

Future electricity supply options for Leigh Creek and Hawker

Revised Community FAQ

This FAQ incorporates questions raised during the Leigh Creek and Hawker community information sessions, handwritten feedback captured during discussions, and questions submitted throughout the consultation process. The answers reflect information available during the current consultation stage. No preferred option has been selected.

The FAQ is split under these categories:

- About the project
- Future electricity supply options
- Costs and customer impacts
- Community growth and future demand
- Renewable energy and future technologies
- Existing infrastructure
- Jobs, contractors and community benefits
- Consultation and next steps

About the project

Why is ElectraNet considering changes to electricity supply in the region?

The existing 132 kV transmission line, that runs from Port Augusta through Neuroodla up to Leigh Creek, is approaching the end of its technical and economic service life. The line is ageing, remote and increasingly challenging to maintain, so ElectraNet must assess long-term options to continue providing safe and reliable electricity supply.

Has a decision already been made?

No. Three credible options are currently being assessed and if other options are identified we will consider those too. No preferred option has been selected. Community feedback will inform the next stage of the assessment process.

Is this project about reducing costs?

The primary driver is maintaining safe and reliable electricity supply as the existing transmission line approaches the end of its service life. Our objective is to find the option which is in the long term interests of south Australian electricity customers considering the price, quality, reliability, safety and sustainability of the overall electricity supply system.

Future electricity supply options

What options are being considered?

Three options are being assessed:

- Replace the full Davenport-Neuroodla-Leigh Creek transmission line.
- Establish stand-alone power systems (SAPS) at Leigh Creek and Neuroodla.
- Replace the Davenport-Neuroodla section and establish a SAPS at Leigh Creek.

What is a stand-alone power system (SAPS)?

A SAPS is a local electricity system that operates independently from the transmission network. It would typically include local generation, battery storage and backup generation. Electricity would still be supplied to homes and businesses through the existing local distribution network.

Would a SAPS be reliable?

Any SAPS option would need to meet applicable reliability, safety, technical and regulatory requirements before it could proceed. Reliability remains a key consideration in the assessment. In saying this, SAPS used reliably around the world, and closer to home in Western Australia, where they have been the first to rollout this technology in Australia, using it to replace traditional transmission lines.

What happens when there is no sun?

A SAPS would typically include battery storage and backup generation to maintain supply when renewable generation is unavailable or insufficient. Detailed system design has not yet been completed.

What happens if backup diesel supplies are disrupted?

Fuel security is one of the issues being considered through the assessment and future design process. Any solution would need to meet reliability requirements and include appropriate contingency arrangements. Detailed design has not yet been undertaken.

Costs and customer impacts

Will my electricity bill change?

No. Under the regulated SAPS model being assessed, customers would continue to receive the same pricing and service protections that apply today. The future electricity supply solution chosen for Leigh Creek and Hawker is not expected to materially impact future electricity bills.

Will I be able to keep my electricity retailer?

Yes. The regulated SAPS model being assessed is designed to maintain customer choice of electricity retailer.

Which option is the cheapest?

Current assessment indicates that a Stand-Alone Power System (SAPS) is likely to have a lower overall cost than the other options being considered. However, no preferred option has been selected, and detailed assessment work is continuing to compare the costs, benefits and overall value of each option.

Are batteries cheap to replace?

Battery replacement costs and whole-of-life costs were raised by community members and will be considered through further assessment. No final technology or design has been selected.

Community growth and future demand

Can a SAPS support future growth in Hawker and Leigh Creek?

Yes. A SAPS can be designed to support future growth in communities like Hawker and Leigh Creek, including growth in tourism, businesses, community services and other commercial activities. Future electricity demand and local development opportunities are being considered as part of the assessment to ensure any solution is fit for the communities' future needs. Large-scale industrial or mining developments may require additional assessment and infrastructure, regardless of the option selected.

What if tourism, industry or population grows significantly?

The assessment process will consider future electricity needs and potential growth scenarios. Community members specifically raised tourism growth, business development and regional expansion as important considerations.

Could a SAPS limit future investment?

This is one of the questions being examined as part of the assessment. No preferred option has been selected and the next stage will provide more detailed comparison of each option and its implications. We welcome submissions describing the type and size of investment contemplated in the region to assist in this consideration.

Renewable energy and future technologies

Will solar and batteries be part of the solution?

If a SAPS option progresses, it would typically include solar generation, battery storage and backup generation. However, the final technology mix has not been determined.

Where would the solar farms or batteries be located?

No final sites have been selected. Any future location would be subject to technical, environmental, cultural heritage, land access and stakeholder assessment.

Could geothermal energy be considered?

Community members raised geothermal energy during consultation. If the SAPS option is chosen, in due course, there will be a procurement process for the SAPS and if there is commercial interest in geothermal then it will have a chance to participate.

Could new technologies be incorporated in the future?

Technology continues to evolve and could be considered as part of future development if it meets the required technical, reliability and regulatory requirements.

What happens to electricity generated when batteries are full?

The detailed operational design of any future SAPS has not yet been determined. Questions regarding exported electricity and management of excess generation will be considered during any future design phase.

Existing infrastructure

What happens to the existing transmission line if a SAPS is selected?

Under the SAPS options assessed in the consultation report, the relevant transmission line sections would be decommissioned and removed. Under the hybrid option, the Davenport-Neuroodla section would remain while the Neuroodla-Leigh Creek section would be removed.

Would local powerlines to homes and businesses be removed?

No. Under a SAPS option, the local distribution network that supplies homes and businesses would remain in place.

What will happen to land and easements if infrastructure is removed?

ElectraNet would undertake significant stakeholder engagement before and during any decommissioning activities, including working with affected landholders and considering environmental and cultural heritage requirements.

Has this type of approach been used elsewhere?

Yes. Stand-alone power systems are already operating in parts of Australia, including Western Australia. Experience from these projects can help inform future assessment.

Jobs, contractors and community benefits

Will there be opportunities for local contractors?

The community strongly supported local procurement opportunities. The extent of contractor opportunities will depend on the option selected and the future delivery model.

Will local jobs be created?

Potential employment opportunities will depend on the option selected. Communities consistently highlighted the importance of local jobs and training opportunities as part of any future investment.

Could community-owned energy assets be considered?

Community members raised interest in community ownership and shared-benefit models. Ownership arrangements have not been determined and if a SAPS option is chosen these would be considered through the design and procurement process.

How will communities benefit beyond electricity supply?

Many attendees asked ElectraNet to consider wider regional outcomes including local employment, training, local businesses and broader social and economic benefits. These themes will be considered alongside technical assessment criteria.

Consultation and next steps

How does community feedback influence the decision?

Community feedback forms part of the Regulatory Investment Test for Transmission (RIT-T) process and will help inform the next stage of assessment.

When will a final decision be made?

No final decision has been made. The current consultation is part of the Project Specification Consultation Report (PSCR) stage. Further assessment and consultation will occur before a final recommendation is made.

Will ElectraNet return to Leigh Creek and Hawker?

Yes. ElectraNet has advised that engagement with local communities will continue as the assessment progresses and additional information becomes available. We will return to the community in 12 months.

Can information be provided in hard copy?

Yes. ElectraNet can provide consultation information in hard copy for community members who prefer not to access information online.

Where can I provide feedback?

Community members can continue to provide questions and feedback through the project contact channels provided with the consultation material. Feedback received during consultation will be considered as part of the next stage of assessment.

Will all questions raised by the community be published?

ElectraNet intends to publish the questions raised at the Leigh Creek and Hawker sessions, with duplicate or similar questions combined and answers refined for clarity.

This version is written as a public-facing FAQ and incorporates the additional themes raised in the handwritten notes, including reliability, tourism growth, community benefits, battery lifespan, local jobs, diesel backup, future technologies, infrastructure removal and community-owned energy assets.