**Response to Climate Council Joint Statement issued December 14th, 2021**

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Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing in response to your [joint statement on 14 December](https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/transmission-joint-statement/) where you suggest that *“renewable energy transmission lines are essential to reducing pollution, protecting climate and preserving nature”.* While there is evidence to suggest that we need to tackle climate change by replacing fossil-fuels with renewable energy, there is certainly no evidence to suggest that the default use of overhead transmission lines are the 21st century answer to support this. **I ask you to re-issue your statement and call-out the devastating affects overhead transmission lines cause.**

I will be impacted by AusNet’s proposed Western Victoria Transmission Network Project (WVTNP) and I wanted to inform you that your suggestion that transmission lines “*will help protect our environment, our ecosystems, our species, our regional communities, our precious places, as well as our towns and cities from the threat of climate change”*, is an unforgivable lie and is far from the reality of the devastation this project will cause to our communities and the environment.

The proposed 190km long overhead transmission line project with up to 80-metre-high towers will carve a 100m wide path of environmental destruction removing everything in its path. To suggest that this is a way to address climate change is incredulous and ignorant to the extensive environmental damage that overhead transmission lines will cause and as a result will negate the green energy generation it will deliver. This is a massive contradiction to “renewable energy” that these very transmissions lines are supposed to be supplying and there are serious questions around the net environmental gains of this project.

AusNet have chosen the easiest and so-called “cheapest option” for the proposed transmission line network opting to use antiquated overhead transmission line technology. The proposed WVTNP overhead transmission network will have a destructive and irreversible effect along the whole route impacting tens of thousands of regional Victorians, hundreds of businesses and the natural environment. Parts of the proposed route run through Victoria's most high-risk bushfire areas as well as prime agricultural land.

Along the proposed 190km corridor, 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. 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,
* remove upwards of 155,000 mature native trees removing vital carbon sequestration by exposing the easement to low or non-vegetative areas,
* have devastating effects on birdlife and bat species in our area that will collide with transmission infrastructure,
* disturb, alter and destroy 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.

Another significant impact to the environment is the heightened fire risk and subsequent risk to lives, homes, bush land and agricultural land that overhead transmission lines pose. This is two-fold with evidence that transmission lines cause bushfires (as confirmed in the [WVTNP Bushfire Preliminary EES Information Sheet)](https://www.westvictnp.com.au/assets/resources/Existing-Conditions-Bushfire-December-2021.pdf) and the restrictions transmission lines and towers impose when fighting fires and trying to save lives, homes and the natural environment. This is certainly not congruent with your suggestion that transmission lines reduce pollution, protect climate and preserve nature.

You have stated that building transmission line networks *"must involve a greater role for regional communities and First Nations groups".* This has certainly not happened with the WVTNP. When trying to speak with government about the project (both state and federal) no one is taking ownership and to get information about the process and the overall energy plan has been tied up in bureaucratic red tape. As far as the planning processes involving regional communities and First Nations groups, this certainly hasn’t happened either, with “inferior community consultation” only happening after the RIT-T process and AusNet dismissing communities concern along the 190km proposed route.

You also state that *Hosting transmission lines should add to the strength of farming businesses* and that they should be paid well to host these. The substantial detrimental impacts of overhead transmission lines reach far beyond any compensation. If you think about the reasons that people choose to live regionally/rurally such as; being close to nature, getting away from large city infrastructure, visual amenity of the scenery, peace and quiet – all of this will be taken away and property values negatively impacted by overhead transmission lines. This is a direct result of AusNets lack of genuine consultation and willingness to seek better outcomes for all Victorians. We invite you to talk with people directly impacted by the proposed WVTNP route to see if they believe any monetary compensation will cover for everything they will lose by “hosting” these transmission lines on their property. Not everyone directly impacted are farming businesses, but everyone will suffer a drop in property value, massive impacts to visual amenity a loss of the environment many of us are so preciously protecting. There is also the impact to those neighbours adjacent the easements who will see these monstrous eyesores and the affect it will have on their lives and livelihoods. Many affects this will have include decreased property values, visual amenity loss and health implications including mental health issues. These ‘neighbours’ aren’t offered any compensation at all!

I ask you to also consider the mental health impacts that overhead transmission lines have on the people that live next to and near them and ask you if you can put a cost on this? We are seeing the impacts of this daily with ccommunities along the 190km route dealing with serious mental health challenges these proposed overhead transmission lines are causing, creating high levels of stress and mental fatigue. Is one persons mental health worth pursuing this outdated overhead transmission technology, let alone tens of thousands of Victorians?

There are far better options available other than overhead transmission lines that will reduce congestion on the existing transmission network, provide actual net renewable energy, have far less impact on the environment and visual pollution and have the support of communities. Underground via HVDC energy transmission [is best practice around the world](https://www.tdworld.com/grid-innovations/transmission/article/20966809/reimagining-the-grid) and [Australian scientific studies support this.](https://www.moorabool.vic.gov.au/files/content/public/about-council/large-projects-impacting-moorabool/western-victoria-transmission-network-project/wvtnp-high-level-hvdc-alternative-scoping-report.pdf?utm_source=open_letter&utm_medium=letter&utm_campaign=link_click) When comparing to overhead transmission lines, underground energy transmission is more reliable, safer and more efficient and will not be impacted by extreme weather, or increase the risk of catastrophic bushfire and will have dramatically less impact to property values. Important benefits of undergrounding include reduced maintenance and far less impact to the environment. Again, **I ask you to re-issue your statement and call-out the devastating affects overhead transmission lines cause.**

There is no question that we need to consider what the future of not only Victoria’s but Australia’s energy supply will look like. The question is do we want to be considered world leaders in how we achieve this or are we happy to rush ahead and take a much less socially responsible path and continue with out-dated, inferior and destructive overhead electricity technology? Our energy supply system can be designed to minimise the impact on the environment and landscape and take account of human needs, overhead transmission lines aren’t the answer.

A GREEN Generation solution requires a GREEN Transmission solution*.* I urge you to please drive the future thinking required to provide a renewable energy solution that is not out-dated, inferior and destructive but one that all Australians and our natural environment deserve and is in Australia’s best strategic national interest. ‘Stop AusNets Towers’ invites you to speak with them to discuss further how the WVNTP project has impacted them and why overhead transmission lines aren’t the answer.

Regards,