

# Expert Conclave – Bushfire

**Subject Matter :** Bushfire

**Date of Conclave :** 23 October 2025

**Time of Conclave commencement :** 9am

**Time of Conclave conclusion :** 10.30am

**Attendees :** Michael Buxton, Alan March, Graeme Taylor, Mark Potter

**Date of finalisation of conclave report:** 24 October 2025

## Introduction

In accordance with Inquiry and Advisory Committee (IAC) Directions 23, Michael Buxton, Alan March, Graeme Taylor and Mark Potter met on 23 October 2025 to consider matters of agreement and disagreement in relation to the Western Renewables Link Project. The following table outlines the key technical issues raised by any or all of the experts and records their opinions. Each expert may document their commentary in the relevant column.



---

**Signature of Emeritus  
Professor Michael Buxton**



---

**Signature of  
Professor Alan  
March**



---

**Signature of  
Graeme Taylor**



---

**Signature of  
Mark Potter**

Ref	Main Issue	Sub-Issue / Question for Expert	March and Buxton Comments	FRC Comments
1	Method	Existence of bushfire risk.	<p>We agree that the route passes through areas of significant bushfire risk. This risk can be heightened on days of extreme bushfire danger.</p> <p>However, in the treatment of the possibility of on-site ignition and the possible consequences of ignition, we believe that the technical reports do not include a full assessment of risk. Even if the likelihood of on-site ignition is low, consequential impacts may still arise and take catastrophic forms. Project reports understate the possibility of low likelihood but high consequence events.</p>	<p>We agree that the route passes through areas of significant bushfire risk. This risk can be heightened on days of extreme bushfire danger.</p> <p>In our view, the assessment of risk has occurred in line with the EES assessment requirements. The assessment considered the risk at both the construction and operations phase and included history of ignition from transmission lines, likely bushfire behaviour and strong and robust mitigation measures to manage the risk.</p>
2		Clause 13.02-1S applies - Primacy of human life is a key factor within the assessment of risk.	The failure to adequately consider consequences to settlement contradicts the requirements of clause 13.02-1S requiring priority consideration to be given to the protection of human life above all other policy positions. We also refer to Clause 71.02-3.	<p>We agree that the assessment rightly assessed the project including the workforce accommodation facilities against Clause 13.02-1S of the relevant Planning Scheme.</p> <p>We also agree that in conjunction with Clause 71.02-3, the primacy of life is a key priority within these assessments. It is our view that this has been effectively assessed.</p>

Ref	Main Issue	Sub-Issue / Question for Expert	March and Buxton Comments	FRC Comments
3		<p>Ignition from infrastructure has occurred historically.</p>	<p>We agree that transmission tower infrastructure has led to past on-site ignition in other locations. This has generally occurred at times of relatively low bushfire risk and generally been contained.</p> <p>We believe that past failures coupled with the uncertainty associated with the high probability of increasing severe weather events should be factors guiding the assessment of risk.</p> <p>Technical Report K provides no comparative details of construction standards. Nor does it model likely performance during extreme events.</p>	<p>We agree that transmission line infrastructure has led to past ignitions within vegetated areas. These are rare occurrences and there is limited evidence of ignitions. We also agree that the records demonstrate that these events did not escalate into uncontrollable bushfire events.</p> <p>The bushfire assessment has effectively considered past ignitions within the Technical Report (K).</p>
4		<p>Existing distribution and private powerline networks are present.</p>	<p>We agree that existing distribution networks exist and potentially can lead to bushfires which affect landscapes and settlement at times of high risk. In the past, such networks have led to dangerous bushfires.</p> <p>However, we point out that the existing risks from such networks does not mitigate the potential risk from the project but rather</p>	<p>We agree that existing distribution networks exist and potentially can lead to bushfires which affect landscapes and settlement at times of high risk. In the past, such networks have led to dangerous bushfires.</p>

Ref	Main Issue	Sub-Issue / Question for Expert	March and Buxton Comments	FRC Comments
			represents significant existing risks that the project will add to.	
5		The BPA and BMO are triggers for further assessment.	We agree that the Bushfire Prone Area and Bushfire Management Overlay are only triggers for more detailed risk assessment via building code and planning regulations, respectively.	<p>We agree that the Bushfire Prone Area and Bushfire Management Overlay are only triggers for more detailed risk assessment via building code and planning regulations, respectively.</p> <p>We also believe that the BMO and BPA can be utilised to identify bushfire hazard areas that require further consideration within a bushfire assessment.</p>
6		Climate change is a key factor in assessing risk.	<p>The probability of worsening environmental conditions and high confidence in the possibility of a confluence of extreme events reduces the legitimacy of probabilities being assigned in technical reports to outcomes.</p> <p>We believe that the reports do not adequately consider a series of factors potentially combining to result in rapid, non-linear, severe impacts which are difficult to predict.</p>	The analysis of climate change impacts has been considered within the Technical Report.

Ref	Main Issue	Sub-Issue / Question for Expert	March and Buxton Comments	FRC Comments
7		Bushfire risk is a key factor for route selection.	Bushfire risk was not considered as a factor in selecting the route for the easement and infrastructure. Bushfire impacts from alternative routes were not adequately considered or assessed. The risks from bushfire potential arising from ignition or from bushfire to infrastructure were only assessed after the final route was decided. Decisions on the route considered proximity to settlements but did not evaluate potential bushfire impacts on settlements.	We believe that the consideration of bushfire risk was a key factor within the selection of the transmission line route.
8	EPR and Inc Doc	Requirement for the Bushfire Management Plan for the construction phase.	<p>We agree that the preparation of the planning amendment is appropriate if the project is to proceed.</p> <p>However, the amendment does not fully address key requirements of the PPN46: Strategic assessment guidelines and Minister's Direction No. 11 - Strategic Assessment of Amendments. This means that broad actions do not respond adequately to Clause 71.02-3 and</p>	We agree that a critical tool to manage the bushfire risk during the construction phase is the development of a Bushfire Management Plan. This is outlined within the Incorporated Document requires a range of elements to be considered in the development of the Bushfire Management Plan.

Ref	Main Issue	Sub-Issue / Question for Expert	March and Buxton Comments	FRC Comments
			<p>Clause 13.02-1S Bushfire particularly to prioritise the protection of human life.</p> <p>We believe that effective performance requirements relating to Bushfire should be included in the incorporated document at the time of any approval.</p>	
9		Construction works in higher risk areas to occur in the off season.	We are of the opinion that significant risk reduction benefits will be achieved, if the project goes ahead, by adding EPRs to the incorporated document that require work in high risk areas, such as near north Darley, to occur during low fire risk seasons.	We believe that the development of the Bushfire Management Plan as required by the Incorporated Document, provides the opportunity in consultation with CFA to develop specific controls and mitigation activities to manage bushfire risk based on the time of year, seasonal changes and other factors.
10	Consequence	Potential impacts on settlement in assessment of consequence	We agree with the recognition in Technical Reports that dwellings exist throughout the study area, and of settlement types potentially subject to risk from bushfire. However, the reports do not assess risks from potential bushfire to types of settlement outside the easement.	We agree with the recognition in Technical Reports that dwellings exist throughout the study area, and of settlement types potentially subject to risk from bushfire.

Ref	Main Issue	Sub-Issue / Question for Expert	March and Buxton Comments	FRC Comments
11		Access and egress	<p>We agree with the acknowledgement of the potentially significant impacts on access and egress during bushfires in the event of infrastructure failure and that potential impacts on Moorabool Shire are significant. However, the reports' assessment of the low - likelihood of tower failure does not provide a risk assessment of tower failure on access and egress.</p>	<p>We agree with the acknowledgement of the potentially significant impacts on access and egress during bushfires in the event of infrastructure failure and that potential impacts are significant.</p> <p>We believe that this risk is already present from the presence of distribution and private powerlines along with roadside vegetation including trees that when damaged or burnt can cause access and egress issues.</p>
12		Undergrounding options	<p>We agree with the evaluation's acceptance that partial undergrounding of the route would reduce bushfire risk.</p> <p>However, no consequence modelling was provided to construction on a new asset in the preferred locations particularly in the vicinity of Darley.</p>	<p>The analysis of under grounding powerlines was considered by the Technical Report (K). However, this was explored in detail in Technical Report (I).</p> <p>We are comfortable with the outcome of the assessment within the Technical Report (K).</p>