
ENVIRONMENTAL SIGNIFICANCE OPINION - Latham Zone Substation to Lower Molonglo Water Quality Control Centre 11kV Feeder (ESO 202500047)

In accordance with section 140 (4) of the *Planning Act 2023* (the Act), I provide the following environmental significance opinion:

APPLICANT

Evoenergy, as represented by Mr Thomas Atkins, Environment, Sustainability and Planning Approvals Manager.

APPLICATION and DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL

The applicant has applied under section 140 (4) of the Act to the Conservator of Flora and Fauna for an environmental significance opinion to the effect that the development proposal set out in the submission is not likely to have a significant adverse environmental impact (the application).

The development proposal is for a proposed underground high-voltage (11 kV) feeder to support critical upgrades to wastewater treatment facilities within the Lower Molonglo Water Quality Control Centre (LMWQCC) as described in the submission.

LOCATION

Works will be located in Blocks 1462 and 1642 in Belconnen district and road verges.

MATTERS TO WHICH THIS OPINION APPLIES

This opinion applies only to the development proposal as described in the application.

OPINION

Provided the works are undertaken in a manner consistent with the following conditions in addition to the mitigation measures contained in the supporting application for an ESO, they are unlikely to cause a significant adverse environmental impact.

This opinion is granted subject to the following conditions made under s140 (4)(b) of the Act:

1. Conditions of approval including mitigation measures as stated in the application.
2. Access to the site must be granted to Conservation Officers if a random compliance inspection is requested by the Conservator of Flora and Fauna.
3. The project must be consistent with the Conservator Guidelines for the Management of Burrowing Animals During Development.

4. The proponent should confer with ACT Parks and Conservation staff for advice regarding suitability and placement, including potential to locate materials, within Woodstock Nature Reserve if appropriate.
5. The proponent is to submit a site-specific Tree Management Plan, Erosion and Sediment Control Plan, and Landscape Management Protection Plan for endorsement by the Conservator prior to construction, to manage and minimise potential impacts during construction.
6. Vegetated areas subject to ground disturbance must be remediated using a native seed mix at a rate of 5g/m² and ratio of 80:20 grass to forb seed by weight. Sterile rye may need to be used in combination with a native seed mix to stabilise soil (note: sterile seed quantity must not contribute to the required 5g/m² of native seed). Recommended species are as follows:

Grasses	Forbs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Austrostipa bigeniculata</i> • <i>Austrostipa scabra</i> • <i>Bothriochloa macra</i> • <i>Chloris truncata</i> • <i>Themeda triandra</i> • <i>Rytidosperma caespitosum</i> • <i>Rytidosperma carphoides</i> • <i>Rytidosperma laeve</i> • <i>Poa sieberiana</i> • <i>Sorghum leiocladum</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Chrysocephalum apiculatum</i> • <i>Vittadinia muelleri</i> • <i>Chrysocephalum semipapposum</i> • <i>Leucochrysum albicans</i> • <i>Linum marginale</i> • <i>Calotis lappulacea</i> • <i>Craspedia variabilis</i>

A [REDACTED] ons for the decision.

Bren Burkevics
 Conservator of Flora and Fauna
 City and Environment

19 November 2025

STATEMENT OF REASONS
REASONS FOR THE DECISION

The proposed development is a proposal mentioned in Schedule 1 of the *Planning (General) Regulation 2023* – requiring environmental impact statement, being:

Part 1.2, item 16 - proposal that is likely to have a significant adverse environmental impact on 1 or more of the following:

- (a) a critically endangered species;*
- (b) an endangered species;*
- (c) a vulnerable species;*
- (d) a conservation dependent species;*
- (e) a regionally threatened species;*
- (f) a regionally conservation dependent species;*
- (g) a provisionally listed threatened species;*
- (h) a listed migratory species;*
- (i) a threatened ecological community;*
- (j) a protected native species;*
- (k) a Ramsar wetland;*
- (l) any other protected matter*

The proposal will impact 0.8 ha of *White Box-Yellow Box-Blakely's Red Gum Grassy Woodland and Derived Native Grassland* (BGW), a critically endangered ecological community listed under the Commonwealth *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act), also listed as *Yellow Box – Blakely's Red Gum Grassy Woodland* under the *Nature Conservation Act 2014* (NC Act), as well as and 2.74 ha of exotic dominated BGW.

Part 1.2, item 17 – proposal involving -

- (a) the clearing of more than 0.5 ha of native vegetation in a native vegetation area, other than on land in a future urban area; or*
- (b) the clearing of more than 5.0 ha of native vegetation in a native vegetation area on land in a future urban area*

The proposal will impact on 3.51 ha of native vegetation.

Part 1.2, item 18 - proposal for development in a reserve, unless the proposal is for minor public works to be carried out by or for the Territory in accordance with a minor public works code approved by the conservator of flora and fauna under the Nature Conservation Act 2014, section 318A;

A short portion (~100m) of the feeder is proposed to be underbored across the southeastern corner of Woodstock Nature Reserve.

The proponent is seeking an environmental significance opinion to remove the requirement for an environmental impact statement on the grounds that the proposal is not likely to have

a significant adverse environmental impact, and has applied to the Conservator of Flora and Fauna for an opinion to that effect.

Meaning of *significant* adverse environmental impact

An adverse environmental impact is *significant* if—

- (a) the environmental function, system, value or entity that might be adversely impacted by a proposed development is significant; or
- (b) the cumulative or incremental effect of a proposed development might contribute to a substantial adverse impact on an environmental function, system, value or entity.

In deciding whether an adverse environmental impact is *significant*, the following matters must be taken into account:

- (a) the kind, size, frequency, intensity, scope and length of time of the impact;
- (b) the sensitivity, resilience and rarity of the environmental function, system, value or entity likely to be affected.

In deciding whether a development proposal is likely to have a significant adverse environmental impact it does not matter whether the adverse environmental impact is likely to occur on the site of the development or elsewhere.

It has been determined that the proposal is unlikely to have a significant environmental impact, based on the documentation submitted, known values of the site, and provided the works and ongoing management are carried out in accordance with the conditions attached to this ESO.

Project description

The development proposal is for an underground high-voltage (11 kV) feeder to support critical upgrades to wastewater treatment facilities within the Lower Molonglo Water Quality Control Centre (LMWQCC) as described in the submission.

The high-voltage feeder will be comprised of four underground 150 mm diameter conduits and 11kV cable, extending from Latham Zone Substation (Block 1 Section 14 Latham) to the LMWQCC (Rural Block 1553 Belconnen) via the road verges of Southern Cross Drive, Pro Hart Avenue, Stockdill Drive, and several leased and unleased blocks within Latham and Holt.

A short portion (approximately 100m) of the feeder is proposed to be underbored across the southeastern corner of Woodstock Nature Reserve (Rural Block 1642 Belconnen). The feeder will then reticulate to facilities within LMWQCC via existing cable joint pits within Block 1642 Belconnen.

The total underground 11kV feeder length is approximately 9.7 km. The proposed development consists of the construction and operation of the following infrastructure:

- 30 cable joint pits,
- Underboring feeder, and

- Open-trench feeder.

The total development footprint has been estimated at approximately 3.51 ha:

- 3.47 ha which includes the alignment for the open-trench sections and a 6 m wide corridor (3 m buffer on both sides of the alignment) to account for construction works for the feeder and 22 of the 30 cable joint pits; and
- 0.038 ha which includes of the 30 cable joint pits within underboring feeder sections plus a 3 m buffer surrounding the pits to account for construction works.

The feeder has been purposefully designed to be constructed within a disturbed road verge parallel to or within a corridor of existing access tracks, underground gas, effluent and water mains infrastructure along Stockdill Drive, and to avoid high value biodiversity areas (confirmed by on site surveys) where feasible.

Pits will be located outside of tree driplines. Underboring of portions of the feeder that intersect tree driplines will ensure that no trees along Stockdill Drive will be damaged or removed. Portion of the feeder that require trenching (e.g. within Rural Block 1462 Belconnen) will be mostly excavated within corridors of existing disturbance (e.g. along access tracks and underground effluent / gas infrastructure).

Disturbed areas in unleased land will be reinstated consistent with Municipal Infrastructure Technical Specifications and may include hydro-seeding of a native grass seed mix suitable for BGW, to be confirmed by the Conservator of Flora and Fauna. Additionally, salvaged rocks and woody debris are intended to be reinstated on completion of works to enhance habitat structure where appropriate, e.g. along portions of the verges of Stockdill Drive.

This proposal will also comply with a site-specific Tree Management Plan, Erosion and Sediment Control Plan, and Landscape Management Protection Plan that will be submitted as part of a future Development Application to manage and minimise potential impacts during construction.

Documentation Submitted

- Explanatory note regarding supporting documentation for the application for an Environmental Significance Opinion;
- Biodiversity Assessment Report, Ecology Consulting, 10 October 2025;
- Annex A – Proposed Amendments to Feeder Route;
- Design Drawings - Lower Molonglo Feeder Amended;
- Letter(s) of Authorisation
- Form 1M.

Natural conservation values present

The study area consists of existing road corridors, a partial area of the Woodstock Nature Reserve, and partial areas of Blocks with Latham District and Belconnen District. Within the study area there is a mix of local native species, landscape/ amenity plantings and exotic vegetation, and habitat features such as burrows, rocks and multiple unnamed hydro lines.

Woodstock Nature Reserve is a key part of the Murrumbidgee River Corridor and is ecologically important because it protects significant patches of critically BGW. Given the study area's proximity to protected areas, it is likely that many native species forage between them and the surrounding landscape, potentially using the study area as a movement corridor to access other habitats.

The woodland community was found to have hollow-bearing features that may be utilised by several threatened arboreal mammals, bats, birds and reptile species. Furthermore, patches of rocky habitat identified along Stockdill Drive may provide suitable foraging and shelter habitat for a range of reptile species. The derived native grasslands may also provide suitable habitat for specialised grassland species.

The majority (2.74 ha) of the area was found to be exotic dominated vegetation. 0.8 ha were found to meet the NC Act criteria and EPBC Act criteria for critically endangered BGW.

Targeted fauna surveys did not detect any threatened species. One threatened fauna species, the Scarlet Robin (*Petroica boodang*), was incidentally recorded during the field survey, observed foraging in the roadside verge woodland along Stockdill Drive. One threatened flora species, the Narrow-leaved Black Peppermint (*Eucalyptus nicholii*), was also recorded, planted within suburban areas as part of landscape plantings.

Potentially Significant Environmental Impacts

The proposed development will impact approximately 3.51 ha of vegetation through trenching, underboring, and associated construction works within the defined proposed development. The vegetation consists of 2.74 ha of exotic-dominated understorey vegetation, and 0.8 ha of moderate to high quality native groundcover and scattered shrubs within a Commonwealth-listed BGW.

The sites have been well chosen and revised to avoid any more than minor disturbance of native vegetation. The disturbance footprint is adjacent to existing roads and consists of pits, areas for open trenching and associated infrastructure. No trees will be removed, and mitigation measures will be taken to reduce impacts where tree protection zones are, including the use of hydrovacating.

Conservation Officers inspected the mapped potential Native Temperate Grassland at the Latham Zone Substation site and confirmed it is not of good quality, containing large areas of weeds dominated by African Lovegrass and Chilean Needle Grass, with only some remaining native grass tussocks scattered in between.

Wombat burrows are located along Stockdill Drive and will be avoided through targeted mitigation measures.

Confirmation of the stockpile and compound location is yet to be provided, noting the intention of proponent to locate in previously disturbed area.

Salvaged rocks and woody debris are intended to be reinstated on completion of works to enhance habitat structure where appropriate, e.g. along portions of the verges of Stockdill Drive.

Conditions have been included to minimise impacts to native species and communities.

This opinion is granted subject to the following conditions made under s140 (4)(b) of the Act:

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It has been determined that if the works are undertaken in a manner consistent with the above conditions attached to the ESO in addition to the mitigation measures contained in the supporting application for an ESO, they are unlikely to cause a significant adverse environmental impact.