

WILLATOOK

Wind Farm



PROJECT UPDATE

Now that we are well into the year, we wanted to provide you with an update on the progress of the Willatook Wind Farm project.

What's happened to date

In July 2023, the Victorian Minister for Planning completed her assessment of the Willatook Wind Farm under the *Environment Effects Act 1978*. This marked a significant milestone for the project as it represented the final step in the Environment Effects Statement (EES) process.

The Minister concluded that the project can proceed, subject to recommended modifications, particularly relating to brolga and the southern bent-wing bat. Upon detailed consideration, the Wind Prospect team has concluded that the recommended modifications would render the project unviable.

Since the release of the Minister's assessment, we have been investigating ways to modify the project's design, construction and operation to secure better biodiversity outcomes while maintaining the viability of the project.

Where we are now

The Victorian Government has recently announced measures to better facilitate environmental assessments and approvals and to support the energy transition while managing biodiversity needs. This includes implementing a new suite of tools and guidelines to assist renewable energy developers in building renewable energy projects in ways that minimise impacts on biodiversity.

The government has also committed to research on key bird and bat species including Brolga and the Southern Bent-wing Bat. This will inform the development of the *Handbook for the development of renewable energy in Victoria*. This handbook will include new guidelines on the planning and construction of renewable projects in Victoria that must be followed.

Further details on the release statement *Protecting biodiversity in the energy transition*, can be found at www.energy.vic.gov.au/about-energy/news/news-stories/better-managing-biodiversity-impacts-of-energy-projects.

Wind Prospect supports the Victorian Government's decision to develop better information, tools and guidance to mitigate biodiversity impacts. We are hopeful that this will help progress the Willatook Wind Farm project in the context of the Minister's recommendations.

What happens next

Wind Prospect will continue to engage with the Victorian Government in the context of its recent announcement, with the aim of progressing the Willatook Wind Farm project as efficiently as possible.

We acknowledge the dedicated effort of our team and the local community over the past decade and thank all who have contributed to the development process to date.

FAQs

What is the significance of the Minister for Planning's assessment for Willatook?

The assessment completed by the Victorian Minister for Planning in July 2023, was the final step of the Environment Effects Statement (EES) process. While it does not grant approval, it makes recommendations to regulatory decision makers regarding the project's environmental effects.

What were the main recommendations made by the Minister?

The Minister recommended widening buffer zones around potential habitat for brolga and the southern bent-wing bat, substantially reducing the area in which wind turbines could be placed. Additionally, a five-month construction ban during the brolga breeding season, from July to November, was recommended.

What is the recent policy announcement by the Victorian Labor Government?

The government has committed to taking steps to improve the knowledge and understanding of potential impacts to biodiversity from wind farms and how best to avoid and mitigate them. This includes providing new tools and guidance that will identify biodiversity values and clearly outline expectations for how to identify, assess and mitigate impacts.

Key actions by government will include mapping of biodiversity values to inform the siting of renewable energy developments; targeted research on key bird and bat species including Brolga and Southern Bent-wing bat, and; guidance for the planning and construction of renewable projects in Victoria.

Further details on the release statement *Protecting biodiversity in the energy transition*, can be found at www.energy.vic.gov.au/about-energy/news/news-stories/better-managing-biodiversity-impacts-of-energy-projects.

Why is new guidance required?

Given the scale of the energy transition currently underway, it is important to find a balance between delivering the necessary renewable energy generation and minimising impacts on biodiversity. At present, the government's policy objectives regarding renewable energy generation are clear and new biodiversity guidance will provide for the management of potential impacts.

What are the renewable energy targets for Victoria?

Victoria has legislated targets of 65% renewable energy generation by 2030 and 95% by 2035. To achieve this energy transition in Victoria, around 8.3 Gigawatts (GW) of new grid-scale renewable energy generation capacity will be needed by 2035. Over this period, wind energy generation is anticipated to increase from 20% to around 60% of all energy generation.

What is Wind Prospect's plan moving forward with the Willatook Wind Farm project?

The Wind Prospect team will continue to engage with government, regulators and agencies and evaluate the application of updated guidance to the Willatook Wind Farm project when it is released. It is possible this could lead to modifications to the project's design and to how it is constructed, operated and ultimately decommissioned.

Community Sponsorships

The Willatook Wind Farm project implemented a Community Sponsorship Fund in 2019. Since then, 22 community sponsorships have been awarded totalling more than \$100,000.

The \$20,000 annual fund aims to provide support for local community groups and organisations operating in the vicinity of the proposed wind farm to improve their services, programs, initiatives and/or facilities.

Since the publication of the last newsletter, several community organisations have been supported by this fund, including:

- Hamilton Scouts
- Friends of St Brigid's Crossley
- Hawkesdale Macarthur Football Netball Club
- Macarthur RSL

For further details please visit the community page on the project website at www.willatookwindfarm.com.au.



Photo: St Brigid's, Crossley