

**Submission  
No 75**

## **INQUIRY INTO RURAL WIND FARMS**

**Organisation:** Country Energy  
**Name:** Mr Craig Murray  
**Position:** Managing Director  
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21 August 2009

The Hon Ian Cohen MLC  
Chairman  
General Purpose Standing Committee No 5  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Email: [gpscno5@parliament.nsw.gov.au](mailto:gpscno5@parliament.nsw.gov.au)

Dear Mr Cohen

**RE: INQUIRY INTO RURAL WIND FARMS**

Country Energy appreciates the opportunity to participate in the Inquiry into Rural Wind Farms, and strongly supports initiatives that promote renewable energy generation.

Although the Committee has specific terms of reference which are wide-ranging and cover a number of issues, our submission provides information on matters with which Country Energy is directly involved, rather than commentary on each matter specified.

**Country Energy's network**

Country Energy operates Australia's largest electricity network extending across 95 per cent of New South Wales, parts of southern Queensland and northern Victoria, with around 200,000 kilometres of powerlines and 1.4 million poles serving more than 800,000 customers.

Our distribution area is geographically diverse and includes the semi arid plains of the Far West, the snowy peaks of the Australian Alps and many coastal and sub tropical regions.

Country Energy plans to invest almost \$4 billion over the next five years to further strengthen the energy network. This includes transforming the electromechanical network into a responsive digital Intelligent Network to improve reliability, support the growth of renewables like solar and wind, and make energy efficiency simpler for customers.

Country Energy's electricity network caters for varying population sizes, from small rural areas to highly populated urban centres and it also provides for large 'spot' users and sources of energy, such as mines and wind farms.

**Facilitating connection of wind farms**

Under Chapter 5 of the *National Electricity Rules*, Country Energy is required to facilitate high voltage connections such as utility scale wind generation.

The inquiry and connection process can take between three and five years - mainly due to factors outside Country Energy's control - including the development application process, community consultation or project financing, the responsibility for which all lie with the project proponent.

Due to existing network system capability and other connection requests for the proposed location, the required capacity for an individual project may not be available.

Investment in new infrastructure to facilitate the connection may be required and, under the *National Electricity Rules*, this investment is usually funded by the proponent.

In 2008-09, Country Energy received 27 connection enquiries relating to utility scale wind generation projects. Of these inquiries, only one proceeded to a formal connection application with the remainder having not yet progressed beyond inquiry stage.

In the past two years, Country Energy has connected one wind farm to our distribution network on the NSW Southern Tablelands. This is in addition to the two existing wind farms at Blayney and Crookwell, both of which were connected to the network by Country Energy's predecessor organisations.

#### **Initiatives to facilitate renewable energy connections**

Country Energy is developing models to determine the appropriate level of embedded renewable generation that can be integrated into the network without affecting the performance of the network.

Country Energy plans to produce contour maps showing the level of connection capacity that the network can offer. This information will assist project proponents when undertaking their planning and feasibility studies.

#### **Renewable Energy precincts**

Country Energy welcomes the NSW State Government's recent announcements regarding the development of renewable energy precincts in regional New South Wales.

Renewable energy precincts - and the accompanying policy changes - will provide project proponents with more certainty, and will provide an avenue for network owners to work more closely with proponents.

However, do note that the connection application process under Chapter 5 of the *National Electricity Rules* remains the governing factor for our dealings with project proponents.

#### **Summary**

Country Energy is committed to finding better ways to manage our electricity network, and welcomes the opportunity to work closely with proponents of utility scale wind generation projects to facilitate connections to our network.

We believe that recent policy announcements by the NSW Government will enhance the approval process for wind farms, and we look forward to working with industry to develop projects in regional New South Wales.

If we can be of assistance to the Committee or if you require further information, please contact Col Ussher, Executive General Manager Infrastructure Strategy  
or via email to [col.ussher@countryenergy.com.au](mailto:col.ussher@countryenergy.com.au)

Alternatively, please feel free to contact me directly on

Yours sincerely



Craig Murray  
Managing Director