**ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS:**

**The Hon. Lily D'Ambrosio**, Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change

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 **Andrew Dyer**, Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner

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Dear Minister,

I am writing to ask that you reconsider the proposed route and the construction methodologies (e.g. overhead Vs undergrounding) for the Western Victoria Transmission Network Project (WVTNP) due to the significant environmental impacts this will cause.

AusNet’s website claims the WVTNP will supply power to only around 500,000 homes in Melbourne and that: “*The project is critical infrastructure required to unlock the renewable energy potential of western Victoria as a key Renewable Energy Zone and will help to deliver clean and affordable energy to Victorians.”*

Along the proposed 190km corridor which includes 80 metre high towers, there will be extensive loss of native vegetation, biomass and wildlife habitat including many endangered species’ to construct the WVTNP. There will also be substantial environmental impacts as a result of the construction materials used such as concrete, steel etc.

Could you please explain how the “renewable energy” that these new lines are supposed to supply will outweigh the environmental ‘costs’ of this project? Furthermore, could you please explain how these significant environmental impacts are congruent with a renewable energy policy?

Fragmentation of wildlife corridors including established bio links via vegetation clearance will result in further decreases in biodiversity of fauna and flora in affected areas. Decisions made by Government in relation to this project directly conflicts with decades of scientific research demonstrating that vegetation clearance directly contributes to a warming and changing climate.

The construction and resultant transmission line and towers will:

* cause loss of protected native animals and threatened species such as the Swift Parrots through habitat loss and destruction,
* have devastating effects on birdlife and bat species in our area that will collide with transmission infrastructure,
* disturb and alter habitat conditions for many animals,
* disorientate and disturb birds and fauna as a result of ongoing noise, vibration and lighting, and
* destroy native vegetation and ground water dependent ecosystems that may be affected by surface hydrological changes.

As an example the WVTNP is proposed to run alongside the Mount Beckworth Scenic Reserve that is home to a significant amount of native flora and fauna including more than 100 bird species. The transmission infrastructure would have an irreversible detrimental impact to the faunal life in the area due to the disturbance and alteration of habitat conditions through construction as well as long term effects from noise and vibration, not to mention loss of habitat.

There is no doubt that we need renewable energy, however based on the above I do not believe this is the best option to achieve this. AusNet’s proposal of overhead transmission lines is not the 21st century solution Australia is looking for. There are much more environmentally responsible options that could be taken to show we truly are forward thinkers in delivering actual renewable energy including underground options and a different route using existing easements.

I urge you to please step forward and help drive the future thinking required to provide a renewable energy solution that not only Victorians, but all Australians and our natural environment deserve.

I call upon you to take a stand with all the communities along the 190km of the proposed corridor and stop AusNet’s Towers and take this project back to the drawing board.

Regards,