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<https://www.thecourier.com.au/story/7193875/are-you-expecting-them-not-to-be-angry-next-stage-of-consultation-ends-on-powerline-project/?cs=12>

## Western Victoria Transmission Network Project: Community anger continues as consultation round ends

[Alex Ford](#)



Reaction: A sign near Daylesford protesting the Western Victoria Transmission Network Project last week.  
Picture: Kate Healy

The anger and frustration in communities surrounding Ballarat within the corridors of interest for a major transmission line project has not abated following two weeks of community information sessions.

The Western Victoria Transmission Network Project, which aims to connect new renewable energy generators near Ararat to the grid with high-voltage powerlines into Melbourne's outskirts, is currently undergoing studies for an Environmental Effects Statement.

But residents opposing the project - who say the powerlines will destroy generational farms and divide communities - say they have not received answers to their questions.

**READ MORE:** [See the narrowed corridor map for the Western Victoria Transmission Network Project](#)

The sessions were held across the entire corridor of interest, and according to AusNet, the company building the powerlines, more than 500 people attended.

Nathan Lidgett, who lives near Myrniong, said that was despite some people being turned away in the rain from a meeting which attracted police attendance.

"The older generation was standing out in the rain and a lot of them after an hour couldn't handle standing outside in the rain, a lot had to leave," he said.

"It hasn't been nasty any of the way through this - yes there's an angry community, but to rock around with five cop cars and have three parked there for an hour or so, it's somewhat intimidating to our community.

"You want consultation and feedback, you're affecting people's livelihoods, homes and communities, are you expecting them not to be angry?"

"One of our neighbours here is fourth-generation here, mid-70s, it's smashing him, and he doesn't know how to deal with it."

Another opponent, Clarkes Hill's Vicki Johnson, said the company "hadn't learned" from the previous round of consultation, and said many residents had not received letters and were unaware of the sessions.



Vicki Johnson with Helma Slater at the Miners Rest information session. Picture: Lachlan Bence

"The whole point of bringing people along and asking them to ask questions and bring concerns to let AusNet know is so disingenuous and disrespectful of all the farmers," she said.

"We've done emails, phone calls, drop-in sessions, pins on maps, and then they're turning around and doing these drop-in sessions again.

"The mistruths that people have been given, still, about the kind of work they can and can't do under the powerlines, it's never-ending."

An AusNet spokesperson said in a statement feedback and insights gathered at the sessions "inform and shape our ongoing technical investigations of the corridor options and support of the process of narrowing these down to a single corridor by mid-2021."

"We summarised and published the feedback we received during 2020 in a Community Engagement Summary Report which [can be accessed on the project website](#) - once we've had the opportunity to review and consider the feedback received through these latest community drop-in sessions a similar report will also be available on the website," they said.

"We'd like to remind people that there is still time to nominate for the Community Consultation Groups initiative that we announced in February. These groups are an important element of engagement and will continue to run through the EES process. The groups will foster collaboration and further support the flow of information to the community about the project."

They also responded to criticism of the police and security guard presence at the sessions.

"We'd also like to make clear that safety of our people and the community is paramount," they said.

"We have put in place a number of measures to provide a supportive and safe environment for everyone participating in our consultation processes. Security presence at the community drop-in sessions has enabled us to host sessions in line with safe COVID practices as well as provide a safe environment for everyone in the room."

#### **READ THE FULL STATEMENT FROM AUSNET BELOW:**

We've had one on one discussions with over 500 community members as we make our way across the recently announced corridors for further investigation.

We really appreciate the time the community has taken to head down and chat to the team. The feedback and insights gathered via these community drop in sessions provides us with important input. We will use this to inform and shape our ongoing technical investigations of the corridor options and support of the process of narrowing these down to a single corridor by mid-2021. This input will shape our work on the ongoing Environment Effects Statement (EES) process.

Over the course of the project, we've heard concerns and learned valuable insights from the community. We summarised and published the feedback we received during 2020 in a Community Engagement Summary Report which [can be accessed on the project website here](#). Once we've had the opportunity to review and consider the feedback received through these latest community drop-in sessions a similar report will also be available on the website.

Everyone in the community can help shape this project. We'd like to remind people that there is still time to nominate for the Community Consultation Groups initiative that we announced in February. These groups are an important element of engagement and will continue to run through the EES

process. The groups will foster collaboration and further support the flow of information to the community about the project.

We will host more community consultations following the announcement of the single corridor in the middle of the year. More information about the next stages of determining the final preferred route can be found on the project [website](#).

We'd also like to make clear that safety of our people and the community is paramount. We have put in place a number of measures to provide a supportive and safe environment for everyone participating in our consultation processes. Security presence at the community drop-in sessions has enabled us to host sessions in line with safe COVID practices as well as provide a safe environment for everyone in the room.

We'd like to thank the community and interested stakeholders for their time and interest so far. Community involvement is critical to achieving the best outcome for this important project and it's important that we continue these conversations.