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**From:** Kathy Morris  
**Sent:** Monday, 19 May 2025 7:24 AM  
**To:** DPS Hansard; Chris Dorahy  
**Cc:** Portfolio Committee 4; ElectorateOffice Cessnock  
**Subject:** RE: Inquiry into the impact of renewable energy zones on rural and regional communities and industries in NSW - Witness confirmation and link to witness briefing video

Dear Chris

I wanted to pass on my deepest thanks for allowing me to be involved on Tuesday. I am sorry that I missed talking to you in person.

Attached is my statement – I have added a couple of extra paragraphs to expand upon a couple of questions that I was asked.

I do not understand why this situation that we find ourselves is so hard. I don't have answers for everything but we seem to miss one of the simplest human needs that we all want, and that is to be heard and acknowledged. I am a reasonable person, I am a conservationist, and therefore I believe that we need to change our energy production to something that is more sustainable. I have listened, I have read, but no-one that I have asked in EnergyCo can put their hand on their heart and say this is the most efficient, well thought out project. I feel that our haste will be our downfall – and I would hate for it to end up like the Snowy Hydro's Hunter Gas Power Station Project.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Kind regards

Kathy

Our direct experiences of the activities of Energy Co. have been of a disorganised, self-contradictory, mostly unfeeling, mostly unlistening entity that is miserly with facts and seeks to overreach and bludgeon affected landowners into submission by their seeming unwillingness to act in any reasonable way.

The community engagement has been inconsistent, adversarial and unsupportive

One thing that is made very clear to us affected residents is that the NSW State Government and by extension its agent Energy Co. (EC) have all the legal power to acquire land without our agreement to build infrastructure. That the only options available to affected landowners are a series of diminishing returns and uncertainties including Valuer General and the Land and Environment Court.

At no stage have we been supported and reassured that we would be taken care of. At all times we have been given the impression that we are problems in the way of their working day.

We have been told that we are too emotional about the loss of our home, I have been told I am too angry, and when am I going to get over this? I have been told that I should be happy with what I get. The best understanding EC seems to offer is that our feelings are an inconvenience, we are an inconvenience in their day and any concerns we raise is our problem.

The whole approach of EC is adversarial. If you want straightforward information about how the project is carried out you are met with questions in turn about why we would want such information and promises to provide it "later", a later that never eventuates. I thought that EC is a public body serving the people of New South Wales but it acts like its activities are state secrets and we are spies for an opposing government. They do not talk openly and honestly with us and these are missed opportunities as we know the land, we are actually rational people that can contribute to solving the issue that the government has.

As part of Just Terms, there is time provided for mediation. But the approach is not an approach to see impacted landowners restored or reinstated. It is equally adversarial, and the negotiation start point is set by EC's valuer. Their valuer is nominally independent but has been selected by EC through long practise in providing such support for the Government. Their view is nearly always miserly and an unwillingness to be motivated by subsequently tendered evidence to see landowners re-instated. EC uses this valuer as a foil and hides behind their nominal independence. This independence also means there is no authoritative oversight on their valuer's work. There is no recourse to 3<sup>rd</sup> party reasonableness. Ultimately the only way out of any impasse in this negotiation phase is move to the Valuer General (VG) who may or may not take any of the previous discussions in account.

**NSW is the only state or territory that does not offer compensation on a reinstatement basis. Why can we not have enough compensation so that displaced owners can live and work similarly in the same neighbourhood, with the same accesses to services and amenity that they had previously. This should be provided as a pro-active service to the impacted owners with their preferences taken into account and alternative houses or land sought on their behalf, rather than something the landholder has to bargain with EC for and then compete in the real estate market for themselves.**

We are now at the stage of accepting EC's offer. This has been done under duress and with veiled threats being made "we are watching the market very closely and current sales are being evaluated against the offer made to you"

We have requested certain conditions for our acquisition – 50% up front so we can find something and start negotiating and a longer settlement as we are finding extremely difficult in finding a place that meets our requirements. We don't have the funds to buy simply but another place.

One might say that the conditions were accepted – 49% not 50% just to show power?, but EC's lawyers did not complete their tasks correctly sent a contract to EC for review, EC didn't complete their tasks correctly and the review the contract to the agreed terms, and so now we are talking again about releasing this advance payment – why do we need to pick up on these mistakes? I didn't realise I was on payroll? **And we have been informed that this next process will take 4 months – why? And this is just to get to exchange.**

We are drained. We are at the mercy of a faceless organization that only provides lip service. I have heard on Tuesday that everyone has consultation fatigue – that is a slap in the face – the level of consultation that we have experienced surmounts to zero – whenever they have been there to 'listen and consult' it has only been to reply, they haven't listened to our concerns.

I wanted to follow up a couple of questions that I feel I could have answered better. Emma Hurst asked about compensation and the differences within the properties values. I understand what market value is, what the Just Terms Compensation Act is based on – EC's valuer clearly stated that the value of any land is based on who is willing to buy it, who wants it. I suggested that EC **needs** this land? Between my neighbor and I, there was a \$500,000 difference in valuation. I am on 50 acres, my neighbor on 30-35 acres. I am on heavily forested property, my neighbour fully cleared. We have been told the value of our property has been impacted by 3 main factors:

1. The creek can flood and this is a problem (to us) as the bridge can go under and we cannot get out. There has been 2 large floods of recent, 2007 and 2020 where the bridge was not passable for a number of days (5-8). Other than that, the

bridge may go under for a day, a few hours, and this has happened about 4 times in 9 years. The large floods left Wollombi an island and blocked off access to the town of Millfield, so it was problematic for everyone including my neighbor.

2. We are off the road – our driveway is a shared driveway with 2 other properties, about 650m long. This is detrimental to the value of our property. Our neighbor is 30m from road. Privacy is not valuable.
3. Cleared land. The reason that our neighbour's land is so much more valuable is because it is cleared, you can 'ride a pony' around on it, and this is straight from the Valuer. I suggested that EnergyCo will be clearing the land as they choose. They will be able to ride a pony around it.

We have found it extremely difficult to find another property. We have access to power, postage and garbage. We are 17km from town. If we run out of milk, we can go into town without too much thought. There are no other properties like ours. Our options at the moment, ironic as they are, are to move further away and off grid. We are leaving our beautiful home for a transmission line, a power supply that we cannot even access.

The second point that I wanted to add to was around stress. This might be hard to read. When we were being pressured to accept EC's offer, my relationship started to suffer. We have fought so hard to get information for ourselves and our neighbours about this project. We have been vocal simply because we have felt the divide and conquer tactics that EC have used could have isolated community members at a time when they were the most vulnerable. I do not know if this has been detrimental to our cause. Definitely it has caused friction between my husband and myself, all we have spoken about for the last 18 months is what is EC going to do next. I have also felt that EC behaviour towards us has become personal because I have been called angry and emotional. They are personal attacks. I have felt powerless, my concerns ignored and simply worthless. I have questioned if my personal actions have put us in a worse position, I have questioned 'wouldn't it be better I wasn't here'. This is a dark place to be in. I might present in one manner but I question my existence. I sought assistance from the support that is offered to landholders. I found it useless. In a conversation with EC, I told them that I sought assistance and the person I was speaking to told me that this was his job, to find those support services. I told him that they were not worthwhile. He did nothing. He didn't offer any other support. As a human being, if someone told me that what I offered was not suitable, I would be asking what, else could I do? This is how EC listens, and they talk about consultation fatigue, shame on them.