The Honourable Lisa Neville

Minister for Police and Emergency Services

G066. Gateway Plaza Leopold

641 – 659 Bellarine Hwy, Leopold. Vic. 3224

lisa.neville@parliament.vic.gov.au

Re: Western Victoria Transmission Network Project (WVTNP)

Dear Minister,

Recently Ausnet has identified two narrowed corridors for the proposed WVTNP, one of which runs north of Darley and the Lerderderg State Park and directly impacts residents of Coimadai, Darley and Merrimu.

As a resident of the Coimadai / Darley / Merrimu regions, it is with grave concern I write to you. The proposed WVTNP and its impact upon my community and surrounding areas is immeasurable. There are numerous issues surrounding this proposed project ranging from extremely poor community consultation, inadequate and inconsistent information, poor planning and zero social license to operate.

There are many concerns I, and the broader community share regarding, cultural heritage, significant environmental impacts, visual amenity, property values, land use, tourism and our mental health. High on the list of concerns is the increased fire risk in a known bushfire prone region and the impact to search and rescue efforts in the Lerderderg State Park. The proposed northern alignment of the WVTNP puts lives, property and visitors to our region at risk. AusNet Services have a duty of care to avoid bushfire prone regions and protect the community.

Coimadai is located north of Darley and is a rural community. It is situated west of Merrimu Reservoir and in the valley of the Pyrete / Coimadai creek area which drains southward from the Lerderderg Hills and Lerderderg State park. During summer and high-risk fire season the entire region is subject to high north winds on extreme fire danger days. A wildfire in the area will put communities at risk in Coimadai, the township of Darley, Bacchus Marsh, nearby Gisborne and other immediate rural areas.

The proposed construction of high voltage power lines through this region will add further risk to communities and impact the efforts of emergency services working hard to protect us and the wildlife. We have all witnessed the Black Saturday fires and the absolute devastation and loss of lives those fires caused. As a community, we will not have our lives put at such an enormous risk for the sake of transmitting power through the shortest route.

There are concerns the lives of water-bomber pilots and community could be put at risk if the Project goes ahead through the proposed northern corridor. The proposed corridor passes through the middle of the Merrimu Reservoir, the regions primary water source, and is raising great concern with community and CFA volunteers. When operating aeroplanes and helicopters in a fire season, pilots are already putting their lives at risk flying at low level in reduced visibility conditions. Add 85m high transmission lines to the equation and the risk renders the water source useless for firefighting efforts. It’s absolutely ridiculous to think we’re going to put them at further risk by putting powerlines all over the landscape. The objective of the Project should be to mitigate risks to the community, the environment and crucial water assets that are relied on for bushfire management.

The Lerderderg State Park is accessed regularly by nature lovers and bush walkers. It is not uncommon for people to become lost or injured in the area necessitating the use of the State Emergency Service and Police Search and Rescue helicopters. Transmission towers located near the Park will most certainly impact the ability and timeliness of future rescue efforts. Rescue choppers will often land on the river flats, directly within the northern corridor, to conserve fuel while patients are prepped for extraction from the Lerderderg State Park.

As you would be aware, the deadly 2009 Black Saturday bushfires killed 119 people, destroyed 125,000 hectares and more than 1,000 homes. The case came about after the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission found the Kilmore East-Kinglake bushfire was caused by an ageing SP AusNet power line. Now AusNet are proposing new infrastructure through another high-risk area. AusNet must consider their duty of care and put these transmission lines underground.

I urge you to consider the safety of our community and object to the use of overhead transmission or find an alternate route.

I look forward to your earliest attention and reply.

Regards