCHEME

Neighbour Shared Benefit Schemes (SBS) are one of the ways that RES ensures long-term local benefits are delivered from the renewable energy transition to regional communities.

A Neighbour SBS provides a framework for making direct annual payments to neighbours of a RES renewable energy project. Owners of qualifying properties may be eligible to receive annual benefit payment throughout its operating life.

The Neighbour SBS will be indexed annually for CPI with eligibility transfer to any future property owners in the event of a change of ownership.

While dependent on the final layout, RES estimate around 70 neighbouring properties will be eligible for a payment under the Neighbour SBS. The neighbours who live closest to the final locations of wind turbines will be eligible to receive the greatest financial benefit, if they choose to opt into the scheme.

Further details of the neighbour SBS, including detailed eligibility criteria and instructions on how to opt in will be made available prior to the scheme's commencement.

Neighbour SBS Property Category

$3000 Construction Impact (one off payment)	$5000 Construction Impact (one off payment)	$5000 Construction Impact (one off payment)	$5000 Construction Impact (one off payment)	$5000 Construction Impact (one off payment)
$4000 per property per annum	**$5000** per property per annum	**$4000** per property per annum	**$2000** per property per annum	**$1000** per property per annum
Eligible Property located within 1km (measured in a straight line) of a wind turbine on the Project Land comprising the Project	Eligible Property with one or more Dwellings within 2km (measured in a straight line) of a wind turbine on the Project land comprising the Project	Eligible Property with one or more Dwellings within 2-3km (measured in a straight line) of a wind turbine on the Project land comprising the Project	Eligible Property with one or more Dwellings within 3km- 4km (measured in a straight line) of a wind turbine on the Project Land comprising the Project	Eligible Property with one or more Dwellings within 4km- 5km (measured in a straight line) of a wind turbine on the Project Land comprising the Project

In addition to the annual payments, neighbours within 5km of final turbine locations will also be eligible for a one-off construction impact payment.

If you think your property may be eligible to participate, or would like to learn more about the Watta Wella Neighbour SBS visit https://www.neighboursharedbenefits.com/, scan the QR code or contact Bernadette Holland on 0420 475 046.

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