

**Submission
No 164**

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

Name: Mr Alexander Tobin

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Alexander Tobin

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

13 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.

I am a husband, a son and brother-in-law to landholders, a proud father of two and a local community member.

I was born and bred in the city before following my heart to the country where I have been blessed to be welcomed into a family and surrounding community. I couldn't muster live-stock, drive a tractor or even put in a fence post, but despite being a fish out of water I will never forget how I was welcomed into a country family and community with open arms. I am now blessed to call this place home.

Hearing stories of hardship and resilience in these towns going back to when soldier settlers built livelihoods to raise families and build communities, I have also witnessed firsthand how hard life on the land can be. I have witnessed drought, flood and bushfires which debilitate peoples livelihood, as well as the social impacts of the COVID-19 epidemic. The ripple effect

of hardships travels for miles and miles within these areas, as does the network of community support to keep one another afloat during such times. These communities do their best to 'get on with it'. It is in their blood, it is part of their culture, it is part of their love for the land that they work upon. It is within their values to continue the legacy of their ancestors who worked so hard and selflessly their whole lives to provide for the current and future generations.

I have come to appreciate and respect how much these rural areas have contributed to people in cities and how much they will continue to do so for generations to come. Food on our tables, preservation of our country's natural beauty and the warm hospitality when people want things such as a much needed 'city escape'.

I have been educated on the potential implementation of the Humelink Project for overhead lines which will impact many landholders and communities. These communities have given so much and will continue to provide essential needs for cities. They and their future generations truly deserve their homes, their memories and their way of life to be protected. They don't deserve an old fashioned way of doing things, they deserve to be part of our Australia that is keeping up with the rest of the world by using the latest technology to provide the best possible future for all Australian's by undergrounding Humelink.

I have witnessed firsthand the psychological impact on family and community members who would be impacted by proposed overhead powerlines. I have worked as a Mental Health Clinician for the past 20 years and it is well known that psychological illness not only impacts the mind, but it also impacts physical health and social/cultural health in a negative way. If a family member is mentally unwell, it becomes a shared problem with a whole family and can impact communities. I have witnessed firsthand this occurring to community members as well as people I love within my own family. The precipitating proposal of overhead powerlines has created a level of anxiety that was already predisposed by past traumas of natural disasters, the COVID-19 epidemic and loss of young community members to death by suicide which is statistically higher in these rural areas in comparison to urban areas. Even as an experienced mental health clinician, I have been impacted by my family's mental health challenges because of the proposed powerline impact upon my own wellbeing. Having good mental health is important for everyone, but especially important for people like me working as a mental health clinician to ensure people I treat receive a high quality of care that they deserve.

Since the proposal of overhead lines was first proposed, I have witnessed family and community members show significant changes in some areas of their usual functioning, showing signs of emotional distress and in some cases early expressions of suicidality and becoming a danger to themselves. Although many have shown resilience and sort profession support in their recovery to manage their mental health, the perpetuating factor of overhead powerlines will remain a barrier to maintaining good mental health and well-being in their future. I worry of the prognosis those who don't seek professional support due to stigma and ability to obtain support under a mental health system already under strain, particularly in these rural areas.

My wife and I recently joined the NSW Rural Fire Service, inspired by the community who stood together against the incomprehensible Dunns Road fire. As overhead powerlines limit the ability to control fires above or from the ground, it places greater risk on volunteer firefighters, especially inexperienced ones like my wife and I. It does not feel morally right that I strongly consider withdrawing my wife and I from the NSW Rural Fire Service due to unnecessary risk, risk that could be mitigated by putting transmission underground.

To use an analogy, major road upgrades such as underground tunnels within Sydney are costly but improve quality of life and have long term gains associated with them for the future. They not only provide a better-looking city landscape, they make things easier for all who live within and visit the city from near and far. If people can get to and from work quicker via a tunnel, they spend less time driving which is better for our environment and better for that person's wellbeing. They can spend more time with at home with family and have more time to prioritise their health and wellbeing. If emergency vehicles can get from one point of the city in less time to prevent a tragedy or to simply save a human life, then this would be considered money well spent. Underground transmissions would be money well spent. When it comes to wellbeing and safety, our rural citizens deserve no less than those living within our cities.

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

Yours sincerely,

Alexander Tobin