

Our reference: DOC/22/37311

8 September 2022

Dear Sir/Madam,

Mount Alexander Shire Council acknowledges the important work underway to strengthen energy security in the National Electricity Market and to reduce the impact on the global environment caused by energy generation.

We note that the 2022 Integrated Systems Plan sets out a whole-of-system approach to the supply of affordable and reliable electricity for residential and commercial purposes; including a major transformation towards renewable energy sources.

In December 2019, Mount Alexander Shire Council declared its recognition that there is a Climate Emergency and committed to make its own operations carbon neutral by 2025.

Accordingly, in-principle, we support your proposed transition to renewable energy sources; noting your longer timeline of 2050.

So too, we welcome the recent communication and engagement by the Australian Energy Market Operator (AEMO) in relation to the Victoria – New South Wales Interconnector West (VNI-West) project.

In doing so, we note that the route for VNI-West has not yet been identified and therefore our ability to offer direct or specific feedback is very limited at this point. That said, we note it is possible the route could be located outside of our Shire and that such an alignment may traverse less populated and less vegetated ground, which in turn may offer less costly treatments to achieve an acceptable solution in the impacted communities.

Irrespective of the route ultimately chosen, it is our strong view that the infrastructure must be designed and built to minimise negative local amenity and environmental impacts.

Should your preferred route be within our Shire, we anticipate significant consultation will be needed with both our Council and our community to understand the basis for this and the intended treatments to ameliorate any potential local amenity, cultural and environmental impacts. We ask that adequate time be made for this in your future stages and would be pleased to discuss this further should the route affect land within Mount Alexander Shire.

Noting that your process has not yet reached this level of detail, we offer the following general points for consideration:

- **Be clear on what decisions can be influenced by Council and our community.**

While we appreciate that the current phase of the project is at a conceptual level, it has been challenging to understand what the principles and decisions are that we can influence, and what is 'not-negotiable'.

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Once clarified, we reiterate our above request that adequate time be included for these principles and decisions to be thoroughly consulted on, and the intended positions understood by Council and our communities, before implementation.

- **Protection of the local environment, cultural heritage, amenity and the wellbeing of our community must be a priority.**

We note that the Project Draft Assessment Report highlights the financial and construction challenges related to undergrounding of the transmission line. However, we consider that protecting the local environment, cultural heritage, amenity and community wellbeing must be treated as higher order objectives than the financial and construction constraints. While we acknowledge and support the intergenerational benefits that the east coast of Australia could receive from this initiative, we do not accept that these should be obtained at the expense of our local community and environment.

- **Community benefit and impact must be considered both locally and at a whole-project level.**

Expanding on the previous point, we consider that net benefits and negative impacts must be identified, analysed and addressed in a local context, and not just at an overall project level, so that equitable provisions are included in the final design along the length of the route.

- **Allow access for existing and new renewable energy generation along the entire transmission route.**

We consider that precluding the opportunity for community or commercial initiatives to connect to VNI-West in areas outside of the identified *renewable energy zones* risks unnecessarily limiting the possibility for innovative solutions to occur in future. Mount Alexander Shire has both an innovative and passionate community in relation to renewable energy and has the potential to make a significant contribution.

- **Support completion of the works needed to provide local distribution of power along the VNI-West route.**

In addition to enabling feed-in access to the route, Mount Alexander Shire asks that necessary infrastructure be included to provide access for our community to use this new power source.

Thank you again for providing the opportunity to offer this initial feedback on the VNI-West project. Should you have any questions regarding the contents of this letter, please contact Mr Michael Annear, Director Infrastructure and Development, on 5471 1820.

Yours sincerely,



DARREN FUZZARD
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER