EnergyCo

Biodiversity impact assessment

Hunter Transmission Project environmental impact statement

March 2025

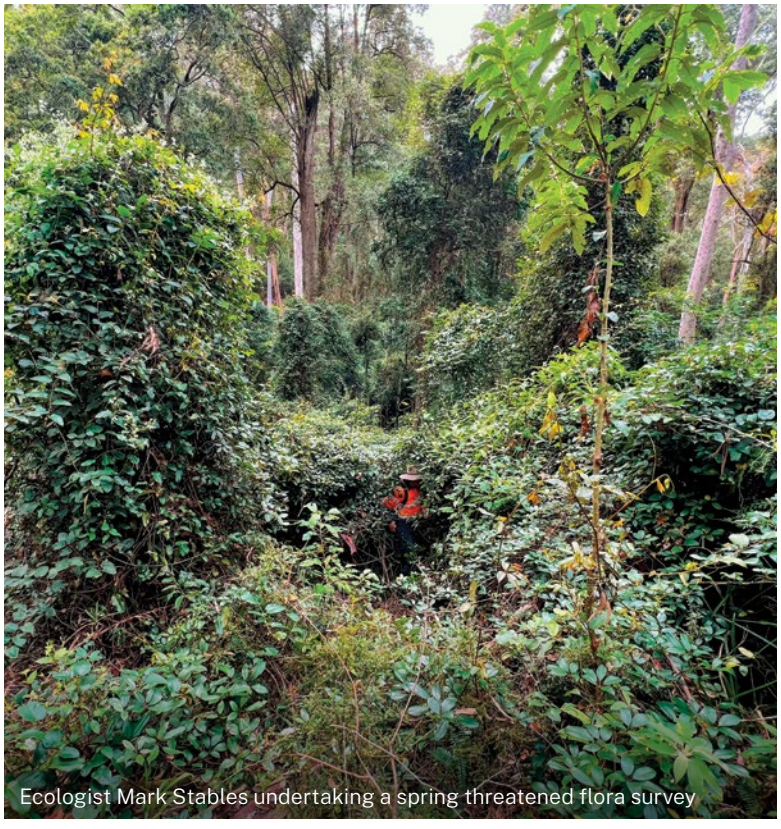
The Hunter region is home to diverse ecosystems, rare species and rich landscapes that support wildlife, communities and industry. EnergyCo is committed to minimising environmental impacts wherever possible while delivering the Hunter Transmission Project.

What is an environmental impact statement?

As the Hunter Transmission Project (HTP) is a critical State significant infrastructure project, it requires an environmental impact statement (EIS) under the NSW planning system.

The EIS must assess the potential environmental, economic and community impacts of the HTP as well as the opportunities. It will also include ways to avoid, minimise and/or mitigate potential impacts.

The EIS will be submitted to the NSW Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure for assessment. Once the EIS is lodged there will be a public exhibition period and interested members of the community will be able to provide formal feedback on the proposed development directly to the department.



Ecologist Mark Stables undertaking a spring threatened flora survey

Minimising biodiversity impacts

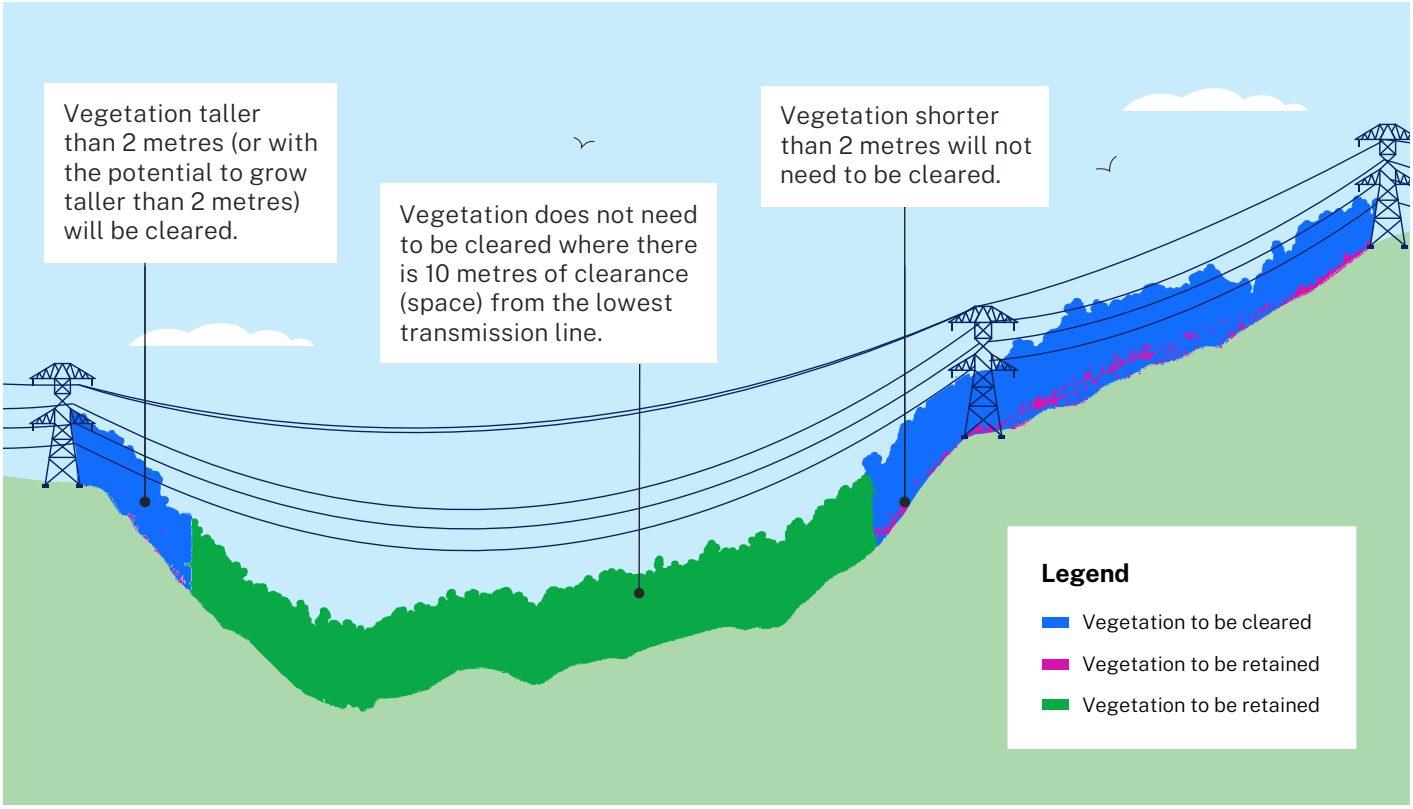
We carefully selected the HTP corridor location as the best option for this critical infrastructure because it will cause the least impact to people and the environment.

Through feedback, consultation and technical studies, we've refined the HTP corridor, making adjustments in several places to address constraints and further reduce impacts.

To minimise impacts on plants and animals, we have:

- Located around 85% of the corridor on **mining, industrial and public land** avoiding environmentally sensitive areas where possible
- Avoided areas of **high conservation values** such as Watagans National Park, Werakata National Park, Warrawolong Flora Reserve and biodiversity offset areas
- **Avoided clearing 200 hectares** of native vegetation, including 100 hectares of impact to threatened ecological communities and threatened species habitat through design refinements
- Revised the corridor in several places to **avoid and minimise impacts** on key threatened or endangered species such as the sooty owl, brush-tailed rock wallaby and littlejohn's tree frog
- Planned to place transmission towers on hilltops, **spanning the transmission line across valleys** to avoid vegetation clearing
- Developed vegetation clearing strategies that **avoid full clearing**, focusing only on vegetation taller than 2 metres

Approach to partial vegetation clearing



A long-nosed potoroo identified during a survey

How we assess biodiversity impacts

As part of the HTP's EIS, the biodiversity impact assessment examines potential effects on plants and animals and proposes measures to reduce those impacts. Key steps in the assessment process include:

Extensive research and mapping

Reviewing historical and current biodiversity data, species records and habitat distributions.

Comprehensive field surveys

Seasonal studies to assess native vegetation, wildlife habitats and ecological patterns.

In-depth impact analysis

Evaluating potential effects on ecosystems, threatened species and ecological communities.

Biodiversity development assessment report

The environmental impact statement for the HTP will include a biodiversity development assessment report that describes in detail the region's existing biodiversity, estimates how much vegetation will need to be cleared if the project is approved, and assesses the effects on threatened plants and animals.

Early biodiversity findings

Understanding biodiversity impacts is essential for ensuring the HTP is delivered responsibly and sustainably.

Our assessment identifies key areas of impact, allowing us to implement targeted mitigation measures to protect species, maintain ecological balance and minimise long-term environmental effects.

We're sharing some early findings on how construction and operation of the HTP could impact biodiversity, along with potential mitigation measures to manage these effects. These findings may change as we finalise the EIS.

Potential impacts

While we've made every effort to minimise biodiversity impacts, some can't be completely avoided given the scale of the project. Keep in mind these are potential impacts. As we finalise the design of the HTP and during construction, we're committed to further minimising and mitigating impacts on biodiversity wherever possible.

- 6 State-listed and 3 Commonwealth-listed threatened ecological communities may be impacted, including the Lower Hunter Spotted Gum Ironbark and Warkworth Sands Woodland.
- Clearing of around 142 hectares of threatened ecological communities is currently proposed.
- Potential impacts to around 30 threatened animal species and 35 threatened plant species have been identified and are subject to additional mitigation measures.

Key mitigation measures being considered:

- **biodiversity management plans and 'no-go' zones** to protect key vegetation and habitat areas
- **avoiding sensitive biodiversity areas** where possible when finalising infrastructure placement
- **pre-clearing surveys** to assess and relocate wildlife if required
- **ongoing monitoring and field surveys** during construction to ensure biodiversity protection
- **connectivity corridors** to help wildlife move safely across the landscape
- **bird diverters** installed near wetlands and rivers to prevent collisions
- **biodiversity offsets** will be implemented in line with regulatory obligations.

Biodiversity offsets

The NSW Biodiversity Offsets Scheme aims to ensure there's no net loss of biodiversity from developments, including projects like the HTP. This works by offsetting (or replacing) a negative biodiversity impact with a positive one elsewhere. EnergyCo is developing a strategy to ensure a consistent approach is applied to biodiversity offsets across projects, with maximum conservation outcomes. This involves a joint analysis with the Conservation Programs, Heritage and Regulation group (part of the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water) on the suitability of prospective biodiversity stewardship agreement sites and other conservation opportunities for the HTP.

Key planning milestones

July 2022
The HTP was declared as critical State significant infrastructure by the Minister for Planning.

May 2024
A scoping report was submitted to the NSW Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure (DPHI).

Aug 2024
Secretary's environmental assessment requirements (SEARs) were issued from DPHI.

We are here
2024 to mid-2025
The environmental impact statement (EIS) is prepared, undertaking technical assessments of the project's impacts and opportunities.

Mid-2025
EnergyCo lodges the EIS. DPHI places the EIS on public exhibition for a minimum of 4 weeks.

Mid/late 2025
EnergyCo will prepare a submissions report responding to the issues raised and lodge it with DPHI.

2026
NSW Government and Australian Government Ministers make final decisions.

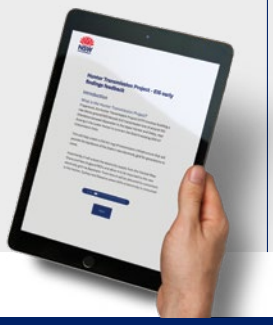
About the HTP

The Hunter Transmission Project is one of the State's most critical energy infrastructure projects. It involves building a new overhead 500 kV transmission line of around 110 kilometres between Bayswater in the Upper Hunter and Olney in the Lower Hunter to connect the State's existing 500 kV transmission lines.

This will fix a missing link in the electricity network and help unlock the supply of electricity from the Central-West Orana and New England Renewable Energy Zones.

Have your say

Share your feedback on biodiversity by completing our quick survey.



Scan the QR code for details.

Contact us

EnergyCo is the NSW Government statutory authority responsible for delivering the HTP as a critical part of transitioning to a cleaner future under the Electricity Infrastructure Roadmap.

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energyco.nsw.gov.au/htp

Scan the QR code for more information.

If you need help understanding this information, please contact the Translating and Interpreting Service on **131 450** and ask them to call us on **1800 645 972**.