

Project EnergyConnect is a landmark infrastructure project that will deliver the first new electricity interconnector between Australian states in 15 years. An electricity interconnector is a connection that allows power to flow between regions in the National Electricity Market (NEM), providing access to a larger number of renewable electricity generators.

Project EnergyConnect, in South Australia, traverses a range of landscapes and vegetation types, from cleared farmland and bluebush plains to large tracts of mallee woodland.

Some of the vegetation types present, particularly the extensive areas of old growth mallee on Taylorville and Calperum Stations, which are skirted by the route, provide important habitat for species such as the nationally Endangered Black-eared Miner bird and the nationally Vulnerable Regent Parrot.

Minimising clearance of native vegetation was a main consideration in route selection for the Project. As a result, the route will follow existing disturbed corridors as far as possible, in particular the southern boundary of Taylorville and Calperum Stations to avoid core areas of critical habitat for the Black-eared Miner.

Flora and Fauna Studies

A range of flora and fauna studies were undertaken by independent specialists for Project EnergyConnect. These studies, along with extensive stakeholder consultation, played a key part in selecting the route, refining the Project design, and understanding potential impacts. Some of the main studies included:



Vegetation and habitat assessments

Vegetation and habitat assessments using the Native Vegetation Council's Bushland Assessment methodology. Ninety-four separate sites were assessed in November 2018, June and October 2019 and January 2021. These assessments involved ecologists collecting data including plant species, vegetation type and condition, and fauna habitat. The data was used to assess the type and significance of the vegetation present, as well as the 'significant environmental benefit' that will be implemented under the Native Vegetation Act 1991 to offset vegetation clearance.

Targeted surveys were also undertaken for vegetation and habitats of significance (e.g. the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 listed Iron-Grass Natural Temperate Grassland and habitat for the endangered Pygmy Bluetongue Lizard, neither of which were detected on the proposed alignment).



Threatened Mallee Birds survey

A Threatened Mallee Birds survey was undertaken by bird specialists. This involved a field survey at 56 sites during the breeding season in October 2019 where experienced observers walked transects and watched and listened for key threatened species. Call playback was also used to try to prompt a response to detect key threatened species. The study also reviewed existing records and data to assess whether key species were likely to be present or impacted. (detected on the proposed alignment).



Wetland Birds assessment

A Wetland Birds assessment was undertaken using the large amount of information available from wetland bird surveys and published studies to assess the potential for impact to wetland birds. This focused on assessing potential bird collision with the transmission line near the Riverland wetland complex, which is south of the proposed route for approximately 36km.



Further detail on the potential impacts and proposed mitigation measures are contained in the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

Key Findings

Flora

Very few threatened plant species are likely to be present or were detected in surveys. The nationally Endangered Peep Hill Hop-bush was the only threatened plant species found on the alignment (near a known population). This species (or any others detected in pre-construction surveys) can be avoided by tower placement and access track alignment. There are also very limited records for other plant species of conservation significance (e.g. two State Rare species, Mallee Bitter-pea and Rohrlach's Bluebush).

Mallee Birds

The route avoids areas of dense mallee habitat in the central part of the alignment which have records of Black-eared Miner from the last 20 years (including several records from the Threatened Mallee Birds study). Based on the study, specialists concluded that the Project is unlikely to lead to unacceptable increased impacts to threatened mallee birds.

Wetland Birds

The wetland birds assessment concluded that the likelihood of bird collision with a transmission line is relatively low, particularly with mitigation measures such as bird diverters on conductors. Any potential impacts to individual species are not significant when overall population numbers are considered.

Disturbance

Other potential impacts such as habitat fragmentation, weed spread, hybridisation, fire risk and disturbance during construction were assessed in the Environmental Impact Statement. The potential impacts have been mitigated by selecting a route that follows existing disturbances such as transmission lines and tracks, and can be effectively managed during construction.

Impacts can be further mitigated

Further survey work will be undertaken during detailed design, including on-ground ecological inspection and micro-siting of proposed tower and access track locations to ensure that there are no unacceptable impacts.

The Project EnergyConnect team is confident that with the route selected and the management measures proposed, there will be no significant impact to flora and fauna.

Stay connected



You can view the EIS, be kept up to date with Project information and provide feedback by visiting the online engagement room on our website or by contacting the Project team.

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