

Submission
No 41

**INQUIRY INTO FEASIBILITY OF UNDERGROUNDING
THE TRANSMISSION INFRASTRUCTURE FOR
RENEWABLE ENERGY PROJECTS**

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The Hon. Emily Suvaal,
Committee Chair,
Inquiry - Feasibility of undergrounding the
transmission infrastructure for renewable energy projects
Standing Committee on State Development
Parliament House
6 Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

10 July 2023

Dear Committee,

HumeLink will inflict untold damage to our precious wildlife and increase greenhouse gases

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to this important inquiry into the feasibility of undergrounding transmission infrastructure for renewable infrastructure projects.

This inquiry represents an opportunity to ensure better outcomes for future generations of NSW citizens and our precious wildlife.

Executive Summary

Key facts

- HumeLink has an action area of 5,714 hectares including clear-felling areas of native forests and bushland with serious impacts on habitat, greenhouse gases and global warming (Transgrid's per the referral to EPBC Act).
- HumeLink will devastate habitats and wildlife corridors for more than 80 threatened or endangered species of flora and fauna
- HumeLink towers will worsen greenhouse gas emissions through large-scale land clearing and increased risk of bushfires

Ironically, multi-billion-dollar transmission projects being carried out in the name of the environment to reduce global warming are now threatening to inflict untold damage to our precious native animals and plants through massive land clearing, destruction of wildlife corridors and increasing the risk of deadly bushfires.

With the State of the Environment report highlighting that the number of threatened plant and animal species has risen, and further extinction of Australian species is expected, it is critical all large, high-impact infrastructure projects in NSW must minimise destructive environmental impact.

In its current form, the HumeLink Tower proposal will devastate habitats **for more than 80 threatened or endangered species** of flora and fauna. At the same time, undergrounding provides a far less destructive alternative at a marginal extra cost.

HumeLink will impact approximately 5,714 hectares of land, including clear-felling areas of native forests and bushland with severe impacts on habitat, greenhouse gases and global warming (per Transgrid's referral to the EPBC Act).

Transmission towers will also increase the risk of bushfires, as highlighted in several recent bushfire inquiries, which could devastate wildlife populations and create large quantities of greenhouse gases.

Impact of wildlife

The proposed path for the HumeLink towers is home to a range of endangered, threatened and vulnerable animals, including the Koala, Booroolong Frog, Superb Parrot, Dusky Woodswallow, Gang-gang Cockatoo, Yellow-bellied Glider, Eastern Pygmy Possum, Squirrel Glider, Greater Glider, Scarlet Robin, Flame Robin, Powerful Owl, Masked Owl and Booroolong and the near threatened Spotted Quoll.

Climbing and flying threatened and protected species, such as Wedge-Tailed Eagles, are particularly vulnerable to powerlines.

Also at risk are critically endangered flora such as the Leek Orchid, Blue Tongued Greenhood, Pimelea Bracteata, a tract of the endangered ecological community, the White Box, Yellow Box woodland, remnant native vegetation areas, a nationally important wetland, and land that has been rehabilitated through government-funded Landcare projects.

The fragmentation of wildlife corridors that will occur from the current proposal, including vegetation clearance in established bio-links, will reduce the biodiversity of flora and fauna.

Greenhouse gas emissions

Destruction of wildlife habitat is only one of the environmental impacts of the current HumeLink proposal.

The clear-felling of land along the 360-metre-long, 70-metre-wide corridor of the Transgrid preferred route directly conflicts with decades of scientific research demonstrating that vegetation clearance directly contributes to a warming and changing climate. As does the manufacture of carbon-intensive construction materials, such as concrete and steel, used to build HumeLink.

The increased risk of bushfires from the HumeLink create another potential source of carbon emissions. In fact, [assessments of the damaging 2019-20 summer bushfires suggest that more than a year's worth of Australian greenhouse gas emissions](#) were released due to the more than 18 million hectares of area burnt, as much as double previous estimates.

Conclusion

It is inconceivable to think that in this century, the transmission of green power requires environmental destruction. While there is no doubt that we need renewable energy, the proposed transmission is not the answer. The cost of undergrounding is more than offset by enduring environmental benefits.

Recent costings provided by independent consultants and real-world experience overseas show that the differential cost between undergrounding and overhead transmission is much smaller than Transgrid's inflated estimates, which have already proved to be wildly inaccurate.

Taking transmission underground, as they have in Europe and California and Transgrid has recently done in Sydney's CBD, is a much more environmentally responsible option to ensure a renewable energy solution that our natural environment and future generations deserve.

I urge the Committee to recommend HumeLink and all other large scale transmission projects being undertaken be decided on what's best for our precious environment. If we are striving for green energy, we need to consider the transmission and not simply generation.

Regards,