

**Submission
No 172**

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

Name: Mr Blake Smith

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Dear The Hon Emily Suvaal MLC,

As a next generation farmer and future landowner who is currently being affected by the current overhead 330kv transmission line and proposed 500kv line, I will describe the fundamental importance in which future and present transmission lines must be placed underground.

The 2019/20 Dunn's Rd bushfire devastated our region to the point it has scarred many including myself. Even with over 15 years firefighting experience it wasn't until the fire headed south that I understood the sheer magnitude and horror of what the 330kv transmission lines are capable of. After witnessing the transmission line arcing multiple times to the ground creating shockwaves and explosions which erupted into monstrous fireballs, it is this and having the daunting and impossible task of fighting the fire in proximity to these towers over the next several days that still give me night terrors to this day.

The ideology that safely managing bushfires in proximity to overhead transmission lines is an understatement to say the least, the fact is there is no management plan. When you incorporate the existing and proposed transmission lines this creates a dangerous super highway over 300m wide which includes the minimum safe distance and 100's of km's long for not only power transmission but fire. This in itself makes it an impossible task considering the length that you must control either side of the transmission lines and the width which not only includes the 50 and 70m easements in which land is cleared but also the minimum safe distance on either side which equates to 180m+ of dense timber and bush that you cannot enter to extinguish the bushfire. To people who may not understand this is beyond ludicrous, safely managing bushfires with transmission lines does not exist, hence undergrounding is the only way forward.

Not only do landowners/volunteer firefighters have to put their lives on the line under transmission lines but they may be unknowingly putting themselves at risk, unknowingly being under the transmission lines during fires can and does happen considering when smoke causes extremely low visibility and under high stress situations chasing down a fire, noticing high voltage transmission lines 35-85m above you which can span over a km between towers is unavoidable. A real example was when I witnessed the 330kv transmission line arc to the ground, it was only a matter of 15 minutes before a cat 7 fire tanker was under the transmission line extinguishing the fire along the road only 50m from where it arched.

In summary transmission lines operate with high voltages, fire fighters are at a great risk of electric shock. There is no effective method of fighting fires near high-voltage transmission lines to ensure the fire fighters are safe, undergrounding does.

Honestly after what I've seen and been through fighting bushfires it is a miracle that no injuries or fatalities have been caused by overhead transmission lines in our area. The proposal of another overhead transmission line not only substantially increases the chances of harm to people but also brings with it the devastation of frequent occurrences like we saw in 2019/20 bushfires. The probability of serious injury and death not only from high voltage but the ability to create an environment designed for the distribution of uncontrollable bushfires.

At the end of the day the option for undergrounding is the most viable option not only financially in the long term but no disturbances to energy transmission from weather events/fire, ability to extinguish bushfires without the certainty of loss of housing, farm land, infrastructure and most importantly life because this isn't just about the significant risks of being electrocuted but the deaths and injuries directly contributed by the inability to control bushfires.

Yours faithfully,

Blake Smith