

Media Release—for immediate distribution
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Networks welcome Coalition’s study on burying power lines—but study must dig deep for answers

The Energy Networks Association (ENA) welcomes the Coalition’s announcement of a climate change strategy based on direct action to reduce emissions and improve our environment. In particular, ENA welcomes the Coalition’s commitment to allocate \$2 million for a major study into the use and application of underground High Voltage Direct Current (HVDC) transmission within Australia.

ENA is the peak national body for Australia’s energy networks which provide the vital link between gas and electricity producers and consumers. ENA represents gas distribution and electricity network businesses on economic, technical and safety regulation and national energy policy issues.

Mr Blyth, Chief Executive of ENA, said: ‘ENA recognises that there are a number of potential benefits for the use of underground HVDC, particularly in relation to transmission over very long distances (renewable energy) where there is potential for increases in energy efficiency through reduced line losses’.

ENA believes that the Coalition’s study would benefit greatly by being expanded to investigate the costs and benefits of undergrounding distribution lines, which are in abundance in the majority of towns and cities throughout Australia. The last national investigation into the costs and benefits of undergrounding both transmission and distribution cables occurred over a decade ago (1998 Australian Government Report: *Putting cables underground*).

‘Several past reports have cited benefits for undergrounding distribution lines, such as reduced motor vehicle collisions with poles, reduced maintenance costs and in some instances improved reliability. In fact, energy network businesses throughout Australia have been proactive, along with local councils and developers, in the undergrounding of electricity assets in new developments for over three decades, and in targeted undergrounding of existing assets’, said Mr Blyth.

Energy networks businesses across Australia currently operate approximately 48 000 kilometres of transmission lines and 800 000 kilometres of distribution lines. Mr Blyth said: ‘There are significant cost and practicality implications that need to be considered when converting any overhead line to an underground line’.

‘ENA believes a new cost-benefit analysis of the benefits of a well-targeted program of putting cables underground would be timely and beneficial, especially considering emerging issues such as the rollout of the National Broadband Network and the ongoing development of smart networks. Given the significant costs of undergrounding at high voltages, any program needs to be carefully targeted to identify where the benefits would be sufficiently high to justify the costs’ said Mr Blyth.

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