

Coalition vows to pull the plug on WRL and VNI West

The Coalition will halt Victoria's transmission line rollout if elected in November and reverse Labor's "draconian" laws hitting farmers.

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The Coalition leaders Jess Wilson and Danny O'Brien have promised to halt the rollout of the WRL and VNI West transmission projects.

Rollout of the controversial VNI West and Western Renewables Link transmission lines will grind to a halt if the Victorian Liberal-Nationals Coalition gains power at the November 28 state election.

Both projects would be paused while the Coalition reviews Victoria's transmission plan, explores alternatives and reconsiders the industrialisation of the rural landscape with renewable energy zones covered in solar, wind and battery developments.

One of those alternatives is [Victorian Energy Policy Centre's "Plan B" option, which proposes using 1321kms of existing powerline easements to lift the state's transmission capacity](#), rather than carving new routes across the state.

A key concern is the soaring cost of the transmission rollout, [with the Australian Energy Market Operator estimating the cost of VNI West alone would blow out from an original estimate of \\$2bn to somewhere between \\$7.6bn and \\$11bn](#).

Victorian Nationals leader Danny O'Brien said the VNI West project had no social licence and Labor had increasingly turned to harsh legislative changes, such as fines for farmers refusing access to their own land, and compulsory acquisition of easements even before planning and environment studies have been undertaken.

"The Labor Government has ridden roughshod over regional communities with its renewables-at-all-cost energy policy," Mr O'Brien said.

He said a Liberal-Nationals government would reverse Labor's draconian laws and "give farmers their rights back while pausing projects like VNI West and properly examining the alternatives."

Coalition energy spokesman David Davis said the Coalition would also drive down the cost of the energy transition by introducing new urban solar parks, which would encourage solar and battery installations on commercial and industrial rooftops in urban areas, to generate renewable electricity closer to where it is needed.

"There are countless hectares of available roof space for solar and battery installations across the warehouses and factories of Melbourne and that is where we need the electricity.

"We will support these developments, which will minimise land use conflict and deliver clean power where it's needed though facilitating the designation of Urban Solar Parks driven by an early expression of interest process, allowing proponents to propose for specific Urban Solar Parks.

"These changes can save Victorians significant costs on their energy bills at a time when cost of living is already biting hard."

Mr Davis said the solar parks could supply up to 25 per cent of demand and reduce the need for as many transmission lines crisscrossing productive farmland.

If elected in November, the Coalition's review is likely to take at least six months, not only halting the transmission rollout but that of new solar and wind developments, which have already slowed to a trickle as subsidies ease and construction costs soar.

Investment in [solar and wind developments has collapsed across the nation, after the value of large-scale generation certificates that subsidise up to half their income crashed from \\$40 last year to just \\$6 this month.](#)

The collapse in the value of the certificates (or LGCs) has coincided with more frequent negative pricing during the day, further undermining returns as excess solar and wind power flooded the market.

The Coalition policy also raises issues for Transgrid, which is building the NSW section of the VNI West project.