

Victorian Government ignorant towards Darley desecration

By Darren Edwards

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The visual amenity of the Darley region would be ruined by overhead power lines if the project goes ahead (Screenshot via YouTube)

Tensions are erupting across Victoria's volcanic plains as a battle to protect state significant landscape from a proposed 500kV overhead transmission network heats up.

A local group, [Darley Power Fight](#), is uniting residents in a mammoth battle to stop a large-scale power transmission project in its tracks before it destroys the high scenic value of one of Melbourne's closest and most popular riverine gorge landscapes.

[AusNet Services](#) has been contracted to construct 190 kilometres of new overhead high voltage transmission lines from Sydenham to Bulgana, a project known as the Western Victoria Transmission Network Project ([WVTNP](#)). AusNet has identified a narrow corridor passing right between [Bacchus Marsh](#) and the [Lerderderg State Park and Gorge](#), a state significant park known for

its remote setting and 300-metre deep river gorge.

This narrow corridor will be home to 12 kilometres of 75-85 metre high dual-circuit transmission towers (close to 30 of them) leaving an irreversible and completely unacceptable scar on this rugged, untouched and spectacular landscape.

The Lerderderg will no longer be the dominant feature of this region which is certain to impact livability and tourism appeal.

This region is recognised for its natural beauty and attracts more than [500,000 visitors](#) each year. Many come to immerse themselves in nature, to drink up the jaw-dropping scenery and escape the hustle and bustle. The perfect antidote to our stressful lives.

Rounding the final bend from Melbourne into Bacchus Marsh, you may no longer be greeted by the sweeping panorama of folding dark green hills. This wild and rugged place will take backstage to a silver army of [transmission towers](#) and an extensive lattice of overhead cables.

If the project goes ahead, it will irreversibly alter the character of Bacchus Marsh and surrounding areas forever by:

- dominating the landscape, permanently altering its appeal;
- causing damage to critical habitat through weed infestation and spread of disease;
- increasing firefighting risk to the park and thousands of residents;
- destroying visual amenity;
- harming local agribusiness;
- decreasing property values; and

- impacting current and future tourism including the [Bald Hill Activation Project](#).

This ill-conceived, 75-85 metre high transmission network will completely desecrate, in a few years, what nature has taken millions to create.

The fact this route is even being considered shows that AusNet Services, the State and Federal Governments have little regard for the public, our region or the immense benefits to all Australians in conserving and enhancing the environment for future generations to enjoy.

The pushback from the community signals a new challenge for the Victorian Government and its planned [Renewable Energy Zones](#). This battle has drawn a line in the sand that indicates network companies will require a [social license to operate](#).

So, what's the [solution](#)? One being called for is to bury the cables underground, preferably using existing easements. It is possible and it doesn't have to cost the Earth. If it's about completing this project on the cheap, then no — underground may not be the best option. Isn't protecting the environment the reason we are switching to renewable energy? If so, surely the value of our environment is more important than the initial project cost.

Transmission towers have been ruining sunsets for over 100 years and it is ludicrous to consider overhead transmission when more environmentally conscious alternatives exist.

The Victorian Government is working towards Renewable Energy Targets and are moving away from coal. In doing so, they should make sure energy transmission networks being constructed are in sync with our reasons for moving to renewable energy in the first place — conserving and enhancing our environment for the future.

Minister for Planning, [Richard Wynne](#), [said](#):

'While this project is important to the future of

Victoria's power system, it's critical we assess its environmental effects to avoid or minimise impacts on the community or the environment.'

AusNet Services stated in an [EPBC Act](#):

'Through alignment selection and design the Project seeks to avoid areas of significance.'

It seems they forgot their mission.

For more information on this project visit www.darleypowerfight.com.au.

[Darren Edwards](#) is a Darley resident and business owner who has lived in the region for more than ten years. He is the founder of the [Trail Hiking Australia](#) website, drawing thousands of visitors to the region annually.