

**Submission  
No 11**

**INQUIRY INTO FEASIBILITY OF UNDERGROUNDING  
THE TRANSMISSION INFRASTRUCTURE FOR  
RENEWABLE ENERGY PROJECTS**

**Organisation:** The Energy Charter

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Members of the Select Committee on  
the Feasibility of Undergrounding the  
Transmission Infrastructure for  
Renewable Energy Projects

## Inquiry into the feasibility of undergrounding the transmission infrastructure for renewable energy projects

### 1. The Energy Charter

The [Energy Charter](#) is a unique CEO-led coalition of like-minded energy organisations with a shared purpose and passion for customers and communities. Our purpose is to empower one another across the energy supply chain to deliver better energy outcomes for customers and communities. Our vision is that together, we can create a better energy future for all Australians.

For us, the opportunity is to keep humans at the centre of the design and delivery of energy solutions; to navigate the changing needs of customers and communities as we transform to a cleaner energy future.

We drive a number of collaborative initiatives across the energy supply chain together with consumer and community representatives, called our [#BetterTogether initiatives](#). Energy Charter Signatories also commit to an [annual Accountability Process](#) led by their CEOs on how they have achieved outcomes for customers and communities and their commitments to continuous improvement.

### 2. Terms of Reference

We note the Terms of Reference for the [Select Committee on the Feasibility of Undergrounding the Transmission Infrastructure for Renewable Energy Projects](#) (the Inquiry) as follows:

That a select committee be established to inquire into and report on the feasibility of undergrounding the transmission infrastructure for renewable energy projects, and in particular:

- a. The costs, benefits and risks of underground versus overhead transmission lines, particularly with regard to bushfire and other weather-related events, ongoing environmental impacts, and community mental health and welfare
- b. Existing case studies and current projects regarding similar undergrounding of transmission lines in both domestic and international contexts
- c. Any impact on delivery timeframes of undergrounding with broad community consensus versus overhead transmission with large scale opposition
- d. Any other related matters.

For your information, we have set out below our [Energy Charter Evaluating Transmission Undergrounding #BetterTogether initiative](#) currently underway that aims to address several of these key issues.



### 3. #BetterTogether Evaluating Transmission Undergrounding

Energy businesses recognise that transmission development projects can have significant impacts on landholders and communities. They also understand that they have a responsibility to engage in a way builds trust and works towards shared value outcomes for everyone.

The [Energy Charter Better Practice Social Licence Guideline](#) was released in May 2023. It relevantly states in relation to undergrounding:

Consider undergrounding when it is a viable option as part of community and landholder consultation. Investigation reports and supporting analysis, including the challenges, benefits and impacts of overhead compared to underground transmission designs from a landholder, community, environmental, technical and cost perspective should be completed and made publicly available. In some instances, it may be preferable for research to be conducted by an independent party with appropriate expertise. It is also important that this information be well circulated with communities, this could include through direct community and landholder engagement and project newsletters.

The [Energy Charter Evaluating Transmission Undergrounding #BetterTogether initiative](#) commenced in mid-2023. It is being led by Transgrid, Powerlink Queensland, AusNet Services, TasNetworks, Marinus Link and AEMO, with support from Energy Networks Australia and ElectraNet. It also involves a Community Outcomes Group made up of community representatives and key stakeholders.

The initiative aims to improve the experience of landholders and communities impacted by the development of new transmission infrastructure by collaborating with community representatives and stakeholders to:

1. Validate community concerns, considerations and expectations for how the viability of underground compared to overhead transmission designs should be evaluated by transmission businesses
2. Co-develop a shared knowledge and evidence-base, including Better Practice approaches to assessing and evaluating social costs and mitigating impacts
3. Identify and address public information and evidence gaps, sources of (dis)information and practice (in)consistencies.

The collaborative process includes a review of technical evidence across a wide range of considerations related on overhead compared to underground transmission designs, as well as social research to understand what communities feel should be taken into consideration, how trade-offs should be managed, and expectations on the types of evidence and communications that should be provided to communities about these decisions.

The insights and evidence collected through the research will be used to co-develop a more transparent way for transmission businesses to make decisions and communicate about whether future transmission developments will be built overhead or buried underground.

This includes being clear on:

- What factors are considered in decision making
- What types of evidence are relied on
- How social costs and benefits are understood and considered



- Clear and accessible public information about key considerations.

Importantly, the final output will be agreed and implemented across transmission businesses with input and guidance from the Community Outcomes Group.

It is expected that the final output will be delivered in March/April 2023. The Energy Charter Accountability Process will also provide ongoing transparency around the outcomes for customers and communities that result.

If you require any additional information, please contact our Director, Innovation Amy Abraham on

Yours sincerely

**Sabiene Heindl**

Executive Director

[The Energy Charter](#)