**The Hon Sussan Lay**

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**Re: Western Victoria Transmission Network Project (WVTNP)**

Dear Minister,

I write this letter as a resident of the Darley / Coimadai / Merrimu region to voice concerns regarding the proposed northern alignment of the WVTNP and its impacts on our community.

The purpose of this specific letter is to highlight the often-irreversible effect on the Significant Habitat of the Lerderderg State Park and surrounding environment.

The Lerderderg State Park and Gorge is rich in Culture, Heritage, and wildlife. The Gorge has been created over thousands of years by the Lerderderg River. This river is one of Victoria’s eighteen Heritage Rivers and the only one of the six major rivers rising in the Wombat Forest with this designation. Heritage rivers are protected under the Heritage Rivers Act 1992 (Vic) for their high conservation, recreation, or cultural values.

The area boasts a range of vegetation types including a Riparian Blue Gum and Manna Gum community of State significance as well as 23 other plant species including over 200-year-old Grey Box Gum trees. These are to be found within the State Park as well on private land adjacent.

The area is also a haven for Koalas, Eastern Grey Kangaroos, Swamp Wallabies and Echidnas. Nocturnal animals include the Greater Glider, Mountain Brushtail Possum, and the Bent Wing Bat.

Bird life abounds including Sulphur Crested Cockatoos, the majestic Wedge-tailed Eagle which can be seen from many vantage points soaring above the area. Black Cockatoos, White Knapped Honeyeaters, White Throat Tree Creepers, Crimson Rosellas, Gang – Gang Cockatoos, the Superb Lyrebird and Large Forest Owls are also to be found throughout the area.

Impacts on wildlife habitats can take many forms. Some are irreversible.

**1. Cinnamon Fungus -** Invasive Cinnamon Fungus seriously affects native vegetation and causes the death of susceptible species and decline of fauna that depends on vegetation for food. The spread of this disease is accelerated though the transport of infected soil and gravel by road-making machinery and other vehicles that will be required to construct overhead transmission towers.

**2. Transmission Line 'right-of-ways' -** Easements create physical disturbance or destruction of natural land and air habitats. Clearing of trees, shrubs, and other plant growth areas for these 'right-of-ways', will be extensive and impact large areas of pristine forest. Habitats in these areas are never able to recover to their original state because of the need to ensure ongoing accessibility to infrastructure for security, repairs, and maintenance. This results in permanent damage to, or loss of, significant plant and animal species from the area.

**3. Soil erosion** - The Ordovician duplex soils of Lerderderg State Park are highly dispensable, making them extremely susceptible to erosion (Soil Conservation Authority & Land Conservation Council 1975). The removal of vegetation and development of easements, access tracks and construction sites encourage sheet, gully and tunnel erosion (DCE 1991). Increase in sediment input into Victorian rivers and streams due to human activities is listed as a potentially threatening process under Schedule 3 of the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act.

**4. Weed infestation -** Easements introduce weeds. Of most concern within the Lerderderg State Park include Gorse, Bridal Creeper and Blackberry, all of which are known to grow along cleared corridors. Serrated Tussock, which infests surrounding cleared land, poses the greatest potential threat to the ecology of the Park.

**5. Overhead Transmission Lines Kill Birds -** Australian bird populations (eagle, hawk, falcon, cockatoo, etc.), are exposed to significant physical and health associated risks from transmission lines and towers. TasNetwork's annual report showed that 29 Tasmanian wedged-tail eagles were killed with strikes to electricity infrastructure in 2017-2018.

Habitat destruction is one of the largest threats facing plants and animal species throughout the world. The loss of habitat has far-reaching impacts on the planet's ability to sustain life, but even with the challenges, there is hope for the future.

I urge you to supporting us by helping to save this unique and environmentally significant habitat so our flora and fauna can thrive, and the Lerderderg State park and surrounding region will remain untouched for future generations to enjoy. Please insist on a comprehensive review of the Western Victoria Transmission Network Project and request permanent removal of the proposed northern alignment between Darley and the Lerderderg State Park from the Project's Area of Interest. The Significance, character and amenity of this historic environment must be protected.

Will you please champion this issue by advocating that renewable energy distribution should always be modern, sophisticated, sensitive to communities and the environment and above all, 'unseen'? I look forward to your response in the hope we can work to conserve and enhance our significant landscape features, fauna, flora, biodiversity and ecological values for future generations.

Thank you for your appreciation of this critically important matter.

Yours sincerely,