

**ACCC ELECTRICITY COMMUNICATION NO. 014**

**MURRAYLINK APPLICATION FOR CONVERSION AND MAR-LETTER**

**COMMENTS FROM WESTERN POWER CORPORATION**

**Placing Transmission Lines in a National Park**

Western Power would normally avoid placing overhead transmission lines in a National Park if possible.

If it has to, it will only do so with the approval of the WA Environment Protection Authority (EPA). Over the years approvals have been successfully sought and obtained from the WA EPA to traverse transmission lines through WA National Parks based upon negotiated outcomes, such as configuring the transmission lines to avoid having to carry out any major vegetation clearing or acquiring and providing properties of high conservation value to the custodian of the National Parks (WA Conservation Commission) as “offsets” for the clearing carried out.

The following comments relate to the five dot points in the "Summary" section of the letter from the Department of Sustainability and Environment to the EACCC dated 31 July 2003.

- *The underground alternative to overhead powerlines is viable. This will be important for any future planning decisions in respect to proposals for overhead powerlines within Victoria, especially if the proposal was to involve a National Park.*

The statement "The underground alternative to overhead powerlines is viable" is not qualified or justified in any way.

Whilst it may be true to say that underground cable options may be a viable alternative to overhead options in certain situations, this would certainly not be always true because it would usually be possible to find alternative lower cost overhead options that also minimise environmental impacts such as impacts on high conservation value areas. In a limited number of cases it may be true that an underground cable option is the only viable option. Alternative low environmental impact overhead options may not be available or may be prohibitively expensive due to the length of overhead line required to avoid environmentally sensitive areas.

There is a further suggestion that given the viability of underground options, this has implications for areas both within and outside National Parks. As already stated the viability is dependent upon context.

- *By working closely with local planning authorities and referral authorities MurrayLink were able to minimize the impact on the environment. This has*

*set a new standard in reasonable environmental management for major projects undertaken by utilities.*

The suggestion is that "reasonable environmental management" involves the use of underground cable. This is not always true as environmental impact may in some cases be greater with underground cable, for example in sensitive areas such as those affected by threatened ecological communities or threatened species it may be more acceptable to span across the sensitive area with an overhead line because the underground alternative may in fact have a more adverse impact upon the area as a result of trench excavation. It is also generally possible to develop reasonable low impact overhead transmission line options.

- *MurrayLink also developed the technology in conjunction with TIHA Pty Ltd to allow the cables to be laid in an easement of 3 metres or less. This is a substantial improvement to the existing standards of laying major infrastructure.*

This implies that new low impact technology is involved. The use of underground cable is simply the application of existing technology at significant cost.

- *Underground power cabling being flexible and requiring narrow easements means that this technology has much more potential to avoid areas of high conservation value than previous technologies.*

This is not valid for the same reasons as stated under the second dot point above.

- *There is no route between Red Cliffs and the South Australian border through Victoria and outside of National Parks, of sufficient width to allow the installation of overhead lines. The only logical approach is to have underground powerlines for at least part of the length.*

This seems to be advocating the widespread use of underground cable outside National Park areas. Why is the width of corridor not sufficient for overhead lines from Red Cliffs to the South Australian border? This would surely be at best an exaggeration of the prevailing constraints.

**DOUG ABERLE  
GENERAL MANAGER NETWORKS**

**21 August 2003**