



# EES chapter 1 - Introduction

Warburton Mountain Bike Destination

# Table of Contents

1.0	Introduction	1
1.1	Project overview	1
1.1.1	Project description	1
1.1.2	Project objectives	4
1.1.3	Project proponent	4
1.1.4	Project timeline	5
1.2	Purpose of the EES	5
1.2.1	Scoping requirements and evaluation objectives	6
1.3	Project approvals	6
1.3.1	Commonwealth approvals	6
1.3.2	Victorian approvals	7
1.4	EES process	7
1.4.1	Consultation	7
1.4.2	Environmental impact assessment	7
1.4.3	Mitigation measures	8
1.4.4	Environmental management framework	8
1.5	EES structure	8

## 1.0 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the proposed Warburton Mountain Bike Destination (the project) and sets out the purpose and structure of the environment effects statement (EES) for the project.

### 1.1 Project overview

#### 1.1.1 Project description

The project is a proposed world class mountain biking destination centred around Warburton, approximately 70 kilometres east of Melbourne as shown in Figure 1-1. The project is anticipated to consist of up to 177 kilometres of mountain bike trails providing a range of mountain bike experiences to suit all levels of riding.

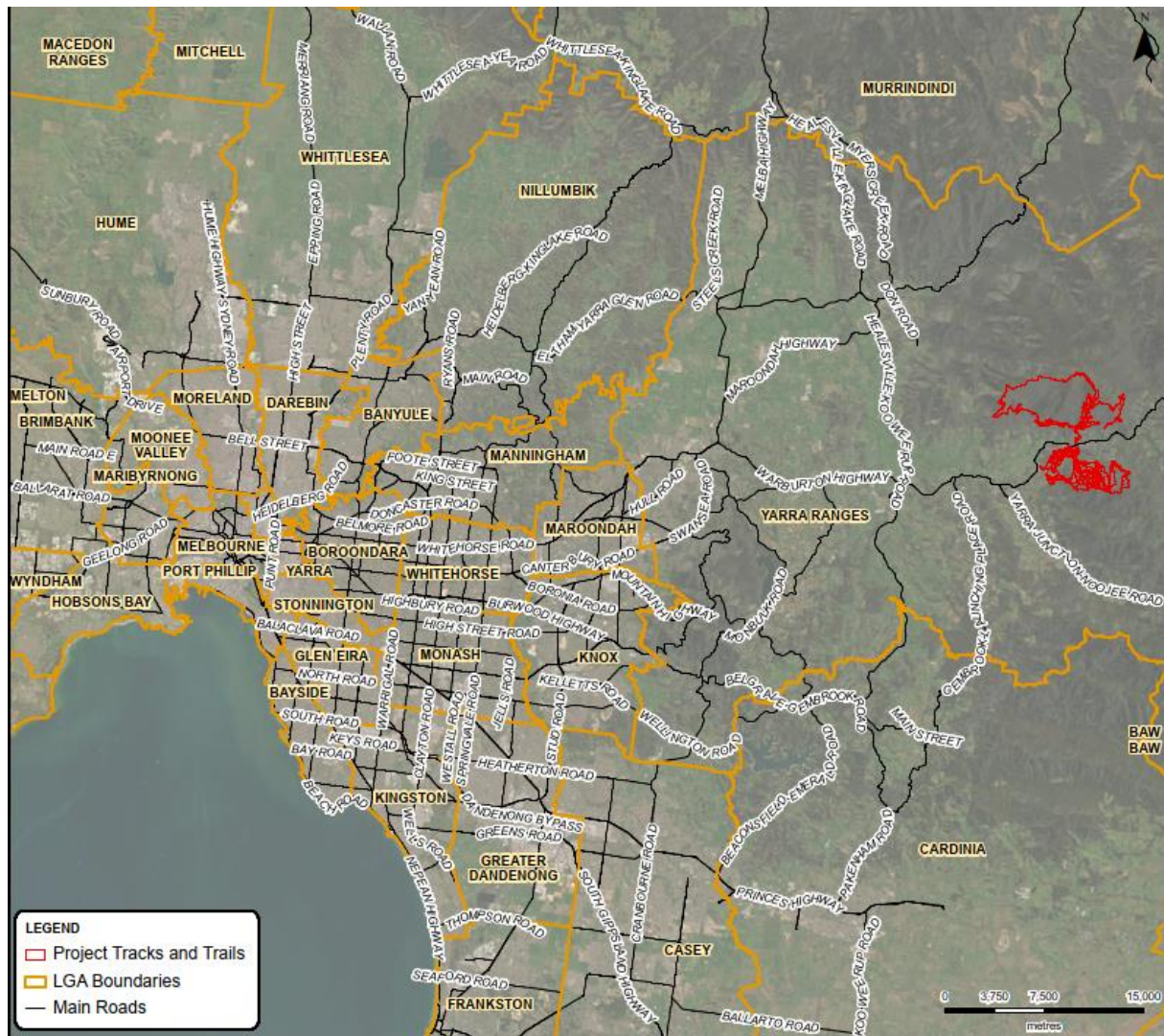


Figure 1-1 Project location

The main project components are as follows:

- The mountain bike trail network, consisting of:
  - Upgrade of existing mountain bike trails – approximately 12 kilometres (seven per cent of project length)
  - New mountain bike trails – up to approximately 155 kilometres (87 per cent of project length)
  - Existing vehicle roads and tracks to be incorporated into the mountain bike trail network – approximately 10 kilometres (six per cent of project length)

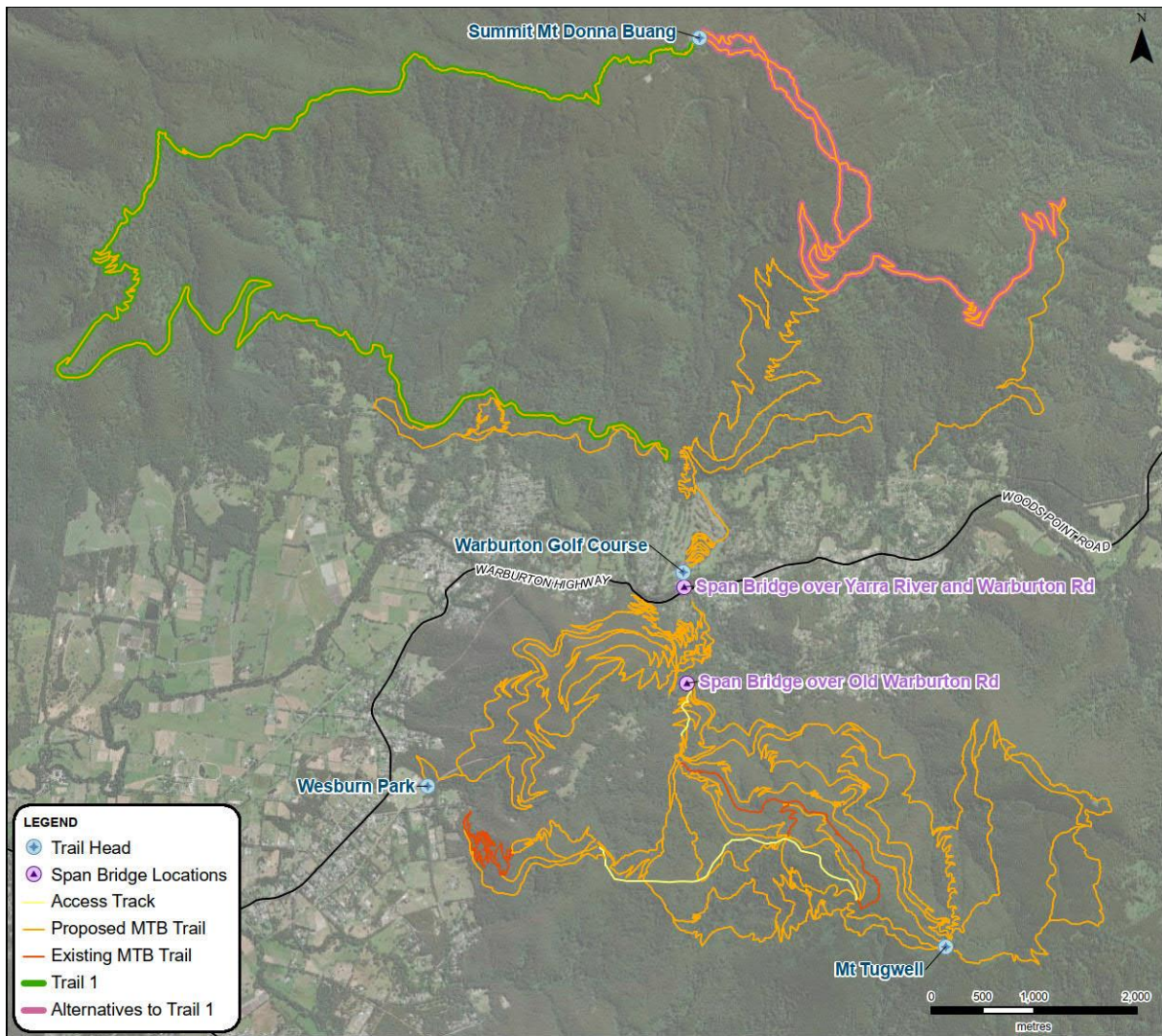
- Two new significant bridges, as follows:
  - Yarra River Bridge (shared use), crossing over the Yarra River, Warburton Highway and Dammans Road
  - Old Warburton Road Bridge (mountain bike use only), crossing over Old Warburton Road
- New Visitor's Hub and main trail head at the Warburton Golf Course and other trail heads at Mount Tugwell, Mount Donna Buang and Wesburn Park. The trail head at Wesburn Park would include 120 additional car park spaces. An additional network access point would also be established at Dee Road.

An overview of the project area showing the locations of each project component is provided in Figure 1-2. Further detail about the project area is provided in **Chapter 3: Project description**.

A summary of each of the main project components is provided below:

- Existing mountain bike trails – approximately 12 kilometres of mountain bike trails existing in the vicinity of Mount Tugwell are proposed to be upgraded and incorporated into the trail network. Upgrades to the existing mountain bike trails would involve enhancements to improve stormwater flow off the trails which would reduce sediment flow off the track, and augmentations to enhance the experience for the rider by improving the flow of the trail.
- New mountain bike trails – up to approximately 155 kilometres of mountain bike trails would be new bike trails. Indicative alignments for the new bike trails have been established within a 20-metre corridor with the exact final trail alignments to be determined during pre-construction activities. Where practicable, the trails are proposed on old benches and old roads or other disturbed corridors, and would minimise the use of switchback corners, avoid excessively flat or steep areas and use the terrain to its maximum. Elevated structures would be used to enable the mountain bike trails to cross over waterways or areas of soft ground or rocky terrain. Two longer span bridges are proposed to cross over the Yarra River and Old Warburton Road. The new mountain bike trails would also be designed and constructed to manage runoff and erosion for long-term sustainability.
- Alternative mountain bike trails – the network design has considered ecological, heritage and socio-economic factors to avoid and minimise the potential for significant environmental impacts without undermining the project objectives. Within this process, trail screening was undertaken to determine the trail sections for which further investigation of alternatives is warranted. The investigations identified Trail 1, nicknamed Drop-a-K with a length of 23 kilometres and vertical drop in elevation of over a kilometre, as requiring consideration of alternative alignments. Subsequently, an alternative to this trail, being the combination of Trail 45, Trail 46 and Trail 47 – with a combined length of 15 kilometres – was identified. The details for the trails can be found in **Chapter 3: Project description**. The details of the alternatives assessment are provided in **Chapter 4: Project development and alternatives**. The relative merit of Trail 1 and the alternative to Trail 1 is assessed in each of the EES technical reports and an integrated evaluation of these options is presented in **Chapter 15: Comparative evaluation of Trail 1 and Trails 45 to 47**.
- New Visitor's Hub and main trail head – the new Visitor's Hub and main trail head is proposed to be developed to the south of Warburton Golf Course. The Visitor's Hub would be collocated with the main trail head and would allow direct access to the mountain bike trail networks. Other facilities would include a shuttle bus shelter, toilet and shower facilities, picnic tables, comprehensive visitor information and bike wash bays.

Other trail heads – three other trail heads are included in the project. A new trail head would be established on top of Mount Tugwell off Mount Bride Road. The existing trail head at Mount Donna Buang and facilities at Wesburn Park would be integrated into the network.



**Figure 1-2 Overview of the project area**

To support the main project components, a number of other ancillary infrastructure and upgrades to the existing landscape are proposed. This includes provision of minimal signage along the trails and at trail heads, and upgrades to Mount Bride Road and Edwardstown Road to accommodate shuttle bus traffic.

The 177 kilometres of mountain bike trails is made up of 61 individual trails, ranging in riding difficulty from easy to extreme, as shown in Figure 1-3. Some of the trails are returning loops, while others are point-to-point trails. The northern trail network (located on the north side of the valley) consists of around 36 per cent of the trails. The southern trail network (located on the south side of the valley) consists of around 64 per cent of the trails.

Further details on the construction and operation of the project including a description of each of the trails are provided in **Chapter 3: Project description**.

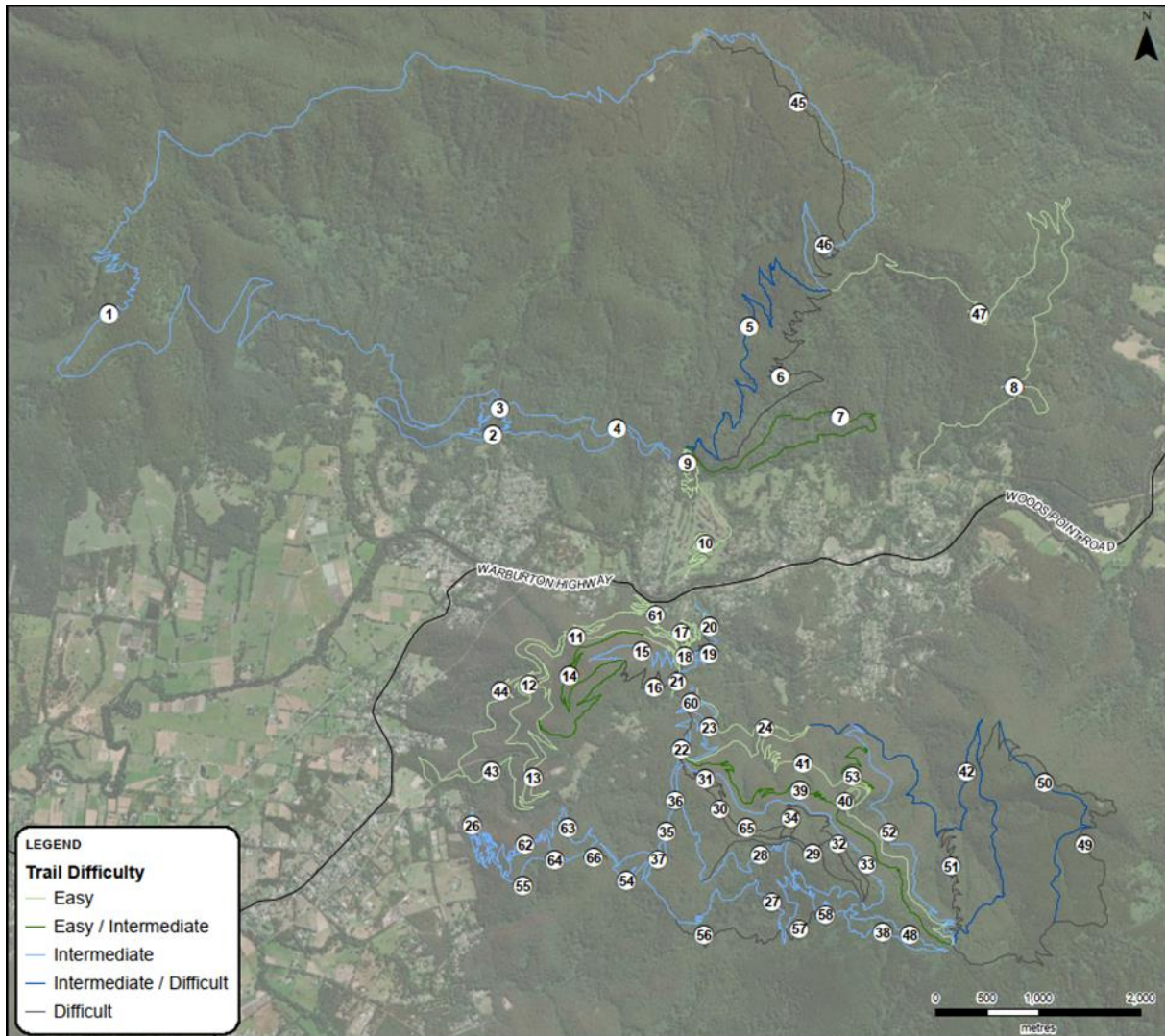


Figure 1-3 Mountain bike trails and difficulty ratings

### 1.1.2 Project objectives

Yarra Ranges Council has identified mountain biking as an opportunity for tourism growth within the region which would also support the health and well-being of its residents. The project would create iconic trails eligible for International Mountain Bike Association Gold Level Ride Centre status which would position Warburton as an internationally significant mountain biking destination.

The project objectives are to:

- Facilitate tourism growth and associated positive economic and jobs growth in the Yarra Valley region
- Create iconic mountain bike trails eligible for International Mountain Bike Association Gold Ride Centre status
- Create spectacular riding experiences that have a competitive advantage over existing mountain bike destinations and leverage Warburton's beautiful township, rural valley and surrounding forested slopes
- Enhance the health and well-being of the community
- Maintain the significant biodiversity and heritage values within the project area and provide opportunities for the community to connect with and appreciate their importance.

### 1.1.3 Project proponent

The Yarra Ranges Council is the proponent for the project. The Yarra Ranges Council is a local government area in Victoria situated on metropolitan Melbourne's eastern fringe. It covers an area of almost 2,500 square kilometres ranging from the urban areas in the foothills of the Dandenong

Ranges 35 kilometres from Melbourne, to the outer regional areas of the Upper Yarra over 100 kilometres from Melbourne.

The Yarra Ranges Council provides a wide variety of services to the Yarra Ranges municipality which has a population of 159,462 residents living in over 55 suburbs, townships and small communities. The Yarra Ranges Council supports Yarra Ranges' economy which is home to 13,620 businesses employing 41,700 people. The council's local planning approach enables the council to recognise that each community is unique and embrace the diversity and strength of local communities and support their health, safety and wellbeing needs.

Yarra Ranges Council has a vision to combine Warburton's scenic natural environment and village atmosphere, with the Warburton Mountain Bike Destination and promote a healthy community as well as attracting national and international tourism.

#### 1.1.4 Project timeline

The timeframes for planning, construction and operation of the project are shown in Figure 1-4 below. The timeline is subject to ongoing adjustment to deliver the project and is subject to the grant of approvals within certain timeframes.

The construction phase of the project would be delivered in two stages. Construction Stage 1 is fully funded however, Stage 2 is subject to acquiring funding. Further detail about project timing and the two stages of construction is provided in **Chapter 3: Project description**.

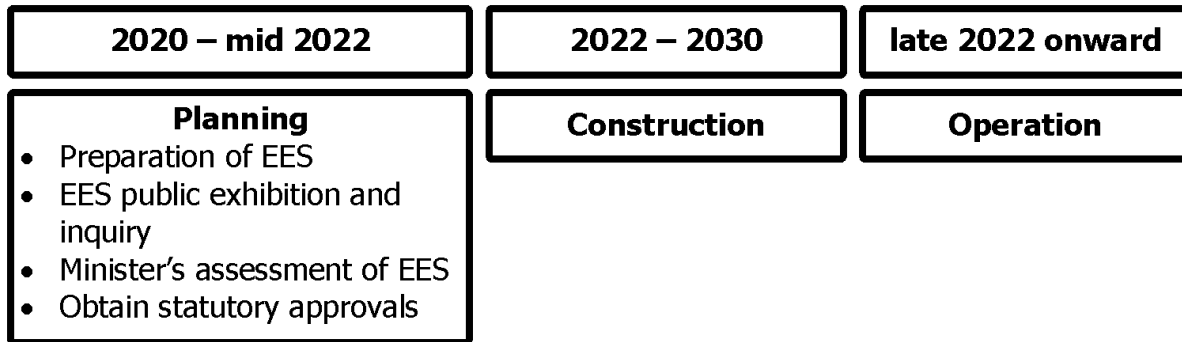


Figure 1-4 Project timeline

## 1.2 Purpose of the EES

The purpose of an EES is to assess the environmental effects of a proposed project. The *Environment Effects Act 1978 (Vic)* ('EE Act') sets out the process under which the Minister for Planning may require the proponent of a project to prepare an EES.

The project was referred by Yarra Ranges Council to the Minister for Planning under the EE Act on 20 December 2019, describing the potentially significant effects of the project following a preliminary assessment of the proposed project. On 21 May 2020, The Minister for Planning issued a decision that the project is to be assessed through the preparation of an EES under the EE Act. The Minister's reasons for making this decision included the project works having 'potential for significant environmental effects'. In particular the project could potentially have significant effects on:

- Listed native vegetation
- Listed flora and fauna species and communities
- Environmentally sensitive waterways

The EES describes the project and its potential environmental effects in detail for the Minister for Planning to make a final assessment of the project's acceptability. The EES process is not an approvals mechanism in itself, but an assessment that demonstrates the ability of the project to meet statutory requirements. It provides statutory decision makers with the information they need to determine whether to grant statutory approvals for the project, and if so, what conditions should apply. The necessary statutory approvals required for the project are summarised in Section 1.3 and discussed in detail in **Chapter 5: Legislative framework**.

This EES:

- Describes the project
- Describes the existing environment that may be affected by the project
- Identifies and assesses the potential effects of the project on the existing environment
- Recommends ways to avoid, minimise or manage any adverse effects
- Proposes an environmental management framework (EMF) that contains the environmental management measures proposed to address specific issues, including commitments to mitigate adverse effects and enhance environmental outcomes.

### 1.2.1 Scoping requirements and evaluation objectives

The matters to be investigated and documented in the EES are set out in the scoping requirements issued by the Minister for Planning. The purpose of the scoping requirements is to ensure the EES:

- Appropriately responds to the decision made by the Minister for Planning that an EES is required
- Identifies and assesses potential significant environmental effects of the project
- Explains how the environmental effects of the works are proposed to be managed for the different stages and aspects of the project
- Identifies and assesses alternative layouts, designs and approaches to avoid and mitigate environmental effects
- Provides sufficient and appropriate information to allow the Minister for Planning to assess the environmental effects of the works under the EE Act.

Draft scoping requirements were exhibited by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) for public comment in August 2020. After considering public submissions, the Minister for Planning published final scoping requirements in November 2020. This EES has been prepared in accordance with the final scoping requirements. The EES may also address other significant issues not identified in the scoping requirements that have emerged during the EES investigations and consultation process. These issues will be discussed in the relevant technical reports appended to the EES.

The scoping requirements establish evaluation objectives for the EES (listed in Table 1). These objectives reflect the decision of the Minister for Planning regarding the need for an EES, and the technical studies have responded to these objectives in their assessments.

**Table 1 EES evaluation objectives**

Evaluation objectives
<b>Biodiversity and habitats</b> – avoid and where avoidance is not possible, minimise potential adverse effects on native vegetation and animals (particularly listed threatened species and their habitat and listed ecological communities), as well as address offset requirements consistent with state and Commonwealth policies.
<b>Water and catchment values</b> – maintain the functions and values of groundwater, surface water and floodplain environments and minimise effects on water quality and beneficial uses.
<b>Social, economic, amenity and land use</b> – minimise potential adverse social, economic, amenity and land use effects at local and regional scales.
<b>Cultural heritage</b> – avoid or minimise where avoidance is not possible, adverse effects on Aboriginal and historic cultural heritage.

## 1.3 Project approvals

Details of the planning and environmental approvals required for the project to proceed and the proposed pathway to achieve these are set out in **Chapter 5: Legislative framework**.

Many other environmental laws, policies and guidelines are relevant to the assessment of environmental impacts. These are described in the technical reports and are the basis of the assessments presented in the EES technical chapters and technical reports.

### 1.3.1 Commonwealth approvals

The Commonwealth *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (Cth)* ('EPBC Act') provides the legal framework to protect and manage designated Matters of National



Environmental Significance (MNES). Under the EPBC Act, if the Commonwealth Minister for the Environment decides that a project has, will have, or is likely to have a significant impact on MNES, the project becomes a 'controlled action' that must be assessed and approved by the Minister before it can proceed.

Yarra Ranges Council referred the project to the Commonwealth Government under the EPBC Act on 19 May 2020. The Commonwealth Department for Agriculture, Water and Environment (DAWE) issued a decision on 16 June 2020 that the project is a controlled action under the EPBC Act. The relevant controlling provision under the EPBC Act cited in the decision is 'listed threatened species and communities (sections 18 & 18A)'.

The EES process is accredited to assess impacts on MNES under the EPBC Act through the Bilateral Assessment Agreement between the Commonwealth and the State of Victoria. The Commonwealth Minister for the Environment or delegate will decide whether the project is approved, approved with conditions or refused under the EPBC Act, after having considered the Minister for Planning's assessment under the EE Act.

### 1.3.2 Victorian approvals

The project requires the following primary approvals under Victorian legislation:

- Approval of amendments to the Yarra Ranges Planning Scheme to facilitate the use and development of the project under the *Planning and Environment Act 1987 (Vic)* ('P&E Act') by the Minister for Planning
- Approval for works within a National Park under the *National Parks Act 1975 (Vic)* by the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change
- Approval for works on a waterway under the *Water Act 1989 (Vic)* by Melbourne Water
- Approval of a Cultural Heritage Management Plan (CHMP) under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006 (Vic)* by the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation.

A number of other approvals are potentially required under Victorian legislation for the project to proceed. Details of these are presented in **Chapter 5: Legislative framework**. It is envisaged that these approvals (if required) would be sought after the primary approvals have been obtained.

## 1.4 EES process

This EES presents an assessment of the environmental effects of the project. It considers the design of the project, construction methodology, operation and maintenance requirements, and the specific potential environmental impacts of each of the components of the project.

### 1.4.1 Consultation

The EES process is designed to be rigorous and transparent, with opportunities provided for input from stakeholders and the wider community.

A consultation plan was developed to set out the approaches Yarra Ranges Council would use to inform the public and obtain targeted input in preparing the EES. The plan outlines opportunities for input into the EES process, including raising specific issues of concern, identifying potential impacts, proposing possible mitigation measures and providing additional information to inform the project's technical specialist investigations and design.

A program of community consultation, stakeholder engagement and communications would also be delivered during implementation of the project. The consultation program is described in **Chapter 7: Communication and engagement**.

### 1.4.2 Environmental impact assessment

To ensure all key issues identified in the EES scoping requirements were addressed, six technical assessments evaluated the potential environmental impacts of the project design, construction methodologies and operational and maintenance requirements.

The technical studies assessed how potential adverse environmental impacts could be avoided, minimised and managed. The findings of the studies are provided in the technical reports attached to this EES.

The common assessment framework applied by the specialists for each technical study is described in **Chapter 6: EES assessment framework**.

### 1.4.3 Mitigation measures

The six technical studies developed an initial set of mitigation measures, based on compliance with legislation and standard requirements as part of their impact assessments.

Through the risk assessment process, an initial set of mitigation measures were refined to a set of recommended mitigation measures that address the findings of the impact assessment, ongoing iterations to the project design, and stakeholder inputs.

Additional mitigation measures were developed where initial risk ratings were categorised as medium or higher and, in some instances, where risks were categorised as below medium, and incorporated into the project design or description and/or included in the EMF.

A complete list of the mitigation measures adopted for the project is set out in **Chapter 16: Environmental management framework**.

### 1.4.4 Environmental management framework

The EMF is a framework for addressing the environmental requirements for the project. The EMF is built from the requirements of each of the statutory approvals required for the project and includes mitigation measures that Yarra Ranges Council would implement to manage any potential adverse impacts.

The mitigation measures set out in the EMF are Yarra Ranges Council's environmental commitments and will be given effect through the relevant statutory approvals including, but not limited to, the planning scheme amendment. These commitments have been included in management plans such as the Cultural Heritage Management Plan 15267, **Attachment V Draft Construction Environmental Management Plan** and **Attachment VII Draft Operations Environmental Management Plan**. The draft versions would be updated after primary approvals have been obtained to incorporate any modifications to mitigation measures and the relevant approval conditions. Additionally, Cultural Heritage Management Plan 15267 will be lodged for approval following public exhibition of the EES.

An offset strategy for the project has also been developed and is detailed in **Attachment IV Biodiversity Offset Strategy and Plan**. This strategy has been developed in consultation with public land managers and project stakeholders and demonstrates how biodiversity offsets for the project are available and can be secured to achieve a no net loss for the project. An Offset Management Plan would be required for all offset sites prior to commencement of any vegetation clearance for the project. The Offset Management Plan would be developed after primary approvals.

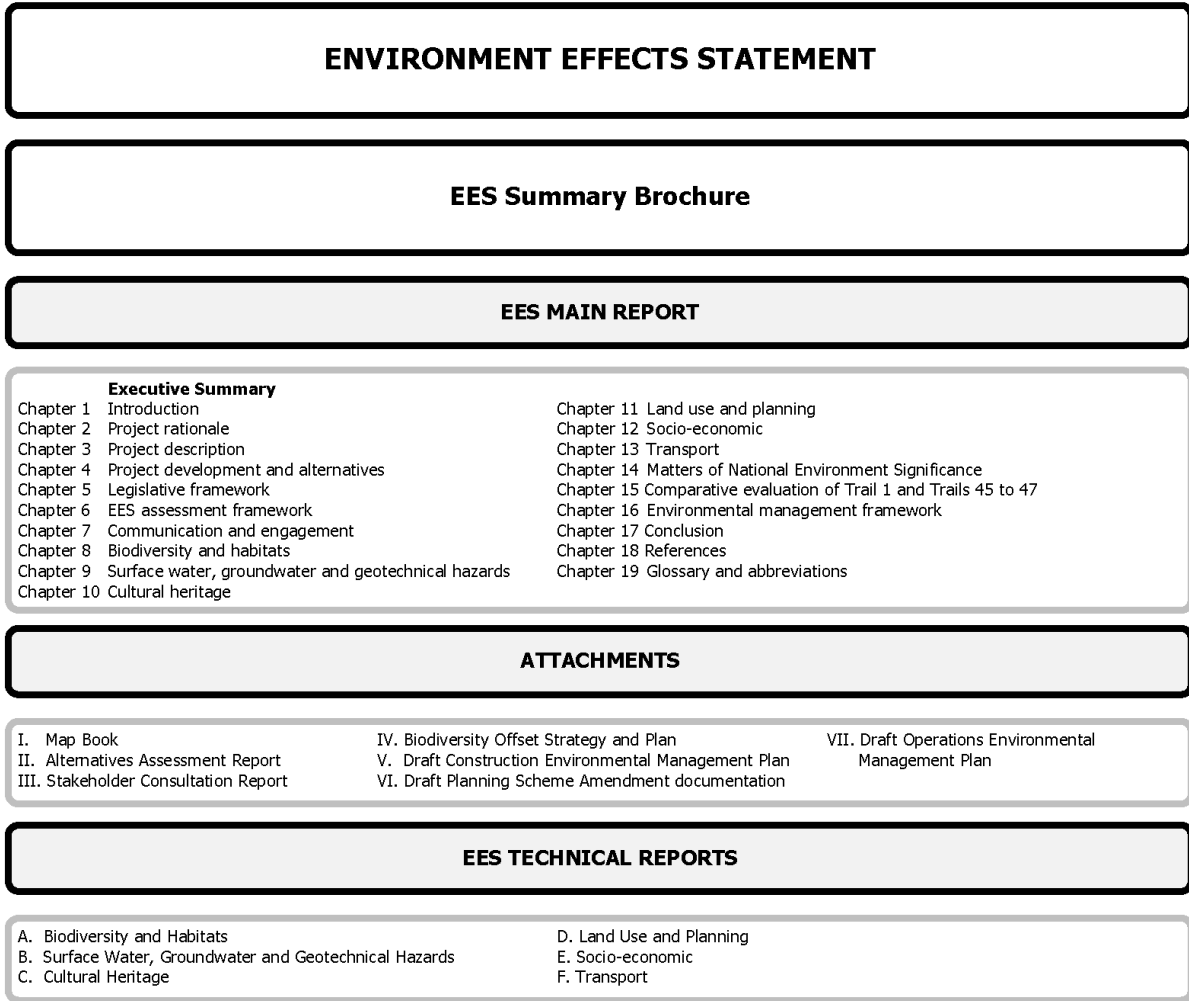
The mitigation measures will inform the conditions administered by relevant statutory authorities, and Yarra Ranges Council will be responsible for their implementation.

The proposed EMF and mitigation measures are presented in **Chapter 16: Environmental management framework**.

## 1.5 EES structure

The structure and content of the EES aligns with the evaluation objectives set out in the scoping requirements. The EES is structured into four parts: a summary brochure which presents the key findings of the EES, the main report, technical reports and attachments.

The structure of the EES is shown in Figure 1-5.



**Figure 1-5 Structure of the environment effects statement**