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APPENDIX D ECOLOGY REPORT

Vegetation and Biodiversity Report for Power Infrastructure Installation Dane Road, Stawell

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September 2023

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Tree Wishes
land care advice

Documentation

Report Title	Vegetation and Biodiversity Report for Power Infrastructure Installation; Dane Road Stawell
Report for	Spiire
Report directed by	Dean Platt ¹
Report written by	Dean Platt ¹ and Tania Begg ²
Internal editing	Dean Platt ¹ , Lorien Firminger ³
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1 – Principal Consultant, Tree Wishes – MEnv; BAppSc (Bio. Resources Management); GDipSc (Land Rehab.)

2 – Project Manager, Tree Wishes – DAppSc (Conservation and Land Management)

3 – General Manager, Tree Wishes – GDipSc (Environment); BAppSc (Biology)

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Tree Wishes (Land Care Advice)

Head Office: 4 Sylvan Lane, Ocean Grove 3226

Phone: 0431 101 409

Visiting Offices: Mt Dandenong, Eltham and Lancefield

ABN 88367920299



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1 Introduction

1.1 Project Background

Plans have been prepared to install power line infrastructure to connect existing lines to a new solar farm site at Dane Road, Stawell, just north of the Stawell township.

Tree Wishes consultancy was engaged to assess the native vegetation and biodiversity impacts of this proposal.

1.2 Study Area Details

Variable/Constant	Description
Location	Dane Road, Stawell
General Description of the Land	The landscape is lightly undulating, used for farming and roadside conservation.
Aspect	The site is lightly undulating
Municipality	Northern Grampians
Planning Zones	Farming Zone (FZ) Rural Living Zone - Schedule 3 (RLZ3)
Bioregion	Goldfields

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1.3 Study Area

The site lies on private land at 105 Dane Road Stawell, with the new power line infrastructure to run through this property and into 58 Dane Road. Figure 1 shows the location of Dane Road in the landscape, with Figure 2 showing the approximate location of the proposed power poles and alignment.

Detailed pole locations are shown in Section 4.

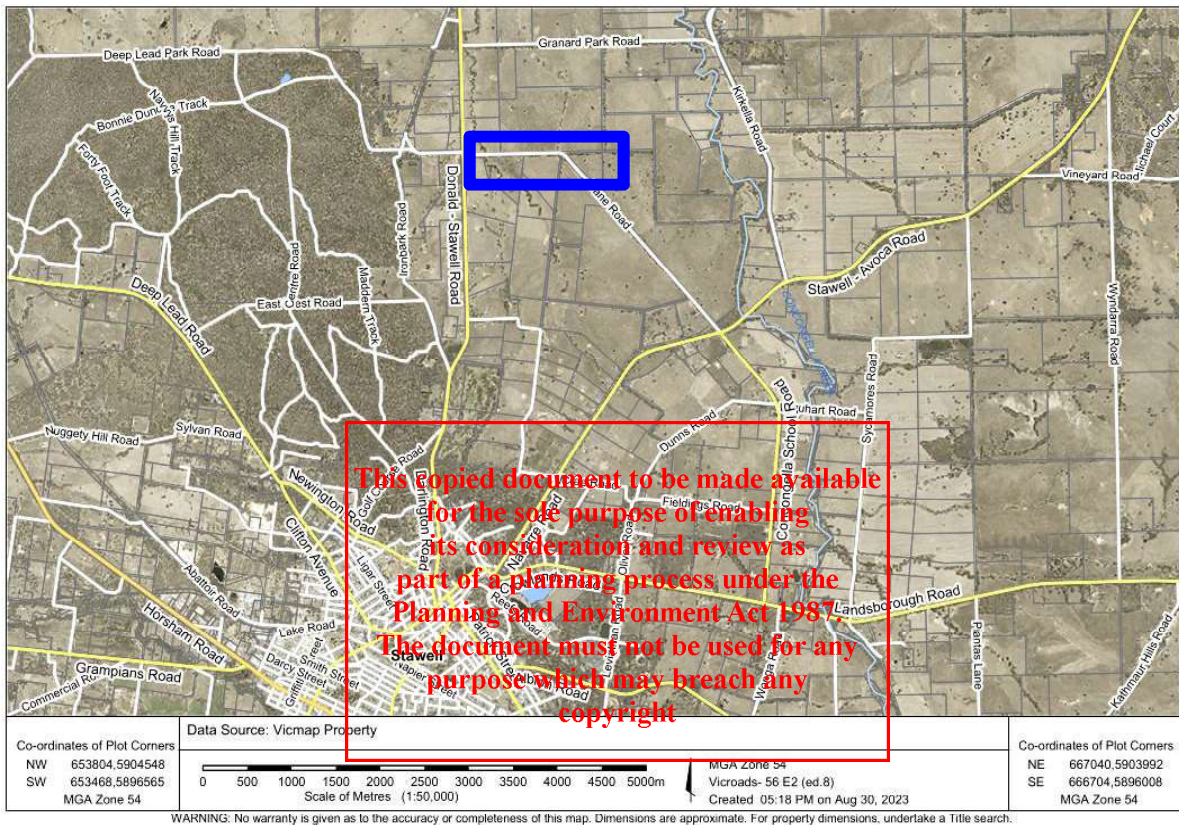


Figure 1. The location of the project in blue within the landscape.



Figure 2. The approximate location of new power poles and lines (in red) in 105 Dane Road, Stawell. Existing powerlines are shown in yellow.

1.4 Scope of Assessment

The objective of this report is to provide native vegetation and biodiversity planning advice on the most appropriate location of power-poles and trenching and thereafter determine the biophysical and legislative implications of the proposal. The following steps were undertaken to provide this advice:

1. A detailed desktop review of existing databases including DELWP modelling, NVIM, Council sources, and Victorian Biodiversity Atlas.
2. A site visit to survey native vegetation and biodiversity features (confirm desktop analysis and check for any anomalies.)
3. A report providing advice on obligations.

2 Desktop Review

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2.1 Native Vegetation Definition

In Victoria, a planning permit is required to remove, destroy or lop native vegetation. Native vegetation is defined in the Victoria Planning Provisions as “plants that are indigenous to Victoria, including trees, shrubs, herbs and grasses”. A planning permit is required to remove native plants that meet this definition, unless an exemption applies. The Guidelines for the removal, destruction or lopping of native vegetation (the Guidelines) classify native vegetation in two categories; remnant patches and scattered trees.

Patch

A patch of native vegetation is:

- an area of vegetation where at least 25 per cent of the total perennial understorey plant cover is native, or
- any area with three or more native canopy trees where the drip line of each tree touches the drip line of at least one other tree, forming a continuous canopy, or
- any mapped wetland included in the Current wetlands map, available in DELWP systems and tools.

Scattered tree

A scattered tree is:

- a native canopy tree that does not form part of a patch.

2.2 NatureKit

NatureKit is a tool to display and produce maps of Victoria's biodiversity, native vegetation, and flora and fauna data.

NatureKit details information on Victoria's:

- Vegetation
- Biodiversity
- Planning
- Wetlands
- Marine and coast
- Disturbance
- Catchments
- Land administration and classification

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2.2.1 Remnant Ecological Vegetation Classes (EVC)

A search of the DEECA NatureKit revealed three EVCs were predicted to occur across the project area, detailed below. The site falls into the Goldfields (Gold) Bioregion.

- EVC 175 - Grassy Woodland (Vulnerable)
- EVC 55 - Plains Grassy Woodland (Endangered)
- EVC 68 - Creekline Grassy Woodland (Endangered)

2.3 Victorian Biodiversity Atlas

The VBA is a database of flora and fauna recordings across the state. It provides information about the location of species and how they have changed over time. As the tool relies on observations submitted by individuals and organisations, it does not necessarily reflect the diversity of species within an area, as some areas are yet to be surveyed or have survey data entered.

2.3.1 Threatened Flora

A search of the DEECA VBA revealed that three threatened flora species have been recorded at or within 1 kilometre of the project within the last twenty years.

The species names, statuses, protections and likelihood of occurrence are listed below in Table 1.

2.3.2 Threatened Fauna

A search of the DEECA VBA revealed that no threatened fauna species had been recorded at or within 1 kilometre of the project within the last twenty years.

2.4 EPBC Act Protected Matters

The EPBC protected matters search tool generates reports that will help determine whether matters of national environmental significance or other matters protected by the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* are likely to occur in the area of interest.

The tool was used to generate a report for the project area and a 1-kilometre buffer of the project.

2.4.1 Threatened Flora

The protected matters report detailed one flora species likely to occur or whose habitat is likely to occur within the area.

The species names, statuses, protections and likelihood of occurrence are listed below in Table 1.

2.4.2 Threatened Fauna

The protected matters report detailed one bird which is known to occur, or their habitat is known to occur within the area.

The species, their statuses, protections and likelihood of occurrence are listed below in Table 2.

2.4.3 Threatened Ecological Communities

The EPBC protected matters report detailed the following ecological communities that may occur or are likely to occur within the area.

- White Box-Yellow Box-Blakely's Red Gum Grassy Woodland and Derived Native Grassland; Critically Endangered. Community likely to occur within area
- Buloke Woodlands of the Riverina and Murray-Darling Depression Bioregions; Endangered. Community may occur within area.
- Grey Box (*Eucalyptus microcarpa*) Grassy Woodlands and Derived Native Grasslands of South-eastern Australia; Endangered. Community likely to occur within area.

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Table 1: EPBC Search Tool Species Records for Rare and Threatened Flora, Status and Protections

Scientific Name	Common Name	Presence Text	Threatened Category
<i>Hibbertia humifusa subsp. humifusa</i>	Rising Star Guinea-flower	7/09/1998	Endangered
<i>Euphrasia collina subsp. muelleri</i>	Purple Eyebright	28/09/1998	Endangered
<i>Caladenia fulva</i>	Tawny Spider-orchid	1/10/2005	Endangered

Table 2. EPBC Search Tool Species Records for Rare and Threatened Fauna, Status and Protections

Scientific Name	Common Name	Presence Text	Threatened Category
<i>Lathamus discolor</i>	Swift Parrot	Species or subspecies likely to occur within area	Critically Endangered

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2.5 Native Vegetation Information Management System

The Native Vegetation Information Management system (NVIM) is an online tool to access Victoria's native vegetation information. The tool is designed for accessing the information and generating reports required to apply for a permit to remove native vegetation using Victoria's permitted clearing regulations (Clause 52.16 and Clause 52.17 of the Victoria Planning Provisions).

The tool generates a report that can be submitted with an application for a permit to remove native vegetation. The tool also determines what assessment pathway an application will follow.

2.5.1 Assessment Pathway

The assessment pathway for an application to remove native vegetation reflects its potential impact on biodiversity and is determined from the location and extent of the native vegetation to be removed. The three assessment pathways are:

- Basic – limited impacts on biodiversity.
- Intermediate – could impact on large trees, endangered EVC, and sensitive wetlands and coastal areas.
- Detailed – could impact on large trees, endangered EVC, sensitive wetlands and coastal areas, and could significantly impact on habitat for rare or threatened species.

Extent of native vegetation	Location category		
	Location 1	Location 2	Location 3
Less than 0.5 hectares and not including any large trees	Basic	Intermediate	Detailed
Less than 0.5 hectares and including one or more large trees	Intermediate	Intermediate	Detailed
0.5 hectares or more	Detailed	Detailed	Detailed

Figure 3. Extent of native vegetation removal and location category to determine application pathway.

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2.5.2 Location Risk

According to the NVIM mapping, the project area lies within Location categories 1, 2 and 3. This means an application to remove native vegetation may follow the Basic, Intermediate or Detailed pathway.

2.5.3 Condition Score

The native vegetation condition map is a modeled layer based on survey data combined with a benchmark model and a range of other environmental data. The condition score of native vegetation is a site-based measure of how close the native vegetation is to its mature natural state, as represented by a benchmark reflecting pre-settlement circumstances. Condition score is a score out of 100, with 100 being very good condition and 0 being no condition.

According to the NVIM mapping, remnant native vegetation at the project area is between 0 and 80 points out of 100, suggesting that the cover and quality is likely to be variable from low to high at the site.

2.5.4 Strategic Biodiversity Value Score

The strategic biodiversity value score represents the complementary contribution to Victoria's biodiversity of a location, relative to other locations across the state. This score is the weighted average strategic biodiversity value score of the mapped native vegetation calculated using the strategic biodiversity value map.

The strategic biodiversity score of any remnant native vegetation at the project area ranges from 0.41 to 1.00.

2.6 Local Planning Schemes

2.6.1 Clause 52.17 Native Vegetation

Clause 52.17 Native Vegetation of the Northern Grampians Planning Scheme requires a permit for the removal of native vegetation. This does not apply:

- If the table to Clause 52.17-7 specifically states that a permit is not required.
- To the removal, destruction or lopping of native vegetation specified in the schedule to this clause.

There is an exemption for planted vegetation that applies at this site, as table to Clause 52.17-7 specifically states:

- Native vegetation that is to be removed, destroyed or lopped that was either planted, or grown as a result of direct seeding.

2.6.2 Land Zones and Environmental Overlays

The project runs through the following two different land zones:

- Farming Zone (FZ)
- Rural Living Zone - Schedule 3 (RLZ3)

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3 Results

3.1 Landscape Context

The site lies on the northern outskirts of Stawell, within a rural landscape. The immediate areas are used for agriculture including grazing and cropping. Remnant native vegetation present is restricted to isolated paddock trees, occasional small patches on private land and along public roadsides.

Within the wider landscape the linear roadside vegetation loosely links to core areas of vegetation to the west, namely Deep Lead Nature Conservation Reserves 1, 2 and 3. Smaller, islanded reserves and private pockets remain in other directions within the landscape.

3.2 Biodiversity Findings

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3.2.1 Site Assessment

The alignment was assessed on foot by Tania Begg (DEECA qualified VQA Assessor) from Tree Wishes in July 2023. This is a sub-optimum time for surveying some flora species, as they may not be actively growing or be dormant at the time of survey. Orchid species are likely to be dormant at this time of year.

Much of the project site consisted of open paddocks used for grazing and cropping. The roadsides and driveway entry to 105 Dane Road supported native vegetation.

Indigenous Vegetation

Indigenous vegetation was restricted to paddock trees and roadside vegetation. The paddock trees were Grey Box (*Eucalyptus microcarpa*) and are considered Scattered Trees.

The roadside vegetation consisted of overstorey eucalypts with a mixed understorey including Hedge Wattle (*Acacia paradoxa*), Common Raspwort (*Gonocarpus tetragynus*), Golden Wattle (*Acacia pycnantha*), Spear Grass (*Austrostipa sp.*), and Wattle Mat-rush (*Lomandra filiformis*). This roadside vegetation is considered a Remnant Patch.

Mapped Wetlands

There are no mapped wetlands involved in this project.

Non- Indigenous Vegetation

Much of the alignment supports non-indigenous vegetation. Exotic pastures dominate with species such as Perennial Rye-grass (*Lolium perenne*), Subterranean Clover (*Trifolium subterraneum*), Capeweed (*Arctotheca calendula*) and Cocksfoot (*Dactylis glomerata*) present.

Planted Vegetation

The driveway at 105 Dane Road supports a native planted treeline of Grey Box (*Eucalyptus microcarpa*) either side of the drive. Flax-lilies (*Dianella* sp.) have been planted under these trees.

3.3 Threatened Flora and Fauna

Threatened flora species were searched for during the assessment, however, none were observed. Orchid species may have been present and unable to be observed as they are dormant at this time of year.

3.4 Threatened Communities

No threatened communities were observed within the project area.

3.5 Habitat Value

The habitat value of the site is moderate. The open paddocks offer low little habitat value, with grazing being the only use fauna can make of the area. The roadsides provide higher value, with diversity in species, good vegetative cover, and multiple layers of understorey. Trees are older and some even provide hollows.

4 Biodiversity Impacts

4.1 Impact Details

Impacts on remnant native vegetation and scattered trees have been avoided as part of the project design. Table 3 provides details of the vegetation at each proposed pole location, as well as photographs and avoidance measures.

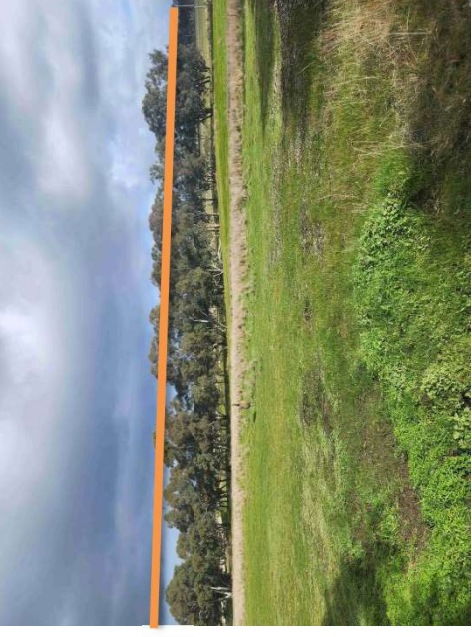

Some planted native trees (Grey Box) will be removed as part of the project at 105 Dane Road. The removal of these trees is exempt under the planted vegetation exemption.

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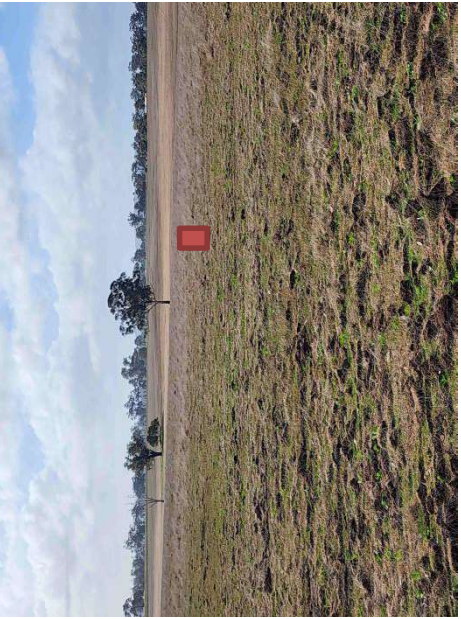
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Table 3. Details of pole locations, vegetation and impacts.

Pole No.	Vegetation Description	Native Vegetation Impacts	Photographs
3	Existing alignment, cleared paddock.	<p style="text-align: center;">None</p>	 <p>Taken facing south into 58 Dane Road showing the location of existing power-lines in orange, with an adult Emu for scale.</p>
4	Remnant patch of native vegetation present on the roadside. Inside private property vegetation is exotic pastures.	<p style="text-align: center;">Native vegetation impacts have been avoided by locating the pole inside private property rather than on the roadside. No access to occur to native vegetation along the roadside during the works.</p>	 <p>Taken facing south showing the proposed power pole within private property in red.</p>


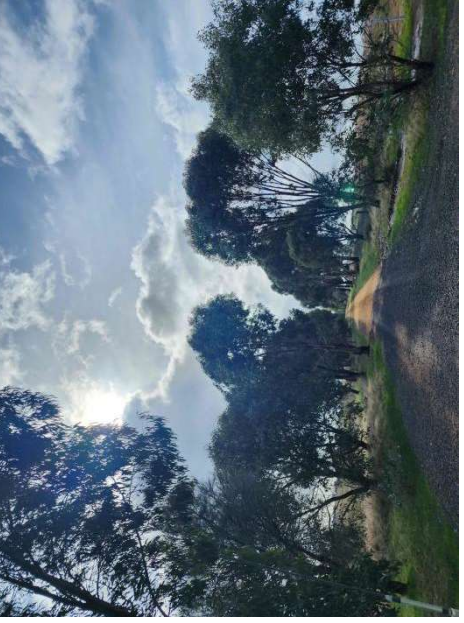
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Pole No.	Vegetation Description	Native Vegetation Impacts	Photographs
5	<p>Cleared paddock with exotic pasture understorey. One scattered tree nearby, not impacted by pole or alignment.</p>	<p>None. No access to TPZ of scattered tree.</p>	 <p>Taken facing north showing the location of the proposed power pole in red. The pole is well outside the TPZ of the tree.</p>
6	<p>Cleared paddock recently ploughed and seeded</p>	<p>None.</p>	 <p>Taken facing north showing the location of the proposed power pole in red.</p>
7	<p>Cleared paddock recently ploughed and seeded</p>	<p>None.</p>	

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Pole No.	Vegetation Description	Native Vegetation Impacts	Photographs
8	Cleared paddock with exotic pasture understorey. Pole north of a scattered tree.	<p>None. No access to TPZ of scattered tree.</p> <div style="border: 2px solid red; padding: 5px; text-align: center; color: red; font-weight: bold;"> This copied document to be made available for the sole purpose of enabling its consideration and review as part of a planning process under the Planning and Environment Act 1987. The document must not be used for any purpose which may breach any copyright </div> <p>None.</p>	 <p>Taken facing west from the driveway into 105 Dane Road from the approximate location of Pole 9, showing the proposed pole in red.</p>
9	Planted driveway, native trees and understorey.	None.	 <p>Taken facing north up the driveway to 105 Dane Road, showing planted Grey Box, the proposed pole will be to the left.</p>
10	Cleared paddock.	None.	

Pole No.	Vegetation Description	Native Vegetation Impacts	Photographs
11	Construction site, no vegetation.	None.	 <p>Taken facing east from the driveway into 105 Dane Road showing the access to the solar farm, with the proposed pole location in red.</p>

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4.2 Avoidance and minimisation

Impacts on remnant native vegetation and scattered trees have been avoided as part of the project design. Native vegetation and tree protection zones will be avoided during the construction and must be marked as No-Go Zones.

4.3 Offsets

No offsets are required as part of the project.

4.4 Threatened Species

No threatened species were recorded during the site assessment. It is unlikely that any threatened species would make use of the proposed impact areas. The pole locations are within cleared and regularly disturbed paddocks.

4.5 Threatened Communities

There will not be an impact of any Endangered Ecological Vegetation Classes.

There will be no impact on state or federally listed ecological communities.

5 Relevant Legislation

5.1 Commonwealth

5.1.1 EPBCA

The Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act) applies to sites where proposed developments or projects may have a significant impact on matters of National Environmental Significance (NES). There are currently seven matters of National Environmental Significance:

- World Heritage properties
- National Heritage places
- Nationally listed threatened species and ecological communities
- Listed migratory species
- Ramsar wetlands of international importance
- Commonwealth marine areas
- Nuclear actions (including uranium mining).

Under the EPBC Act, a proponent must refer proposed actions that may have a significant impact on matters of national environmental significance to the Australian Government Environment Minister (or delegate).

Relevance to proposal

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- There are no listed flora species likely to be impacted by this project.

Listed Fauna

- There are no listed fauna species likely to be impacted by this project.

Listed Communities

- There are no listed communities likely to be impacted by this project.

Action required: No referral required.

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5.2 State

5.2.1 Environmental Effects Act (1978)

The criteria for the types of potential effects on the environment that might be of significance and therefore warrant referral of a project include:

- potential clearing of 10 ha or more of native vegetation;
- matters listed under the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988:
 - potential loss of a significant area of a listed biological community; or
 - potential loss of a genetically important population of an endangered or threatened species (listed or nominated for listing), including as a result of loss or fragmentation of habitat; or
 - potential loss of critical habitat; or
 - potential significant effects on habitat values of a wetland supporting migratory bird species;
- potential extensive or major effects on land stability, acid sulphate soils or highly erodible soils over the short or long term;
- potential extensive or major effects on beneficial uses of waterbodies over the long term due to changes in water quality, stream flows or regional groundwater levels.

There is no native vegetation removal required.

Action required: No Statement referral required.

5.2.2 FFG Act (1988)

The Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988 (FFG Act) is the key piece of Victorian legislation for the conservation of threatened species and communities, protected flora and fauna and for the management of potentially threatening processes.

Threatened species and vegetation communities are listed under the FFG Act and action statements are prepared for each listed item, which provides background information, reasons for decline and current threats, as well as management actions. Protected flora species are not threatened but require protection for other reasons. For example, highly sought-after species such as ferns, orchids and grass trees are protected to control their removal in the wild.

Proposed works or activities on public land which may kill, injure or disturb threatened or protected flora species require a Protected Flora License or Permit from DEECA.

There are no listed species proposed to be impacted by this project.

Action required: No FFG permit required.

5.2.3 Wildlife Act 1975

The Wildlife Act 1975 is the primary legislation in Victoria for the protection of wildlife. The Act requires that wildlife research (i.e. fauna salvage and translocation) is regulated through a permit system, which is managed by DELWP. Authorisation for habitat removal must be obtained under the Wildlife Act 1975 through a license granted by DELWP. Any persons involved in fauna removal, salvage capture or relocation of fauna during mitigation measures must hold a current Management Authorisation under the Wildlife Act 1975.

Action required: No action required.

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5.2.4 Planning and Environment Act (1987)

Since 1989, a planning permit from Council is required for proposals to remove, destroy or lop native vegetation on land greater than 0.4 hectares. In some instances, exemptions to the planning permit requirement can apply and are outlined in Clause 52.17 of the Victorian Planning Provisions, under the Planning and Environment Act 1987.

Clause 52.17 Native Vegetation of the Planning Scheme requires a permit for the removal of native vegetation.

Action required: No native vegetation removals are required as part of this project. Some planted trees will be removed as part of the development however, these trees are exempt under the planted vegetation exemption within table to Clause 52.17-7.

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5.3 Local Planning Scheme (overlays, zoning)

5.3.1 Zones

There are no vegetation requirements associated with the land zoning as part of this project.

Action required: No permits are required under the zones for the removal of vegetation associated with this project.

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6 Conclusions

- A proposal to link a solar farm to the electricity grid is underway at Dane Road, Stawell. The proposal involves the installation of nine power poles in farmland.
- There is native vegetation present along the roadsides of Dane Road in the form of remnant patch, and within the paddocks in the form of scattered trees. Planted native trees are also present.
- The proposal avoided impacts on native vegetation as part of the design phase.
- There will be impacts to planted trees within 105 Dane Road Stawell. The removal of these trees is exempt under Clause 52.17.
- Native vegetation and tree protection zones must be marked as “no-go” zones during the construction.
- No threatened species or communities were recorded within the project area and are unlikely to present, so there will be no impact to threatened species or communities.

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