CHAPTER 3

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

Term of Reference 1 (a) (ii) ' ... 1 the possible impact of the power line and the accompanying land resumptions on the vegetation and overall environment.'

Definitions

3.1 In its submission to the Committee, *Powerlink* Queensland states: 'It is acknowledged that a high voltage transmission line may have an impact on the environment of the area through which it passes. The *environment* refers not only to the natural ecological values of the area, but also to the man-made environment, social and cultural attributes and economic issues'. [2]

3.2 This is a very broad definition of 'environment'. The Committee's terms of reference require it to examine, as separate terms of reference, 'the vegetation and overall environment' and the 'social fabric and local economic viability of surrounding communities'. This report therefore makes a distinction between impact on natural environment, discussed in this Chapter, and social and cultural impact, including local economic impact and impact on agricultural land, discussed in Chapter 4. Broader economic issues are discussed in Chapter 5.

Power Authorities' Position

Environmental Legislation

3.3 In both NSW and Queensland, development of the Eastlink proposal is subject to statutory requirements under environmental impact legislation. In NSW the relevant Act is the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 19 79* (NSW) and Eastlink cannot proceed until all the legislative requirements of the *Act* have been fulfilled and the Minister for Urban Affairs and Planning (NSW) has approved the activity.

3.4 In Queensland, the relevant power authority must comply by requirements of both the *Electricity Act* 1994, which specifically covers environmental impact in part 2, and the *Environment Protection Act 1994.*

3.5 The project's Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) must address a comprehensive list of matters and both power authorities must consult the Commonwealth Environmental Protection Agency during preparation of the Environmental Impact Statement. To do this, the two State power authorities have agreed to nominate as joint proponents under the Commonwealth *Environment Protection (Impact of Proposals) Act 1974* and to prepare one Environmental Impact Statement that would satisfy both NSW and Queensland legislative requirements, as well as those of the Commonwealth. It is expected that the EIS will be available for public comment in Februa /March 1996.

Consideration of Environmental Factors

3.6 According to the two power authorities involved, the Eastlink project takes environmental factors into consideration at two levels. Firstly, in selecting a preferred corridor, the environmental impact of each option was compared so as to select the corridor with the least environmental impact. [3] Secondly, after selecting the preferred corridor (the Western Corridor), the exact route will be chosen having regard to the environmental impact study of that corridor.

3.7 In the submission presented by the NSW Transmission Authority, *Transgrid,* it was argued that it was not possible for the Authority to address the Committee's terms of reference, and in particular point 1 (a) (ii), until the EIS process had been completed. However, on the basis of 'extensive past experience' it was possible for *Transgrid* to provide 'some general comments' .

3.8 In an effort to minimise the environmental impact of high voltage power line construction and maintenance procedures, the power authority would seek the involvement of landholders, the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service and the NSW Department of Lands and Water Conservation.

3.9 With regard to vegetation, *Transgrid* noted that a necessary impact will arise from the statutory requirement that a minimum clearance be maintained between the power line and towers and the ground, and that there was no avoiding some disturbance to the environment through which the line passed. [5] However, all efforts would be taken by the Authority to reduce the damage to vegetation through the use of minimal clearing practises. These would include the lopping of trees instead of their removal, prudent use of topography in open terrain, replacement tree planting with more manageable species, and restricting clearing just to tower sites in rougher terrain, rather than clearing along the full length of the route.

3.10 The impact of the power line on the environment would depend on the type of environment through which the route passed. The line would have minimal physical impact in cleared agricultural land and would have a much higher impact in areas of dense native vegetation such as national parks, nature reserves and undeveloped crown land. The Western Corridor is located primarily within cleared lands and largely avoids forested areas. Those areas that are not agricultural are mainly eucalypt woodland and open forests.

3.11 With regard to the overall environment, *Transgrid* noted that, in its experience: ' ... once constructed, transmission lines become passive elements in the overall environment surrounding them.' Further, *Transgrid* claimed: 'The process under-taken to identify the preferred location for [the power lines], followed by the detailed environmental impact assessment and the development of comprehensive mitigation measures ensures that the resultant impact is minimal and acceptable.'

3.12 Powerlink, in its submission, noted: 'For Eastlink, a consideration of environmental issues started at the beginning of the corridor selection process. The *preliminary corridor concepts* which were developed in-house before public consultation commenced, were based on a consideration of broad environmental issues. Factors such as population density, national parks and wildlife areas, and physical topographical barriers helped define these broad corridor concepts'.

3.13 After delineation of the broad corridors, environmental factors were again taken into account, including present land use, probably flora and fauna impact, location of houses and schools, heritage and conservation areas, access difficulties and scenic quality of areas. In the final corridor selection process 10 primary factors were evaluated: conservation areas, impact on tourism, visual impact, tree cover, severe soil erosion, houses within 500m, cropping land, irrigation land, number of land parcels and technical cost issues.

Broad Environmental Benefits

3.14 As pointed out in the submission by the Commonwealth Department of Primary Industries and Energy, Eastlink may result on a broad scale in some environmental benefits. These could arise from ' the sharing of reserve capacity, the reduced need for additional power generating plant, and the energy saving resulting from the more efficient use of energy resources. The submission further notes that alternatives to Eastlink would not necessarily be environmentally benign and proposals such as the Tully Millstream Hydro Electric Scheme has potentially adverse impacts on a World Heritage Listed area.

Community Concerns

3.15 Considerable concern was expressed to the Committee, both in submissions and in oral evidence, that the construction of Eastlink would result in unacceptable environmental impact. The types of impact sustained, it was argued, would be soil erosion, vegetation loss and disruption to plant and animal communities and consequent fragmentation of habitat. Of broad concern was the apparently contradictory philosophies of governments which, on one had, promoted programs such as Landcare and One Billion Trees while, on the other hand, allowing the destruction of trees and associated habitat along the full length of the proposed Eastlink route. Other specific concerns included impact on Aboriginal and European heritage.

3.16 Landholders and conservationists argue that the environmental impact would be much wider than just the easement zone; that once the construction damage is done, no amount of rehabilitation will return the affected areas to

their original standard of environmental integrity; and, more importantly, that there is no need for the intrusion in the first place because Eastlink is not necessary and not wanted.

3.17 The construction of the Eastlink power line will necessitate the use of heavy machinery and access to pylon sites about every 400-500 metres along the entire length of the line. As the route proposed would be between 380 and 400 km long, this would mean a total number of pylons of between 760 and 1000. Although the power authorities plan to rehabilitate any areas damaged by construction machinery, submissions argued that in some places it would be impossible to fully rehabilitate the land. Once the soil was disrupted, a scar would be there for ever.

> This transmission line would cross farming land that is subject to high erosion from water. With the end result being that considerable soil conservation measures have been carried out ... Maintenance of these control measures is an ongoing procedure and the construction of steel towers anywhere across this land completely contradicts soil conservation practices.

3.18 Another important aspect of construction, of concern to property owners, is the potential for mud-laden machinery to carry weed seeds from one place to another. This can also occur after construction when maintenance inspections are carried out. Several people were particularly concerned about the spread of *Parthenium* weed which is known to cause health problems in central Queensland through allergic reactions to its pollen. Its spread south is of concern to physicians.

3.19 Similarly, the contamination of heavy machinery with soil could allow the spread of fungal diseases such as *Phytophthera cinnamonni.*[2] In addition, the construction of access roads and the easement itself provides increased access for feral animals into properties and nature reserves, and the creation of windrows of felled trees to create habitat which favours introduced species such as foxes, rabbits and cats.

3.20 However, as described by *Powerlink,* routine procedures are carried out during the construction of power lines to curtail the spread of weeds and fungal spores by cleaning vehicles and equipment prior to their movement from infested to weed-free areas. Should weed infestation be established to have been the result of power line construction, power authorities will take responsibility for their eradication or reimburse farmers for that cost.

Soil Erosion

3.21 Particular concern was expresses about the potential for soil erosion following the excavation of pylon sites and creation of access roads. Once soil is disturbed in some areas, it is very difficult to stabilise again, particularly in steep, heavily wooded country. Although the Darling Downs has deep rich black soil in parts, it is very unstable. Paddocks become inaccessible when wet, and the soil type is classified as having high erosion potential. The hills and ridges in that area are even more prone to erosion. They grow very little grass, being protected by a combination of shrubs and trees. Following mechanical disturbance, the soil moves easily down slope into gullies during rain.

3.22 In Traprock country, south of Warwick, the soil is highly susceptible to erosion. Even on almost flat land *(2%* slope) a bulldozer can cause erosion that is difficult to repair. Local resident are extremely concerned that construction of Eastlink would cause serious environmental damage. Of particular concern is the possibility that, while local properties have always been managed by property owners who understand the fragility of the land, power line construction crews may not be so sensitive. In evidence to the Committee, a representative of the Traprock Branch of SEQAE/TOTA stated: 'Due to the steep and inaccessible nature of the corridor within the particular reference section, it would be impossible without causing extreme erosion danger to gain access to tower construction sites with heavy vehicles such as cement trucks and semitrailers'.

3.23 Soil erosion affects not only the immediate construction sites but has the potential to affect the water quality of the river systems through siltation and increased flow of nutrients from fallen trees. As stated in evidence to the Committee by a representative of SEQAE: 'since the Eastlink route crosses 350 kilometres of the headwater catchments of the Darling River ... a route more damaging to the Darling River could not be found'.' Siltation and increased nutrient deposition can cause toxic algal blooms and destruction of aquatic habitat.

3.24 The power authorities have acknowledged that some environmental damage will occur during construction but they believe that minimal impact construction practices will prevent any serious damage and that, after the construction phase is complete, rehabilitation of disturbed areas will ensure that the impact doesn't continue.

Loss of Trees

3.25 While many farmers in the regions affected by Eastlink have joined in collective conservation practices such as Landeare programs and are making individually efforts on their own properties, they see the destruction of many hundreds of trees along the power line casement to be anathema to the cause of conservation. They see hypocrisy in governments which legislate to ensure tree preservation and which provide funding for tree replanting, yet allow large scale destruction of trees by power authorities**.**

3.26 One submission estimated that if the casement was 60 metre wide and the power line several hundred kilometres long, then the total area where trees would be removed was about 2000 hectares. The submission argued: 'We should be encouraging, tree plantings not their destruction'. Another submission noted that since the 1970s farmers have been working to link remnant vegetation with road plantings and shelter belts, and in 1991 they were assisted with tree planting through a government grant under the 'One Billion Trees' program. Despite the prolonged drought, farmers have persevered with the program and have worked hard to nurture the trees.

Fragmentation of Habitat and Impact on Fauna & Flora

3.27 One of the likely consequences of tree clearing along the power line route will be fragmentation of habitat. As pointed out by the Armidale Branch of the National Parks and Wildlife Association, the New England environment is already heavily fragmented and any further breakup of woodland habitat should be avoided. The Branch 'is concerned at the prospect of extensive damage to vegetation and wildlife habitat, at a time when every effort is being made to reduce habitat loss, and thereby species loss'.

3.28 Various submissions expressed the view that the creation of a bare corridor through native vegetation, and revegetated farmlands would have a negative impact on wildlife, particularly tree dwelling mammals such as koalas, possums and gliders, and birds such as the Red Goshawk, Squatter Pigeon and Glossy Black Cockatoo. These submissions pointed out that habitat for such wildlife is already fragmented and any further breakup of the integrity of the areas in which they live could threaten their viability. The easement created by Eastlink would result in a continuous north south barrier to the movement of tree dwelling animals, especially in areas where trees are already scarce.

Concern for the Lockyer Malley & Llelidon Hills Areas

3.29 The Helidon Hills area near Warwick has great scenic and botanical value. This rugged area contains a wide diversity of fauna and flora, **as** it retains much of the natural tree cover and it relatively free of weeds. It also contains several endangered animal species and has been recommended for inclusion as a national park. Being close to Brisbane, its location is convenient for nature-based recreation. The Toowoomba Field Naturalist Club maintained that the Eastlink easement will cause considerable damage to the natural vegetation of the Helidon Hills and the Club opposes Eastlink on these grounds.

3.30 The submission from the Lockyer Valley Against Eastlink group noted that the power line route would pass through areas of high conservation value, including habitat of rare and endangered species, and vegetation types which were poorly conserved in south east Queensland. These areas included the Helidon Hills (a large area of continuous bushland), and remnant bushland in the Paradise Falls, Dry Creek, Silky Oak and Paradise Mountain area. Some of these areas had critical conservation status. *27*

3.31 In addition, the Helidon Hills area is an important part of the Lockyer Valley water catchment. Because the Valley has no major rivers or prospect of a major dam it depends totally on underground water. Residents of the Valley expressed concerns that any disturbance to the integrity of the vegetation in the Hills will have an impact on the ability of the area to contribute to groundwater.

Concern for the New England Environment

3.32 Several submissions from the Armidale area expressed concern for the fragility of the New England Environment, noting that the soil structure is such that it is highly susceptible to erosion and that the region has already suffered badly from tree die-back.

3.33 A submission from this region noted:

> Some years ago New England suffered what is now known as ,severe tree die-back' where very large tracts of trees died leaving the landscape quite bare ... The de-nuding of trees from the landscape is well known to cause other long-term problems such as lower rainfall, salting of the soil, wind and water erosion to name but a few ... It would now seem that the proposed route could necessitate clearing a large part of what is left of good trees on this property - contemptible.

3.34 The Chairman off the Guyra Landcare group pointed out that the proposed route would disrupt the Guyra Tree Corridor Programme, the region's major Landcare effort, both because the easement would traverse some of the tree corridor and because the Eastlink consultation process had caused acrimony within the community which had hindered the process of negotiating tree corridors between properties.

Concernfor the Condamine Catchment Area

3.35 The Condamine Catchment Coordinating Committee was formed to bring about sustainable land management in the Condamine region, an area of some 30,000 square kilometres centred around Warwick and part of the Murray Darling Basin. As outlined in the Coordinating Committee's submission, the Eastlink proposal raises a number of land and water management issues within the catchment. Their major concerns relate to the clearing of trees, which could lead to soil erosion and increased stream siltation, and which will have an impact on biodiversity, animal habitats, weed invasion, and reduction in environmental integrity.

3.36 Local Landcare groups in the Condarnine Catchment have worked hard to involve both rural and urban people in a wide range of land rehabilitation projects; planting trees to establish seed woodlots of local native species, planting shelter breaks for stock and crops, integrating tree species to local soil conditions, carrying out remedial work on salinity problems, soil stabilisation work, and establishing wildlife corridors.

3.37 The Allora Landcare Group point out that the proposed Western Corridor traverses an important Landcare project near Allora along Tudor Valley Road. The project involves tree species trials aimed at encouraging graziers to establish timber plots for multiple purposes. The Landcare Group consider the project to be of great importance because of its location, and because a large amount of time and money has been put in to establishing the trials. The Allora Group argued: 'Landcare groups all over the country are demonstrating a genuine commitment to ecologically sustainable development and protection of biodiversity. It is time for a similar commitment from our State Governments and public utilities.

3.38 They have been dismayed to find that power authority attitudes have been uncaring of their enthusiasm. The Tudor Valley site lies directly along the Western Corridor and when informed of this, representatives of the power authorities reportedly offered to replace the project with 'bushes'. According to a member of the Allora Landcare Group: 'Any effort to point out the potential for serious damage to natural systems has been met with "we'll fix it, little realising (or caring) that detrimental effects can have dramatic and far-reaching consequences that are extremely expensive and sometimes impossible to rectify'.

Use of Chemicals in Easements

3.39 Various methods are used to reduce vegetation height along power line easements. These methods include tree felling and the use of herbicides to prevent their regrowth. Concern was expressed in submissions that because power authorities use subcontractors to carry out vegetation control, the authorities lose control over the operations and the standard of care taken when chemicals are used may not be as high as landholders would like. Examples were cited of chemical mishandling by subcontractors and accidental toxic chemical spray drift onto private properties.

A Philosophy of Care

3.40 Landholders who have worked hard over many years to revegetate their properties in order to improve the landscape and to encourage wildlife are now bewildered and frustrated that their acreages will be divided and despoiled by a cleared easement and rendered unattractive by ugly structures. Similar comments were made by rural landholders along the full length of the line.

3.41 Landholders who have worked to blend their own agricultural land with neighbouring nature reserves pointed out in their submissions that the involvement of rural landholders in wildlife conservation has considerable benefit to all Australians. 'Conservation is being achieved in an economic and sustainable way, instead of locking up large tracts of land which is difficult to keep free from both animal and plant pests and at considerable cost to the public purse'.

3.42 Indeed, for many landholders, the recent drought has highlighted the fragility of the environment in which they live. They have struggled to retain ground cover, to reduce the potential for erosion, to protect their farms from the vagaries of the weather. But while they can accept the impact of the drought, because they have no control over the weather, they are at a loss to understand why anyone would intentionally place stress on the environment in which they live when there appears to be many more benign and globally desirable alternatives.

3.43 Over recent years there has been a change in the way rural Australians think and there is a groundswell for more responsible land management. [36] Through observing the detrimental impact that traditional farming practices have had on their properties, and through the advent of Landcare programs, Coordinated Catchment programs and Whole Farm Planning philosophies, the traditional Australian farmer has changed from user of the land, only reaping the benefits, to concerned custodian, willing to put back into the land as much, or more than has been taken out. There has been a definite change in the philosophy of many rural landholders such that most farmers now both understand the need for environmentally sustainable farm management practices, and are keen to redress the environmental mistakes of the past.

3.44 The Glen Innes Natural Resources Advisory Committee Inc (GLENRAC) submitted that: 'There are in excess of thirty Landcare groups, Catchment Management Committees and Resource Management organisations at work in the North of NSW, all of them cooperating with Government agencies to achieve the objective of reducing soil and water degradation. ... [However] throughout the Landcare Groups there is a strong perception of the denial of the value of the whole Landcare movement by a Government which plans a project which will destroy as many trees as have been planted and cause as much soil erosion as has been rectified by the Landcare Groups, and will in addition cut every wildlife corridor between Armidale and Springdale'. [37]

Visual Impact

3.45 Many submissions to the Committee expressed the concern that Eastlink would result in loss of the visual integrity of the bush in those regions through which the line traversed. Submissions pointed out that people generally move to rural areas to enjoy the bush environment, particularly the natural beauty of the landscape and to escape the visual disharmony of cities.

3.46 Many submissions argued that constructing large towers and associated power lines through picturesque farmland would spoil the visual attractiveness of the environments in which they lived. This would reduce the quality of life for those who live within eyesight of the chosen route by despoiling the very beauty of the bush that they had sought by moving to that particular place. *33*

3.47 As an example, during inspections the Committee visited the property of Mr Alexander (Jimmy) Martin; some 100 acres of land bought recently as a place for retirement. The power line would stand between his house, set on the side of a hill, and a scenic valley, obstructing the view. Mr Martin said he had been offered $22,000 compensation by *Transgrid* for the casement which he believed was insufficient to ameliorate the loss of the view, the main reason why he had bought that particular property.

3.48 In fact, the whole valley in which Mr Martin lives is of high scenic and rural heritage value. The Committee inspected several other properties in the area, all of which had very attractive scenic outlooks, both in the near distance and far away. These views would be considerably spoiled by the imposition of a high voltage power line.

3.49 Other witnesses pointed out that their properties had already been crossed by several other power lines, of lower capacity and height. While they, had tolerated the construction of the smaller lines, the combined impact of those lines and the much larger pylons and lines of Eastlink would be intolerable. One submission stated: 'My small 16.3 ha. property has been grossly devalued by the existing THREE power line constructions through my good improved grazing paddocks. A fourth construction of the even larger Eastlink line is OBJECTIONABLE especially when it is not justifiable'. Another submission noted: 'We already have three power lines going through our 7 hectares hobby farm. They are nothing but an eyesore. To have another set erected will be disastrous for us.

3.50 And, while compensation might be paid to people over whose property the line would cross, those properties which suffered a visual impact only would not be eligible for any compensation, even though the line may go very close to their boundary and completely spoil the view. People in this situation were angry that they had to suffer the visual intrusion of an offensive structure with no prospect of compensation.

Heritage

3.51 A number of properties in the Western Corridor region pointed out that they had special heritage values that would be compromised by the construction of Eastlink. In addition, the general concept of family heritage was mentioned in quite a number of submissions to the Committee.

Aboriginal Heritage

3.52 Mr J W Deacon submitted to the Committee that part of his property through which Eastlink would pass was of significant Aboriginal heritage. The area was used as a camp by Aboriginal people and many of the trees bear marks of Aboriginals removing bark. Mr Deacon has applied to the Heritage Commission for listing, and officers of the Commission have undertaken to express their concerns to the power authorities. Forty-eight trees have been recorded and it is believed that the scars are at least 130 years old. There is also a small valley on the property which has been protected by Mr Deacon's family since 1915 because the valley was a women's area. There is also an Aboriginal camp site and a site of rock quarrying.

3.53 As noted in the submission: 'there are not many sites left close to civilisation where areas are still reasonably intact and have trees which were used by the aborigines still standing. This shows where they lived and hunted. For the towers and cables of Eastlink to be in close proximity to this site would destroy much of its significance and atmosphere' .

Heritage Property 'Olliera'

3.54 Specific concern was expressed that Eastlink was greatly reduce the value of the heritage listed-property 'Ollera'. This property, which is situated some 80 kilometres from Armidale near Guyra, has been listed variously by the National Trust in 1975, the Australian Heritage Commission National Estate of Australia in 1979 and the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NSW) as a wildlife Refuge in 1973. The property has considerable potential for rural tourism.

3.55 The property's assets include:

- a homestead built in 183 8;
- heritage buildings, including slab cottages, shearing shed with surrounding landscaping and trees;
- a small stone church with stained glass windows (St. Bartholomew's Church of England), maintained at the property's expense for 119 years but used by the public;
- a cemetery containing 380 graves (152 years old);
- a cricket field and associated grounds, maintained by the property for 145 years and open for public use; and
- over 130 family journals and documents held by UNE archives.

3.56 The property is already traversed by four other main power lines including a 132kV line.

3.57 The Committee visited 'Ollera' on the morning on 13 October 1995 and agreed that the homestead, the church and the outbuildings had very high value as rural heritage.

Family Heritage

3.58 Both the New England and Toowoomba regions have been settled for many years and some properties have been in the hands of the one family for three or more generations. Owners of these properties felt a strong pride in their family heritage and expressed a strong desire that their property should remain in the ownership of their family for many more generations. However, they felt that the imposition of Eastlink has threatened future heritage: that younger generations would not want to live on a property which had traversing through it a high voltage power line for health reasons, for aesthetic reasons and for reasons of privacy .

Environmental Impact Statement

Power Authority Position

3.59 The formal environmental impact study (EIS) is being carried out for the power authorities by consultants Dames and Moore. The EIS will be supported by a range of specialist studies of the social and biophysical environment, including visual, natural, agricultural and socio-economic environment, with specific studies to cover flora and fauna impacts, visual impacts and impacts on agriculture and land use. The fauna and flora survey was carried out by consultants from New England University.

3.60 According to the terms of reference of the EIS, it must cover:

- a description of the existing environment;
- a description of the effect of Eastlink on the environment.,
- an economic evaluation of Eastlink;
- safeguards and mitigation measures to be employed;
- assessment of feasible alternatives;
- government authorities who must be contacted; and
- issues arising from community consultation.

Community Criticism of the EIS Process

3.61 Two specific criticisms were made to the Committee regarding the Eastlink EIS. The first related to the conduct of the fauna and fauna survey and the second related to the extent of the EIS process**.**

3.62 The fieldwork for the EIS dealing with fauna and flora was carried out for 10 weeks from mid-April until the end of June. Being autumn and winter, and following a severe and prolonged drought, a number of submissions to the Committee noted that this period would not have been the best time to survey flora and fauna. In evidence a representative of the Armidale Branch of the National Parks Association argued that the survey would not have picked up annual plants, nor some perennials which flower in spring and which would have disappeared by autumn**.**

3.63 The sampling methods used during the flora and fauna survey were also criticised. One submission noted that when a power authority representative had been questioned as to why no survey had been carried out in a certain area, the reply had been that the impact assessment in that area had been done from an aeroplane. Other submissions noted that field surveys had been conducted only on some properties, at a spacing of about every 5 kilometres. In addition a number of local environmental groups, such as the Condamine Catchment Coordinating Committee, requested to be involved in the EIS process for Eastlink but no response to their request was given by the power authorities.

3.64 On one property in the Wandsworth region of New England, a fauna survey was only carried out after a specific request was made by that property owner. Despite spotlighting and live-trapping for small mammals, none of three endangered species known to be present on the property were sighted. It was assumed that this was a result of the time of year that the sampling had been carried out.

3.65 Thus because of the timing of the fauna and flora surveys, and because of the sampling methods used, it was the general view of local environmentalists that the results of the biological survey were not representative of the biota that actually exists along the Western corridor.

3.66 Of equal concern to people living in the Western Corridor was the fact that the Corridor was chosen before the EIS was carried out. Inherent to EIS methodology is the principle that the environmental impact of one option be compared against the environmental impact of another option, or several other options. While the power authorities involved have stated that broad environmental factors were taken into account in choosing the Western Corridor, evidence was presented to the Committee that the legislative requirements of carrying out an EIS are only being fulfilled for one option.

3.67 The Armidale Branch of the National Parks Association, in particular, expressed concern that the EIS related only to the Western Corridor, and that environmental impacts were being assessed without examination of feasible alternatives, both at the broad level of whether the link itself was desirable, and at the level of which Corridor was environmentally preferable.

3.68 In addition, the Branch was concerned that the environmental impact of all the developments associated with Eastlink were not being taken into account and that the EIS was only considering the impact of the Eastlink route itself. The Branch submission noted that the Project Concept document: 'indicates that to achieve maximum trading benefits the interconnection plan will involve many more lines than the single one now being discussed' Other lines associated with Eastlink include:

- a 78km double circuit 275kV line from Blackwall (near Ipswich) to Withcott (near Toowoomba) via Springvale;
- a second 330kV line from Armidale to Lismore (the choice of this route had not been made at the time of the Project Concept report);
- a 340km double circuit 275kV line from the Callide coalfield near Gladstone to Tarong, north of Toowoomba; and
- another line between the Hunter Valley coalfields of NSW and Springdale needed to upgrade interconnection and maximise trading opportunities.

3.69 The Branch submission stated emphatically: 'The discussion of these extra lines ... proceeds without any apparent concern for the two-, three- or four-fold increase in environmental and social impacts to be experienced on the ground. We think that the cumulative effects of the total complex should be considered now, before the first line is allowed to set a precedent for the inevitable sequence'.

3.70 The Gatton Shire Council argued it its submission that it had not been adequately consulted on the future of Springdale. Had the Council been informed that up to nine lines would converge at Springdale it would have more vigorously opposed the location. The Council argued that the EIS should have covered the impact of all lines and not just the one line associated directly with Eastlink, and that it should have been consulted on the terms of reference for the EIS.

3.71 During public hearings and inspections it was made clear to the Committee that the two power authorities were already negotiating with landholders to determine the exact route that Eastlink would take across their land. Yet the EIS has not been completed. This fact, plus the criticisms of the way in which sampling for the EIS was carried out, have led many people in the Eastlink region to conclude that the EIS is considered by the power authorities to be a mere formality and a farce.

3.72 The Committee is aware that on the one hand, the power authorities have taken a pragmatic attitude and that, on the other hand, landholders and conservationists have taken a 'worst case scenario' approach such that the views of the two groups have become very polarised.

3.73 The Committee accepts that there will be some direct environmental impact associated with the construction of this high voltage power line. The primary impact will be loss of trees through clearing of easement and resultant fragmentation of habitat. Other potential environmental impacts include soil erosion, the introduction of noxious weeds during construction and maintenance activities, the use of herbicides to control vegetation regrowth along easements, the unfavourable visual impact of the line, and impact on special heritage areas.

3.74 Of greater concern to the Committee is, however, the actions of the power authorities in determining the preferred corridor, then carrying out the Environmental Impact Statement. While the final impact statement is not due to be completed until mid-1996, it is clear that the power authorities have already chosen a specific route, if not over the whole length of the line, certainly over parts of the line. This is evidenced by the fact that some land holders have already been made offers of compensation. The practice of negotiating an easement before the Environmental Impact Statement is complete goes against recognised Environmental Impact Statement practice.

3.75 The Committee questions the practice of carrying out an environmental impact assessment of a proposal when alternatives have not been included in the detailed Environmental Impact Statement and when siting of the line is clearly going ahead before the Environmental Impact Statement is complete.