

Vegetation to go for power

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A black-eared miner bird.

... but changes made to save birds

ABOUT 400ha of native vegetation will be cleared in South Australia to make way for a \$2.33bn electricity interconnector, documents released for consultation show.

But ElectraNet, which is behind the SA component of the project that will save residents about \$100 a year on their power bills, says the vegetation clearance will be offset by the interconnector's environmental benefits.

ElectraNet's environmental impact statement says the interconnector, between Robertstown in the Mid North and Wagga Wagga in NSW, will improve the reliability of the state's electricity supply and support the move to a lower carbon economy.

Birdlife Australia had raised concerns about the project destroying part of the last habitat stronghold for several species, including the endangered black-eared miner.

The interconnector route was to cut through Calperum station, part of the Riverland Biosphere Reserve. But Birdlife Australia's preventing extinctions program manager, Jenny Lau, said ElectraNet made significant changes based on the concerns.

The route will now reduce habitat loss by traversing the boundaries of conservation areas and using existing tracks and easements wherever possible.

There are only about 500 black-eared miners remaining, with an estimated 400 living across the Riverland Biosphere Reserve, which also includes Gluepot Reserve and Taylorville station.

The reserve is also important habitat for the red-lored whistler and striated grasswren – both listed as vulnerable. "It's an extremely important area for mallee birds," Dr Lau said. "They're large areas that haven't been burned for many decades and these species require vegetation that hasn't been burned for a very long time."

Modelling found that during construction 200 jobs would be created with another 250 from projects enabled by the interconnector.

ElectraNet land services manager Scott Haynes said there were several options to offset the project's vegetation clearance, including contributing to replanting work and paying into the government's Native Vegetation Fund.

The electricity interconnector would also help SA export more renewable energy into the grid and reduce the state's carbon footprint.

After consultation, the SA Planning Commission will assess the environmental impact statement, before it goes to Planning Minister Vickie Chapman for final approval.

TransGrid is responsible for the NSW portion of the interconnector project.