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Australian Energy Market Operator
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To Whom it May Concern

Submission RIT-T – Gannawarra Shire

The Gannawarra Shire is located in North West Victoria and has been facilitating the development of renewable energy since 2009. It has long been our goal to become the renewable energy capital of Victoria/Australia and to leverage the renewable industry for further commercial activity.

To date the development of large scale solar farms has been significantly restricted by an outdated transmission network that simply doesn't have the capacity to handle the solar farms currently built and connected, let alone the hundreds of megawatts that are waiting to be built and connect. The current situation is creating serious insecurities and if not rectified will see many developers heading interstate to secure developments.

Council has been advocating for transmission works to be undertaken in North West Victoria that will unlock the generation potential from Bendigo through to Mildura along with the proposed Victoria – NSW interconnector (KerangLink). We understand a range of measures are planned that will assist to unlock some capacity of the transmission line but nowhere near enough compared to what is proposed from serious developers. The network upgrade needs to happen as soon as possible.

Why VNI 7 (KerangLink)

1. The Murray River REZ is the largest and most capable renewable energy zone in Victoria, with solar resources much higher than anywhere else in Victoria. Linking the Murray River REZ and South West NSW REZ will create one of the most capable renewable energy zones in Australia.
2. VNI 7 will provide around 2,000MW more energy than the Shepparton and Dederang options. This is critical for the future of large scale energy development at a national level.
3. The Murray River Group of Councils supports KerangLink. Supporting councils include Mildura, Swan Hill, Gannawarra, Loddon, Campaspe and Moira. They realise that KerangLink is the best location for solar farms. We all share the vision of North West Victoria becoming the solar capital of Australia.
4. The Murray River REZ has in the vicinity of 3,000MW of permitted projects waiting in limbo along with serious interest in an additional 3,000MW. If a solution isn't forthcoming many will move their investments interstate. These projects are located from Bendigo to Mildura.

The Victorian Transmission Network requires significant and urgent upgrading to ensure reliable supply into the future and to enable the State to meet its ambitious 50 per cent renewable energy target by 2030. To meet these targets there is an urgency to implement new transmission capacity by 2024/2025. It is ambitious but it needs to happen.

The required upgrades include a new 500 kV transmission line from Ballarat – Bendigo – Kerang with double-circuit 220 kV transmission lines from Kerang – Wemen – Red Cliffs and a minimum double-circuit 220kV transmission line from Bendigo – Shepparton – Glenrowan.

The recent press release that the Andrews Government is seeking to override the complex regulatory issues is great news. If this policy considers other aspects other than the RIT-T this will assist us to not only develop our solar generation potential but invest in other exciting opportunities in the North West region.

Central Victorian Greenhouse Alliance has developed the Loddon Mallee Renewable Energy Roadmap on behalf of the Loddon Mallee New Energy Taskforce. It estimates that by mid- decade, renewables could deliver well over \$1 billion in supply chain benefits to the region and create over 3,200 jobs during construction. This would create much needed growth in an area of Victoria with the highest rates of social and economic disadvantage.

A range of economic and physical attributes should be a key consideration alongside the RIT-T.

1. Agricultural activity should be a serious consideration in the interconnection options.

- a) The Bendigo to Kerang area is predominately broad acre dryland farming with some mixed irrigation farming and small pockets of dairy. It is not high value horticultural land and the path for development should be much faster.
- b) The Kerang area is sparsely populated compared to some of the intensive horticultural areas.
- c) The land values in and around Kerang are much lower than the horticultural land in other transmission options.

2. Social licence is important

- a) The North West region has strong social licence including support from the Murray River Group of Councils and demonstrated acceptance of renewable energy.
- b) The smaller communities are in need of hope and confidence in a fast changing rural economy. Solar fits nicely with the landscape and will assist to diversify the local economy.
- c) Kerang is home to Victoria's FIRST large scale solar farm and battery storage. Let's continue the good news growth story.

3. Solar resources

- a) Resources are highest in North West Victoria and would be strengthened by a connection to south west NSW.
- b) The North West provides Victoria and NSW with long term development opportunity in the renewable energy sector.

4. Development partners

- a) Some developers have expressed an interest in building a private line between Bendigo and Kerang. This could be an ideal "quick connection" to Melbourne.

While the Project Specification Consultation Report suggests that VNI 7 would be the most expensive of the options, we need to remind ourselves that the output of this option is around 60% GREATER than the next best option. We are comparing 5,000MW against 3,000MW.

The overall output of VNI 7 together with the expected benefits of dealing with broad acre landowners will ensure a quicker and more cost effective build time than the other options.

We look forward to AEMO giving the VNI 7 option the green light to progress to the construction stage and being part of Australia's renewable energy future.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Phil Higgins', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Phil Higgins
ACTING CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

