

**For the Attention of**

**Mr Banasiak and**

**The Members of the Portfolio Committee No 4 – Regional NSW conducting the Inquiry into Impact of Renewable Energy Zones.**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit a post-hearing statement.

I am a long term resident of the Central Western Orana REZ area with long term roots in its cultural, agricultural, social and economic development. I was born in Gulgong and raised on a farm between Gulgong and Wellington. As a final year high school student, I spent 12 months on an exchange scholarship on a farm in Wisconsin USA. I completed a Law degree at ANU and have worked in private enterprise both as a solicitor and as the founding manager of Genesis Industries (Australia). Since 1987, I have owned and lived and worked on a 900 ha farm purchased by myself and my wife and situated at the back of the Burrendong Dam in the Yarrabin valley.

Our farm is located in land zoned for rural and agricultural purposes. Until recently, it has existed surrounded by working farms. It is now sandwiched between 4 projects:

- the Ungula Wind Farm (6kms),
- the Burrendong Wind Farm (6km),
- the Phoenix Pumped Hydro project (7km) and
- Piambong Wind Farm (with which we have a lengthy boundary to the north, south and east).

We are surrounded by over 240 turbines in these wind farms. The proposed size for Piambong is 230 metres in height the closest of which is likely to be less than 200 metres from our boundary. On the information we have been given, we will see about 20 plus from our house.

In addition, **the heavy vehicle transport route for the Burrendong Wind Farm** is the Council managed road which runs through our property for about 5 km. The traffic flow is very light (possibly 5 or 6 vehicles a day) on this scenic, narrow, tree lined dirt road which most would describe as a track and which runs past our house and yards. The Burrendong WF Scoping Report outlines a minimum increase in traffic movements to **300 plus per day** during a two year construction period, following which the construction of the Phoenix Hydro Project is likely to commence.

In relation to Item (a) of the Terms of Reference, the current and projected socioeconomic, cultural, agricultural and environmental impacts of projects within the CWOREZ, I say it is a *death by one thousand cuts* to all four headings.

More specifically, in relation to the impact of the CWOREZ on my community and myself, my evidence is set out below.

## General Impacts

**My host neighbours have stopped farming. When hosts sign up for wind farms, good agricultural practices such as maintaining fences and spraying weeds become a thing of the past.**

The windfarm on our eastern and northern boundaries is not built and is now called Piambong Wind Farm. It was previously the eastern arm of the Uungula Wind Farm but it was abandoned. Since the hosts farmers on our boundary signed up the first time with Wind Prospect, they essentially stopped farming the land next to us. Our boundary fences are in rough country and in places, only accessible to us through the host's farms. It is beyond our capacity to maintain these fences by ourselves. Before the hosts commitment to the wind farm, we all shared tasks relating to fence maintenance. We can make demands via the "Dividing Fences Act" and maybe engage contractors but the costs are prohibitive all round. The inability to maintain boundary fences makes it nearly impossible to keep our own stock from straying. When this occurs, they are never returned because our neighbours are essentially absent.

Weed management has been abandoned. Weeds including tussock and St Johns Wort and Tiger Pear have been left untreated and it is virtually impossible for us to stop the spread onto our land. The onslaught by uncontrolled weeds has been relentless.

**Feral Animal Control** has become impossible. We now have huge numbers of feral goats, pigs, foxes and wild dogs. They move at will across neighbouring wind farm sites where they find a safe haven. Feral animal impacts on all types of farming can and do have devastating effects on farm production whether it is a cropping or grazing (or both) enterprise. Our farm is predominantly a sheep grazing business. Pigs and feral goats exacerbate fencing problems as they can render a fence line useless in a very short time. Pigs, foxes and wild dogs in high number drastically reduce lambing percentages. Feral goat and feral deer in large number destroy carrying capacity.

With the loss of neighbours who are actively farming, not only have our fencing, weed and feral animal burdens become significantly greater, **we have lost part of the labour force which was essential for carrying on our rural enterprises.** Although farmers are very independent, sharing and helping neighbours were once requisite parts of farm business, even for corporate farms. Labour for common jobs was once shared – lamb marking, fill in shed hand or roustabout, feral animal culls, wild dog baiting, a spare set of hands whenever it was really needed. Neighbours were always ready to assist when there was equipment failure or breakdown, or a need to borrow urgent essential supplies. The breakdown of our community meant we lost these things. We also lost the last 2 shearers we had for our merino flock because they were also hosts. Shearers became increasingly hard to get and we ended up changing our operation to meat sheep.

These problems are exacerbated as a number of people in the community who could foresee the coming impacts, **sold out and left the area.** One of these, a non-host, ran and co-ordinated the wild dog baiting programme.

The numbers of people involved in local **volunteer fire fighting brigades** has become problematic because host neighbours have lost interest either altogether or, in part. Some move elsewhere to live. Many do not live in dwellings as close to the turbines as their neighbours do. In our case, the three large landowners (windfarm hosts) on our eastern boundary either live somewhere else altogether or are far enough away not to be personally impacted by such things as noise, shadow flicker etc. Our volunteer fire brigade numbers were diminishing prior to the REZ but now the stand off over renewables has practically killed them off.

Our contact with farmers where wind farms actually exist – Bodangora, Crudine, Yass, Boorowa, Crookwell and various locations in Victoria confirm this same pattern. Non host farmers adjoining the developments are more often than not left isolated and depressed. Our experience can also be validated by local real estate agents. As a Stock & Station agent from a reputable agency in Dubbo recently told me, *“After Bodangora was built, they (i.e. host farmers) just took their feet off the pedal.”*

**Our communities are fractured.** Neighbours now hosting wind farms were among our closest friends. These friendships are shattered. Now we are essentially entrenched in a pattern of “irretrievable breakdown.”

In brief exchanges with our former friends, one explained *“We are doing it for our family”* referring to the money. Another said *“I don’t care what happens. I’ll be at the beach.”* There are a few hosts and even non-hosts who say *“Oh, but it’s good for the planet”* but it’s usually an afterthought suggested by the developer.

But these people have yet to receive the anticipated “pieces of silver. **Our local hosts have been waiting 17 years for their money and haven’t received it.** Pretty much they are now all too old to ever enjoy the spoils. Three are bedridden, one from very old age, one from two strokes and one from cancer. One who sat next to me at our daughter’s wedding is aged 88 and not exactly up to enjoying the prospect of the spoils anymore. Even the next generation cannot be certain if and when the windfarms will be built.

Now the hosts are being told they could be held responsible for ‘decommissioning’ – there goes the succession plan. **All those farms now face the risk they will never be farmed again.**

Our own **succession plan has been destroyed.** We had approval for a second dwelling on the farm for our daughter and family to move home and return to the community with her family, bringing their skills with them. The approval has now lapsed-no way they’re coming anywhere near this potentially wind farm polluted valley.

Our **land values are already impacted** notwithstanding that the bulk of the developments surrounding us are not yet even under construction. Those in obvious proximity to wind and solar farms are already clearly experiencing the impacts of downward land values. There are specific examples of the destruction of the value of long held assets and people’s livelihoods.

An unconditional Contract for Sale on a nearby lifestyle block on the Yarrabin Road has just been revoked shortly before settlement when the buyer found out about the Burrendong Wind Farm. Senior Counsel was engaged by the buyer and it was argued that the marketing of the block on the basis, inter alia, of its magnificent views, was a misrepresentation given the potential wind turbines.

A major prime land farm of 4,500 acres at Bodangora has not been able to get a bid at auction. There were only 2 inspections before the auction of this long held prime real estate and the agents have not been able to achieve any inspections at all in the months since the auction.

Despite protests to the contrary, there is no doubt that **the reduction of farming land across the state as a result of REZs is significant. Most reports and figures take no account of the flow on effects of the type outlined above.** They assume that there are no impacts on farming land surrounding renewable developments and nothing could be further from the truth. Just in the case of our farm alone, 910 ha can be added to the lost agricultural land and we are a very small part of the Piambong Wind Farm neighbour area. The correct calculation should add the thousands of hectares of farms immediately surrounding the development site to the development site itself. It should then take into account the flow on effect of the loss of those areas to the agriculture related businesses within the community that depend on the agricultural base. As these services are impacted, the effect becomes cyclic because it becomes harder and harder for farmers to survive.

One of the forgotten factors in calculating the loss of agricultural land is the **impact of biodiversity offset credits.** Under the current biodiversity credit offset scheme, developers are required to buy biodiversity credits or set up stewardship arrangements for damage done in project development areas. The offset credits required are greater in number than those destroyed. This means that more farming land must be locked up in perpetuity and not farmed. The government is now reluctant to just let developers pay money into the scheme as a substitute for credit purchases. The current policy is stressing credit purchases and to actually lock up a real “like for like” area. The result is that more than double the land covered in developments will be taken out of agricultural production forever.

Other “impacts” which are reasonably/rationally foreseeable:

- *Water table impacts.* Every EIS being filed simply states that the developer will source essential water locally but there are no details of precisely how and how much water will be removed from local water tables, let alone the cumulative impact this will have. Our nearest neighbour has long boasted that their bore (in close proximity to our boundary) taps into the “great artesian basin.” She has also stated that the wind farm developer wants access to the water.
- *Micro climate impacts on our local ecosystems.* The wind industry is well aware of the micro climate impacts of wind farms. The land surface temperature changes are well established and beyond dispute. But these temperature changes are given no consideration in EIS’s in relation to surrounding agricultural enterprises. One of our neighbours is an extensive

olive plantation and a commercial olive oil enterprise. There has been no assessment of the micro climate impacts on the enterprise.

- *Impacts on animal health.* Although these are impacts which remain largely uninvestigated and unreported, they are nevertheless complained about all around the world where animal husbandry and wind farms are pushed into the same areas. I referred above to a large holding at Bodangora which has been listed for sale but has attracted no offers as a result of its proximity to the Bodangora Wind Farm. This is an historical mixed farming property with a reputation for high quality cattle. Since the commencement of operation of the wind farm, the proprietor has experienced a 30% reduction in calving success from cows depastured in paddocks adjacent to the wind farm! The local vet cannot identify the cause but the same cows and calves depastured away from the wind farm improve in condition with no reduction in calving percentages.

### **The Specific Impacts on my farm of the Heavy Vehicle Access Route for the Burrendong Wind Farm**

Our farm, Glencoe, is centred around the Yarrabin Road which runs through it for approximately 4 kilometres. The road is unsealed and narrow. The majority of the road is unfenced on both sides and our grazing paddocks which run down onto the road are managed with grids (alongside gates) to permit the uninterrupted travel of any traffic on the road. The Road has always been classed as a minor public road and has been maintained by the Mid Western Regional Council. The traffic flow is very light as the road is not used as a connecting road between any villages or towns per se. The traffic is largely resident landowners only. The approximate present traffic flow is about 10 vehicles per day and 4 of those trips are neighbours going to and from the school bus.

In relation to the general workings of the farm, the road runs through our prime ewe grazing paddocks. From the point of view of working the wider farm, this is the prime area we frequent on a day to day basis for weed and pasture control and for checking on stock. Stock, pasture and dams are all likely to be impacted by noise and dust.

Our working yards with small holding paddocks, associated watering dams, stock yards and shed about the Yarrabin Road at its southern end. The actual yards and shed are about 90 metres off the road at this point. To the best of our knowledge since the construction of the Burrendong Dam in 1957 (and always by us since 1987), the existing portion of the Yarrabin Road that runs from our north western boundary to our sheep yards and shearing shed (3.2 km) has been used by the owners of Glencoe for mustering livestock from the paddocks through which the road runs, into the sheep yard holding paddocks, with gates directly from the road into these holding/working areas. Construction of the road upgrades will necessitate significant change in the management of the farm and making mustering and stock movement much more difficult.

Our home is about 400 metres from the road.

Council requires that the road be sealed and the proponent has now acknowledged that the roadside paddocks will need to be fenced off from the road. This will cut off our eastern paddocks from our western paddocks and render the latter largely useless. It will cut off dams which are located on one side of the road from the other. Movement of stock across the newly fenced bitumen road will be difficult given projected traffic numbers. Movement up or down the road will be all but impossible. This means that stock movements to and from the working yards will be much longer and more difficult as they will need to be taken kilometres around through hilly areas. This will also periodically be impossible as the road provides the only concrete causeway through flood prone creeks on the property.

The works proposed by the proponent involve:

- Permission, licence or consent to alter or close the existing road reserve and to replace it with a different and extended road reserve, over areas which are presently our private property;
- Consent or licence (for unknown persons) to enter and be on our private land to carry out all necessary works to build the road depicted in the maps received, the extent of such entry and work being uncertain but far wider than the scope of the road reserve;
- destruction of fences, dams, gates, and grids;
- destruction of mature trees, shrubs and remnants of woody box gum areas;
- nuisance, noise, dust etc during construction impacting our home and our workplaces;
- significant interference with our capacity to carry on our sheep grazing enterprise during construction; paddocks adjacent to the road would be unusable;
- long term changes to (and interference with) our stock and farm management practices;
- transformational (and in our view, detrimental) changes to our amenity; and
- Consent now to all of the above matters commencing on an undefined date (2025? 2026? 2027? 2028? ...) with immediate works to be effected by an as yet unagreed entity (Council?) for and on behalf of an as yet unknown entity (Ark? AGL?) to continue for an undefined period, followed by permanent alterations to and interference with our capacity to run our farm.

After the road has been constructed, we would be subject to significant and intrusive oversized, heavy and light vehicle movements. The figures are difficult to accurately determine from the EIS. Although there will be peak and lighter periods, we are looking at a minimum of about 2 years of intensive disruption nominally peaking at over 300 vehicle movements per day. Following completion of the wind farm, there will inevitably be higher traffic levels as the sealed road (which will be used by employees of the wind farm) will become a viable traffic route between Mudgee/Bathurst and Wellington or Dubbo. It will also be used by the projected Phoenix Pumped Hydro project.

Our amenity and our capacity to carry on our sheep enterprise will be significantly impacted. In the short term, during road construction and, probably, through wind farm construction, it will be impossible for us to operate on our present stock

numbers. Once sheep numbers are significantly reduced in this manner, it takes some years to build up flock numbers afterwards and there is an inevitable loss of good breeding stock.

No compensation has been offered by the project manager for Ark Energy. He has advised us that he is pursuing “compulsory acquisition” notwithstanding that Council is the Authority for the road and Council has declined to.

## **Final Comments**

Who is responsible for our electricity powered national energy market system NEM, including generation, transmission, distribution and cost? Who is responsible for the so-called “energy transition”?

There is no central authority. The “authority” is as follows:

- The Prime Minister of Australia;
- The federal Energy Minister;
- The Premiers of Queensland, NSW, Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania;
- The Chief Minister of the ACT;
- The Energy Ministers of the above states and territories.

There are various statutory authorities and regulatory organizations including but not limited to:

- Australian Electricity Market Commission (AEMC);
- Australian Energy Market Operator (AEMO);
- Australian Energy Regulator (AER);
- Clean Energy Regulator (CER)
- Energy Security Board (ESB).

Other connected bodies are now:

- ACCC;
- ASIO (cyber security matters – solar panel chips);
- FIRB (Federal Investment Review Board);
- Climate Change Authority.

In NSW, we also have:

- The Department of Planning;
- Transgrid;
- Energy Co.

Since the 2020 *Electricity Infrastructure & Investment Act* we have added:

- Energy Co – Infrastructure Planner;

- AEMO Services – Consumer Trustee;
- The Australian Energy Regulator – Regulator;
- Electricity Infrastructure Fund;
- A Scheme Financial Vehicle;
- A Financial Trustee;
- The Minister for Planning, the Minister for Energy & Climate Change;
- The Department of Planning & Infrastructure;
- A couple of Parliamentary Committees and Boards;
- An Agriculture Commissioner (200 plus meetings since appointment and not yet left Sydney); and
- An Ombudsman.

Since November 2023, the *Climate Change (Net Zero Future) Act* –

- Net Zero Commissioner and potential for 6 more Commissioners.

The above lists are by no means complete. All of these bodies need to coordinate with each other in relation to the transition. This has produced an administrative excess, enabled critical problems to be avoided by ongoing referrals elsewhere and resulted in an absence of transparency. It has enabled the avoidance of dealing with basic technical issues other than by way of more plans and hyperbole. It also means that it is impossible to determine with whom responsibility lies or to whom complaints or expert comments should be addressed. As the system is not transparent, it is not possible to objectively assess important matters including the costs of the proposed transformation or the real extent of subsidies. The only things which are clear are, firstly, that the administrators are patting themselves on the back about what they are going to do while the basic problems are unsolved and indeed, unsolvable. Secondly, that the State government is hell bent on urgently *getting on with it* .

The question we must ask is “Why?”

The system proposed **will not work**. It will not work because of technical issues.

There are many technical and engineering based reports from around the world that support the fact renewables power systems fail to deliver and will never work due to technical issues. Proponents and those who make a living from trying to solve the issues are happy to claim it can and will be all worked out “at some time between now and the end of time,” but that is not good enough.

I illustrate my point by bringing just one engineering report to everyone’s attention. It is an AEMO report titled “Engineering Roadmap to 100% Renewables FY 2024, Priority Actions.”

The Report says that information collated from engineers and stakeholders resulted in identification of over “**300 engineering gaps**” in getting the renewables system from where it was in December 2021 to where it needs to be to function without fossil fuelled synchronous generators.

The writers have identified 174 “actions” needed to be progressed. They state that progress has been made but, underwhelmingly, the progress is mostly about more plans, with very few, if any, people getting their hands dirty.

It is acknowledged in the report that Australia needs a large influx of **more skilled engineers** and **new technologies**. It is acknowledged that even if the roadmap infrastructure is built, then new problems will emerge and will have to be solved. The writers do not know if the emerging problems can ever be solved. To top it off, one of the “actions” needed is ‘weather monitoring infrastructure” including “collaboration between the Bureau of Meteorology and AEMO to develop a sustainable business model for acquiring, curating and releasing new weather observations that will provide enhanced *nowcasts* and forecasts for the energy sector.” As a farmer, I say “good luck with that.”

Billions of dollars have been earmarked to be spent and it is acknowledged that from within Australia we neither have the workforce or the material resources or the technology to make it happen.

There is no forum (including the court system) for us or other Australian citizens to have a transparent public debate about the reality of these technical engineering issues. There is no capacity for your average working Australian to be properly informed. We are being propelled by political and ideologically committed proponents to accept this so-called energy transition and that it can be done and must be done. But engineering reports prove that it is a “dream” we are expected to pay for.

The recommendation of myself [as well as the community groups the CWOREzist Inc., and the Burrendong SOS] is that a complete moratorium be put in place on all further renewable energy development in NSW for a minimum of two years until this gigantic mess can be debated in a forum not dominated by government paid bodies (such as the CSIRO). There are literally thousands of reports, articles and studies from appropriately qualified people all around the world which describe the technical and engineering problems relating to renewable energy sources that inhibit it from ever being fit for purpose in this century.

I have not addressed the Supplementary Questions as they are directed at hosts receiving financial rewards for hosting renewable energy projects.

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