

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

NEW SOUTH WALES

Hearing: 17 July 2025

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS

Voice for Walcha (Submission 56)

(1) You noted that megafires in 2019–2020 were completely overlooked in planning. Should a REZ ever have been placed next to a high-risk National Park?

Answer:

In our view, it is certainly the case that a REZ should not be located against National Parks. In the case of the New England REZ, the Oxley World Rivers National Park, incorporating the Gondwana World Heritage Area, lies directly on the eastern boundary of the New England REZ. Following drought condition in 2019, wildfires moved from East to West, up the gorges through the Oxley Wild Rivers National Park. Water bombing from helicopter was a crucial strategy to suppress these fires in areas that are totally inaccessible by road (by fire trucks and other equipment).

We have spoken directly to the contractors that are involved with aerial firebombing, and they are very clear about their position – they will NOT fly anywhere near or through a Wind project, if there is cloud or smoke. It is a NO-FLY ZONE.

Winterbourne Wind Project is one example of where this poses a real risk to life and property. Winterbourne Wind, like the REZ, lies on the boundary of the National Park. The problem lies with the fact that the water supply is to the west of the project area and the fire risk is to the east, in the National Park. To carry water to the project area incurs a significant detour and travel time addition – impacting the ability to effectively fight the fire. This places additional risk to life and property on the boundary of the National Park.

In addition to the hinderance to fire-fighting a bushfire in the National Park from the air, is the added risk of fires starting from a wind project that lies directly alongside a National Park. Many fires have started in the gearbox of the wind powered generator, if maintenance is not carried out properly, or if there is a catastrophic accident. This can start grass fires below the generator which may travel, or commonly, wind borne ignited oil and grease can travel from the generator and ignite further grass or brush fires.

Further more, there are other risks and impacts of locating renewable projects alongside National Parks;

- Erosion runoff from earthworks for roads and foundation construction, running into waterways into and through the National Park.
- Biological risk of weeds being spread into the National Park area, as areas of disturbed and bare ground following earthworks propagate weed burdens, in addition to possible introductions from the many vehicles entering the project sites
- In the case of solar projects, chemical contamination risk from leached solar panels, or from plastics, especially Bisphenol A, (BPA) from leading edge erosion of turbine blades. These chemicals, if located upstream of National Park areas, (as is the case with the Oxley Wild Rivers National Park) will leach into these National Park waterways.

Kind Regards,

Voice for Walcha

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(2) You've called out the lack of transparency in REZ submissions. Should EnergyCo be compelled to publish community feedback and how it shaped the outcomes?

Answer:

We have always asked for transparency, as well as genuine consultation. From the very beginning of the formation of the REZ, this has been poorly lacking.

We have asked Energy Co if there was any consultation with our community prior to the formation of the New England REZ, as they had claimed publicly that there was. We were told that a public submission process was conducted. We asked for evidence, and we asked for a copy of any of the submissions that were made from our community.

While we accept that there may have been a submission process of the Renewable Energy Zone Declaration, we were certainly not made aware of it, Energy Co have not provided any evidence to inform the public of this process, and we are still unaware of anyone in our community being made aware of the process.

We are still unable to sight any submissions that were made, as energy Co refuse to display these submissions – even in redacted form.

We provide the following unaltered email evidence of this communication. Note, this is part of an email chain with other follow up requests and messages in between having been removed, for the purpose of being concise.

\_\_\_\_\_Email to Mat Morris, requesting evidence of the submission process\_\_\_\_\_

**From:**

**Date:** Saturday, 13 July 2024 at 8:07 AM

**To:** Mat Morris

**Subject:** RE: Meeting with Doug Parris

Hi Mat,

I am looking for some information that we would like before we meet with Doug.

1. Where can I find EnergyCo's most recent plan for the New England REZ? Short and long-term. I am reading conflicting information when reading AEMO's ISP compared with EnergyCo information. The most recent information I can find from EnergyCo is the NSW Network Infrastructure Strategy and it is very outdated.

If you are genuinely conducting community consultation this information should be available. We should not have to wait until the Scoping Report is published. This is information I would like to have and understand before we have our meeting with Doug.

2. Could you also direct me to some very old information. In the NSW Network Infrastructure Strategy, it says the process to identify network options benefited from the feedback of host communities received during the exhibition of the REZ declaration. Can you please tell me where I can access those submissions and feedback.

Thank you Mat.

Kind regards

Rachel

**Rachel Greig**

\_\_\_\_\_ Response from Energy Co \_\_\_\_\_

**From:** Mat Morris

**Sent:** Monday, 29 July 2024 4:35 PM

**Subject:** Re: Information Request

Hi Rachel,

I have been advised that the submissions for the New England REZ declaration received from the public exhibition period in 2021 were never made publicly available and will not be made so. I appreciate that you may not be happy with this response, and I can certainly note that on the project VfW file.

On a more informative note, it is hoped that the Scoping Report will be available on the DPHI major portal on Wednesday 31 July 2024. I am waiting for confirmation and will email you tomorrow, which will include a formal letter of notification and an offer to brief members of VfW on the content of the scoping report.

I look forward to catching up on Thursday morning.

**Mat Morris**

Community Engagement Manager

New England Renewable Energy Zone

**Energy Corporation of NSW (EnergyCo)**

**W** [energyco.nsw.gov.au](http://energyco.nsw.gov.au)

\_\_\_\_\_ End of Email chain \_\_\_\_\_

In addition to this, we have participated in surveys regarding the process that has occurred with the introduction of the New England REZ, and the consultation that has occurred since. We

have not sighted the result of these surveys, and we are unable to get any information about how they will be responded to.

The lack of transparency, and the lack or genuine effort to consult meaningfully, has resulted in a community that is not trusting of the organisation. It has created anxiety in our community, mental stress and extremely destructive division.

More damningly, we have no confidence of their competency, as we have often been unable to get any meaningful justification of their design process and outcomes. One example is the 4GW hub, (Central South) located 15km west of Walcha, where many projects have been proposed by a project flipper, and then abandoned, is one example of wasteful spending on infrastructure (50km of transmission detouring from the main spine, and a 4GW capacity hub) that is completely redundant. If questioned about this design, we are completely stonewalled with meaningless consultancy speak.

Kind Regards,

Voice for Walcha