

Submission
No 116

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

Organisation: Batlow Community and Cultural Association Inc.

Date Received: 14 July 2023

The BCCA

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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

Thursday 14th 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 feasibility of undergrounding the transmission infrastructure for renewable energy projects.

Batlow Community and Cultural Association Inc (BCCA) is a not-for-profit community organisation providing civic leadership to the Batlow community. As part of our objects, we aim to stimulate the ongoing economic community, social and cultural prosperity of the community of Batlow and its environs; and to advise Council on policy matters affecting Batlow, its residents, and its environments, including town planning and development proposals.

Our town and its surrounds are bursting with prime agricultural diversity and sits adjacent to Australia's largest Alpine National Park, as well as Australia's largest pine plantations. All these must be protected at all costs. Our committee has been approached by many community members regarding the proposal of erecting overhead transmission structures for renewable energy projects in our region and within view of our town.

If the power lines go up as proposed, this could have serious repercussions for our landholders that are directly impacted by having them on their properties, and for those nearby who can see the transmission lines and the visual pollution they will create.

The BCCA committee is most concerned about this project for the following reasons:

- The impact on the livelihood, investments, and lifestyle of those landholders directly affected by the proposed overhead power lines on their property. Overhead power infrastructure will also most likely increase insurance premiums due to increasing fire risks.
- The degradation of land values for both landholders directly impacted and the surrounding areas.
- The potential of creating bushfires should any arcing to the ground occur.

Should a bushfire be in the region, overhead powerlines will restrict access to emergency services and fire fighting as smoke and moisture from a nearby fire have the potential to increase arcing from the lines and ground.

This region has already been hit with a major disaster from the Dunns Road fire and the proposed overhead infrastructure once installed would increase the risk of bushfires.

Following the Dunns Road fire, it will take decades for our forests, which are a major source of employment and income, and as such tourism is being looked at as having the potential to sustain the community in the meantime and into the future.

- Visual pollution in the area would have a great impact on tourism as investors are less likely to come to our region and some existing landholders who are looking at this option are now reconsidering and reluctant to invest. Apart from that, visitors and potential residents are less likely to come.

BCCA is not convinced about the projected cost comparisons of going underground versus overhead. Obviously, companies involved in the project are claiming overhead transmission is less expensive to install, however, they would be looking at maximising their returns to shareholders at what may be a great cost to our region, its primary producers, and our environment. Whilst going underground may initially be dearer although that's questionable, it would have long-term benefits in terms of our region's prosperity and the safety of our environment, especially considering we are next to a major national park.

In summing up underground energy infrastructure reduces the environmental impacts as the corridor for vegetation clearing is less during construction and operations; it can follow some existing roads and corridors; is less likely to start fires; would have a lesser impact on existing farming and forestry enterprises; and far less likely to damage the aesthetic and livability quality of our region.

The Federal Minister for Climate Change and Energy Minister, Chris Bowen did state that running a line underground "can be a solution in various places for various issues". Surely this is the case here!

We 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 to be environmentally and socially responsible in the way we transmission power as well as generate it.

Sincerely,

pp. Tonya Valentino

Ray Billing

Ray Billing, Chair
BCCA