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Conservation Regulator

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Submission to: **Regulating the protection of Wildlife Statement of Regulatory Intent CONSULTATION DRAFT JULY 2021**

Energy Grid Alliance acknowledges the importance of protecting wildlife and are pleased to make a submission in response to regulating Victoria's natural environment.

There is nothing more important to our existence than a healthy natural environment. Yet despite efforts in recent decades, many native plant and animal species remain under threat as Victoria's biodiversity continues to decline. We need to stop the decline of our biodiversity and ensure that our natural environment is healthy, valued and actively cared for.

The decline of our biodiversity also impacts the future health, wellbeing and prosperity of all Victorian communities.

The purpose of this submission and accompanying paper is to:

- Respond to questions raised on the draft consultation paper
- Provide an overview of the important need to protect Victoria's biodiversity
- Highlight the importance of community and landholder initiatives such as land for conservation
- Identify how creation of biolinks (corridors for the protection of native flora and fauna) can halt further habitat fragmentation and improve the long-term health of our ecosystems and the species they contain.

This submission also presents case studies relating to the proposed energy infrastructure project, the **Western Victoria Transmission Network Project (WVTNP)**. The first of many large-scale transmission projects planned for the state of Victoria as we transition to renewable energy generation.

These case studies highlight an urgent need for energy network operators and related stakeholders to adopt stringent environment protection policies that serve to protect and enhance our environment and prevent further decline of our biodiversity. They also present a case for active regulation of the electricity transmission sector and compliance with environment law.

We welcome further opportunities for discussion with the Conservation Regulator in regulating the natural environment seriously.

Sincerely



Darren Edwards

Director

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RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS RAISED:

**Regulating the protection of Wildlife Statement of Regulatory Intent CONSULTATION DRAFT
JULY 2021**

The Conservation Regulator wants this Statement of Regulatory Intent (SRI) to set clear, realistic expectations for the public on what is within our scope of responsibility.

Q. Is the scope of responsibility presented by the SRI clear?

A. On page 4 of the Statement of Regulatory Intent (SRI), it is stated that the Conservation Regulator is working towards ensuring that Victoria's public land and its biodiversity are appropriately managed and protected from **illegal** human activity. Energy Grid Alliance believe this should be expanded to encompass 'ALL human, government, essential infrastructure and business activity'.

Q. What requires further clarification?

A. It is not clear if the Conservation Regulator will regulate essential infrastructure development such as transmission line routing, construction and maintenance and the impact associated activity will have on biodiversity. It is also not clear if there is a solid understanding of risks to biodiversity and effective compliance approaches.

The regulatory approach described in this section is multifaceted to adequately address wildlife harms.

Q. Which of the regulatory approaches listed do you see as most critical to achieving wildlife protection, and why?

A. 3: Support compliance by assisting regulated entities and the community to understand how to comply with their obligations under the regulatory framework. This may include information on conditions given to permission holders, and engagement with industries known to impact on wildlife to ensure wildlife protection.

Q. How is the Conservation Regulator currently performing in the six listed regulatory approaches in your opinion? Please provide examples.

A. We are unable to determine or provide examples at this stage.

Q. Which of these four priority harms concern you the most?

A. The unauthorised destruction of wildlife, with a particular focus on the destruction of wildlife threatened by extinction. This is of most concern given legislation and planning policies are able to be easily amended to accommodate essential infrastructure projects, at the expense of the environment. Decision makers in government, business and land management too often fail to fully acknowledge the impacts of their actions on biodiversity – and are not routinely required to do so. This should be the role of the Conservation Regulator.

Q. Are there any priority harms to wildlife relevant to the Conservation Regulator that you have observed or are aware of that are not captured here?

A. Siting and routing of renewable energy infrastructure such as wind turbines and transmission lines. The objective of transmission route planning should be to avoid construction of easements through native parks, nature reserves, bushland and biolinks to avoid further habitat fragmentation and harm to the environment.

Q. Are the key drivers of non-compliance and wildlife harm captured here?

A. Drivers of non-compliance appear to focus on impact or lack of awareness by the public. There is no reference to conflict between wildlife, habitats and essential infrastructure activities.

Q. Are there any drivers that you believe are missing?

A. Siting and routing of renewable energy infrastructure such as wind turbines and transmission lines in or over native habitat or wildlife corridors (biolinks) should be included.

Q. What does success look like? What other goals or success measures within scope would facilitate wildlife protection?

A. Success = When wildlife and habitat conservation is afforded priority over projects or activities that seek to degrade or destroy the environment and when we recognise that native plants and animals have an intrinsic right to exist, thrive and flourish. Success will be achieved when we stop the decline of our biodiversity and further fragmentation of native habitats from human activity.

Q. What information would you want released annually to indicate the performance of the Conservation Regulator and the realisation of the stated success measures?

A. The release of mapping and data demonstrating the decline of fragmentation, the increase in conservation of native habitat and the reduction of bird fatalities due to collisions with overhead transmission lines. It would also be pertinent to publish incidents of non-compliance and breaches of law protecting wildlife by decision makers in government, business and land management to ensure they are publicly held to accountability.

Q. What opportunities for discussion with the Conservation Regulator regarding issues with wildlife protection or environmental regulation would you like to see in the future?

A. While consultation papers are a beneficial tool. Workshops and forums involving all stakeholders, including communities, would be beneficial to allow all Victorians (not just government, business and land management) to actively participate in decisions that serve to conserve, protect and enhance our biodiversity for the future.

Q. Would you like to be updated on this project?

A. Yes, that would be appreciated.

ENDS