Wet Tropics World Heritage Area rezoning

Sunday Creek 275KV electricity transmission line

Background

Powerlink is in the process of constructing a 275 kV electricity transmission line generally on the alignment of the existing 132kV transmission line between Ingham and Tully. The project involves dismantling the existing line and then building the new line. There are currently 24 towers within the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area (the Area) between 25m to 30m high. The new line will require 22 new towers within the Area with towers approx 40m to 60m tall with about 40m x 40m clearings at each tower site. All access tracks will be upgraded to accommodate large construction vehicles and some new access tracks will be required to reach some tower sites. The new towers are constructed on concrete or soil screw foundations and then lifted by crane in sections. The new conductors are strung using winches or helicopters.

The section of the line runs about 4km through the World Heritage Area about 50m north of Sunday Creek (which is to the north of the Cardwell Range) through Girringun National Park to the boundary of the National Park near Fishers Landing. It includes 10 towers (numbers 55 to 65). There is a deviation from the original alignment in this section between towers 55 to 60 to avoid steep terrain (see pictures 1 and 2).

Rezoning requirement

The new powerline construction within the Area is mostly within existing Wet Tropics zone C. The intent of zone C is to accommodate community infrastructure while ensuring adverse impacts are minimal and acceptable and to protect and enhance the integrity of land in the zone. The Authority has already issued a permit to Powerlink to undertake construction of the electricity transmission for sections that are within Zone C (Permit 11006, issued 14 March 2012).

However, the Permit makes an exception for the construction of towers IT-55, IT-57, IT-58 and IT-59 which are currently within zone B (see Pictures 1 and 2). This involves a small area of zone B to the north of Sunday Creek that will be affected by the above four tower footprints and the spans of powerline between them. This is the area to be rezoned from zone B to zone C.

Assessment of impacts on integrity and values of the World Heritage Area

The area to be rezoned north of Sunday Creek is in the foothills of the steep, forested terrain of the Girringun National Park to the west of the coastal swamp vegetation
complexes, forestry plantations and agricultural landscape adjacent to the Bruce Highway.

The vegetation surrounding the easement in this section is classified under Regional Ecosystems as predominantly 7.12.24 *Eucalyptus portuensis* and *Corymbia intermedia* open forest to woodland (or vine forest with *E. portuensis* and *C. intermedia* emergents), on wet and moist foothills and uplands on granite and 7.3.21 (of concern) *Eucalyptus portuensis* and *Corymbia intermedia* open forests and woodland on granites and alluvium with some areas of melaleuca viridiflora.

The main impacts will be disturbance associated with upgrading access tracks (including installing creek crossings), the clearing of tower construction areas up to 40m by 40m and their associated foundation works. Some vegetation will need to be cleared or trimmed or pruned to allow for safe distances between the conductors and the vegetation. There will also be additional visual impact of the taller tower structures on the landscape.

Powerlink will seek to mitigate these impacts by:

- the use of taller towers, allowing more of the conductors to be placed over the canopy
- revegetation of the realigned section north of Sunday Creek
- restoring key habitat linkages across the easement to achieve ‘no net loss of habitat’
- minimising clearing of tower installation sites, followed by site revegetation.

Powerlink will apply treatments to towers and conductors in the vicinity of the Cardwell Range Lookout to dull their surfaces and minimise their visual impact.

**Community considerations**

An extensive consultation process has already been undertaken as part of the approvals process for the powerline construction. During this consultation, the views of relevant community groups, individuals, service and utility providers and government agencies were canvassed. Some adjustment was made to the siting of towers in agricultural areas to maintain efficiency of farm operations, and also to maintain acceptable separation from residential areas.

The deviation in the line in the vicinity of Sunday Creek is in part to protect Aboriginal cultural heritage.

A Cultural Heritage agreement has been entered into with the relevant Traditional Owners in accordance with requirements of the Wet Tropics Regional Agreement and Native Title notification requirements.

The proposal has the support of the State Government and the local regional councils. The wider north Queensland community also supports the proposal as there is a community benefit in the construction of this section of the 275kv line. It will provide an increased capacity and a secure electrical power supply to the far north Queensland population.
Evidence or other material on which findings of fact were based

- the report: 275kV Ingham Tully upgrade Wet Tropics World Heritage section Detailed study of ecological values Biotropica May 2011

Further details

Details of the proposal can be viewed at:

- the Wet Tropics website at www.wettropics.gov.au/plan-rezoning
- Wet Tropics Management Authority: 1st Floor Corporate Tower, 15 Lake St Cairns

Copies of the proposed zoning amendment may be obtained by contacting the Wet Tropics Management Authority on 4052 0555 or by email: wettropics@wtma.qld.gov.au.

If you require further information about the proposed amendments, please contact Mr Campbell Clarke on 07 4052 0531.

Have your say

Written submissions are invited from interested groups and members of the public, Aboriginal people, landholders, public authorities and government. Submissions should be forwarded to:

Zoning Amendments
Wet Tropics Management Authority
PO Box 2050
CAIRNS QLD 4870

or email: wettropics@wtma.qld.gov.au

Closing date for submissions is Monday 8 October 2012
Picture 1: Existing zoning for the Ingham to Tully powerline at Sunday Creek
Picture 2: Proposed rezoning for the Ingham to Tully powerline at Sunday Creek
Picture 3: Powerline a few kilometres north of Sunday Creek (Photo: Biotropica)

Picture 4: Powerline and maintenance track near Sunday Creek (Photo: Biotropica)