04

Community Consultation

4.0 Community Consultation

4.1 Overview of Community Consultation

In accordance with the EES Scoping Requirements: "*The proponent's EES consultation should enable feedback to be inputted on the project and its potential environmental effects, as well as respond to issues raised."*

Community consultation was commenced in the early stages of the Project in March 2019 to establish landscape values, key landscape features, important viewpoints and the community's perception of the Project. The proponent undertook extensive engagement with key stakeholders and community members throughout the planning process utilising a variety of consultation mechanisms including phone calls, one-on-one discussions, dwelling visits / door-knocks, drop-in and information sessions, visual impact assessments, visualisation tools, webinar, newsletters and website.

4.2 Results of Community Consultation

Understanding of the community perception towards the proposed development is an intrinsic component of the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment process. A CSIRO study published in 2012: *Exploring community acceptance of rural wind farms in Australia* provides a snapshot of community acceptance levels regarding Australian wind farms from a variety of stakeholder perspectives. It found levels of acceptance among the public are highly subjective and can differ depending on location, local context and place attachment.

An EES Consultation Plan and EES Commencement Documents have been prepared by the Proponent as per the EES Scoping Requirements. These reports highlighting the findings of the community consultation undertaken to date. The below provides a summary of the key outcomes of this report in relation to landscape and visual.

Neighbouring landowners have raised concerns regarding the potential visual impacts not only from dwellings but from farm paddocks where they spend a lot of their time working.

Concerns raised regarding the cumulative visual impacts of the project when other neighbouring projects are considered and the changing character of the landscape to a more industrial landscape.

Concerns raised regarding potential visual impacts of overhead powerlines associated with the project. Greatest concern is overhead powerlines external to the project area based on experiences at other wind farms.

Concerns that this project, along with other approved wind farm projects in the local area, will result in too many turbines being visible and that this effect could change the character of the area making it more of an industrial landscape rather than an agricultural landscape.

As a result of community consultation during the development period, the Project has undergone changes during the planning and design phase. Feedback and recommendations obtained from ongoing consultation have been taken into account with various protection buffers and exclusion areas implemented to protect environmental values. Design changes will continue to be made throughout the EES process to respond to consultation feedback.

During consultation, Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation expressed concern that the project will have an impact on their intangible heritage. Intangible heritage values cannot be assessed within a Visual Impact Assessment, as they relate to cultural meaning and experience rather than physical visual change.

05

Existing Landscape Character

5.0 Existing Landscape Character

5.1 Existing Landscape Character

The purpose of the Landscape Character Analysis is to establish the existing landscape and visual conditions through descriptions, mapping and photographic representations. The study method for undertaking the Landscape Character Analysis has been established in accordance with the *Draft National Wind Farm Development Guidelines* and Australian Institute of Landscape Architects (AILA) Guidance Notes for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment where relevant and in conjunction with previous experience on large scale wind energy projects.

The study method is also based on the Policy and Planning Guidelines (2022), which state that the assessment should consider the following landscape features:

- The topography of the land
- The amount and type of vegetation
- Natural features such as waterways, cliffs, escarpments, hills, gullies and valleys
- Visual boundaries between major landscape types
- The type, pattern, built form, scale and character of development, including roads and walking tracks
- Flora and fauna habitat
- Cultural heritage sites
- The skyline

Table 4 provides an overview of the methodology used to establish a quantitative approach to defining and assessing the landscape character.

Landscape Character Assessment Inputs:	
South West Victoria Landscape Assessment Study	
• Map Layer identifying landscape character types and significance throughout the region in which the wind energy project is located.	**Refer to Section 5.2**
Significant Landscapes of South West Victoria	
• Map Layer identifying landscapes of significance throughout South West Victoria.	**Refer to Section 5.3**
Sensitive Land Zoning Designations	
• Map Layer identifying Sensitive Land Zoning as designated under the Moyne Planning Scheme.	**Refer to Section 5.4**
Sensitive Landscape Overlay Designations	
• Map Layer identifying Sensitive Landscape Overlays as designated under the Moyne Planning Scheme.	**Refer to Section 5.5**
Sensitive Heritage Designations	
• Map Layer identifying Sensitive Heritage Zoning as designated under the Moyne Planning Scheme.	**Refer to Section 5.6**
Key Landscape Features	
• Identify areas of visual interest or quality that stand out visually in the landscape.	**Refer to Section 5.7**
Landscape Character Unit Classification	
• Landscape is categorised into Landscape Character Units (LCU) and Sensitivity Ratings are applied to each LCU.	**Refer to Section 5.8**
Viewpoint Inventory and Sensitivity Levels	
• Undertake a viewpoint inventory from public and private locations.	**Refer to Section 8.0**
Zone of Visual Influence	
• Undertake visibility or view shed mapping when assessing what may be visible from a given viewpoint looking in all directions.	**Refer to Section 7.0**

Table 4 Overview of Existing Landscape Character Assessment Inputs

5.2 South West Victoria Landscape Assessment Study

The *South West Victoria Landscape Assessment Study: Regional Overview Report* (2013) was prepared by the Victorian Government's Department of Planning and Community Development. The Department commissioned a landscape assessment of South West Victoria to better understand and assess the visual character and significance of the wide range of landscape types which includes the volcanic plains and cones that dominate much of the area. The Western Volcanic Plain region extends between the Great Dividing Range in the north and the Grampians in the central west. The study is also used to inform planning scheme policies that assist in planning decision-making, and ensures that landscapes of significance are adequately protected and managed for the future. While the study provides useful guidance for assessing landscape character and significance and informing planning scheme policies, it is not listed as an incorporated or background document in the Moyne Planning Scheme and therefore carries no statutory weight.

5.2.1 The Western Volcanic Plain

The Study Area is located within the area defined as the Western Volcanic Plain (refer to **Figure 6**).

The South West Victoria Landscape Assessment Study states:

- *"This Character Type is formed by a flat to undulating basaltic plain scattered with volcanic features including stony rises, old lava flows, numerous volcanic cones and old eruption points which together create a unique visual landscape. This is a place of big skies, long views with volcanic rises that punctuate the horizon. When the first European settlers arrived they found the land primed for agriculture as it contained very few trees. Shelterbelts of cypress and pine were planted to protect crops and livestock from the winds that sweep the plain and are now a defining characteristic of the Type"*
- *"Many paddocks and roadsides are edged with beautifully formed dry stone walls that were created when early pastoralists cleared the land of rocks for agricultural purposes, to contain stock and to control vermin."*

(Department of Planning and Community Development, 2013).

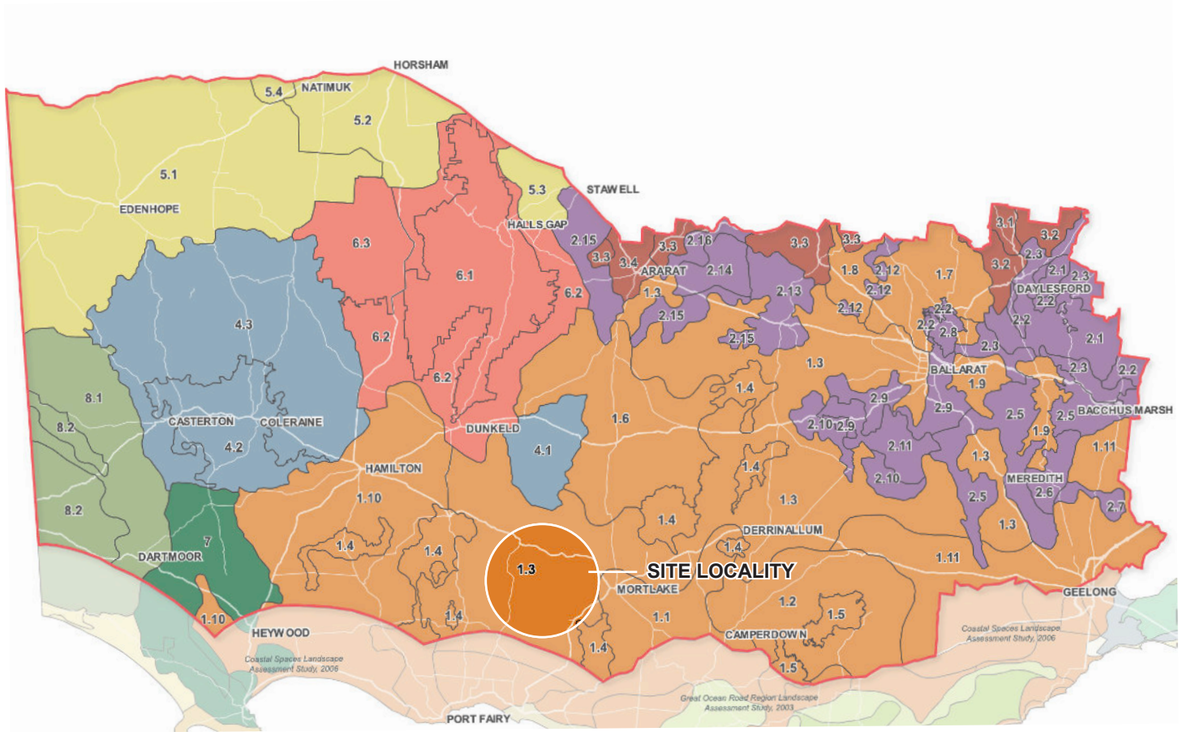

Figure 6 Landscape Types & Areas of South West Victoria (Planisphere, 2013, not to scale)

5.3 Significant Landscapes of South West Victoria

The *Significant Landscapes of South West Victoria* is a part of the South West Victoria Landscape Assessment Study, that was conducted in 2012 to assess character and significance of landscapes throughout south west Victoria. Broad landscape areas were examined in detail and an assessment of their cultural landscape values was undertaken. These detailed assessments led to the designation of some landscapes as Regionally Significant, and others of State Significance (or higher, though a rating of 'national' significance has not been attributed due to the scale/ context of the study, and the inability to justify such a rating through comparative analysis (Planisphere, 2015).

Figure 7 shows the levels of significance attributed to the landscapes across South West Victoria, as well as the viewing locations from which regionally and state significant views are available.

State Significant viewing locations have been identified to the east, southeast and northwest of the Project (in excess of 12 km from the Project), located outside the study area. At this distance, the Project is unlikely to be a prominent element in the landscape and if visible would be viewed in the context of nearby wind farms. The Project Site itself is not located within a significance investigation area.

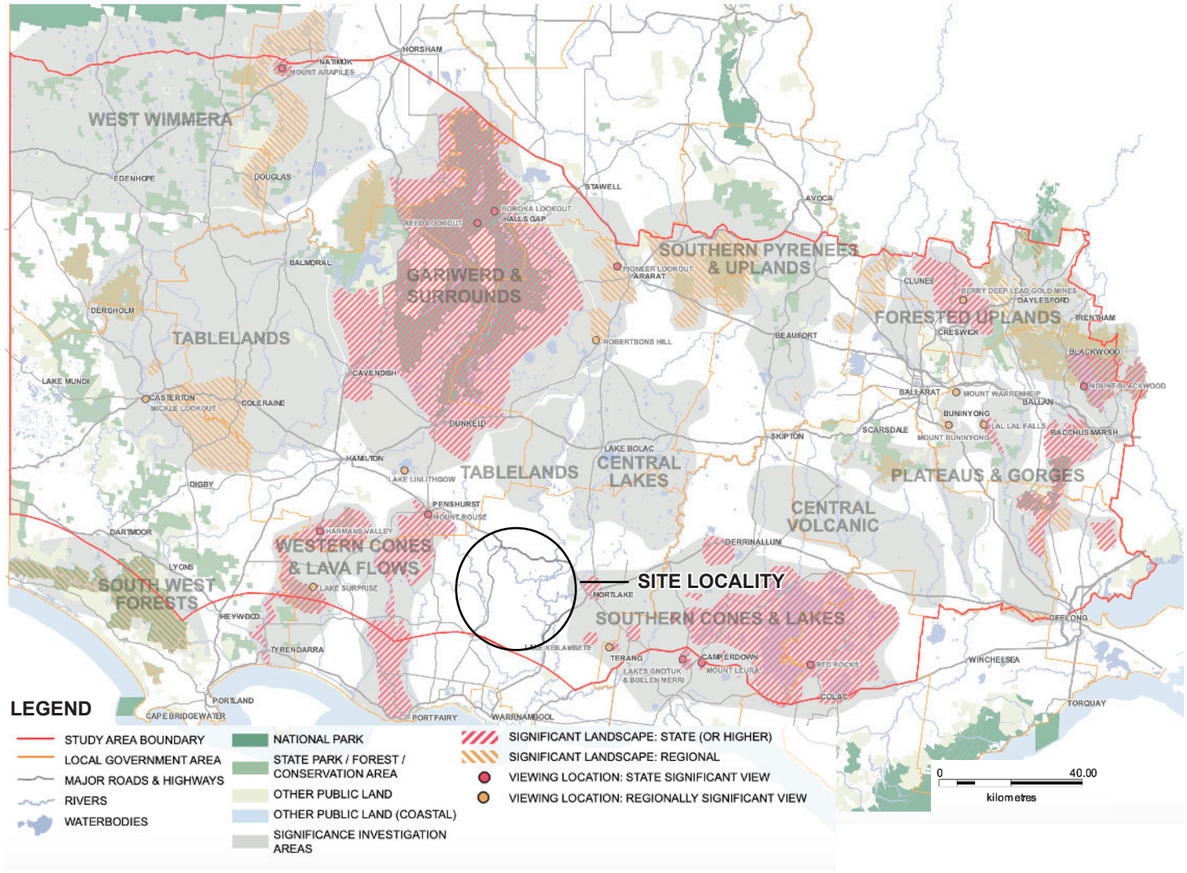

Figure 7 Significant Investigation Areas and Significant Landscapes and Views of South West Victoria (Planisphere, 2013)

5.4 Sensitive Land Zoning Designations

5.4.1 FZ - Farming Zone

The Project Site and surrounding land is zoned FZ - Farming Zone under the Moyne Planning Scheme. The objectives of the Farming Zone relevant to landscape and visual impact within this LGA is '*to ensure that non-agricultural uses do not adversely affect the use of land for agriculture and the use and development of land based on comprehensive and sustainable land management practices and infrastructure provision*' (Moyne Shire Council, 2020). "*In reaching a decision on a proposal in this zone, the responsible authority must give significant weight to the farming productivity of the land and the relevance of the proposal to farming. There is an expectation that decisions will be made in favour of protecting and supporting farming.*" (Victoria Department of Transport and Planning, 2024)

5.4.2 RLZ - Rural Living Zone

Semi-rural residences to the north east of Caramut are located within RLZ - Rural Living Zone. The objective of this zone is *'to protect and enhance the heritage values of the area and provide for residential use in a rural environment*' (Moyne Shire Council, 2020).

5.4.3 TZ - Township Zone

Zoning designations within township areas include TZ - Township Zone. Those within the Study Area include the areas within and around Caramut, Hexham and Ellerslie. Woolsthorpe is located approximately 12 km south west of the Project Site, outside of the 6 km Study Area. This zoning designation aims to "*encourage development that respects the neighbourhood character of the area*" and "*provide for residential development and a range of commercial, industrial and other uses in small towns*".

5.4.4 SUZ - Special Use Zone

Other zoning designations within the Study Area include SUZ - Special Use Zone. SUZ allows for development that is specific to that area. Land to the east of the Project is zoned SUZ1. This zoning designation aims to "*facilitate the development and use of a gas-fired power station in a manner which recognises the character and amenity of the surrounding area*".

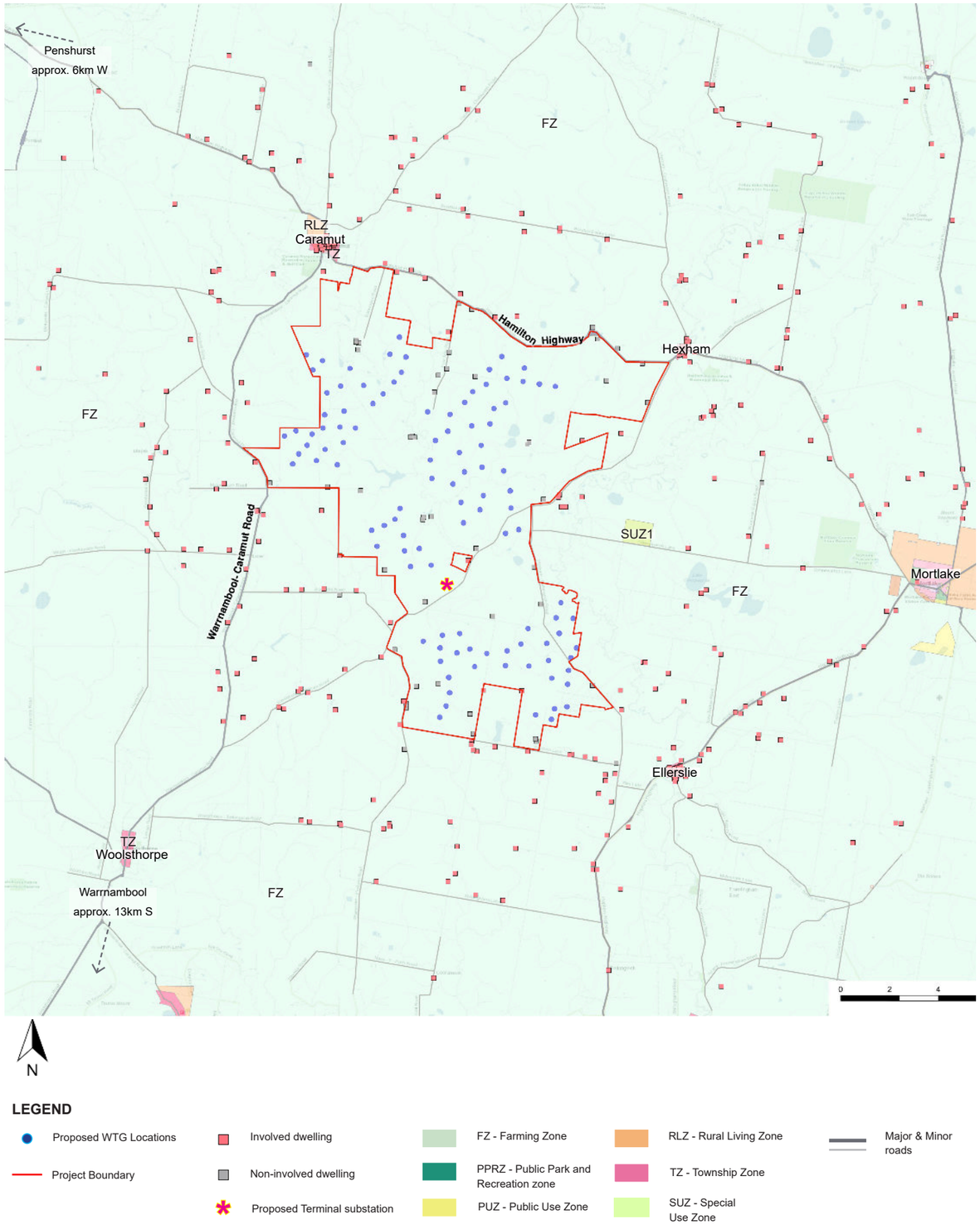

Figure 8 Land Zoning Designations within the Study Area (Source: VicPlan 2023)

5.5 Significant Landscape Overlay Designations

The Project does not fall under any significant landscape overlay as designated by the Victorian Planning Scheme. However, surrounding areas that have landscape, environmental and building overlays impose restrictions on built form and development. Land within the Project boundary is classified as bushfire prone land (refer **Figure 9**).

5.5.1 ESO - Environmental Significance Overlay

The Environmental Significance Overlay ensures proposed development is compatible with the desired outcomes and environmental values. One site that falls within this overlay has been identified to the east of the Project Site at Mortlake Power Station, designated as ES03 in the Moyne Planning Scheme (DTP, 2023).

5.5.2 Heritage Overlay

This Heritage Overlay is applicable to areas with very high historic significance to conserve their character and cultural significance. There are two Heritage Overlays located within the Project Site and two sites containing historic homesteads have been identified within the immediate surrounds. Refer to Section 5.6.

5.5.3 Bushfire Management Overlay

Areas to the west and east of the Project are classed within the Bushfire Management Overlay. Victorian Planning Maps also classifies the Project Site and its surrounds as prone to bushfire.

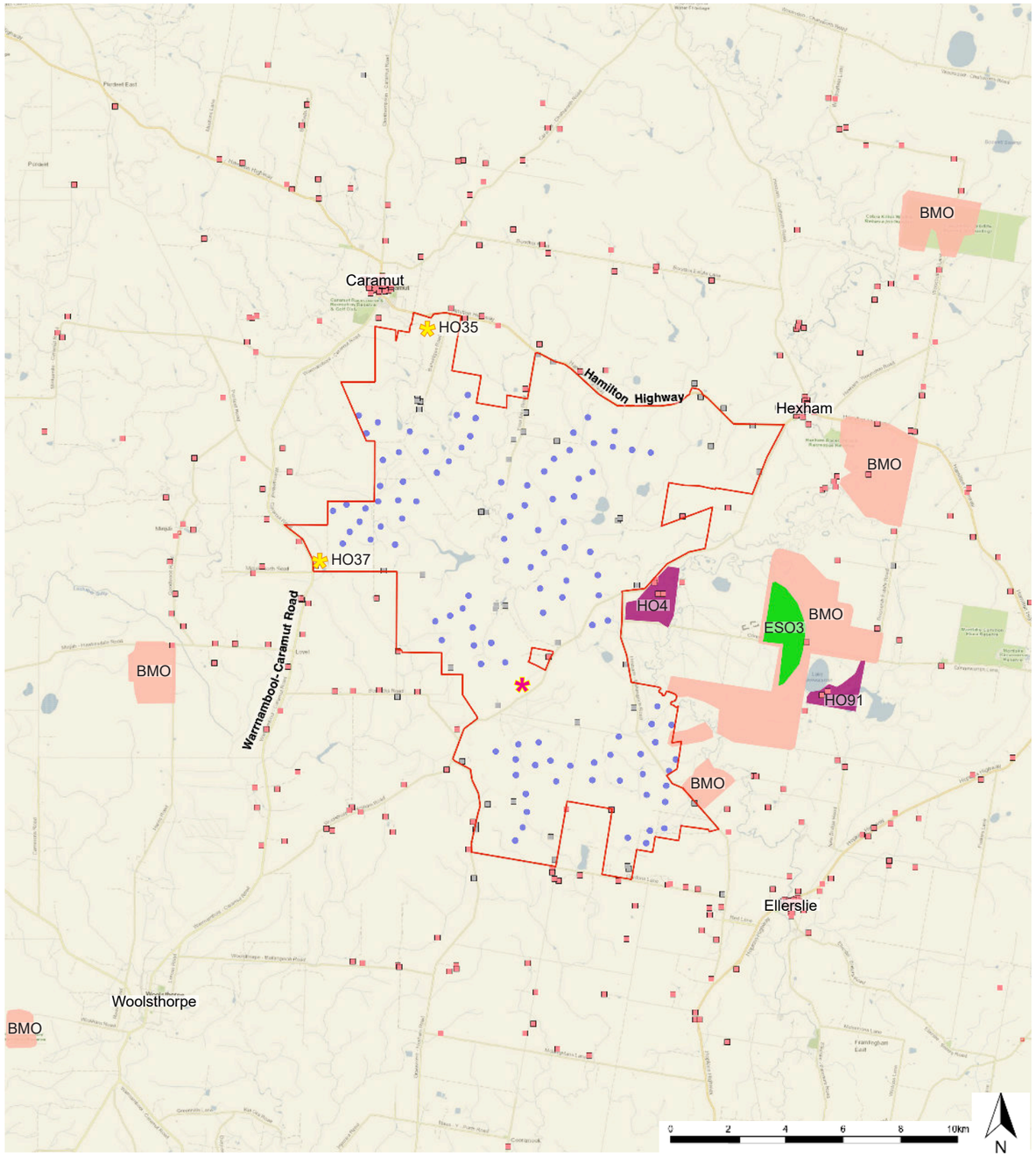

Figure 9 Landscape Overlay Designations within the Study Area (Source: VicPlan 2023)

5.6 Sensitive Heritage Designations

Figure 10 identifies areas of heritage significance within the Project Site and its immediate surrounds.

5.6.1 Areas with Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Sensitivity

The *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2008 (the Act)* and the *Aboriginal Heritage Regulations 2018 (the Regulations)* provide protection for all Aboriginal places, objects and human remains that are located on public or private land (Heritage Victoria, 2023). **Figure 10** identifies indicative areas of Aboriginal cultural heritage sensitivity within the Project Site and surrounds, as provided by Aboriginal Victoria and in line with the Act and the Regulations.

An area of cultural heritage sensitivity is an area in which Aboriginal cultural heritage is known to be, or is likely to be, present and which has not already been subject to significant ground disturbance (Heritage Victoria, 2023). Some of these areas are considered of high ecological value such as rivers, lakes and creeks that drain the volcanic plain. Sites of significance include Lake Connewarren, Salt Creek, Spring Creek, parts of Mortlake Common Flora Reserve and Hopkins River Corridor that runs to the east of the Project Site. Where applicable and located within the Study Area, this report assesses the visual impact on these locations.

5.6.2 Areas under the Victorian Heritage Register

The Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) lists the state's most significant heritage places and objects protected under the *Heritage Act* 2017 (Heritage Victoria, 2023). There are no VHR listed items within the Project Site. Merrang Homestead (identified as VHR number H0322 and Heritage Overlay H04) is listed for architectural, historical and aesthetic state significance (VicPlan, 2023) and is situated to the east of the Project.

5.6.3 Areas in a Heritage Overlay

The Heritage Overlay is part of a local planning scheme and includes places with heritage significance to a local area. These places are protected under the *Planning and Environment Act* 1987. There are two (2) Heritage Overlays located within the Project Site. These include the Bridge over Burchett Creek (HO35), located in the north eastern corner of the Project Site, and Stone Mileposts (HO37)located on Warnnambool-Caramut Road.

Two (2) other sites have been identified outside of the Project Site in the Study Area, these include Merrang Homestead (H04), which is also listed on the Victorian Heritage Register as stated above, and Woolongoon Homestead Complex (HO91) located further east within an area that is also partly identified of Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Sensitivity (DTP, 2023).

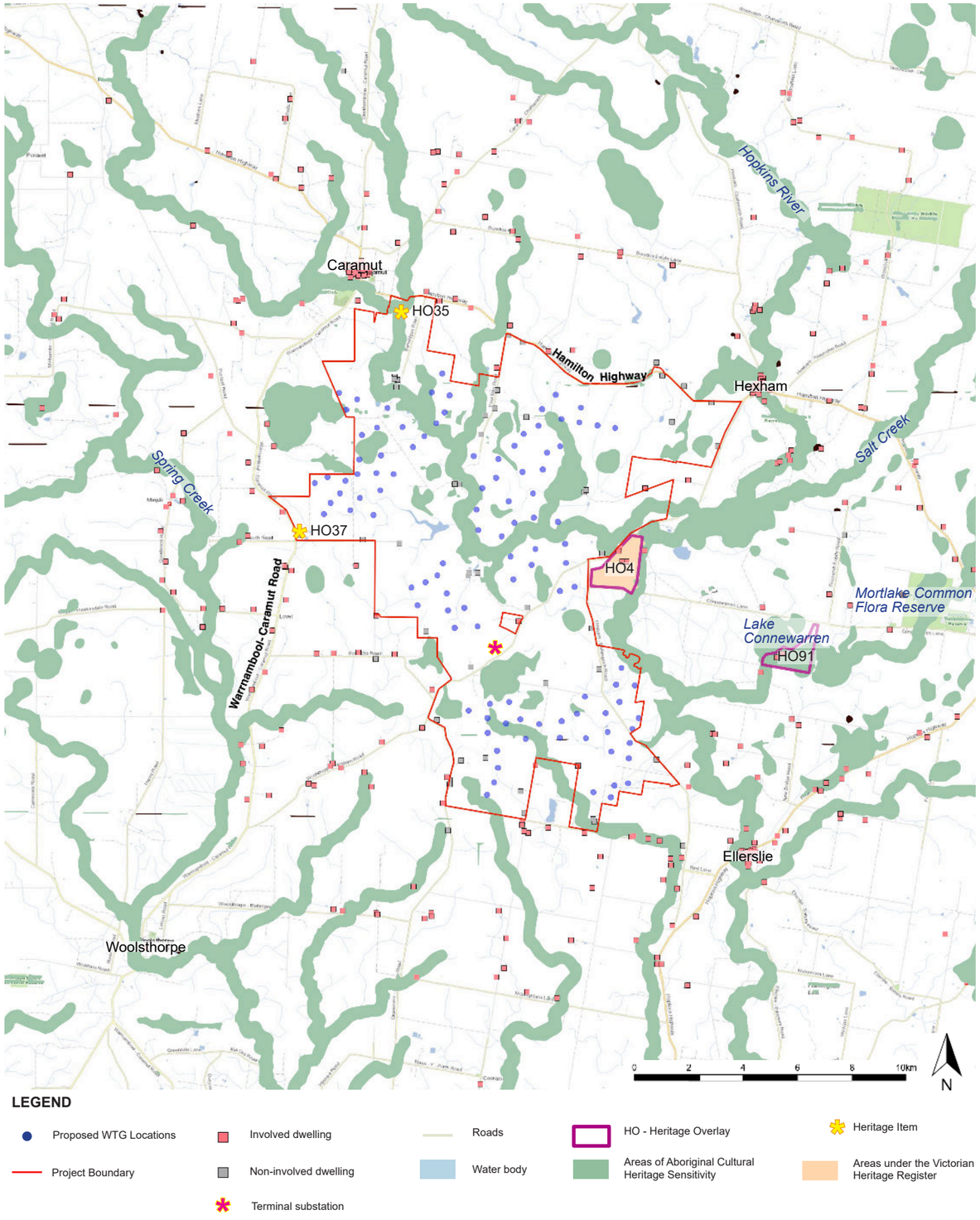

Figure 10 Landscape Heritage items and areas within the Study Area (Source: VicPlan 2023)

5.7 Key Landscape Features & Key Viewing Locations

The following provides an overview of the key features identified within the Project Site and its surrounds which contribute to the overall visual character of the landscape (refer to Figure 11).

5.7.1 Nearby Towns and Villages

The Project is located within the Moyne Shire Local Government Area (LGA). The nearest towns and settlements include Hexham, Caramut (along the Hamilton Highway), and Ellerslie (along the Hopkins Highway). Mortlake is situated approximately 10 km east of the Project Area, while Woolsthorpe lies about 12 km to the southwest.

5.7.2 Landform, geology and soils

The Western Plains region of Victoria is characterised by large, windswept flat plains with gentle undulations. The area is dominated by Cainozoic volcanic deposits which form a flat to undulating basaltic plain with stony rises (DELWP, 2019b). Extinct volcanoes rise to create key landscape features within an otherwise flat pastoral landscape. Shallow saltwater and freshwater lakes feature throughout the landscape.

Several quarries have been established on prominent volcanic peaks in the region to extract scoria gravel, including at Mount Shadwell (refer to Image 6). Located approximately 15 km east of the Project Site, Mount Shadwell is a notable landmark within the local area, rising to an elevation of 292 m. It is the highest of a group of scoria mounds and is largely cleared of vegetation for grazing. A large scoria quarry operates at its eastern base (Agriculture Victoria, 2020). Mount Shadwell is identified as a State Significant Landscape in the South West Victoria Landscape Assessment Study (2013).

The landscape character of the Western Plains has been modified by agricultural activities on flat pastoral lands fertile with rich, red volcanic soils. Remnant volcanic features dot the landscape and are key visual markers within the landscape.

Due to the existing wind resources and access to the existing 500KV transmission line, a number of wind farms are located across the volcanic plains.

5.7.3 Vegetation

The area falls within the Victorian Volcanic Plains Bioregion characterised as a largely treeless landscape dominated by native tussock grasses and herbs rather than trees, particularly the grasslands. The dominant native grasses include Danthonia species (particularly D. caespitosa, D. duttoniana and D. setacea), Dichelachne crinita, Elymus scabrus, Poa labillardieri, P. sieberiana, Stipa species (particularly S. bigeniculata) and Themeda triandra (VicFlora, 2025). Land is cleared for agricultural activity with the replacement of native grasslands with exotic pasture species and monocultural crops (Planisphere, 2013). Dense plantation areas are scattered across the region (refer to Image 8).

Image 6 Distant view of Mount Shadwell from Mortlake-Ararat Road

Image 7 Rocky outcrops characteristic of the volcanic plains with distant views to an existing wind farm

Image 8 Dense vegetation within pine plantation