

Submission
No 251

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

Organisation: Hills of Gold Preservation Inc

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PRESERVE HILLS OF GOLD

HILLS OF GOLD PRESERVATION INC.
87 JENKINS STREET NUNDLE NSW 2340

19th July, 2023

Legislative Council Standing Committee on
State Development inquiry into and report on
feasibility of undergrounding the transmission infrastructure
for renewable energy projects

To whom it may concern,

Resident and landholder advocacy group Hills of Gold Preservation Inc make the following public submission to the Inquiry into the Feasibility of under grounding the transmission infrastructure for renewable energy projects.

Our members have been drawn into gaining knowledge about energy transmission and generation infrastructure planning since 2018 when developers publicly proposed Hills of Gold Wind Farm near Nundle, in north west NSW.

Proposed Hills of Gold Wind Farm is not in the New England Renewable Energy Zone. However our organisation is represented on Responsible Energy Development for New England, and our members have attended energy forums hosted by NSW Farmers' Association, Energy Corporation of NSW, and Department of Planning and Environment at Walcha, Uralla and Armidale.

At a meeting between ReD4NE and Energy Co at Armidale last week Energy Co representatives explained that proposed transmission routes and substations through the Tamworth LGA and New England are based on 34GW of Expressions of Interest from the renewables industry.

Hubs and transmission have been planned around some proposals that aren't even in the planning pipeline. This demonstrates how disadvantaged communities are in the DPE assessment process.

We are not in the room to comprehend what is being planned. However the Transgrid System Security Roadmap (pg 8) shows the forecast 2033 and 2050 generation that would be made possible any new transmission.

How can the DPE and Independent Planning Commission recommend rejection of proposals with transmission and substation infrastructure already planned to support them.

So communities are led to believe that they have a voice and social licence will be considered as part of the assessment, when not one renewables proposal has been recommended for rejection by the DPE, rejected by an IPC, and upheld in the Land and Environment Court.

With this history, how can communities support new transmission, underground or aboveground, with the knowledge it will result in new generation they have no chance of fighting regardless of environmental impacts.

At energy forums during the past few years Energy Co presented plans for co-locating new transmission with existing transmission. Using existing easements for new transmission would result in reduced biodiversity loss and landholder impacts.

As rural residents we have chosen to live close to the land because we value nature. Many of us live off grid or have installed solar power or solar hot water, as well as storing water and growing food to increase our sustainability.

What we cannot stand is urban governments and media pushing a renewables transition on environmentally sensitive or high value agricultural land. Pro-renewables stories and government messaging share the same media space with advertising for luxury air travel and consumer goods, with no cognisance of the connection to carbon emissions.

We encourage the Inquiry to liaise with the NSW Farmers' Association Energy Transition Working Group to discuss locating new transmission in far west NSW where there are less productive, larger landholdings, much of it leasehold country. Here, renewables hosts are better able to absorb the benefits and impacts of proposals, not neighbours.

Existing Visual and Noise Guidelines do not protect landholders from renewables impacts, in our case located on a range 1200-1400m elevation with proposed wind turbines 230m to blade tip.

EnergyCo representatives last week stated that years-long DPE and IPC assessment and subsequent judicial reviews and legal action is considered normal. However, this is not normal life for rural communities. It is an abhorrent intrusion on our daily lives with unmeasured social and health impacts.

Next month Hills of Gold Preservation Inc will hold its fifth Annual General Meeting and it is depressing to consider the thousands of hours spent researching, writing and meeting, that could have been better directed to family, business, and wellbeing.

For NSW residents to accept the impacts of the renewables transition for the common good, the NSW government needs to offer greater protection for communities inside and outside

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the REZes. Poorly sited proposals should not enter the planning system. The avoid, mitigate, offset model is not acceptable. The 'Integrity of the NSW Biodiversity Offsets Scheme' report states that there is no such thing as no net biodiversity loss.

Biodiversity, national park assets, soil and water matter. Amenity and pre-existing tourism and agricultural industries matter.

We do not see this reflected in the history of DPE and IPC renewables assessment.

The whole process for the approval of renewable energy projects demonstrates a incoherent and piecemeal approach to planning. The process should involve the identification of suitable sites with minimal impacts and at the same time the identification of suitable transmission corridors prior to development applications for renewable energy projects being considered.

Until there is lived experience that rural landholders' voices are heard in the DPE and IPC assessment system, then the NSW Government will experience resistance to new transmission above or underground.

Kind regards,

Hills of Gold Preservation Inc Executive
John Krsulja, Brian Tomalin, Selena Sylvester, Natasha Soonchild, Ian Worley, Teresa Eather
and Megan Trousdale