

# Developing the Northern Queensland Renewable Energy Zone

DRAFT REPORT

August 2021



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## Notice of commencement of second stage of consultation

This Notice is to inform the Australian Energy Market Operator (AEMO), Registered Participants and interested parties (Consulted Persons) that Powerlink Queensland (Powerlink) is commencing the second stage of consultation on the proposed development of a Queensland Renewable Energy Zone (QREZ) in Far North Queensland.

The establishment of the Northern QREZ will increase the generator hosting capacity by up to 500MW in the Far North Queensland region. As the proposed augmentation works are largely funded by the Queensland Government, this project is classified as a funded augmentation under the National Electricity Rules (the Rules)<sup>1</sup>.

In accordance with the requirements of the criteria and procedures set out in Sections 5.18 and 8.9 of the Rules, Powerlink has published the draft Final Report and Determination (Draft Report) on the matter under consultation as well as submissions received to the Stage 1 Consultation Paper<sup>2</sup>.

### Matter for consultation

The matter for consultation is to call for submissions in relation to the proposed augmentation to develop a Renewable Energy Zone in North Queensland and to seek feedback on whether there are any other matters which could reasonably be considered as part of the development of the Northern QREZ.

Further details are provided in the Draft Report published with this notice and also made available on Powerlink's website.

### Invitation to make submissions

Submissions should be presented in a written form and clearly identify the author of the submission, including contact details for subsequent follow up.

As submissions will be made public and published on Powerlink's website, any commercially sensitive material, or material that the party making the submission does not want to be made public, should be clearly identified.

Consulted persons, as part of their submissions, may also request a meeting with Powerlink to discuss the matter under consultation. Powerlink may also publish details of the matters discussed as a result of meeting with Consulted Persons.

Submissions close at 5pm Monday, 13 September 2021.

Please address submissions to:

Roger Smith  
Manager Network and Alternate Solutions  
Powerlink Queensland  
PO Box 1193  
VIRGINIA QLD 4014  
Tel: (07) 3860 2328

Submissions can be emailed to: [networkassessments@powerlink.com.au](mailto:networkassessments@powerlink.com.au).

Please note that Powerlink is not obliged to consider submissions received after the closing date.

### Consultation process

The consultation process and anticipated timeframes are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: Consultation process and timeframe

Consultation process	Date
Publication of Notice of Consultation (Stage 1)	28 June 21
Closing date for submissions in response to the Stage 1 Notice and Consultation Paper	6 August 21
Publication of Draft Report (commencement of Stage 2)	26 August 21
Closing date for submissions in response to the Stage 2 Notice and Draft Report	13 September 21
Publication of Final Report (subject to the submissions received)	September 21

Powerlink reserves the right to amend the timetable at any time.

<sup>1</sup> As defined in Chapter 10 page 1293, Version 165 of the Rules.

<sup>2</sup> Submissions have been made available on Powerlink's website.

## Executive Summary

Powerlink Queensland (Powerlink) is a Transmission Network Service Provider (TNSP) in the National Electricity Market (NEM) that owns, develops, operates and maintains Queensland's high-voltage electricity transmission network.

### Initiating a path to Queensland's energy future

Our energy system is rapidly transitioning, underpinned by much greater levels of Variable Renewable Energy (VRE) generation which continues to grow as technologies evolve and the uptake of distributed renewable energy resources such as rooftop solar increases.

As Queensland is rich in a diverse range of renewable resources – solar, wind, geothermal, biomass and hydro, it is an attractive location for large-scale VRE generation development projects, creating considerable interest from all over the world. This provides an opportunity for the efficient and coordinated development of renewable energy sources and associated electricity infrastructure in specified geographic areas known as Renewable Energy Zones (REZ).

In August 2020, the Queensland Government committed \$145 million to establish three REZ in Queensland. The Queensland Renewable Energy Zones (QREZ) will be located in Northern (which includes the Far North Queensland region), Central and Southern Queensland. This coordinated approach will safeguard Queensland's future by addressing energy transition, deliver a reliable, secure and affordable energy supply to Queenslanders and support the Queensland Government's target of 50 per cent renewable energy by 2030.

It was further announced in May 2021 that the Queensland Government would direct \$40 million of this committed funding in transmission line infrastructure to establish the Northern QREZ, with Neoen's Kaban Wind Farm identified as the foundation proponent. Powerlink has also committed \$5 million of regulated capital investment to the establishment of the QREZ, the benefits of which exceed Powerlink's commitment.

### Developing the Northern QREZ Consultation

In accordance with the criteria and procedures set out in Sections 5.18 and 8.9 of the National Electricity Rules (Rules), Powerlink commenced the first stage of a funded augmentation consultation process in June 2021, issuing a Notice of Consultation (Notice) and Consultation Paper to the Australian Energy Market Operator (AEMO), Registered Participants and interested parties (Consulted Persons).

The matter for consultation is to call for submissions in relation to the proposed augmentation to develop a Renewable Energy Zone in North Queensland and to seek feedback on whether there are any other matters which could reasonably be considered as part of the development of the Northern QREZ.

### Submissions to the Notice and Consultation Paper closed on 6 August 2021.

This Draft Report and Determination (Draft Report) represents the commencement of the second stage of the consultation process by Powerlink regarding the development of the Northern QREZ in accordance with Section 8.9(h) of the Rules Consultation Procedures.

Proposed transmission network augmentation works to establish the Northern QREZ

The proposed augmentation to develop the Northern QREZ is to establish a third 275kV connection into Woree Substation, with all associated works to commence Quarter 4 2021 and to be completed by November 2023. The scope of work includes

- conversion of one side of the coastal 132kV double circuit transmission line to permanently operate at 275kV as the third transmission line between Ross and Woree substations with an associated line reactor at the Woree Substation end
- establishment of a 275kV bus at Woree Substation
- construction of a 275kV bay at Ross Substation and
- installation of a 275/132kV transformer at Tully Substation.

### Engagement with Powerlink's Customer Panel

Powerlink works collaboratively with its Customer Panel who were made aware of the commencement of this consultation. As this is the first time a funded augmentation has been undertaken, Powerlink took the opportunity to discuss and clarify any questions with regard to consultation process.

## Submissions received

Four submissions were received in response to the Notice and Consultation Paper, one of which was confidential.

All submissions received were supportive of the development of the Northern QREZ. More detailed discussion on the submissions and matters raised is noted within this Draft Report.

The three non-confidential submissions from Bioenergy Australia, CS Energy and SolarCitizens, have been made available on Powerlink's website.

While no meetings were specifically requested by Consulted Persons as part of the consultation process, in order to provide context and enable meaningful conversations given their submissions, Powerlink held meetings with:

- SolarCitizens on 30 July 2021
- A confidential party on 18 August 2021.

Based on the submissions received and consequent meetings with Consulted Persons, Powerlink has assessed that there are not any other matters which require consideration as part of the development of the proposed Northern QREZ.

## Draft determination

Given the technical and economic analysis undertaken and the positive and supportive nature of the submissions received, Powerlink considers that the proposed transmission network augmentation to increase the hosting capacity in North Queensland will provide an opportunity for the efficient and coordinated development of renewable energy sources in the region. In turn, this will encourage future growth in industry and employment and support local communities.

The development of the Northern QREZ will also provide a reliable, secure and affordable energy supply to Queenslanders while supporting the Queensland Government's target of 50 per cent renewable energy by 2030.

Powerlink's draft determination is to enable the development of the Northern QREZ by establishing a third 275kV connection into Woree Substation by November 2023.

## Next steps

Powerlink is seeking written submissions on this Draft Report by 5pm Monday, 13 September 2021.

Please address submissions to:

Roger Smith  
Manager Network and Alternate Solutions  
Powerlink Queensland  
PO Box 1193  
VIRGINIA QLD 4014  
Tel: (07) 3860 2328

Subject to the submissions received to this Draft Report, Powerlink anticipates publication of a Final Report and Determination in late September 2021.

## 1. Purpose and scope

Powerlink recognises the importance of engaging with a diverse range of customers and stakeholders who have the potential to affect, or be affected by, Powerlink activities and/or investments.

A funded augmentation is defined in the National Electricity Rules (Rules) as a transmission network augmentation for which the Transmission Network Service Provider (TNSP) is not entitled to receive regulated revenue. Given the proposed development of a Northern Queensland Renewable Energy Zone falls into this category as it is primarily funded by the Queensland Government, Powerlink is required to and welcomes the opportunity to undertake a public consultation which is being conducted in accordance with the criteria and procedures set out in Sections 5.18 and 8.9 of the Rules.

This consultation falls outside the bounds of the Regulatory Investment Test for Transmission (RIT-T) due to the external nature of the funding provided which will facilitate non-regulated opportunities and developments in Far North Queensland. This, in turn, will support the broader community in the region. Unlike the RIT-T, a funded augmentation consultation does not require a cost-benefit analysis to justify the project nor does it seek non-network or alternate solutions to replace or defer the proposed augmentation given the funding source<sup>3</sup>.

This Draft Report and Determination (Draft Report) represents the commencement of the second stage of the consultation process by Powerlink regarding the development of the Northern QREZ.

## 2. Introduction

Our energy system is rapidly transitioning, underpinned by much greater levels of Variable Renewable Energy (VRE) generation which continues to grow as technologies evolve and the uptake of distributed renewable energy resources such as rooftop solar increases.

Queensland is rich in a diverse range of renewable resources – solar, wind, geothermal, biomass and hydro. This makes Queensland an attractive location for large-scale VRE generation development projects, creating considerable interest from all over the world. A more coordinated approach to the development of generation and transmission is the logical next step to more efficiently and economically address the challenge of energy transition.

### 2.1 Renewable Energy Zones, a path to the energy future

The Rules describe a Renewable Energy Zone (REZ) as a geographic area proposed for the efficient development of renewable energy sources and associated electricity infrastructure<sup>4</sup>. REZ development may involve expanding the transmission network into a REZ or augmenting the capacity of an existing transmission line to increase hosting capacity. This would then facilitate the connection of multiple VRE projects to the transmission network or enable the development of connection hubs to more economically support clusters of VRE projects through economies of scale.

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<sup>3</sup> To enable the technical integration of the proposed QREZ into the transmission network, Powerlink has committed to \$5 million of capital works, which fall beneath the RIT-T cost threshold of \$6 million. The proposed regulated capital expenditure has been assessed as prudent given that the market benefits exceed the proposed expenditure.

<sup>4</sup> The Rules Version 165, page 540.

Identifying optimal locations for potential REZ<sup>5</sup> requires consideration of a range of criteria including:

- energy source potential
- infrastructure availability and access
- stakeholder and local authority support
- environmental suitability and
- economic and community benefits.

In addition, REZ are likely to be more cost effective than the creation of multiple connection paths to the transmission network as infrastructure sharing reduces the need for asset duplication.

Identifying REZ to establish priority areas for the development of VRE projects will enable transmission networks to better meet the needs and expectations of customers now and into the future.

## 2.2 Queensland's strategy for developing Renewable Energy Zones

In August 2020 the Queensland Government committed \$145 million to establish three REZs in Queensland due to the availability of high quality renewable resources in those regions. The Queensland Renewable Energy Zones (QREZ) will be located in Northern (which includes the Far North Queensland region), Central and Southern Queensland.

Given the quality of wind resources available in Far North Queensland, resulting in high investor interest in the region, a Northern QREZ will encourage economic growth and ultimately assist in putting downward pressure on electricity prices. The strategic development of the proposed Northern QREZ provides an opportunity to optimise and coordinate investment in transmission and generation infrastructure in such a way as to support both industry and local communities in the region.

Moving forward, this strategic and coordinated approach to the development of QREZ will realise previously unidentified synergies between transmission and generation investment in Queensland. In turn, this will ensure a reliable, secure and affordable energy supply to Queenslanders while supporting the Queensland Government's target of 50 per cent renewable energy by 2030.

## 3. Safeguarding Queensland's future by unlocking renewable energy potential

Powerlink has been working with the Queensland Government on strategies to identify opportunities to unlock renewable energy potential in Queensland. This is expected to facilitate a more diverse generation profile and lower the cost of connecting new VRE projects in the State. Development of the strategy included consideration of the existing transmission network topography in Far North Queensland, particularly the coastal 132kV double circuit transmission line between Ross and Woree substations which, with modification, has the potential to enable more hosting capacity for renewable generation.

In [May 2021](#) it was announced that the Queensland Government would direct \$40 million of the committed funding in transmission line infrastructure to establish a QREZ in North Queensland, with Neoen's Kaban Wind Farm identified as the foundation project. Powerlink has also committed approximately \$5 million of regulated capital investment to the establishment of the QREZ, the benefits of which exceed Powerlink's commitment.

The proposed transmission augmentation works are to energise one side of the existing 132kV coastal double circuit transmission line, originally constructed to accommodate transmission at 275kV. This results in the establishment of a third 275kV transmission line into Woree.

This coordinated approach to transmission and generation infrastructure development will:

- safeguard Queensland's future by addressing energy transition
- deliver a reliable, secure and affordable energy supply to Queenslanders and
- support the Queensland Government's target of 50 per cent renewable energy by 2030.

<sup>5</sup> Although the REZ concept is aimed at identifying priority areas for development, it is not intended to preclude the development of VRE projects outside the targeted zones.

There are widespread benefits expected from the proposed coastal 275kV circuit upgrade including:

- releasing restricted operation of future generation
- increasing the generator hosting capacity by up to 500MW, opening up the Far North Queensland region for further investment<sup>6</sup>  
improving reliability to the Cairns area
- safeguarding Far North Queensland's electricity supply from the impacts of cyclonic conditions and
- enabling outages on the existing 275kV transmission lines north of the Ross Substation.

## 4. Matter for consultation

The matter for consultation is to call for submissions in relation to the proposed augmentation to develop a Renewable Energy Zone in North Queensland and to seek feedback on whether there are any other matters which could reasonably be considered as part of the development of the Northern QREZ.

## 5. In June 2021 Powerlink commenced the First Stage of consultation

In June 2021, Powerlink Queensland (Powerlink) issued a Notice of Consultation "Developing the Northern Queensland Renewable Energy Zone" and Consultation Paper to the Australian Energy Market Operator (AEMO), Registered Participants and interested parties (Consulted Persons) as the first stage of consultation.

This funded augmentation consultation is being undertaken in accordance with the Rules consultation procedures<sup>7</sup>. Powerlink as the consulting party must consider all valid submissions and undertake meetings with Consulted Persons as necessary or desirable, using best endeavours to hold meetings within the required timeframes (Refer to Figure A1).

## 6. Engaging with our stakeholders and customers

Powerlink recognises the importance of engaging with a diverse range of customers and stakeholders who have the potential to affect, or be affected by, Powerlink activities and/or investments. In particular, Powerlink works collaboratively with its Customer Panel in the normal course of business.

Powerlink's Customer Panel provides a face-to-face opportunity for customers and consumer representative bodies to give their input and feedback about Powerlink's strategic direction, decision making, processes and methodologies. It also provides Powerlink with a valuable avenue to keep customers and stakeholders better informed, and to receive feedback about topics of relevance. As this is the first time a funded augmentation has been undertaken, Powerlink took the opportunity to discuss and clarify any questions with regard to the consultation process. While maintaining confidentiality, Powerlink will continue to provide updates to and request input from the Customer Panel throughout the consultation process.

## 7. Submissions received

Four submissions were received in response to the Notice and Consultation Paper, one of which was confidential. All non-confidential submissions are available on Powerlink's website.

### 7.1 Summary of submissions received and conclusions

#### *Bioenergy Australia*

Bioenergy Australia's submission is very supportive of the development of the Northern QREZ and other renewable energy zones in Queensland to facilitate the development of bioenergy, given the State's considerable bioenergy resources.

<sup>6</sup> Without the coastal 275kV circuit upgrade future VRE generators (post Kaban Wind Farm) need additional investment in remediation to be compliant with their Generator performance Standards. These capital costs will significantly exceed the capital works that Powerlink is required to undertake as part of this upgrade.

<sup>7</sup> Refer to Section 8.9 of the Rules.

Bioenergy Australia's submission discusses the environmental, economic and regional opportunities and benefits anticipated as a result of the development of biofuelled electricity generation in Queensland and more broadly nationally. The submission also explores the existing barriers and the policy instruments which Bioenergy Australia consider will activate the development of bioenergy.

Powerlink supports the development of all types of energy projects requiring connection to the transmission network in Queensland and welcomes the support for the development of the Northern QREZ offered in Bioenergy Australia's submission. Given the broader context of the matters discussed in the submission, in particular the development of a Commonwealth Bioenergy Roadmap, Powerlink has strongly encouraged Bioenergy Australia to also lodge a submission with the Queensland Government as part of its public consultation on Queensland Renewable Energy Zones.

### *CS Energy*

CS Energy supports the proposed transmission augmentation and recognizes the opportunities it provides in terms of unlocking the potential for new generation in the region as well as improving reliability of supply and increasing network resilience to Cairns and the surrounding communities.

CS Energy, a government owned corporation, supports the approach to the development of REZs 'with the onus on individual assets to fund connection to the network and remaining technology agnostic' noting that 'any learnings should be mirrored' in other QREZs. In addition, given that some regulated funding is associated with the development of the Northern QREZ, CS Energy encouraged transparency in the funded augmentation process.

As mentioned, Powerlink continues to support the development of all types of energy projects requiring connection to the transmission network in Queensland, including VRE projects. While the development of REZ increases the commercial attractiveness for new generation to connect in certain areas, the Rules set out the obligations, connection and access process and charging mechanism<sup>8</sup> which ensures that network connections costs are borne by the connecting party, protecting the interests of electricity consumers.

Powerlink welcomes the comment regarding the importance of transparency in this public consultation process and Section 8 provides additional information on the regulated funding component of the Northern QREZ.

### *SolarCitizens*

SolarCitizens support the development of a Northern QREZ, although expressed concern that the proposed increase in capacity may not be sufficient to meet the anticipated growing demand in North Queensland.

On 30th July Powerlink met with SolarCitizens to discuss:

- the approach to the development of a Northern QREZ
- to clarify and share Powerlink's technical knowledge about the anticipated hosting capacity resulting from the proposed augmentation works set out in this consultation and
- how the proposed augmentation relates to the 2020 ISP future projects.

Powerlink explained the benefits of this investment in that it:

- utilises the latent capacity of the existing transmission network to increase hosting capacity and provides additional reliability of supply to Cairns
- has a relatively short implementation timeframe, and does not preclude additional investments to further increase capacity where justified
- allows for the connection of a foundational proponent.

Powerlink welcomed the opportunity to respond to questions and explain various elements of the investment while obtaining valuable customers' perspectives.

### *Confidential submission*

Powerlink received a further supportive and confidential submission for the development of renewable energy resources in the Northern QREZ. Powerlink also held a meeting with the submitter to provide context to the consultation process and planning processes more broadly.

<sup>8</sup> Refer to Chapter 5 Part B and Chapter 6A of the Rules.

## 8. Description of the proposed Northern Renewable Energy Zone

The proposed augmentation to develop the Northern QREZ (Refer to Figure 1) is to establish a third 275kV connection into Woree Substation, with all associated works to commence Quarter 4 2021 and to be completed by November 2023. The scope of work includes:

- Conversion of one side of the coastal 132kV double circuit transmission line to permanently operate at 275kV as the third transmission line between Ross Woree
- Construction of a 275kV bay at Ross Substation
- Installation of a 275/132kV transformer at Tully Substation
- Installation of a 275kV busbar at Woree Substation with associated bays and a line reactor.

The regulated capital cost of these works is estimated at approximately \$5 million. This falls beneath the RIT-T cost threshold of \$6 million. Powerlink has assessed the cost in accordance with its obligations under the Rules that all proposed augmentations provide a net economic benefit to all those who produce, consume and transport electricity in the market<sup>9</sup>.

Without the 275kV upgrade, future VRE generators (post Kaban Wind Farm) will require additional investment in remediation to be compliant with Generator Performance Standards. In this context, the proposed capital expenditure has been assessed as prudent given that the benefits to the electricity market (as a whole) significantly exceed the cost of the capital works that Powerlink is required to undertake as part of this upgrade. Further, the market benefits associated with reduced network losses and improved reliability of supply to Cairns<sup>10</sup> are expected to result in additional benefits. Collectively, these will deliver positive long term benefits to electricity consumers.

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<sup>9</sup> Refer to the Rules Clause 5.12.1(b)(4).

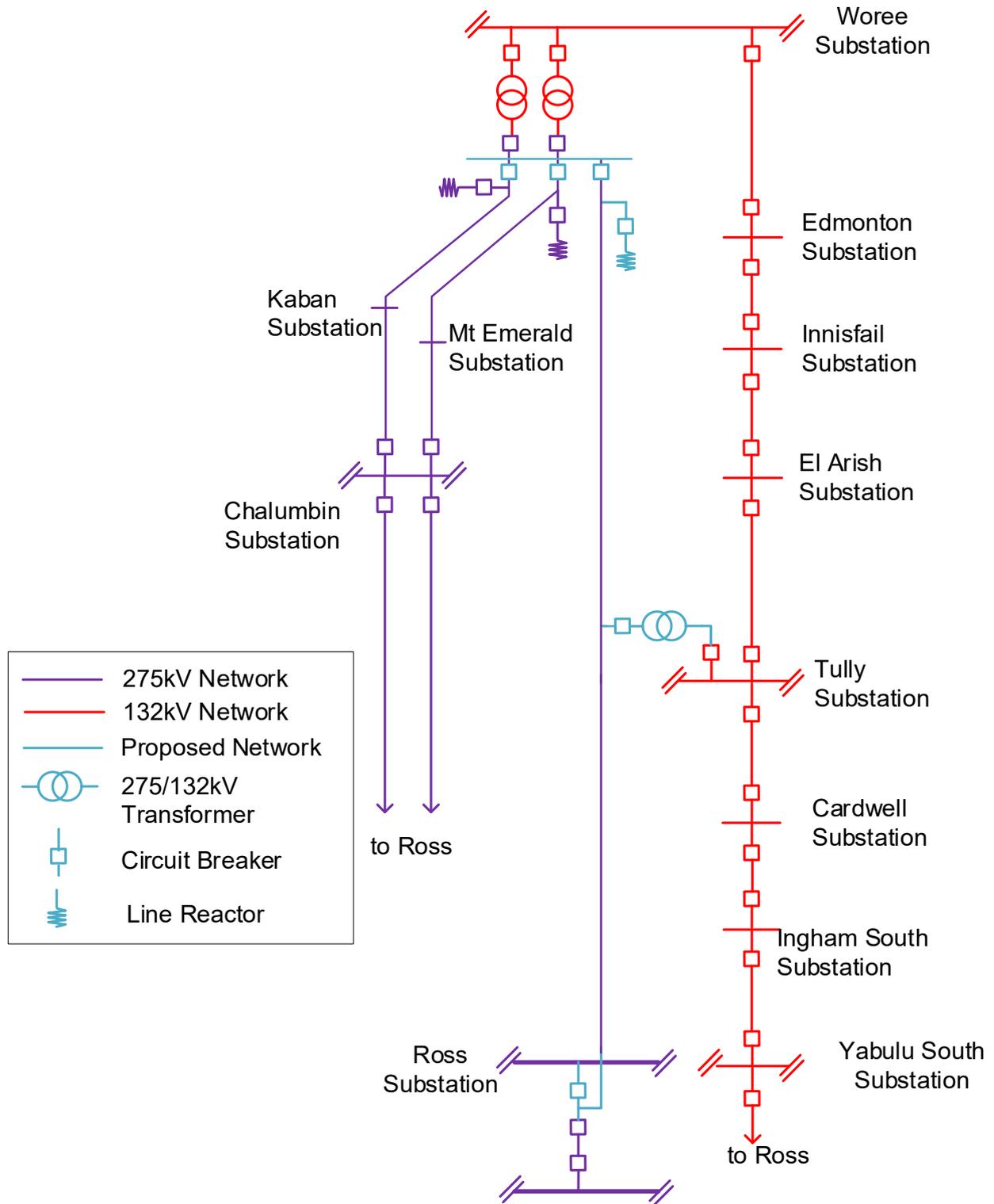
<sup>10</sup> Especially during severe storm activity where double circuit outages may occur and cyclone events.

Figure 1 Proposed Northern Queensland Renewable Energy Zone



The proposed transmission network topography is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2 Proposed transmission network topography



## 9. Draft determination

Given the technical and economic analysis undertaken and the positive and supportive nature of the submissions received, Powerlink considers that the proposed transmission network augmentation to increase the hosting capacity in North Queensland will provide an opportunity for the efficient and coordinated development of renewable energy sources in the region. In turn, this will encourage future growth in industry and employment and support local communities.

The development of the Northern QREZ will also provide a reliable, secure and affordable energy supply to Queenslanders while supporting the Queensland Government's target of 50 per cent renewable energy by 2030.

Powerlink's draft determination is to enable the development of the Northern QREZ by establishing a third 275kV connection into Woree Substation by November 2023.

## 10. Lodging a submission with Powerlink

Submissions should be presented in a written form and clearly identify the author of the submission, including contact details for subsequent follow up.

As submissions will be made public, any commercially sensitive material, or material that the party making the submission does not want to be made public, should be clearly identified.

Consulted persons, as part of their submissions, may also request a meeting with Powerlink to discuss the matter under consultation. Powerlink may also publish the details of matters discussed as a result of meeting with Consulted Persons.

Submissions close at 5pm Monday, 13 September 2021.

Please address submissions to:

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### 10.1 Consultation process

The consultation process and anticipated timeframes are outlined in Table 1.

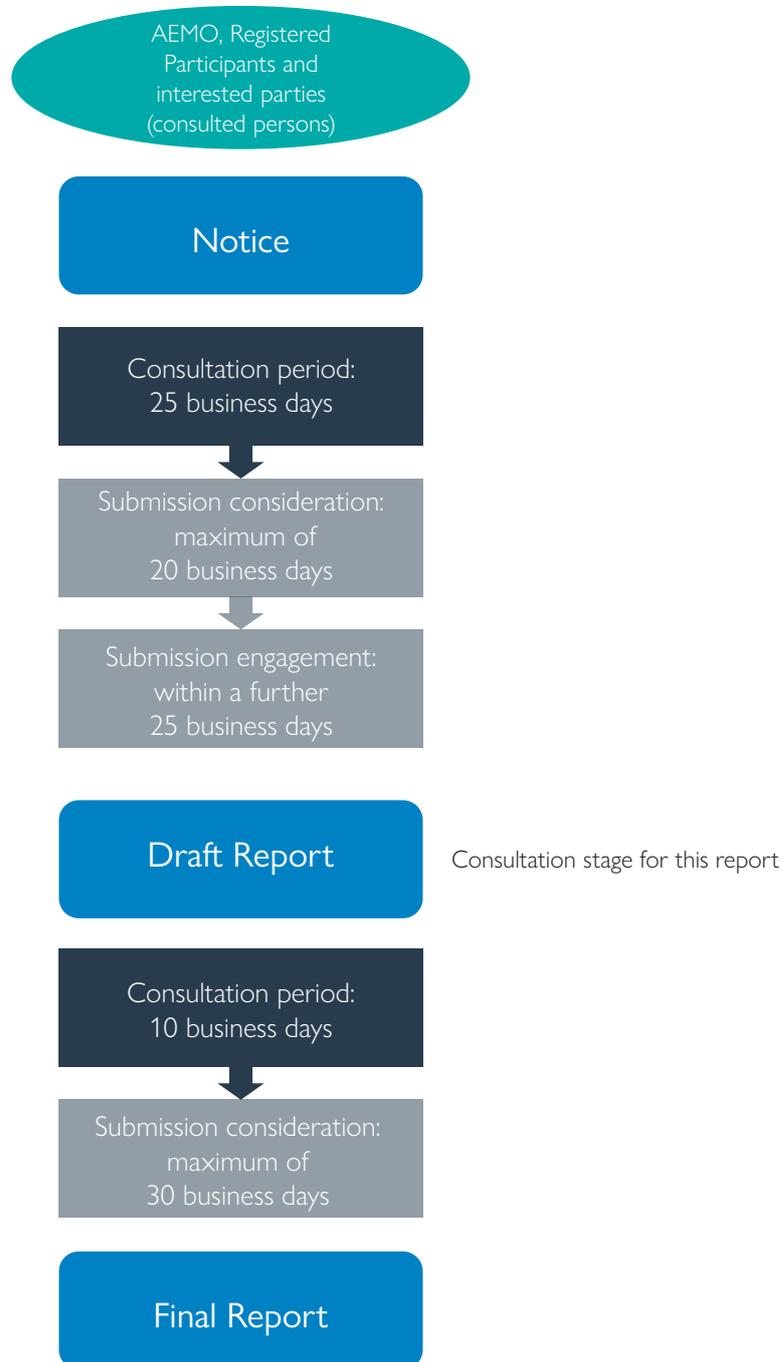
Table 1: Consultation process

Consultation process	Date
Publication of Notice of Consultation	28 June 21
Closing date for submissions in response to the Notice and Consultation Paper	6 August 21
Publication of Draft Report	26 August 21
Close date for submissions in response to the Draft Report	13 September 21
Publication of Final Report (subject to the submissions received)	September 21

Powerlink reserves the right to amend the timetable at any time.

## Appendix A The funded augmentation process

Figure A1: Funded augmentation consultation process



As part of the consultation process, Powerlink must publish both a draft and final report including summaries and discussion on:

- the submissions received and any subsequent meetings
- material issues raised
- the conclusions and any determinations made on the matter under consultation and
- procedures followed in considering the matter.

In addition, the consulting party must complete the Rules consultation procedures prior to making a decision or determination.

## Appendix B Funded augmentation technical requirements

### The proposed augmentation maintains existing compliance obligations

Powerlink considers the proposed augmentation does not result in non-compliance with obligations in relation to other Transmission Network Users under the Rules<sup>11</sup>. It is expected the Northern QREZ will deliver positive benefits to Transmission Network Users<sup>12</sup> and the broader community by facilitating the development of high quality renewable energy resources and drive economic growth in the region.

### Assessment of internetwork impacts

Powerlink considers the proposed augmentation is not likely to have a material internetwork impact<sup>13</sup> based on AEMO's criteria<sup>14</sup> and discussion with TransGrid. As a result, an augmentation technical report from AEMO was not required as part of the First Stage of Consultation<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Clause 5.18(b)(2) of the Rules.

<sup>12</sup> Refers to those parties such as customers, generators and Network Service Providers directly connected to the transmission network, defined in Chapter 10 (Glossary) in the Rules.

<sup>13</sup> Clause 5.18(b)(3) of the Rules.

<sup>14</sup> Section 5.7.7 of the Rules.

<sup>15</sup> Clause 5.18(b)(3) of the Rules.

# Contact us

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