



Hon Stephen Robertson MP
Member for Stretton



Queensland
Government

Your ref: Petitions
Our ref: CLLO/10097

Minister for Natural Resources,
Mines and Energy and
Minister for Trade

12 NOV 2010

Mr Neil Laurie
The Clerk of the Parliament
Parliament House
Cnr George and Alice Streets
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Mr Laurie

Thank you for your letter dated 27 October 2010 forwarding petition number 1549-10 on the subject of Powerlink Queensland's (Powerlink) proposed Woolooga to Eerwah Vale Transmission Line (the project). I have considered the petition carefully and am pleased to provide my response.

In compliance with the *Sustainable Planning Act 2009* (the Act), Powerlink employed environmental consultant Parsons Brinckerhoff (PB) to conduct comprehensive environmental investigations for the project. The details of these investigations can be found in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) published in December 2009. The EIS concluded that there were no social, environmental or cultural heritage issues that would prevent the proposed transmission line from being recommended for community infrastructure designation under the Act.

In addition, Powerlink voluntarily referred the project to the Federal Government Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts to review the project with regard to the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act). It was found that no environmental assessment was required by the Federal Government under the EPBC Act, as the project is considered to have no significant impacts on matters of national environmental significance. The Federal Government's decision aligns with the findings of the Final EIS.

The *South East Queensland Koala Conservation State Planning Regulatory Provision* (SPRP), the *State Planning Policy 2/10: Koala Conservation in South East Queensland* (SPP) and the related *Offsets for Net Gain of Koala Habitat in South East Queensland Policy* (Offsets Policy) have been in effect under the *Sustainable Planning Act 2009* (SPA) since 31 May 2010.

Level 17
61 Mary Street Brisbane Qld 4000
PO Box 15216 City East
Queensland 4002 Australia
Telephone +61 7 3225 1861
Facsimile +61 7 3225 1828
Email nrmet@ministerial.qld.gov.au

The SPP applies to projects in South East Queensland for which Ministerial designation for community infrastructure is sought, including the Woolooga to Eerwah Vale Transmission Line and Eerwah Vale Substation Project.

The Final EIS concluded that the impacts on koala habitat will be minimal and that there is no impact on high value mapped koala habitat. Powerlink has advised the impact of the final alignment on the small areas of low/medium value mapped koala habitat will be mitigated by selectively locating towers, and placing conductors (wires) above the canopy, so as to largely preserve existing vegetation on the easement. Under the SPP, the project will comply with the Offsets Policy, which is aimed at achieving a net gain in koala bushland habitat. Potential solutions for achieving this outcome include a requirement that the clearing of non-juvenile koala habitat trees is offset at a ratio of five new koala habitat trees for every one non-juvenile koala habitat tree removed, or an equivalent cash contribution.

Powerlink has advised it will use best practice easement and vegetation management techniques for this project including maintaining as much habitat on the easement as possible in sensitive locations. The Environmental Management Plan identifies strategies to ensure minimal disturbance to the biological environment. Some examples of these strategies include, where appropriate, installing the conductors (wires) over the top of the vegetation canopy to preserve connectivity; minimising the exposure of bare soil; selective clearing and retaining low growing vegetation on the easement; and the use of hand-clearing.

The potential impact on koala habitat was also assessed by PB as part of the field work leading to the Draft EIS and also in the Final EIS for the project. PB used the latest government mapping available from the Department of Environment and Resource Management's Koala Conservation Unit in its preparation of the EIS. In addition, PB also carried out scientific field surveys in numerous locations along the proposed alignment to identify significant fauna and flora, including the koala.

PB assessed 12 different routes for the new powerline in the Final EIS, including several alignments alongside the Bruce Highway. The Bruce Highway route options were the most expensive of the 12 route options considered, with much greater environmental and social impacts (most notably, proximity to housing).

The Department of Transport and Main Roads advised Powerlink in June 2009 that there was no room for a transmission line within the road reserve for the existing highway, nor where the road reserve is to be widened to allow for the Cooroy to Curra highway upgrade. If the powerline is to run parallel with the highway, extensive land acquisitions adjacent to it will be needed for the easement at a higher cost than Powerlink's preferred solution.

When deciding whether or not to make a community infrastructure designation, the delegated Minister must consider a number of matters set down in the Act, including the public benefit test set out in section 201 of the Act, and whether adequate environmental and public consultation has been carried out. In this instance, as the delegated Minister, I must also consider issues raised in submissions made to Powerlink during the consultation process and the account taken of those issues. I trust that the issue raised in the petition was provided to Powerlink during its call for submissions as part of the designation process for this project.

Should you have any queries regarding my advice to you, Ms Bernadette McNevin, Manager, Energy Sector Monitoring Division of the Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation, will be pleased to assist you and can be contacted on telephone 3404 8014.

Yours sincerely

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

STEPHEN ROBERTSON MP