

Hexham Wind Farm

FACT SHEET Brolga



The proposed Hexham Wind Farm is located between Hexham, Caramut and Ellerslie in the Moyne Shire in south-west Victoria. If approved, the Project would incorporate up to 106 wind turbines with an approximate height of up to 260 metres from ground to blade tip. The proposed Project also includes an on-site terminal station and Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) and other associated infrastructure.

As part of the Victorian Government's planning and approvals process for major projects, Wind Prospect is preparing an Environment Effects Statement (EES) for the proposed Hexham Wind Farm. An EES is a requirement under the *Environment Effects Act 1978* and includes a detailed assessment of a wide range of environmental and social assessments such as biodiversity, ecology, historical heritage, Aboriginal cultural heritage, landscape and visual amenity, traffic and transport, noise, socioeconomic and surface and groundwater.

To complete the assessments, considerable research and consultation is being undertaken to avoid and mitigate any potential adverse effects on the environment and the social fabric of the community during construction, operation and decommissioning of the proposed Project. Wind Prospect recognises the value of the natural and built environment in which the proposed Project is based and understands and respects the community's desire to protect both the environmental and social landscape that has existed for many years.

Assessment

As part of the EES, the Brolga Impact Assessment is being finalised in accordance with the Victorian Government Planning Minister's scoping requirements for the assessment of environment effects, the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988* (FFG Act) and the *Interim guidelines for the assessment, avoidance, mitigation and offsetting of potential wind farm impacts on the Victorian Brolga population 2011* (DSE, 2012), referred to as the 'Interim Brolga Guidelines.' Regular consultation with the state Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) has taken place to ensure the Interim Brolga Guidelines are being applied as required. Interim Brolga Guidelines were established in Victoria to ensure that wind farm projects will not have a negative impact on the Brolga population. The interim guidelines provides a standard approach until new Brolga guidance is finalised and approved.

How the assessment has been carried out

The risk to the state-threatened Brolga has been carefully considered during a rigorous environmental planning and assessment process.

The Brolga Impact Assessment has been prepared by ecological specialists Nature Advisory for Hexham Wind Farm. It followed the *Interim Brolga Guidelines*, to ensure the Project avoids and mitigates any potential impacts on breeding Brolgas.

The *Interim Brolga Guidelines* require a three-level assessment of the potential impacts of the wind farm on Brolga.

The interim guidelines can be reviewed here: www.swifft.net.au/resources/Brolga-Guidelines_2011_Final_online-v2.pdf.

Level one assessment

Level one involved desktop studies to identify known and potential Brolga habitat within and up-to a 10-kilometre radius from the proposed Project site. This included:

- Collating and reviewing all available historical and recent Brolga records to determine the extent of Brolga occurrence.
- Conducting initial field surveys between 2009 and 2013, including:
 - › Brolga searches in November 2009 and February 2010,
 - › An aerial survey for Brolga in October 2010,
 - › Community consultation in 2011 with landowners and neighbours to gather information on Brolga habitat,
 - › Brolga breeding season searches during 2012-13, involving the investigation of 11 wetland areas within the proposed Project site to identify Brolga breeding activity.



Level two assessment

Level two involved collecting comprehensive data about the location, nature and extent of Brolga habitats, as well as patterns of habitat use and behaviour at breeding, flocking and foraging sites within and up-to a 10-kilometre radius from the proposed Project site. Extensive investigations were undertaken between 2018 and 2020, and from 2022 to 2024. Survey methods included:

- Detailed consultation with landholders,
- A comprehensive aerial survey for breeding Brolga,
- Ground-based roaming observational surveys,
- Review of previous data collected on Brolga flights and movements,
- Hydrological assessments to show wetlands most suitable for Brolga breeding, foraging and roosting.

Level three assessment

The level three involves four steps. To date, step one and step two have been completed:

Step one: Turbine-free buffers are being established around breeding and flocking sites, in consultation with the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA). The turbine-free buffer areas are designed to protect Brolga breeding wetlands from potential construction and operational impacts and consider:

- Confirmed or valid historical breeding records,
- Other suitable wetland areas within two kilometres of a breeding site,
- Non-wetland areas and movement corridors connecting breeding sites and other suitable wetlands.

Step two: A site-specific collision risk model (CRM) has been developed to estimate the number of Brolga affected by turbine collision over the proposed Project's operating life.

Steps three and four which includes a Population Viability Assessment which is being finalised.

Preliminary findings

The preliminary findings of the Brolga Impact Assessment are:

- 62% of wetlands are permanently drained.
- A significant proportion of the area, in particular the southern and north-western portions, lack wetlands and the Brolga has not historically been recorded there.
- Eight breeding pairs of Brolga were confirmed inhabiting the study area during 2019. During the assessment period, 2019 was the most successful year for Brolga breeding and therefore this is assumed to be the maximum number occurring in any year.
- No flocking activity has been recorded during the flocking season, with the closest flocking site 20 kilometres north-west.
- 22 breeding wetlands within five kilometres of the Project site are considered suitable for future Brolga breeding.
- Initial Collision Risk Modelling (CRM) estimates a potential loss of one to 11 Brolga (median 4.6) over the operating life of the proposed Project, based on conservative 90% avoidance rate. It should be noted that it is well established that even collision-prone bird species avoid collisions with wind generators on most occasions.*

Managing adverse effects

Based on the assessment findings, the following mitigation measures are proposed:



Turbine-free buffers are applied to protect these wetlands.



Consideration of a framework for Brolga compensation to replace the estimated number of Brolga affected by the Project.



Implementation of the Interim Brolga Guidelines to ensure the proposed Project does not contribute to cumulative impacts on the Victorian Brolga population in south-western Victoria.



Next steps

The final Brolga Impact Assessment will be submitted as part of the EES documentation for review and assessment by the Planning Minister. The Minister will place the EES and all technical assessments on public exhibition for a period of 30 days. Feedback received from the community during the public review period will be summarised in a Submissions Report and considered as part of the Minister's Assessment of the Project.

Have your say

The environmental, social and economic technical studies are being finalised and we welcome you to have your say on the proposed Project. You will be provided with advance notice of the EES exhibition and the formal opportunity to submit a submission, however you can provide feedback at any time by getting in touch with the Project team by email, phone or mail.

We will be out in the community in the lead up to and during the public exhibition period to answer questions about the proposed Project, the EES, technical studies and any other queries you may have.

Visit the Project website for more information on our upcoming in-region engagement activities.

Wind Prospect respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which our office and each of our projects are located. We also acknowledge and uphold their continuing relationship to the land and pay our respect to their Elders past, present and emerging.

Contact

If you need an interpreter, please call 13 14 50. If you are deaf and/or find hearing or speaking with people on the phone difficult, please contact the National Relay Service on voice relay number 1300 555 727, TTY number 133 677 or SMS relay number 0423 677 767.

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