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# Farmers 'held to ransom' on lines

## Forcibly acquired land row

**EXCLUSIVE**  
**Madeleine Bower**

Farmers whose land is being forcibly acquired to build energy transmission lines are accusing a NSW government authority of using "blackmail tactics", with many saying they still do not know basic details such as who will pay rates and be liable for damages, despite being forced to sign over parts of their land next week.

It comes as the NSW government begins a review into how landholders are compensated for compulsory acquisition, with Treasurer Daniel Moohkey acknowledging current legislation was "not fit" for purpose. Mr Moohkey and Energy Minister Penny Sharpe told farmers at a meeting in Dunedoo last month the current legislation was not up to scratch, but a review would not be done in time to help them.

"It is not fit for the purpose of dealing with energy transition," Mr Moohkey said in budget estimates last Friday.

He also acknowledged that state-run EnergyCo had not been negotiating in a way that was "satisfactory", saying Ms Sharpe had since warned the authority it needed to be "a model litigant".

"Both the minister and I were clear with them that we didn't think the manner they (the farmers) were being engaged by EnergyCo was satisfactory," Mr Moohkey said.

The review will delve into the Land Acquisition (Just Terms Compensation) Act, which dictates how much private landholders who have their lands compulsorily acquired for projects such as rail, roads or transmission lines can

be compensated. A Planning Department spokesperson said the review aimed to help landholders better understand the requirements around acquisition and compensation.

"It will aim to remove areas of uncertainty and complexity... and make clear the legal rights of landholders and obligations for acquiring authorities," the spokesperson said.

Frustrated landholders accuse EnergyCo of strong-arming them into agreeing not to take their compensation claims to the valuer general.

Dunedoo farmer Stuart Hackney will have transmission lines go down the centre of his 268ha farm. The original plan would have resulted in the lines affecting the location of his grain silos and cattleyards.

After negotiating a slight change of route to avoid the silos, Mr Hackney said he was told if he did not agree, the route would revert to the original plan.

"If I fight it and go to the Valuer-General, they've blackmailed me that the route will revert to how it was in the original environmental impact statement," he said.

Central West farmer James Armstrong said he was also told the same thing after he negotiated a minor change to the route of 8km of transmission lines to go through his property, the closest of which goes 170m from his house.

A spokesperson from EnergyCo said the "preference is to secure land access via agreement where possible."

"We can't comment on individual cases, but we are working with landholders and considering individual property needs," she said.