



# VALLEY ALLIANCE

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

### SUPPLEMENTARY SUBMISSION

**SUBMISSION NO:** 136 (Tim White)

**ORGANISATION:** Valley Alliance

**DATE:** 6 September 2025

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### 1. EnergyCo's Misinformation Regarding Aerial Firefighting

**Question from Committee:** During your evidence, you stated that 'EnergyCo initially claimed their transmission lines would not affect aerial firefighting and that Chaffey wasn't a key water-bombing site, which they later admitted was incorrect and they had not engaged with RFS on this.' Why do you think that EnergyCo let this happen?

**Response:** In my opinion, this critical failure was a direct result of two key factors: **arrogance** and a profound **lack of expertise** within EnergyCo's project team.

This was not an isolated incident but part of a pattern of behaviour. EnergyCo had not consulted with the local community, local Rural Fire Service (RFS) fire command, or any of the regional aerial firefighting contractors. Instead, they engaged an external consultant, Dominic Adshead, who, at a community forum on 14 May 2024, incorrectly claimed that Chaffey Dam was not used for fixed-wing aerial firefighting. This demonstrated a massive lack of understanding of the local terrain and a failure to engage with local expertise. Under questioning from the audience, Mr. Adshead admitted he was a forestry, not a bushfire, expert. The subsequent strong opposition from RFS brigade captains and other community members present at the forum was ignored by EnergyCo.

This pattern of disregard continued as EnergyCo refused to acknowledge the formal objection from Tamworth Regional Council Mayor, Russell Webb, on 25 May 2025. The issue had been raised numerous times with EnergyCo and directly with Minister Sharpe during a face-to-face meeting on 29 November 2024.

The evidence became irrefutable during the significant bushfire season between Christmas 2024 and New Year 2025. Of the seven bushfires in the Tamworth Local Government Area, two were in the planned transmission corridor. Continuous aerial water bombing from Chaffey Dam was used to save lives, livestock, and property, with the operations extensively documented on social media and news programs.



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EnergyCo would have proceeded with its planned route regardless, had this not gained significant media attention during and after the bushfires. They were given numerous accounts of the serious impacts of blocking Chaffey Dam and repeatedly ignored the information in a clear effort to meet politically motivated deadlines without conducting in-depth, on-the-ground research.

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## 2. Issues Resulting in Transmission Line Location

**Question from Committee:** Was it a planning, management, or other issue that resulted in the transmission lines being built near the dam?

**Response:** The issues were a combination of both **poor planning** and **bad management**. The project was designed by engineers in a Sydney office who had never visited the region and possessed a fundamental lack of knowledge regarding local conditions.

Management did not insist on deeper research or direct community engagement. Despite evidence of growing community concern, these concerns were completely ignored. From an outsider's perspective, it appears that **arrogance** characterises EnergyCo's management. The power granted to EnergyCo by the state government and the project's strict timeline have fostered a "we will build this regardless of your concerns" mentality. EnergyCo operates as if the law and government are entirely on its side, and nothing will impede its progress.

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## 3. Claim of Consultation with RFS

**Question from Committee:** Why do you believe they initially stated they had consulted with RFS?

**Response:** I believe EnergyCo management may have engaged in a high-level consultation with the NSW RFS command to establish an overall guideline for transmission planning. However, they **definitely did not consult with the RFS on a regional or local basis**.

I believe they assumed that a high-level framework would be sufficient to cover their lack of research into regional issues. It was a statement they believed would not be challenged and provided them with a convenient way to bypass detailed, on-the-ground engagement. In short, it was a claim made to deflect scrutiny.

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## 4. Underground High-Voltage DC Option

**Question from Committee:** From your opening statement you said "Valley Alliance (VA) partnered with Syncline Energy to explore an underground HVDC option. Syncline's proposal is



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estimated to be \$1.3 billion cheaper than the overhead plan — and has 100% support from affected landholders." Could you elaborate on the underground option mentioned in your address?

**Response:** The underground option we refer to is a high-voltage direct current (HVDC) transmission plan developed in collaboration with **Syncline Energy**, an Australian company with proven expertise in Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) and underground transmission cabling.

Valley Alliance initiated contact with Syncline to assess the feasibility of an underground solution for the NEREZ transmission project. Syncline's team came to New England, personally drove what they considered to be the optimal route for underground transmission from Armidale to Muswellbrook, and then developed a comprehensive plan, a feasibility study, and a detailed budget for the project.

Following the development of this proposal, Valley Alliance organised meetings with key stakeholders, including Tamworth Regional Council, the Member for Tamworth (Kevin Anderson), the Federal Member for New England (Barnaby Joyce), Armidale Mayor Sam Coupland, and a community meeting for impacted landholders.

The community meeting, which involved farmers from Walcha to Wallabadah, resulted in a **unanimous 100% vote in favour of the undergrounding option**. Every landholder present expressed a willingness to host the underground cabling on their property. The discussions included fair compensation that would last for the life of the project, as well as addressing the technical issues that would impact farming operations.

All meetings with elected officials and councils also saw strong support for the proposal. The Syncline plan projects the cost of undergrounding to be **\$1.3 billion cheaper** than the current forecasts for the overhead transmission line.

The result is a more cost-effective project for NSW taxpayers that has the full, unqualified support of the communities directly impacted along the route. We have provided a copy of the presentation document given to Armidale Mayor Sam Coupland to be used as reference material.