

INQUIRY INTO IMPACT OF RENEWABLE ENERGY ZONES (REZ) ON RURAL AND REGIONAL
COMMUNITIES AND INDUSTRIES IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Hearing: 13 May 2025

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS

Ms Kathy Morris – Landowner

Initial Communication and Notification

(1) In your experience, did EnergyCo or the responsible government body provide adequate initial information about the scope, impacts, and timeline of the project?

In our experience EnergyCo did not provide adequate initial information. This was characterised by the manner of communication of the original notice. Flyers about the project were distributed by EnergyCo personnel to some land holdings in or near the proposed study area. Many of our neighbours did not find out about the project until they found various contractors trespassing on their property.

This initial flyer talked about the broad scope of the project but it was impossible to determine if your property was impacted or not. It was only by chance that a neighbour encouraged us to attend a local meeting. At this meeting, before we had confirmed our address, we were told that we didn't need to be there. We were also told that after the meeting we would get a map that would show the study area. Why not provide this map in the initial flyer? As an impacted resident that is the most critical piece of information and we had to find out about it by chance? On confirming our address the EC staff looked up a database and our address was highlighted in another colour. It turns out that we would be directly affected.

We do not understand why all properties in or adjacent to the study corridor were not sent registered mail to the address for council notices. This information should also have included that original map. It was very much like EC was trying to minimise our awareness of the project by purposely providing only vague information when more detailed information was available. This reluctance on EC's part dogged every subsequent interaction we had with them.

Quality and Consistency of Consultation

(2) How would you characterise the consistency of communication from project representatives? Did you experience contradictory or changing messages throughout the process?

In a nutshell, poor.

The example we had of contradictory information was during feedback from the initial public feedback on the proposed study corridor. We were led to believe that by their communications that the proposed corridor appeared to go down our eastern boundary that we shared with the Hare Krishna farm. After the feedback was collated, we were contacted by EC and told that they had considered our request to move the line east (we had asked that it be moved over grazing pasture) and that the line would move east. Shortly after this phone call, on the evening news, the Hare Krishna farm was celebrating because the line was being moved west and off their property. So, was the line being moved east or west? Our further

concern was that if the line did not go from the ridge top of our shared boundary, then it would consequently only move further west and closer to our home because the topography of our property would make it difficult to place a tower in certain locations.

Attending the various open local meetings, we found that staff were only willing to parrot the material freely available on the published flyers. Most of which was aimed at explaining the broader project to people not directly impacted. General statements about how the impact to the environment would be minimised and the like. But when you asked about specific circumstances or the direct impacts to your property you were met with blank stares.

But additional information did exist, sometimes a staff member would open a laptop to find something and accidentally show more detailed maps, access plans etc. Or we would meet various contractors trying to find specific locations and they would show us detailed maps with proposed line and tower placements.

(3) Can you provide examples where your requests for clear information, clarification, or documentation were either delayed, denied, or inadequately handled?

One of our issues that we had was we not provided with a clear picture of what would happen, what did the project look like from a higher perspective rather than simply our own property. EC told us that they would not show our neighbours property as this would violate their privacy. So, I organised a landholders meeting and all landholders that were affected were in attendance. We proposed 10 questions that we wanted answered and this was sent across (attachment 1). The meeting took place on the 20th June 2024 at the Cessnock library. All landholders were in attendance either in person or virtual. This meeting was a debacle. It was meant to start at 5pm and conclude at 7pm as this was when the library closed. EC staff were not ready for the meeting, had IT issues and the meeting didn't kick off until 5.25pm. We then spent 40mins being told how important this project was for NSW. At this point, we didn't care, we were either losing our homes or parts of our property without clear concise information. Of the 10 questions proposed (note that EC had 3 weeks to prepare for this meeting, they chose the date), only really one question was answered – proposed access routes. The most important question we need answering was where the towers were going to be located. This was flashed up on the screen – and from the feedback of the then CEO, the image that was presented to us was a mistake. It showed another route which would have severely impacted one of the residents and they had not been informed about this.

The meeting was meant to be recorded, this did not happen, our questions were meant to be answered this did not happen. I subsequently followed up this meeting and to date I have not had a reply.

When I asked for this meeting to take place, I was asked if I would rather be given the information and then I could pass this onto all the landholders, I was regarded as the lightning rod for this section of the project - a person in which all the landholders turn to. I was dismayed at attitude of EC, this was their job – why put it onto someone whose world had just been turned upside down?

In asking for more information on construction, build etc, we came across meeting minutes (available of the 'net) from Regional Reference Group (RRG). At these meetings, a variety of stakeholders present information to this group. We have found out that at one of the RRG meeting, construction photos from were supplied – why could we not have this information as it seems to be freely available? Why do landholders have to go digging to find this information? This project is being run like some ASIO secret spy stuff?

Fairness, Transparency, and Treatment by Authorities

(4) Have you experienced any actions by project representatives or government officials that you would characterise as coercive, aggressive, or bullying in nature?

EC staff had a tendency to note what you said in various meetings and then use your comments against you in later meetings. Such as saying you had confirmed permission for EC contractors to enter your property or that you preferred one outcome over another. EC would get upset and say things like “you said on such and such”. They didn’t consider that we are operating from a position of inexperience. Then when EC staff would tell you things, such as the inconvenience of the Wallaby pen for the construction team, they would later dismiss your notes or recollection. EC didn’t work with you to find solutions to issues, they had to be cajoled and harried. You had to convince multiple people in the hierarchy, even for solutions that would make EC’s life easier.

Another example of overreach was the request to permit contractors onto our property forth purposes of the environmental impact statement. But the form they provide to record this permission actually allowed any EC staff or contractors to enter at any time for any purpose for up to 2 years.

- I was told “when am I going to get over it”

In the middle of May 2024, we had our 1st formal meeting with EC. Present were Erika Minnaard, John Ottaway, Garth (?), Emily (?) and Shanti Heard. Peter and I were there together with our solicitor Phillip O’Hearn. This was a meeting where we were told that a tower was going on the property and a construction easement of 140m wide from north to south would be created for this project. As environmentalists, wildlife carers and generally people who have a strong connection to the land, we were horrified and shocked and the level of destruction that was going to be inflicted. In arguing our case I was told by EC representative Shanti, *when am I going to get over it, you need to move on*. I felt throughout this entire process that all the concerns that I raise are my problems and I am a problem.

- I was branded by the Communications Director as being “too angry”

We hadn’t heard anything from EC for a couple of weeks then I came upon information that EC would be attending a public community meeting in Mulbring. This is a community about 35km away from Millfield. A community not directly impacted by the HTP, but the location of the new home of the communications director. At this meeting much fanfare was made of reduction of directly impacted private landowners from 75 to 25. But again without any detail of where these “spared” land owners were. We wondered why we had to find out at an out of district meeting about news that might affect us. On pressing for details, we were told that the central region in which we live had no changes. Which left us visibly upset. We were challenged at that point by EC staff who declared that “we were too angry”

- Lunney saying any meeting with us was pointless, Kathy is too emotional

Part of the negation is to have valuers meet and discuss their valuations and come to common ground. It was also suggested to us by Erika and John that we should meet with EC’s valuer. EC’s valuer had another opinion, he suggested that “meeting with us was pointless, Kathy is too emotional”. This is despite the fact that we are both competent professionals and my husband has a master’s degree in company value management. When we finally had our meeting with EC’s valuer, he suggested that our property was worth less than neighbouring properties because recent “100 year” floods had left us flooded in. This is even though that same flood had flooded cut off the whole Wollombi valley. Our place

was/is actually very well positioned flood wise and is higher from the flood plain than any of our nearby neighbours. We tend to escape such rare events with very limited damage.

Equally we were told the presence of a permanent water source that we are free to take water from for non-commercial purposes lowered the value of our property. Despite the fact that every resident and real-estate agent will tell you the complete opposite.

EC's valuer also told that our property is worth less because it is covered in trees. That in-effect the hundreds of trees we had planted were devaluing the property. He actually suggested that our property was less valuable because it couldn't be cleared, staggeringly ignoring that the HTP plans to clear at least the middle third of the property.

Amazingly it is the features of the creek, established forest and abundant wildlife attracted us to the property and **our chief issue with the valuation process was that we would struggle to find a similar property in the same region for the money offered. At this point in time, we have not been able to and we have been looking for over a year.**

In February 2025, negotiations had stalled and EC was not moving on dollars, and we had not signed or agreed to their offer, the veiled threats started. We were told that John was looking closely at the market and reporting back to EC as to how the market was moving. It didn't matter that these properties were not like ours, but we felt threatened, and we have been told that we should be happy with what we get.

(5) Can you provide examples of interactions or decisions by EnergyCo or government authorities that you believe lacked transparency or honesty?

I feel that the process is not transparent, it is not about minimising harm, it is adversarial. EC holds all the power, all the information, their job is to remove us an obstacle. And this is done with an unsympathetic wave of a hand.

I have run out of steam, I do not feel that I can keep going. EC has sucked the life out of me. Well done EC, well done.

Attachment 1.

HTP agenda



Kathy Morris



Mon 3/06/2024 11:08 AM

ⓘ This is the most recent version, but you made changes to another copy. [Click here to see the other versions.](#)
You forwarded this message on 3/06/2024 4:13 PM.

Following our conversation on Friday, the agenda that we would like to set for the affected landholders in the central area of the HTP is as follows:

- Tower locations, with co-ordinates so that we can best evaluate potential impacts post meeting as well.
- Proposed access routes for construction and maintenance, ideally with pictures from a similar 500kV line install. How much will the roads change? How many additional roads would be built? What standard of road would be built? Who will these roads be maintained by?
- Bushfire management - firefighting access
- More explanation and clarity regarding the decision to run new transmission line rather than parallel with existing 330kV or proposed upgrades to the current 330kV line. How was this decision made? Cost? Environment?
- Land clearing for tower building, location access and easements again ideally with relevant in progress pictures.
- Does the easement need to be cleared for the running of the wires from tower to tower? We're trying to determine how much impact there will be up front on the fragile ravines and gulleys. Again, relevant videos and pictures would be a big help.
- How will impacts to fauna be monitored during clearing? Do the rules vary on the type of land being crossed (Forestry vs Private for example)? Who audits this?
- Rehabilitation of the construction easement. Over what timeframe would this occur? Who authorises that it has been completed satisfactorily?
- With the offset for deforestation are there any guidelines on what qualifies, any candidate locations currently being considered?
- Eco-studies should cover all 4 seasons – how is this going to be addressed as all landholders have very different eco-systems

As couple of the impacted landowners are Sydney based we'd like to have a video or online facility so that the Sydney sides have a reasonable option. Cessnock Library (02 4993 4399) has a conference room that is central and neutral that has this capability. We'd also expect that it's reasonable for attendees to make their own records of the meeting to facilitate any subsequent meetings with their professional advisors.

We would like to have this meeting before there is any formal communication from the Acquisitions team so that we are best prepared.

Kind regards
Kathy

RE: Copy of story | Singleton Argus



Kathy Morris



Thu 8/08/2024 5:19 PM

Thanks Kelly – I have been waiting for a call back for the last 3-4 weeks re the actual line and tower placement – you said you were going to call back in a week. Or is the project not going ahead?

Kathy

From: EC EnergyCo Hunter Transmission Project Mailbox <
Sent: Thursday, August 8, 2024 4:44 PM
To: Kathy Morris
Subject: FW: Copy of story | Singleton Argus

Hi Kathy

Thank you for sending through the article.

If you would like to discuss the matter or have any questions, you are welcome to contact me on 1800 645 972.

Kind regards

Kelly

Hunter Transmission Project community team
Energy Corporation of NSW (EnergyCo)



EnergyCo