

**Submission
No 73**

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

Name: Mr Ross Smith

Date Received: 12 July 2023



Ross Smith

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

12th July, 2023

Dear The Hon Emily Suvaal MLC,

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

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

We are Glenellerslie Hereford & Poll Hereford Stud (established 1974) running 600 head of cattle on our property. The original property "Glenellerslie" was settled in 1948 by Gordon & June Smith, part of Ellerslie Estate War Service Land Settlement. In 1977 the adjoining property "Spyglass" was purchased, which already had the 330kv High Voltage transmission line running through it. The proposed Humelink 500kv high voltage line will run parallel to this line on the southern side. This area is heavily timbered hilly country.

I will attempt to address all the terms of reference.

In describing the most important issue, that of bushfire control around overhead High Voltage transmission lines, please allow me to describe my experience during the Dunn's Road fire which started 6 kilometres away because of a lightning strike in 2019/20. Please note that many fires have started in the same vicinity, the largest in the past being 1985. When the fire escaped south up the Yaven Creek Valley, all fire appliances chased it to defend homes. I had stayed to defend my home since I had a sprained wrist from driving the ATV into a wombat hole. The unattended fire burnt back towards the area already burnt in a northerly direction while spreading easterly. When the fire reached the 330kv transmission line the smoke caused the lines to arc to the ground in a very impressive light show & the sound of muffled

thunder, it was incredible frightening to witness. That was the first inkling I had that the lines were dangerous, having chased fire under them in 1985. I must have had luck on my side at that time. The fire jumped the road into our neighbour's timber & I took our old tractor & spray rig into the hill to assist those private vehicles on hand. When I returned for more water, I was surprised to find that the RFS had put a grader trail from opposite my house to our other neighbour's house & beyond with the intention of burning all of Spyglass hill we presume because of the High Voltage lines therein. I could not allow that to happen because of the build-up of fallen timber & debris under the transmission line, the result of 40 years of TransGrid maintenance being to fall the trees & leave them where they fell. This would have increased the intensity of the fire and would have burnt for days, making it difficult to hold the line if the wind got up. Fortunately for us the fire jumped into the State Forest further up the valley, so the few who were there to control the burn left. We, our neighbours, and others stopped the fire in our neighbour's before it got to the transmission line through some good old fashioned hard work. Understanding now what danger the transmission lines pose we were risking our lives travelling to and from the fire ground.

It was only afterward that I found out that RFS will not send any appliances, ground, or air, to fight fires near high voltage lines. We have asked TransGrid how they can protect us from fires burning near transmission lines and they have no answer, and as we have stated to them underground is the only way to protect us and our community, they do not disagree.

The existing 330 kv line has an easement of 50 metres, Humelink will add another 70+ metres of no-go land totalling 120 metres. I'm not sure what the RFS position is but I wouldn't go within 250 metres of them after what I witnessed. That totals 620 metres of land stretching from Batlow to Wagga and beyond where no fires can be fought or controlled in that vicinity. We did travel under them every day while fighting the fire, which meant that if we had to retreat, we would have been racing through hill country risking instant death. We already have one HV line to contend with and should not be put at further risk with another larger, more intrusive hazard.

In this scenario, why would the fire risk be more than doubled, when the safer option is to just put the lines underground. (HV/DC not HV/AC). You would think that we would be looking at alternatives that will reduce all risks rather than increasing them.

If Humelink is above ground 1.2 km x 70metres of timber (possibly more for their access) comprising Red Gum, Roundleaf gum, Stringy Bark, Kurrajong and others will have to be removed. Underground would possibly take 20 metres, although I am open to a change of easement so no or few trees need removal (for underground).

If Humelink is above ground all my land south of the 330 lines will be unavailable for the application of super phosphate or spraying of weeds by helicopter (the only feasible way), we do not want to put people at greater risk to their safety. Bushfires are more & more being controlled using aircraft. Humelink's 80 metre towers will double the height of the existing 330kv line, making it twice as dangerous for anyone flying in the vicinity.

If Humelink is above ground, it will doubly spoil the environment and in our case will completely ruin our southerly skyline which is the view through our kitchen window. The 330kv lines there at present have always been there for us but are mostly nestled into the hill & timber so don't stand out as much as the new monsters will. We have significantly increased the number of trees in that area since we purchased it. The cumulative, negative impacts are excessive.

We worry about our pregnant cattle that we run in the hill to give them plenty of exercise pre calving. There has not been enough study on the effects of stray power from AC lines on the effect on the unborn foetus, and we believe there may be some detrimental effects.

I understand that because my boundary fence runs parallel to the proposed Humelink power line then it may become live. This is not appropriate.

Undergrounding Humelink and future high voltage transmission lines via HV/DC will:
eliminate risk of cables causing fire in high winds!
eliminate fire control hazards in the next fire event, by air & by ground!
eliminate risk of interruption of power transmission in severe weather events or bushfires!
minimal impact to land after construction is complete!
no cables hanging overhead to impose on agricultural operations and recreational flying!
no visual impact!
little to no electromagnetic field impacts!
a much-reduced size of easement!
removing opposition to Humelink will allow the construction to begin!

Delay on undergrounding Humelink and other transmission projects will only have a huge impact on the delivery time frame if TransGrid continue to espouse above ground lines which equals more opposition with landholders having to be dragged kicking & screaming through the courts.

Underground however equals no opposition and I for one will be there with the shovel to help get started.

Thank you for our chance to have an impact on this important nation building structure.

I urge the Standing Committee to recommend that undergrounding is the best way forward for renewable energy transmission in NSW. As we transition to net zero emissions, we need environmentally responsible transmission as well as generation.

Yours sincerely,

Ross Edward Smith
Member Darlow Bushfire Brigade 1970 to present.
Vice-Captain Darlow Bushfire Brigade since 1977.
Captain Darlow RFS 2017 to 2019.

GLENELLERSLIE HEREFORDS

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