

Submission
No 46

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

Name: Hon Pru Goward AO

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The Honourable Pru Goward AO

July 11, 2023.

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

Dear The Hon Emily Suvaal MLC,

Re: Feasibility of undergrounding the transmission infrastructure for renewable energy projects

I write to join with many others in opposing the construction of overground powerlines across the Bannister area, north of Goulburn, part of the 360 km Humelink 500kV electricity transmission line.

I note the improving cost effectiveness over time of underground powerlines, the obvious substitute for overground lines. Indeed, the mandating of underground high voltage powerlines, as they would need to be were they in the urban areas of Wollongong, Newcastle or Sydney, would underscore the commitment of the NSW Parliament to ensuring all regions of NSW were afforded the same aesthetic but, more importantly, the same safety protections as their fellow citizens in these cities. It is time the NSW Parliament supported its citizens, where-ever they live, to enjoying the same level of safety. If we can afford to rely on solar and wind power, we can surely afford to have it transmitted safely around the state.

It is also likely that were the NSW Parliament to mandate underground cabling, improved technology and reduced costs would result from it, as Humelink sought to reduce its costs over the 360 kilometres. I would encourage your committee to seek evidence from electrical engineers about the potential improvements in the cost effectiveness of underground power.

I understand the fire risks associated with overhead powerlines have led governments around the world, include in the state of California, USA, to mandate underground lines. As a former Member of Parliament for this area, I well recall the numerous bush fires allegedly sparked by birds becoming entangled in high voltage power lines like those proposed here, and the catastrophic fires which followed. Unsurprisingly, little effort has been made to quantify the safety risk of overhead high voltage transmission lines, which your inquiry has the capacity to address. However, the economic and environmental impact of bushfires in the Goulburn region are only too familiar to local people. A government which wished to govern for all the people of New South Wales should be determined to mitigate the bushfire risks of the past and, accordingly, mandate underground transmission lines.

Additionally, underground lines require minimal environmental clearance, which reduces the need for tree clearance and would not endanger the habitats of countless animals, as currently occurs wherever high voltage lines are constructed.

Australia is one of the world's richest countries, with enviable living standards and relatively cheap power. The country's commitment to green energy is commendable and the critical role of Humelink in bringing low emissions energy to Australian consumers should not be marred by a lack of social licence.

Furthermore, a failure to recognise that Australian consumers are demonstrably prepared to bear whatever marginal cost underground power represents in their energy bills, once this is amortised over millions of people and many decades, would not only be seen as a reflection on Humelink's shortsightedness, but the shortsightedness of the NSW Parliament. The NSW Parliament needs to see beyond the immediate commercial considerations of HumeLink and anticipate the long term, which will inevitably necessitate a commitment to underground power for our high voltage transmission lines and the state's transformation to a green energy generator.

Thank you for your attention,

The Hon Pru Goward AO

Former NSW Member for Goulburn, 2007-2019.