

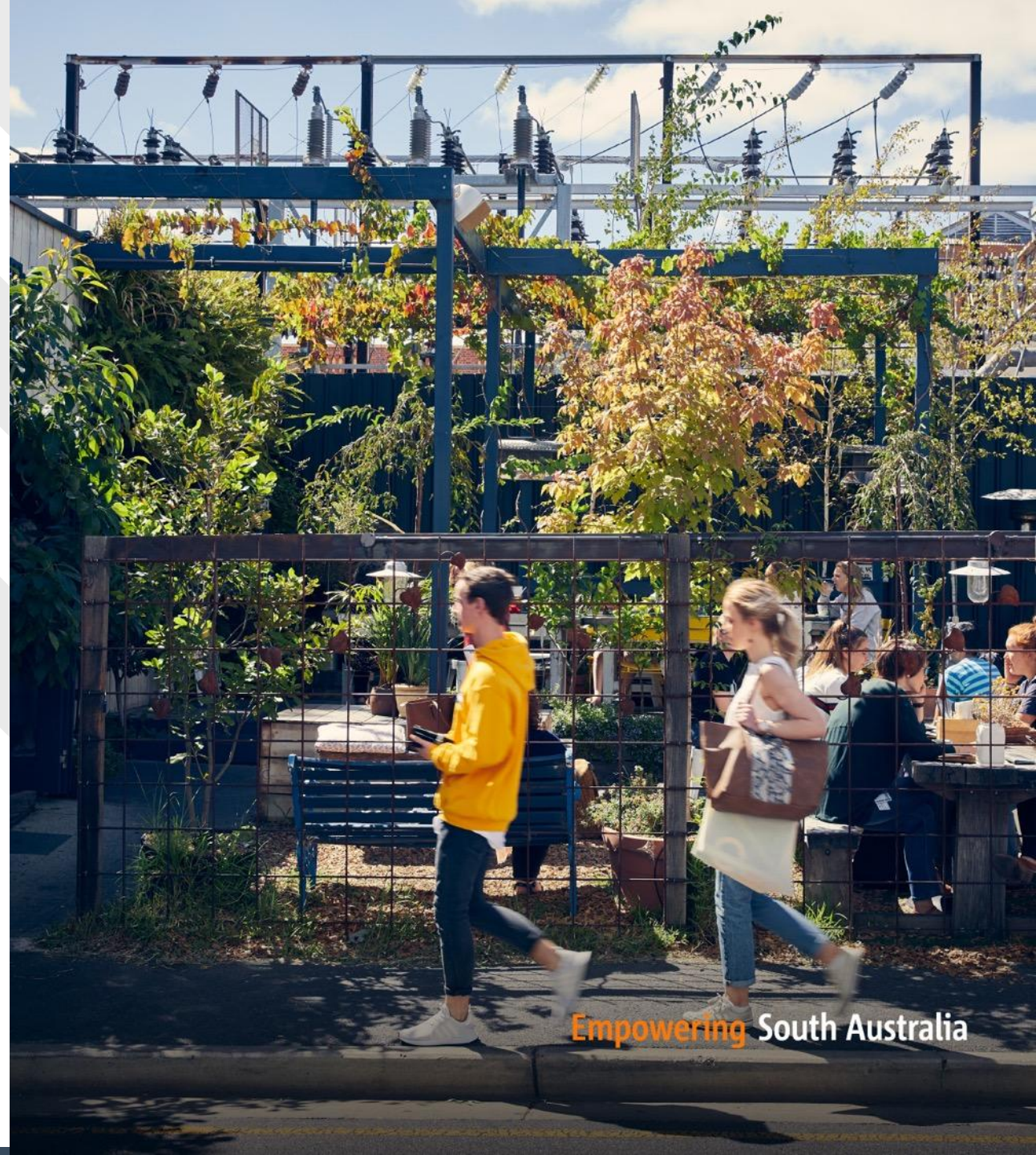
Vegetation Local Government Forum

Thursday 16 October 2025



Welcome and Overview

Leonie Scriven



Empowering South Australia

Acknowledgement of Country

SA Power Networks acknowledges the multiple Traditional Owners of the lands that host the South Australian electricity network and their connections to land, sea and community. We would also like to pay our respects to Elders past and present and acknowledge that these are living cultures.

Empowering South Australia, 2023
by Presten Warren (b. 2000)



FORUM AGENDA

10-10:10am Welcome and Overview

10-10:30am Workshop Discussion

10:30-11:10am Vegetation Operations Overview

11:10-11:40am OTR Update

11:40-11:50am Stakeholder Engagement Update

11:50am-12pm Green Adelaide Update

LUNCH

12:45-1:30pm Non-compliant Plantings

1:30-2:20pm Workshop Discussion

2:20-2:30pm Summary and Close

2:30-3:30pm Networking Session

Vegetation Management Advisory Group Overview

The VMAG is one of ten advisory groups to SAPN made up of representatives from:

- State and Local Government
- Arboriculture and Horticulture experts
- Scientific environment leaders
- Nursery Industry
- Green Adelaide
- Botanic Gardens of South Australia
- SA Power Networks Vegetation Management team

Key objectives VMAG

- Investigate initiatives to improve the management of vegetation around powerlines
- Review the SAPN long-term Vegetation Management Strategy
- Educate and raise awareness of appropriate species selection for planting near electrical infrastructure
- Explore opportunities for partnerships in programs or initiatives including those concerned with greening or urban canopy improvement

Current and recent priorities and focus areas include:

OTR Avenues and Stands Guidance Document

Finding ways for SAPN to contribute to the more effective management of the state's green canopy.

Priority on updating bushfire boundaries and engaging councils and stakeholders to ensure alignment with regulatory requirements.

The need for improved public education on clearance requirements and SAPN's vegetation management processes. This will include a review of all external communications with VMAG members involved in a review of the website recently.

Potential for members to advocate for balancing tree canopy preservation with reliable electricity supply.

Members advocating for better vegetation-related outcomes in the PLEC scheme, including consideration of the 30% canopy target.

Learning by listening to expert through meeting presentations such as provided by Professor Bob Hill on the likely impacts of extreme heat days on our trees, cities and environment.

Table discussion (10 minutes)

Round the table introductions

What would you like to obtain/learn from today's forum?

Vegetation Services - Operations Overview

Maddison Cross – Acting
Vegetation Services Manager



Vegetation Management Program

We are required by legislation to inspect and clear vegetation from around powerlines at regular intervals of no more than three years in both bushfire and non-bushfire risk areas.

Legislation is governed by the Office of the Technical Regulator through the Electricity Act 1996 and Electricity (Principles of Vegetation Clearance) Regulations 2021. These inform our vegetation management framework and supporting program to reduce risk of bushfire, support network reliability, and to keep the community safe.

Vegetation Clearance Innovation



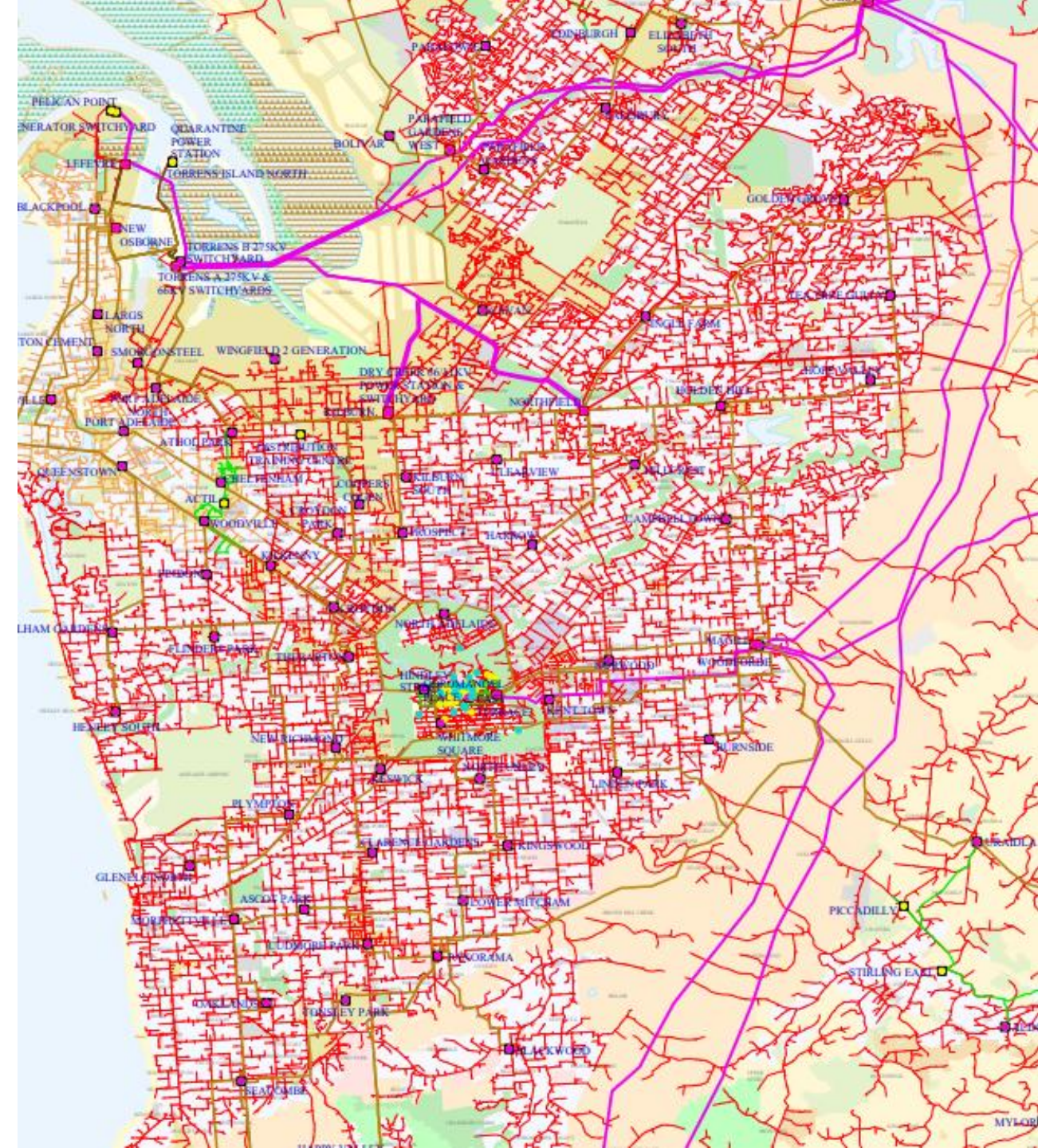
Vegetation Clearance Innovation



Vegetation Services

Over 88,000 km of overhead powerlines across South Australia

Our vegetation plan is periodically reviewed to ensure we continue to deliver a comprehensive program that demonstrates value to our customers and balances our legislative responsibilities. The South Australian community ultimately fund the significant cost of vegetation clearance works, which forms part of customer electricity supply charges.



How We Structure Our Vegetation Management Program

Program Governance

- Oversee the statewide vegetation program to ensure it aligns with legislative requirements and regulatory obligations under the *Electricity Act* and *Regulations*.

Contractor Oversight

- We engage and manage delivery partners like Active Tree Services, ensuring all works are delivered safely, efficiently, and to the required technical and compliance standards.

Quality, Safety & Assurance

- Our internal team conducts audits, monitors work quality, and ensures vegetation is cut to the correct clearance distances supporting ongoing compliance and public safety.

Council & Community Engagement

- We respond to public and council enquiries, work with local stakeholders on sensitive issues, and help explain what we do, why we do it, and how it fits into broader safety and reliability outcomes.



Clearance Zones and Buffer Zones – What We Cut To and Why

Clearance Zone

- The space around a powerline that must be kept clear at all times
- Defined in the *Vegetation Clearance Regulations 2021*
- Zone varies by voltage, span length, and risk area
- Breaches are non-compliant and must be corrected
- We are required to take reasonable steps to prevent vegetation entering this zone

Buffer Zone

- Sits outside the clearance zone
- Used to prevent regrowth or sway into the clearance zone before the next cycle
- Can only be cut where reasonably necessary
- Supports compliance and long-term vegetation stability



Our Vegetation Management Programs

Annual Bushfire Program

- Focused on high-risk Bushfire Risk Areas (BFRAs)
- Delivered annually to meet pre-summer deadlines
- 2026 program planning already underway

33/66 KV Reliability Programs

- Additional clearance for key sub-transmission lines
- Run on a rotating three year cycle to maintain compliance and manage regrowth.
- Includes targeted work in regional and metro areas

Cyclic Clearance Program (3-Yearly)

- Covers lower-risk Non-Bushfire Risk Areas (NBFRA)
- Run on a rotating three year cycle to maintain compliance and manage regrowth.
- Applied across metro and rural areas



Challenges We face

Community & Council Expectations

- Pressure to preserve amenity and tree cover, even where clearance is required.
- Increasing focus on urban greening targets, often without recognising compliance constraints.
- Community expectation to reduce cost while expecting higher levels of service or tailored outcomes.

Understanding & Perception

- Limited public awareness of why, where, and how we manage vegetation.
- Mismatch between community expectations and legislated requirements
- Concerns about “over-trimming” without understanding growth cycles and fire risk.

Operational Realities

- Property access issues, scheduling delays, and regional variability.
- Delivering consistent programs across 68 council areas, each with their own context.
- Balancing safety, compliance, reliability and local sentiment.



OTR and the SAPN Vegetation Management Program

Ian Furness | 17 October 2025

energymining.sa.gov.au



OTR and the SAPN Vegetation Management Program

- The Office of the Technical Regulator (OTR) is responsible for Safety and Technical Regulation of electricity infrastructure in South Australia
- This includes the vegetation management conducted by SA Power Networks under the *Electricity Act 1996* (the Act) to the extent described by the *Electricity (Principles of Vegetation Clearance) Regulations 2021* (the Regulations)
- The role of the OTR in relation to vegetation management around electricity infrastructure includes:
 - Regular audits of the SAPN program to ensure compliance
 - Consideration of complaints and objections from private landholders and councils
 - Administration of the bushfire risk areas established under the Regulations
 - Administration of the lists of permitted and approved vegetation under the Regulations



Complaints and Objections

- Under Regulation 10 an owner/occupier of private land can object to a proposed land entry for vegetation clearance purposes.
- While this objection is in place, the vegetation management cannot proceed.
- OTR will typically determine that the proposed pruning is to the extent permitted by the Act and Regulations.
- Often these are closed by mutual agreement between SAPN and the owner/occupier as to the extent of pruning.
- There are times where the OTR determines that the pruning as planned complies with the regulations, and so close the objection, even if this is not supported by the owner.

10—Objections relating to vegetation clearance

- (1) An occupier or owner of private land may lodge an objection with the Technical Regulator concerning a matter set out in a notice of intention to enter land to carry out work received from an electricity entity or council under Part 5 of the Act.
- (2) An objection under this regulation must—
 - (a) be made to the Technical Regulator in writing; and
 - (b) be lodged with the Technical Regulator within 21 days after receipt of the notice to which the objection relates or such further time as the Technical Regulator allows.

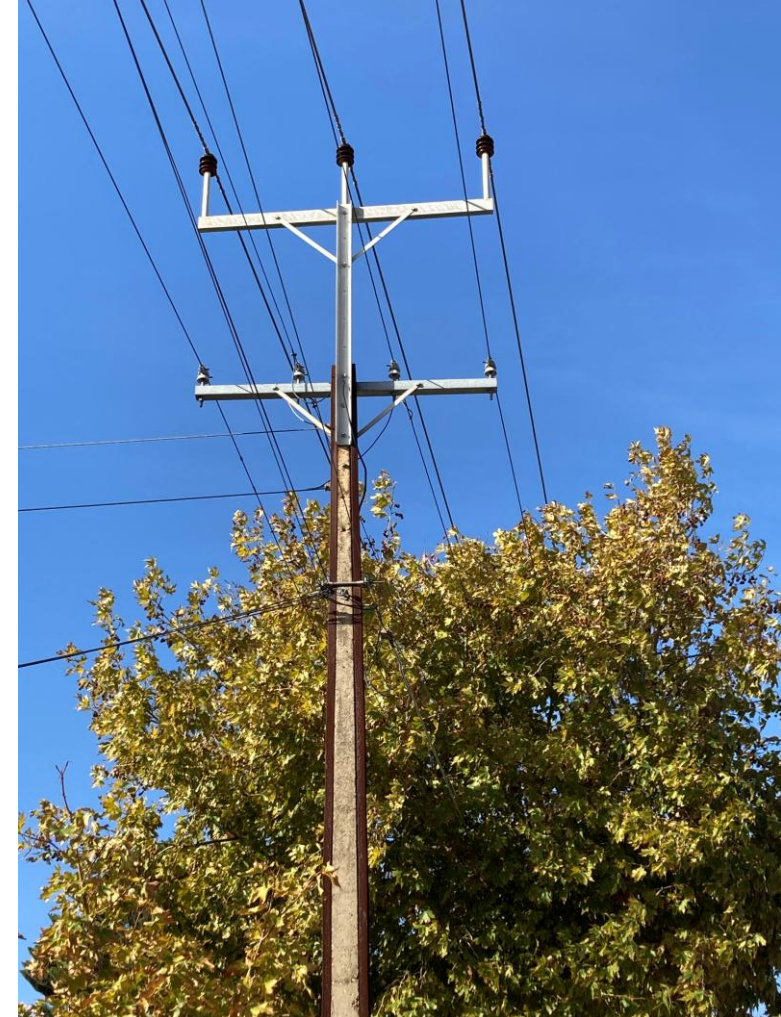
Common Complaints and Objections

Objections

- The pruning is not required or is excessive.
- The owner/occupier does not want any pruning performed.
- Pruning will lead to damage to the tree.

Complaints

- Biosecurity restrictions on land entry
- Unhappy with the appearance of the tree after pruning
- Tree is unbalanced after pruning
- Vegetation through low voltage conductors in prescribed non bushfire risk areas

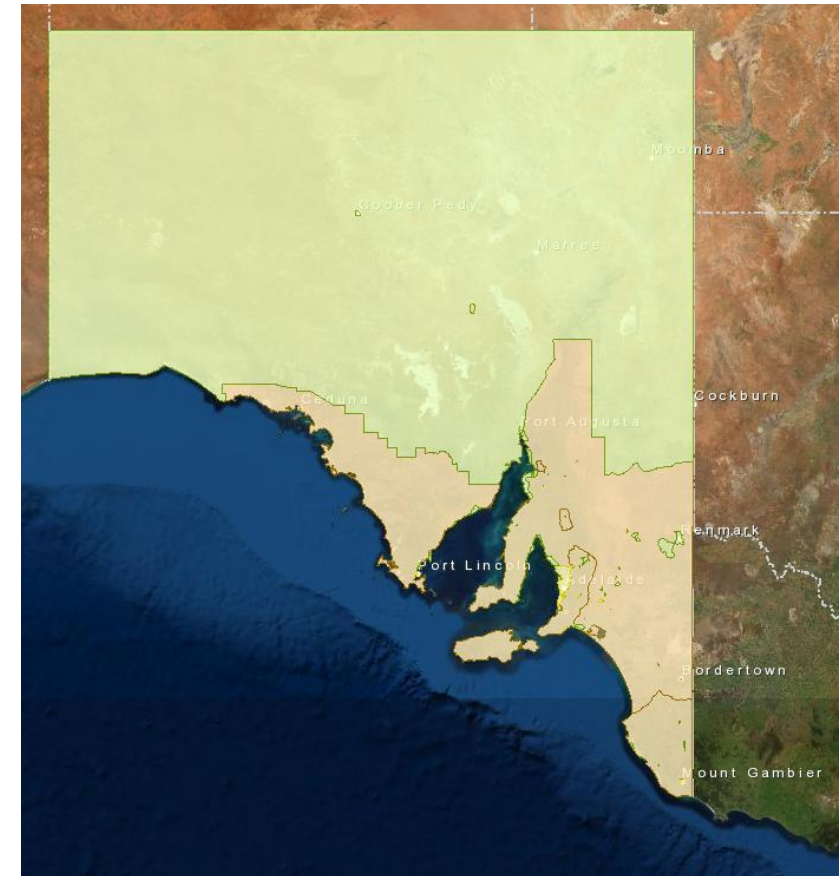


Bushfire Risk Area Boundaries

- Bushfire risk areas are established under the Regulations
- Now published on both Location SA and SARIG
- 3 categories, bushfire risk area, non-bushfire risk area, prescribed non bushfire risk area

Bushfire Risk Areas will typically see:

- Larger clearance zones and buffer zones around aerial powerlines leading to trees and other vegetation being pruned to a greater distance from the lines
- More frequent – often annual – pruning
- Tighter restrictions on planting near powerlines



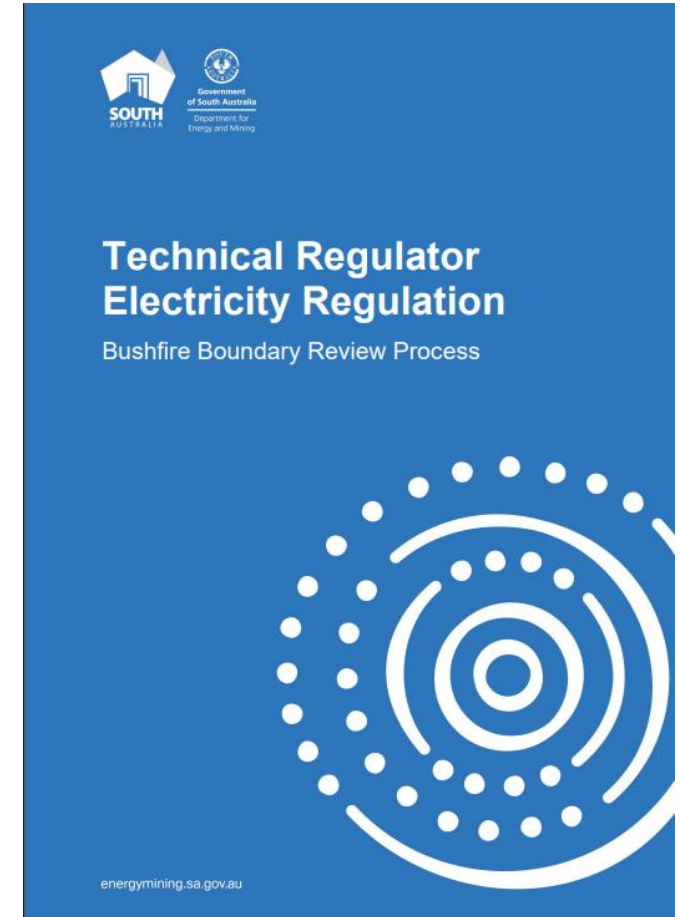
Prescribed Non-Bushfire Risk Areas

- Lowest category of bushfire start risk
- Typically, in built up, readily accessible areas with emergency services who can respond quickly to a fire start after it is reported
- Allows for pruning of trees in proximity to low-risk powerlines to be completed using a risk-based approach, sometimes allowing soft foliage to be in very close proximity to uninsulated lines
- Low risk powerlines have a span of 50m or less, and are comprised of low voltage conductors
- This allows for a much greater volume of canopy to be retained, while ensuring that the infrastructure is safe



Bushfire Risk Area Boundary Reviews

- Historically, bushfire risk areas were defined by maps contained within the regulations themselves, meaning that any changes required a lengthy consultation and cabinet process
- Several years ago, the regulations were amended to permit the Technical Regulator to publish these maps, making it far simpler to make changes where appropriate
- The OTR has published a guide on our website including background, identification of current boundaries, considerations when proposing an amendment and OTR actions.



Case Study

Blyth Bushfire Risk Area



Avenues and Stands

- Schedule 2, Section 3 of the Regulations provides an exemption allowing for replanting of *stands* or *avenues* of vegetation
- This allows for replanting an avenue/stand with the same species – even if this is not normally permitted, however any new avenues/stands established after regulation (1988) must be comprised of appropriate species

3—Exemption

Vegetation may be planted in proximity to a public powerline in a non-bushfire risk area and any such vegetation may be nurtured, if—

- (a) the vegetation is planted in replacement of vegetation in a stand or avenue of vegetation situated along a road; and
- (b) the vegetation is of the same species as that being replaced.

- The terms *avenue* and *stand* were not however defined in the Regulations
- This led to some confusion, and so in 2023 OTR conducted consultation on this matter, including a workshop

Avenues and Stands - Guidance

- After considering a range of submissions, the regulatory history, and opinions expressed at the workshop, the OTR published guidance on interpreting this section of the regulations

Recommendations

The Technical Regulator should not attempt to define 'Avenue' or 'Stand' but simply recognise this as an attempt to preserve the existing 1988 streetscape. At around 35 years later, equivalent community motivations would be to preserve tree canopy cover.

- A tree existing on 1 November 1988 is able to be replaced with that same species, whether or not it was continuously replaced at each senescence, with no conditions.
- A tree existing in the Non Bushfire Risk Area (NBFRA) on public land on 1 January 2017 (although it is acknowledged that there is a reasonable argument that this date should be 11 September 2018) that did not exist on 1 November 1988, will have the powerline clearance maintained by SA Power Networks but on senescence the tree will need to be replaced by a permitted or approved list tree.
- Trees that are planted after 1 January 2017 (not in replacement of a tree that existed at 1 November 1988) must be from the permitted or approved lists.

Planting near powerlines

Replacement of trees in avenues and stands near public powerlines in the NBFRA.
Technical Regulator Decision and Consultation summary

Contacts

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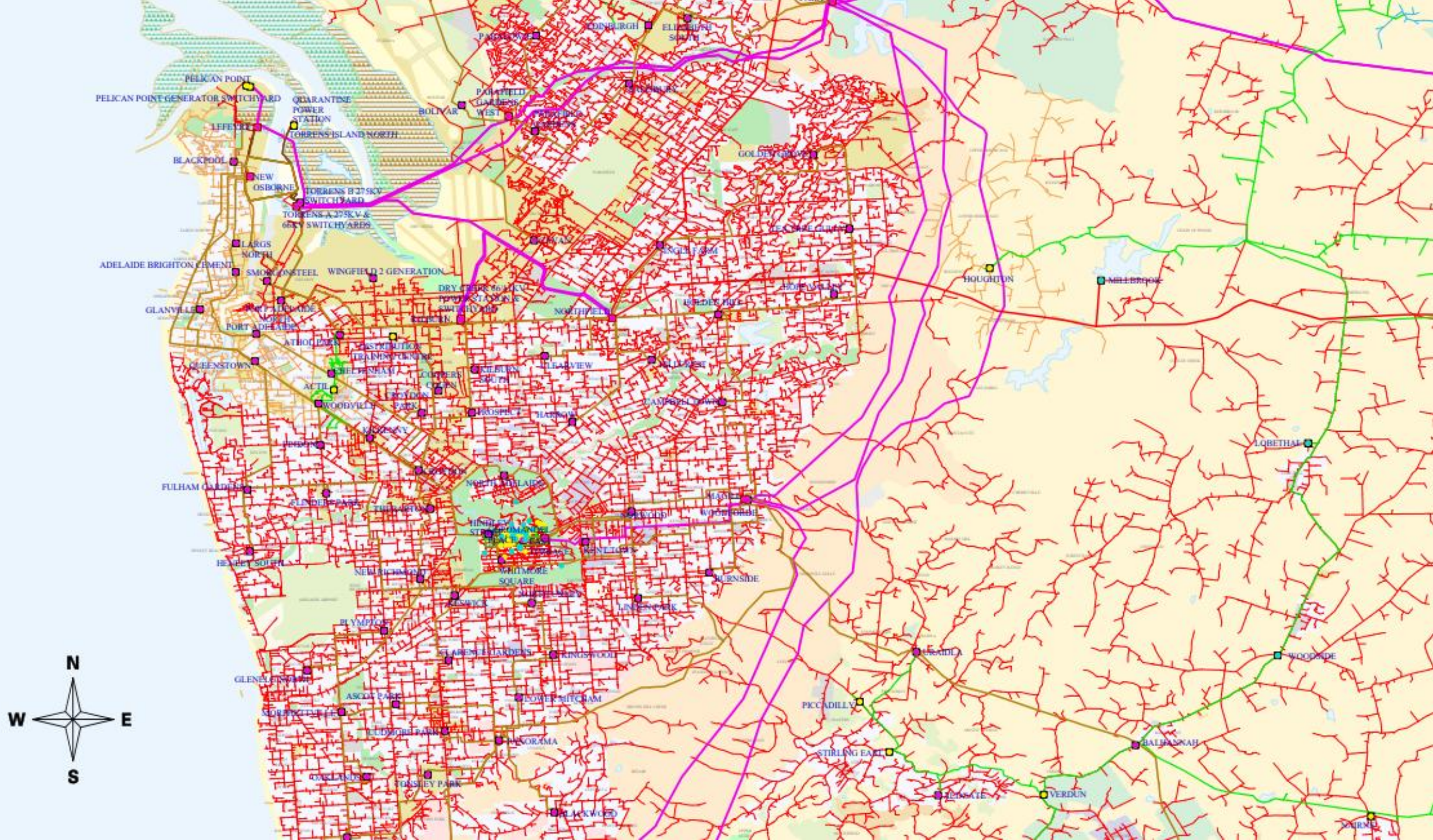


Stakeholder Engagement Update

Erin Hampton – Stakeholder Engagement Lead

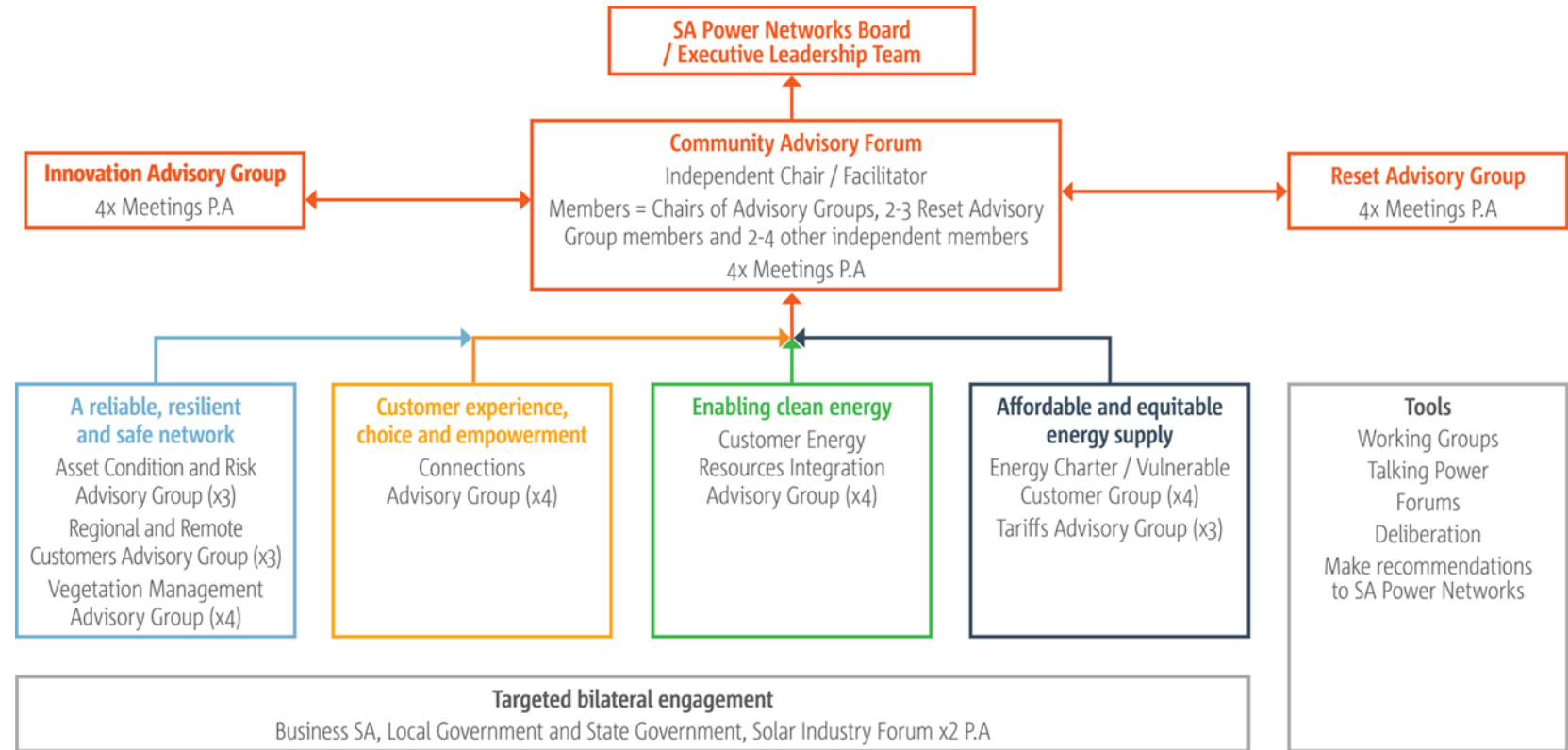






Our consultative group model

- VMAG one of 9 specialist Advisory Groups – Kim Syrus, VMAG Chair
- Chairs of all AGs make up our Community Advisory Forum
- Link to our Executive Leadership Team
- Quarterly Briefing Note to CAF after each meeting – insights, focus areas, recommendations, topics of interest
- Newly formed Innovation Advisory Group – Ian Seccafien VMAG representative
- Each group to identify 1-2 problem statements per annum
- Consultative Group structure to be reviewed Q4 2025/ Q1 2026



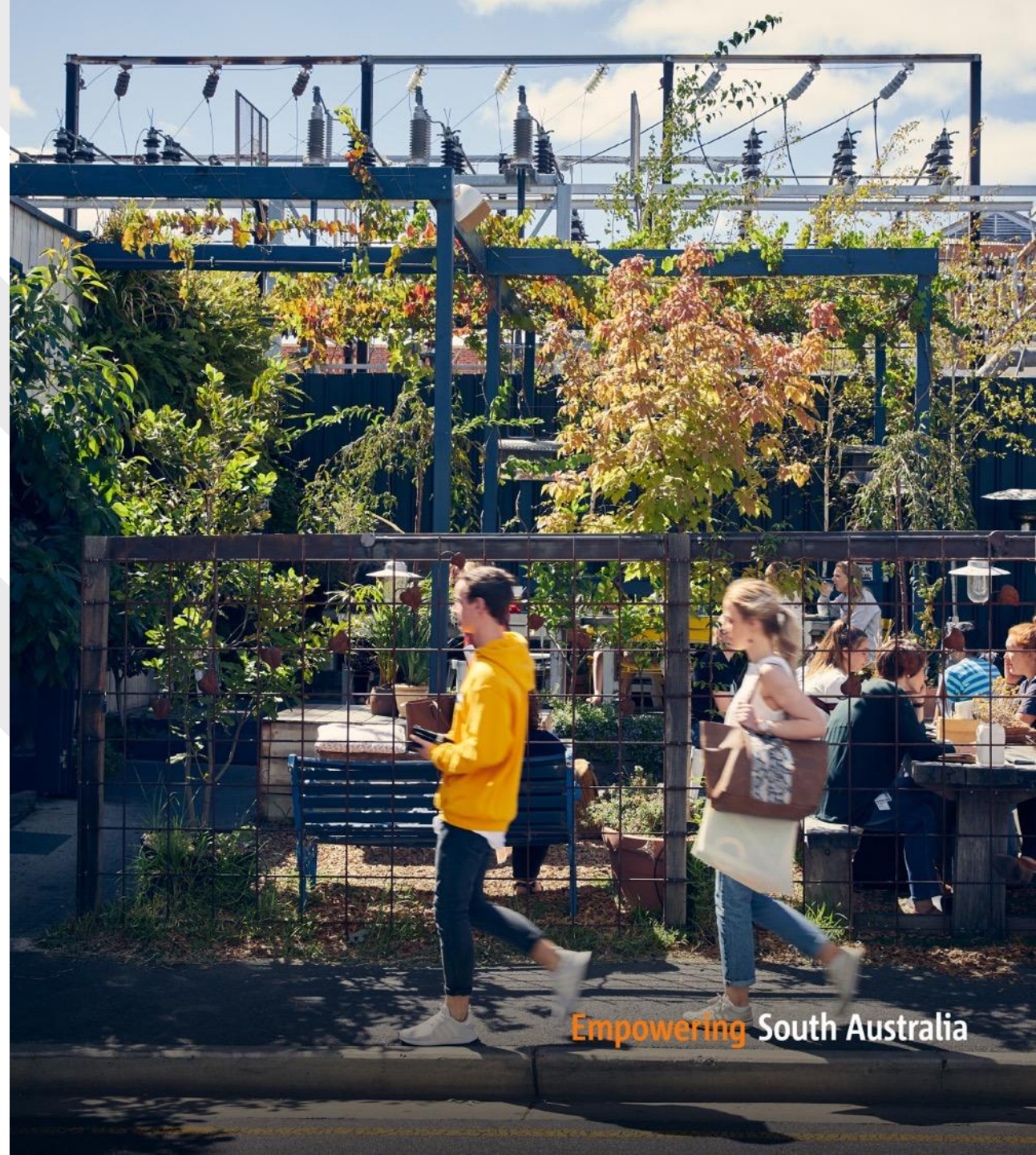
Stakeholder Engagement

- Dedicated resource for stakeholder engagement
 - Recruitment/ interview process underway
- Continued management of VMAG and review of group in Q1 2026
- Focus areas for next 6-12 months
 - Meeting with all 18 metro Councils to continue to build relationships and understand opportunities for collaboration
 - Review of all external comms – eg. social media strategy, review of factsheets/video content, council/landholder notifications
 - Complaints framework
 - Customer insights
 - Protocol for Vegetation Management near powerlines



Green Adelaide Update

Dr. Sheryn Pitman – Urban
Greening Lead



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LUNCH

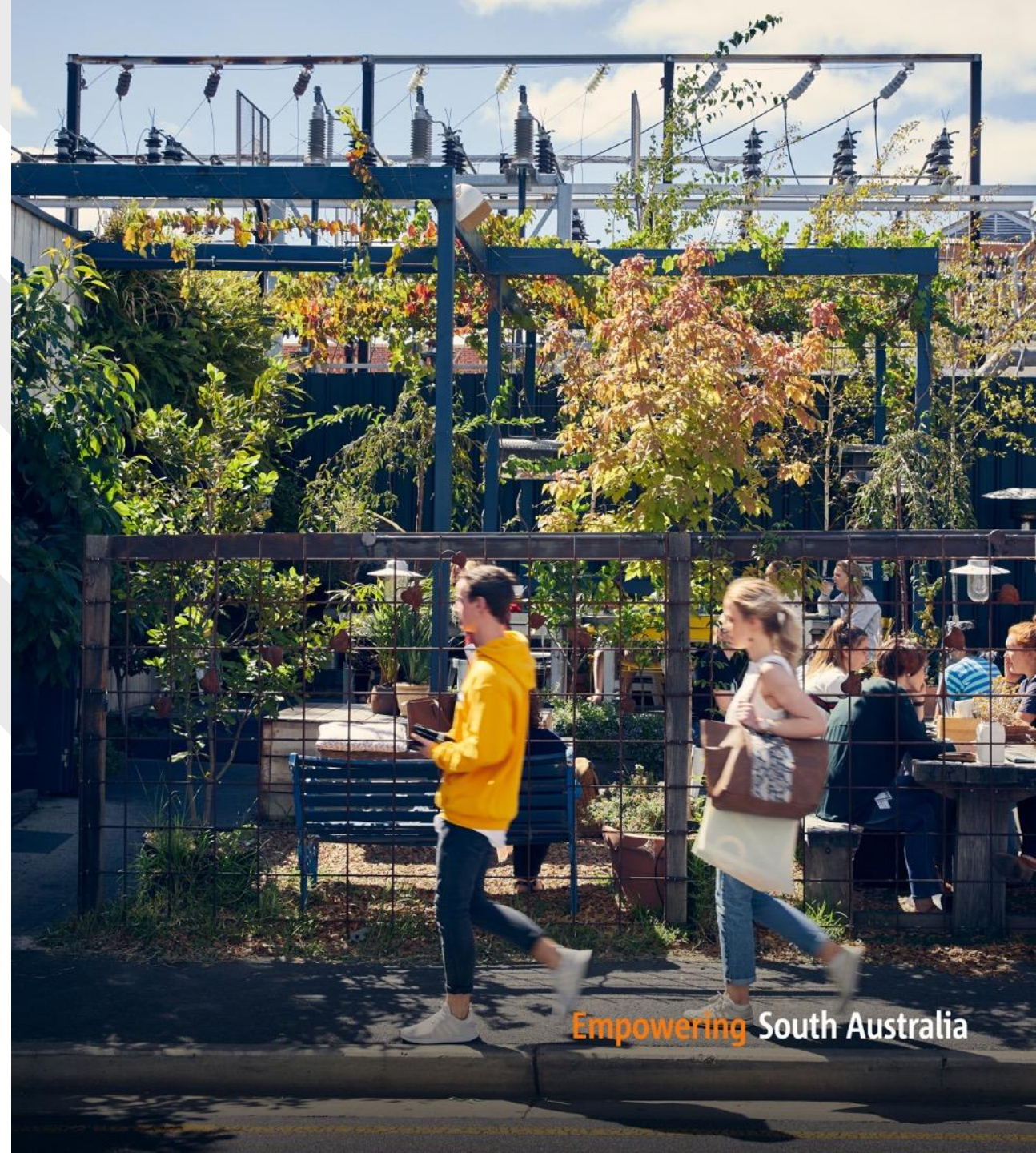
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Non-Compliant Plantings (previously Inappropriate Species)

Vegetation Management around
Powerlines

Paula Caldicott – Project Manager



Empowering South Australia



Contents

- Why Vegetation Management around Powerlines matters?
- Consultation and Activity to Date
- Regulatory Framework and Compliance
- Collaborative Solutions
- Future Recommendations
- Next Steps



Why Vegetation Management Near Powerlines Matters?

Safety, Reliability and Risk Reduction

Proactive vegetation management reduces risks associated with non-compliant (previously inappropriate species) plantings near electrical infrastructure while supporting the establishment of appropriate plantings that enhance roadside amenity, shading and cooling.

Vegetation management assists with preventing fire hazards, power outages, and infrastructure damage, reducing risks to community safety, employees and network reliability. At the same time, well planned vegetation contributes to healthier, more attractive, and cooler neighbourhoods.

In addition to safety benefits, effective vegetation management delivers significant economic value to communities and local councils by minimizing vegetation management costs, emergency response costs, reducing infrastructure repair expenses, preserving service continuity and improving liveability.

Compliance

SA Power Networks is required by legislation to comply with the [Electricity Act 1996 \(South Australia\)](#) and its regulations; the [Electricity \(Principles of Vegetation Clearance\) Regulations 2021](#).



- Vegetation Protocol Published
- Presentation to council CEOs

- Risk-based approach introduced
- Correspondence with council about species list
- Powerline Friendly List Workshops
- Powerline Friendly List published
- Legislative review engagement/workshops
- Inappropriate plantings subgroup established
- Avenues and Stands definitions discussion commenced

- Appropriate Species Reference Group established
- Local Government Forums

- Communication sent to impacted councils
- Avenues and Stands discussion/consultation

- Consultative group review - VMAG established
- Letters sent by OTR to all councils
- Continued communication with impacted councils
- OTR Avenues and Stands guidance document published
- Agreement reached with City of Marion

- Continued communication with impacted councils
- Consultation with VMAG
- SAPN official position declared
- Vegetation Forum discussion

Pre 2015:

- 2013 LGA Working Group established
- 2014 - Arb Reference Group established



Activity to Date

Consultation

SA Power Networks has undertaken extensive consultation around “inappropriate” species for a number of years. This has involved a breadth of stakeholders, including local government, the Office of the Technical Regulator (OTR) and key stakeholders. The result of this consultation includes the [“Replacement of trees in avenues and stands near public powerlines in Non-Bush Fire Risk Area \(NBFRA\)”](#) recommendation released by the OTR.

Non-Compliant Plantings

SA Power Networks is required to adhere to the [Electricity Act 1996 \(South Australia\)](#) and the [Electricity \(Principles of Vegetation Clearance\) Regulations 2021](#). Within these documents there are legal restrictions on the types of vegetation that can be grown under/ or near powerlines. This applies if the tree or vegetation is planted within prescribed distances of powerlines.

[List 1 and 2 of approved and permitted trees](#) (OTR document) identifies which plant species can be planted around powerlines. Any species of plant not on these lists, or the [Exempt List](#), has previously been recognised as “Inappropriate Species”.

Name Change to Non-Compliant Plantings

Feedback received, particularly from SAPN’s Vegetation Management Advisory Group (VMAG), indicated that “Inappropriate Species” was not the preferred language when identifying trees not captured on the OTR lists. SA Power Networks is now suggesting these plantings should be recognised as “non-compliant plantings” which ties back to the regulations.



Activity to Date

Council Activity to Date

SA Power Networks contacted several councils in writing between 2019 and 2024 identifying what it believes to be non-compliant plantings. These councils will be the starting point for our next steps and engagement. Our intent is to work collaboratively with these councils and other stakeholders to identify the most appropriate outcome.

Dates proposed – Avenues and Stands

In late 2024, the OTR released recommendations for the “Replacement of trees in avenues and stands near public powerlines in NBFRA”. This document references two dates – 1 January 2017 and 11 September 2018.

To align with the OTR recommendations, SA Power Networks is now moving forward with the date of 1 January 2017 for the non-compliant species review and actions.

We will continue to work with councils around specific plantings and dates, noting each council has different considerations and circumstances.



Regulatory Framework and Compliance

Regulatory Framework and Compliance

Formal Recognition of Non-compliant Plantings

Inappropriate species near powerlines are classified as non-compliant, a term that aligns with the Electricity Act 1996 (South Australia).

Regulatory Alignment

Clearances around powerlines are identified in the Electricity (Principles of Vegetation Clearance) Regulations 2021. To mitigate risk and improve safety within communities, planting guidelines (List 1 and List 2 governed by the OTR) must be adhered to in locations with overhead powerlines to reduce ongoing management and costs to consumers.

Stakeholder Understanding

Focusing on appropriate plant selection and planting suitable species of trees under/ near powerlines will help support green canopy coverage initiatives and assist in vegetation management decisions for councils.

Informed Future Planting Decisions

Recognising non-compliant plantings and utilising trees from [List 1 and 2](#) and the [Exempt list](#) where overhead powerlines exist provides the ability for future landscape planning, improved green canopy coverage and promotes compliant plantings near powerlines.



Collaborative Solutions





Proposed Solutions

Building Trust and Collaboration

SA Power Networks is eager to work collaboratively with councils and other stakeholders to support long term vegetation management recommendations and strategies. We acknowledge that councils may face different challenges, and we are committed to identifying ongoing opportunities to partner with our stakeholders.

Supports Safety and Compliance

Our proposed approach supports safety, reliability and regulatory requirements for **non-compliant plantings since 1 January 2017**.

Risk Assessment and Possible Alternatives

Non-compliant plantings will be identified, reviewed, and assessed based on risk. Options will be explored with the relevant councils (those initially contacted between 2019-2024). SA Power Networks acknowledges that future solutions may not be directly aligned to those proposed in 2019-2024 but are committed to working with councils to develop possible solutions.

The review will then be extended to Bushfire Risk Areas (BFRA) and other councils to ensure consistency and compliance across the State.

Collaborative Problem Solving

SA Power Networks will work closely with councils to find suitable solutions and assist with compliant practices going forward.

We would also like to highlight that “new” non-compliant plantings will be addressed immediately if identified through our 2026 inspections and beyond.

Please note that removals and cost recovery processes will be discussed, if timely solutions cannot be negotiated.



Future Recommendations

Future Collaborative Recommendations

Enhanced List 1 and List 2

Further improvements to List 1 and 2 could increase success and diversification of Council planting programs. SA Power Networks are committed to partnering with Council, the OTR and other stakeholders to further develop and improve these lists.

Detailed Growing Conditions

We recommend that the lists could be expanded through appropriate risk-based considerations to ensure availability and ideal environmental conditions for successful growth.

Partnering With Local Growers

Greater collaboration with the Nursery and Garden Industry South Australia (NGISA) and growers/nurseries would be beneficial to support informed species selection and increase diversity of South Australia's urban forest.

AS4373-2007 Pruning of Amenity Trees Standard

Exploration of AS4373-2007 with stakeholders may promote beneficial future outcomes.



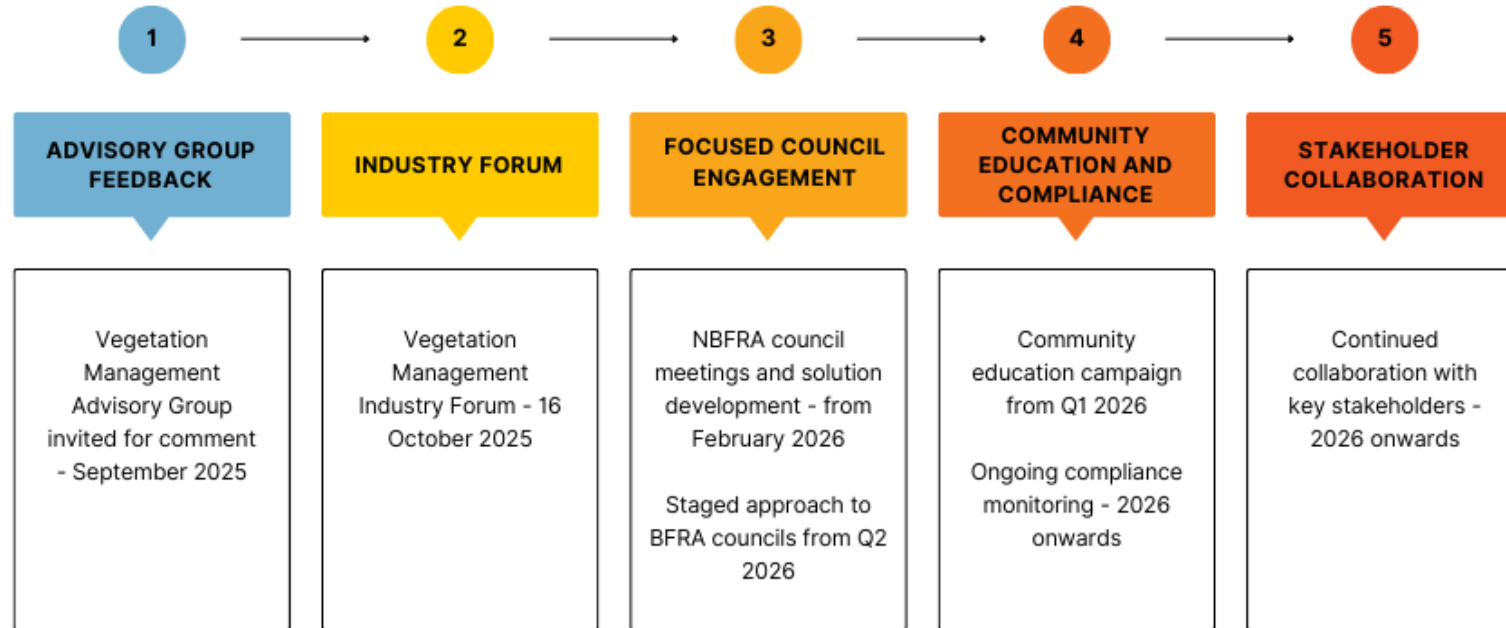
Proposed Actions



Proposed Actions

- VMAG Feedback (October 9, 2025)
- Vegetation Management Industry Forum (October 16, 2025)
- Focused NBFRA Council Meetings and Solutions (February 28, 2026)
- Broader Education Campaign (Q1, 2026)
- Staged Approach to BFRAs (Commencing Q2, 2026)
- Ongoing Compliance Monitoring (2026 onwards)
- Collaboration with Key Stakeholders on Recommendation (2026 onwards)

Non-compliant species management roadmap



Building and Maintaining Strong Partnerships

We are committed to developing positive and collaborative relationships with our key stakeholders, including local councils.

We endeavour to balance the challenges of risk, sustainability, greening and affordability moving forward and understand that our stakeholders at times can have conflicting or competing challenges.



Workshop

Vegetation near powerlines – the challenges and opportunities



The Challenges....

- Safety, reliability of power supply and legislative compliance.
- Urban greening and canopy targets.
- Non-compliant tree planting, avenues, and stands.



Potential discussion topics

- Non-compliant tree planting and how to collaborate effectively.
- Appropriate species selection near powerlines and opportunities for improvement.
- Balancing tree maintenance or removal with greening and canopy targets.
- Implementation of OTR's guideline for avenues and stands of trees near powerlines.

Or further discussion from any of the presentations from today....



Consider the following in your discussion

- Collaboration with councils, developers, and community groups.
- Education and awareness campaigns.
- Policy or regulatory changes – 2031 legislative review (not a quick win as process is complex and takes time).
- Innovative planting techniques or species trials.

Also consider:

- How ideas/opportunities could be developed further.
- Opportunities for collaboration (e.g., with councils, arborists, Vegetation Management Advisory Group).
- Potential trials or pilot projects.

Questions?
Comments?
Concerns?



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