

PROTECTED

# **Meekatharra Network Extension Native Vegetation Clearing Referral Supporting Document**

January 2024

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Project Context

Horizon Power is a Western Australian (WA) Government Trading Enterprise (GTE) and the state's regional and remote energy utility. Horizon Power operates under the *Electricity Corporations Act 2005* and is governed by a Board of Directors accountable to the Minister for Energy. Horizon Power is an experienced asset manager undertaking active management of vast electricity networks across WA, utilising mature and robust operational, health and safety, and environmental systems.

Horizon Power has been engaged for the provision of supporting infrastructure for the telecommunications assets and other associated infrastructure located approximately 2 km north of the townsite of Meekatharra, WA. Horizon Power is proposing to install 13 new poles and associated infrastructure expanding to the proposed location of telecommunications assets and infrastructure.

The proposed work will involve clearing of vegetation, civil works, installation of overhead cables and associated infrastructure. The total clearing footprint for the proposed works will not exceed 0.12 ha.

### 1.2 Scope and Purpose

The purpose of this document is to demonstrate that the proposed clearing of native vegetation for the extension of the existing electricity network satisfies the four Criterion outlined in 'Guideline: Native Vegetation Clearing Referrals' (DWER, 2021) and, as such, should be considered a 'very low environmental impact activity' that does not require a clearing permit.

To demonstrate this, Horizon Power has provided:

- An overview of the activity and a description of the proposed clearing.
- Avoidance, mitigation and management measures applied to minimise the clearing of native vegetation and reduce the likelihood of environmental impacts associated with the activity.
- An assessment of the clearing against the four Criterion specified in DWER (2021).

A Standard Construction Environmental Management Plan is also provided (Appendix D). This is a standard requirement of the Horizon Power Environmental Management System for projects clearing native vegetation where specific project approvals do not apply.

## 2. Description of the Activity

As discussed in Section 1, the work will involve the clearing of vegetation, civil works, installation of overhead cables, poles and associated infrastructure. The proposed clearing will extend from an existing access track and off Great Northern Highway. The total proposed clearing area will not exceed 0.12 ha.

Horizon Power intends to undertake these works through the exercise of powers conferred by sections 46 and 49 of the *Energy Operators (Powers) Act 1979* (the Act) and as such do not require landowner permission. As required under the Act, Horizon Power will notify all landowners of the proposed work through a formal Notice of Entry.

## 3. Description of Proposed Clearing

### 3.1 Extent of Proposed Clearing

The proposed clearing will occur within the Project Area (Figure 1; Table 1) which has a total clearing area of 0.12 ha in size.

### 3.2 Proposed Clearing Locations

*Table 1 Meekatharra Network Extension land parcels*

Lot on Plan	Volume	Folio	Area of clearing (ha)
Lot 280 on Deposited Plan 217089	LR3122	970	0.0825
Lot 154 on Deposited Plan 240326, being Reserve 15815	LR3128	624	0.0375

The proposed clearing locations will occur within the Project Area observed in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Proposed Clearing Area.



### 3.3 Proposed Clearing Method

Clearing will be undertaken by hand tools and light vehicles for access with mechanical assistance to install poles at the proposed new pole locations (i.e. mechanical and non-mechanical clearing).

### 3.4 Avoidance, Mitigation and Management Measures

Sites have been selected to locate them in areas within and adjacent to existing disturbance while minimising disturbance to vegetation where possible. Utilising the existing access track will reduce the disturbance and clearing to vegetation, along with the placement of poles and associated infrastructure where minimal vegetation is located to further reduce clearing and disturbance to vegetation.

Horizon Power is a mature and competent asset manager with an established Environmental Management System and extensive assets across Western Australia under active management. Clearing activities are undertaken following standardised processes and will be implemented in accordance with our Standard Construction Environmental Management Plan (Appendix B), which includes the following measures to minimise potential impacts.

- Clearing will be minimised where possible through placement of assets in existing cleared or areas of minimal vegetation where possible, along with utilising the existing access track.
- The clearing locations demarcated prior to clearing activities.
- Standard weed and hygiene management practices which will be applied to these works.
- Clearing will be undertaken slowly and in a one-way direction to allow fauna to move offsite if present.

## 4. Suitability for the Clearing Referral Process

The 'Guideline: Native Vegetation Clearing Referrals' (DWER, 2021) Section 5.3 outlines those clearing activities not considered to be suitable for the Clearing Referral process. Table 2 demonstrates that the proposed clearing activity is suitable for assessment under the Clearing Referral process.

*Table 2 Assessment of Suitability for the Clearing Referral Process*

Aspect	Assessment	Suitable? (Yes/No)
The referral process cannot be used for proposed clearing on land subject to an agreement to reserve or a conservation covenant under the Soil and Land Conservation Act 1945 (SLC Act)	Land is not subject to a conservation covenant.	Yes
The referral process cannot be used for proposed clearing on land subject to an environmental protection covenant under Part VB of the EP Act	Land is not subject to an environmental protection covenant.	Yes
The referral process is not suitable for proposed clearing that is not likely to be completed within two years.	The works are proposed to commence in February 2024.	Yes
The referral process is not suitable for proposed clearing that will contravene the requirements of a soil conservation notice issued under Part V of the SLC Act	The proposed clearing activity will not contravene the requirements of a soil conservation notice issued under Part V of the SLC Act.	Yes
The referral process is not suitable for proposed clearing that will or is likely to have a significant impact on matters of national environmental significance (MNES)	The proposed clearing is not likely to have a significant impact on MNES. No EPBC Act listed flora, fauna or ecological communities are likely to be impacted.	Yes
The referral process is not suitable for proposed clearing that includes marine native vegetation clearing activities	No clearing of marine native vegetation is proposed.	Yes
The referral process is not suitable for proposed clearing that may impact on protected or otherwise significant flora or fauna	The proposed clearing is not likely to have a significant impact on protected or otherwise conservation significant flora or fauna (as detailed in Section 5).	Yes
The referral process is not suitable for proposed clearing that will be within a highly cleared landscape or an area containing limited or restricted native vegetation types.	The proposed clearing is not within an extensively cleared landscape or an area containing limited or restricted native vegetation types, as detailed in Section 5. More than 99% of Pre-European Vegetation Association extents remain.	Yes
The referral process is not suitable for proposed clearing that is on land previously reserved as an environmental offset under the conditions of another approval under the EP Act.	A review of the DWER Offsets Register (via spatial dataset DWER-078; GoWA, 2022) indicates that the land is not reserved as an environmental offset under the conditions of an approval under the EP Act.	Yes



## 5. Assessment Against DWER Criterion

### 5.1 Criterion 1: The area proposed to be cleared is small relative to the total remaining vegetation

The proposed clearing activity satisfies Criterion 1, as detailed in the following tables.

*Table 3 Assessment of the Proposed Clearing Activity Against Criterion 1*

Aspect	Assessment
Extent of proposed clearing	The total proposed clearing is 0.12 ha This is less than the 10 ha threshold for clearing activities located north of the 26° latitude line.
Threshold for remaining extent of native vegetation association or complex in the relevant IBRA bioregion	More than 30% of the relevant vegetation associations remain within the relevant IBRA bioregion, therefore; a permit is not required on this basis.
Threshold for remaining native vegetation surrounding the boundary of the proposed clearing	Within a 10 km buffer of the proposed clearing more than 30% native vegetation is remaining. Therefore, a permit is not required on this basis.

*Table 4 Pre-European Vegetation Association Extents*

Site	Vegetation association	Scale	Pre-European extent (ha)	Current extent (ha)	% Remaining	% of current extent in all Department of Biodiversity Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) managed land (proportion of current extent)
Meekatharra, WA	18 Low woodland, open low woodland or sparse woodland with consisting of Mulga Acacia aneura and associated species.	State: WA	19,892,306.46	19,843,148.07	99.75	6.64
		IBRA Bioregion: Murchison	12,403,172.30	12,363,252.47	99.68	6.64
		IBRA Subregion: Eastern Murchison	10,269,896.44	10,234,838.22	99.66	5.14
		LGA: Shire of Meekatharra	3,117,900.46	3,111,264.68	99.79	11.11

### 5.2 Criterion 2: There are no known or likely significant environmental values within the area

The proposed clearing activity satisfies Criterion 2, as detailed in the following tables.



Table 5 Assessment of the Proposed Clearing Activity Against Criterion 2

Environmental value	Assessment
Vegetation type and condition	Based on photographs of the site locations, the proposed clearing sites are comprised of scattered and loosely-spaced low woodland consisting of <i>Mulga Acacia aneura</i> , <i>Eucalyptus spp.</i> and <i>Triodia basedowii</i> and associated species which commensurate with the mapped vegetation known to occur in Vegetation Association 18. Vegetation is sparse and scattered, showing evidence of extensive degradation including possible weeds (Appendix B). The proposed clearing of 0.12 ha required for this scope of works is not considered likely to impact significant environmental values.
Significant fauna and habitat	Eleven conservation significant fauna species were considered likely or possibly occurring within the vicinity of the proposed clearing (Appendix C). Significant impacts are not expected given the widespread availability of habitat in the region and poor condition of the vegetation to be cleared.
Significant ecological linkage	The proposed clearing is not part of a significant ecological linkage.
Mapped ecological community	No Threatened or Priority Ecological Communities listed under the EPBC Act or BC Act were identified based on desktop searches. The vegetation to be cleared is unlikely to represent any ecological communities given the lack of species diversity.
Significant flora	No Threatened or Priority species were identified as likely to occur within the proposed clearing area. <i>Eremophila retropila</i> a Priority 1 taxon has been recorded within 800 m of the proposed clearing area. This species habitats consists of desolate rocky hills, open spinifex plains associated with scattered and scarce shrubs and woodlands, barren dry sand dunes or dry shrubland biomes. Given the existing disturbance and poor quality of the proposed clearing area, this species is not considered likely to occur (Appendix B). The proposed clearing of 0.12 ha of native vegetation is not anticipated to impact significant flora or their habitat.
Water resources	The project area is located approximately 2 km north of the Meekatharra townsite, installation of the proposed new poles requires digging of 1.70 m below ground level, no groundwater impacts are expected from the proposed activities. No wetlands or rivers were identified within 5 km of the proposed clearing. No Internationally (Ramsar) or nationally important wetlands are located within 20 km of the proposed clearing area.
Conservation Reserve	No conservation areas are present within 20 km of the proposed clearing. No impacts to conservation areas are anticipated in association with this scope of works.
Environmentally Sensitive Areas	The proposed works are not in an Environmentally Sensitive area.
Land and soil quality	A review of the Australian Soil Resource Information System (ASRIS) indicates no known risk of Acid Sulphate Soils (ASS). The sites do not intersect any known contamination. No off-site impacts are anticipated in association with the activity. Land and soil quality is not likely to be impacted by the activity.
Heritage-related values and native title matters	No known Aboriginal heritage sites are within the proposed clearing areas. Registered Aboriginal Heritage Site 6062 and 6189 are located approximately 700 m and 1 km of the proposed clearing areas, respectively, no impacts are expected to these heritage areas. Horizon Power has an Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Management Policy and established internal processes to protect and mitigate the risk of impacting Aboriginal cultural heritage. There are no native title implications of the proposed works. None of the proposed clearing areas are within a World Heritage Area or National Heritage Area.

### 5.3 Criterion 3: The state of scientific knowledge of native vegetation within the region is adequate

The Project area is located within the Murchison bioregion and Eastern Murchison subregion; both have over 99% of Pre-European vegetation remaining.. Low woodland, open low woodland and sparse woodland, *Acacia*

*aneura* (mulga), has been identified as the most extensive vegetation type in Western Australia (Beard et al. 2013). Beard et al. (2013) described the vegetation type extending throughout 38 million hectares within the Murchison, Gascoyne, Great Victoria Desert, and Little Sandy Desert Bioregions. In addition, 172 surveys of the Murchison Bioregion are detailed on the Index of Biodiversity Surveys for Assessments (IBSA) database (DWER 2022). It is, therefore, considered that the state of scientific knowledge of native vegetation within the regions is adequate.

#### 5.4 Criterion 4: Conditions will not be required to manage environmental impacts

Due to the small scale of clearing and low environmental impact of the clearing activity, non-standard controls are not considered to be required to manage environmental impacts for this work. Avoidance, mitigation and management measures have been applied to the scope of works, as detailed in Section 3.4. A standard CEMP will be applied during construction (Appendix D). Given the application of these measures, as well as the abundance of native vegetation within and surrounding the impact area and the limited clearing proposed, it is considered that clearing can be undertaken without conditions being applied to further manage environmental impacts.

## 6. References

Beard, J.S, Beeston, G.R, Judith, H., Hopkins, A. J. M 2013, The Vegetation of Western Australia at the 1:3,000,000 Scale. Explanatory Memoir. Second Edition. Conservation Science Western Australia. 9. 1-152.

Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW) 2021, Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 Protected Matters Search Tool Results, retrieved February 2022 from <http://www.environment.gov.au/epbc/pmst/index.html>

Department of Water and Environmental Regulation (DWER), 2021. *Guideline: Native Vegetation Clearing Referrals*, Available at: <https://www.wa.gov.au/service/environment/environment-information-services/guideline-native-vegetation-clearing-referrals>, Accessed October 2022

DWER, 2022. Index of Biodiversity Surveys for Assessments (IBSA), [https://biocollect.ala.org.au/ibsa#q%3D\\*murchison\\*%26queryText%3D\\*murchison\\*%26max%3D30%26sort%3DdateCreatedSort](https://biocollect.ala.org.au/ibsa#q%3D*murchison*%26queryText%3D*murchison*%26max%3D30%26sort%3DdateCreatedSort) , accessed January 2024

GoWA (2022). *Data WA*. Available at: <https://data.wa.gov.au/>, accessed February 2022.

*Environmentally Sensitive Areas (DWER-046)*

*Pre-European vegetation (DPIRD-006)*

*Aboriginal heritage sites (DPLH-001)*

*Heritage Council WA – State Register (DPLH-006)*

*Legislated Lands and Waters (DBCA-011)*

*RIWI Act, Rivers (DWER-036)*

*Public Drinking Water Source Areas (DWER-033)*

*RIWI Act, Surface Water and Irrigation Districts (DWER-037)*

*RIWI Act, Groundwater Areas (DWER-034)*

## Appendix A: Certificate of Title



## Appendix B: Site photographs

















## Appendix C: Species that may or are likely to occur

Scientific Name	Common Name	Presence	Commonwealth Threatened Category	State listing category	Migratory Status	Preferred habitat
<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>	Curlew Sandpiper	Species or species habitat may occur within area	Critically Endangered	Critically Endangered	Migratory	Intertidal mudflats in sheltered coastal areas, including estuaries, bays, inlets and lagoons
<i>Pezoporus occidentalis</i>	Night Parrot	Species or species habitat may occur within area	Endangered	Critically Endangered		Mature spinifex habitat in arid and semi-arid regions
<i>Aphelocephala</i>	Southern Whiteface	Species or species habitat likely to occur within area	Vulnerable			Undisturbed open woodlands and shrublands with an understorey of grasses or shrubs
<i>Falco hypoleucos</i>	Grey Falcon	Species or species habitat likely to occur within area	Vulnerable	Vulnerable		Triodia grassland, Acacia shrubland and lightly timbered arid woodland
<i>Leipoa ocellata</i>	Malleefowl	Species or species habitat likely to occur within area	Vulnerable	Vulnerable		Semi-arid to arid zone in shrublands and low woodlands inclusive of Acacia and eucalypts
<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	Grey Wagtail	Species or species habitat may occur within area			Migratory	Streams, lakes, rivers and areas exposed to rocks and canals
<i>Motacilla flava</i>	Yellow Wagtail	Species or species habitat may occur within area			Migratory	Well-watered open grasslands and the outskirts of wetlands, mangroves and other dense vegetation
<i>Charadrius veredus</i>	Oriental Plover, Oriental Dotterel	Species or species habitat may occur within area			Migratory	Arid elevated areas on open upland flats, mountain ridges or plateaux with sparse vegetation and bare rock
<i>Calidris acuminata</i>	Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	Species or species habitat may occur within area			Migratory	Muddy edges of shallow fresh or brackish wetlands inclusive of inundated grass and low vegetation
<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	Common Sandpiper	Species or species habitat may occur within area			Migratory	Muddy edges and rocky shores, freshwater lakes and shallow rivers
<i>Calidris melanotos</i>	Pectoral Sandpiper	Species or species habitat may occur within area			Migratory	Wet coastal ridges, grasslands, marshy wetlands and flooded plains

## Appendix D: Standard Construction Environmental Management Plan

