

**Submission
No 270**

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

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Anne Jones

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Inquiry into the feasibility of undergrounding the transmission infrastructure for renewable energy projects.

Thank you for the opportunity to present to you this submission on the feasibility of undergrounding transmission infrastructure for renewable energy projects. The following submission is on the behalf of three farming families impacted by proposed transmission lines as part of the Central-West Orana REZ.

Stuart and Donna Hackney

Bruce and Pam Davis

Anthony and Anne Jones

While there are three families listed in this submission, it is important to note that similar concerns are held by many other families impacted by the proposed transmission lines.

I would also like to request some leniency with this submission. While it may appear at first to be drifting from the terms of reference, I would argue that it is important to build a robust picture into considerations surrounding the undergrounding of transmission lines.

- It is important to note that while none of the families are happy about having to have powerlines run through their properties, they have not communicated a “flat out no” to hosting the transmission lines. They do, however, have major concerns around the proposed route.
- The compensation offered for the proposed route is simply not adequate. The proposed route on each of these properties has a major impact on their operations. These impacts could be reduced with consultation with the land holder to select less intrusive routes.
- It must be pointed out that in a lot of cases in this project we are not talking about one transmission line. Many families are being forced to host 3 separate lines. These include two 500kV lines and one 330kV line.
- When looking at the cost of biodiversity offsets for these projects, there is a major issue surrounding equity of compensation. Figures surrounding the Hume Link show that biodiversity offsets will cost the project over \$2.5m per km. The following is taken from the AEMO 2021 Transmission Cost Report: ***“The estimated biodiversity offset cost of \$894m for the lines (Option 3C Figure 3) averages \$2.7m per kilometre of double-circuit line [\$894m/330 km]. This is half the cost of building the line itself - \$5.4m/km [\$1,796m/330 km]. Assuming a 70-metre-wide easement, this equates to \$400,000/hectare.”*** This is in comparison to the \$200,000 per km paid over a period of 20 years (\$10,000 per year per km) to land holders as compensation. There are other parts to the compensation arrangements, however, these add only modest amounts to the total. What this means is, that a land holder, who may be 100s of km’s away from the project, who is selling biodiversity offsets, may receive far greater monetary benefit from the project than the very people who are suffering the greatest impact.
- To put further emphasis on the lack of compensation we can examine the payments made to landholders who host wind turbines. If you were to host 4 wind turbines, you would receive in the vicinity of \$30,000 per turbine per year for 30 years. This would equate to a total payment of \$3.6m. If you were to host two 500kV overhead transmission lines through the middle of your farm over a distance of two kms you would receive \$40,000 per year for 20 years for a total of \$800,000. If you add in the compensation for construction and purchasing of easements, you may get close to \$1m total.
- From the above two examples, biodiversity offsets and wind turbines, the argument can be clearly made that the current compensation paid for above ground transmission lines is well and truly devoid of any meaningful relationship to true market value.
- Due consideration must also be given to the size of the property on which transmission lines are being proposed. It can be the case that these overhead transmissions lines will have a far greater impact on smaller landholders. This is not always the case, pending the selected route, but it is fair to say that in most cases, if the overhead transmission line easement is occupying 20% of a family’s property it is going to have a more significant impact than on a property where it is occupying 1% or less.

- The simple fact is that there is not a lineup of property owners wanting to host above ground transmission lines with the current rate of compensation. In reality, the vast majority are against them. This is a true indication that there is a disconnect in terms of value between developers and property owners. I find it very hard to see any equity in governments making a handful of farming families bear the cost of trying to keep electricity prices low for the greater population.
- Governments have shown an enormous lack of forward thinking when it comes to the State's energy needs. After years of pondering, all of a sudden, there is major rush to get infrastructure built and renewable energy delivered. A plan has been launched with the priorities seemingly being timeframe and lowest possible cost to electricity users. In the case of above ground transmission lines, this is at the expense of individual families who are being forced to host these projects. The decision surrounding the undergrounding of transmission lines should have been a market decision, just as should have all decisions surrounding the rollout of this infrastructure. Compulsory acquisition should only be used as a very last result. This entire project is operated around "pretend consultation" and at the end of the day landholders will have had zero real opportunity to come to a commercial agreement regarding infrastructure on their own land. The argument is often made that renewables are the cheapest form of energy. One can't help but think it's a skewed claim when governments are forcibly acquiring land and not operating within free market principles.
- The current compensation payments would most likely be acceptable if the transmission lines were undergrounded. An acceptable level of compensation for above ground transmission lines must be considered when looking at the increased cost of undergrounding.

The statements on the following pages highlight the impact on individual properties along the proposed route of the Central-West Orana REZ transmission project. While many of these issues could be solved through the undergrounding of this infrastructure, it is not the only solution. A combination of differing routes and more realistic compensation would go a long way to making this project more palatable and equitable for those directly affected.

Stuart and Donna Hackney

The Hackney's affect property is 650 acres in size. The proposed transmission lines consist of two separate 500kV and one 330kV line. These transmission lines will take up roughly 125 acres in total, representing some 19% of their property.

1. The proposed route runs straight over the top of the Hackney's cattle yards, grain silos and sheds and will likely mean the removal of this infrastructure. There is no other location on the property suitable for relocation of the above infrastructure due to inaccessibility in wet weather.
2. The proposed route runs through a substantial stand of mature Apple Box Gum and Kurrajong tress on the property. It is understood that this particular stand of trees predates farming on the property. It currently provides essential shade for stock and this practical benefit is not replaceable in the short term. There are no similar stands of trees on the property.
3. The Hackney's have spent decades investing in soil conservation and water management on their property through the use of carefully engineered land contouring, among other measures. They are concerned that the construction of the transmission lines and associated access roads through the centre of their property will render their soil conservation and water management practices ineffective, detrimentally impacting the productivity of the land. Access roads would require each side of any impacted contour bank to be piped and filled to allow vehicles to cross without compromising the integrity of the contour banks.
4. In addition to land contouring, The Hackney's employ the use of constructed waterways to control the flow of water across the property and minimize erosion. These drainage channels are not passable in wet or boggy conditions, as any wet weather traffic causes immense damage and erosion.
5. The offset nature of the proposed towers for the three transmission lines will likely hinder the maneuverability of farming equipment, impacting the efficiency and costs associated with productive farming.
6. The long-term plans for the use of the property include the construction of additional shedding and a residence on the land earmarked for the transmission lines.
7. The current proposed route for the transmission lines effectively cuts the property in half.

RM & AL Jones

Below is an email sent to Mike Young, the exec director of Energy Co, by Anthony and Anne Jones.

Good afternoon Mike,

Two weeks ago, we were told that you would visit our farm 'Spirview'.

'Spireview' is situated in the Orana REZ and will be significantly affected by two 500kV and 330 kV transmission lines running in close proximity to the north of our house.

As we still have not had the pleasure of your company, we have put together a quick little slideshow to show you what this farm means to us. The images are all taken in our front yard looking to the north.... where the lines are being planned.

It is not just a farm...it is our home, our peaceful sanctuary, our place to gather with family and friends. Yes, it is our castle.

Whilst we understand the need for these lines, we would greatly appreciate an explanation for why they can't be placed to the south of our house. We have stated this from the very first negotiation.

Throughout the process we have been respectful, engaged, and tolerant. We are reasonable people who are happy to negotiate in a fair and reasonable manner.

We would appreciate a visit in the very near future where these issues can be discussed.

Regards

Anthony and Anne Jones

1. Major visual impact from house. The proposed lines are only several hundred metres from the homestead.
2. Recreation/ Agritourism. Impact on several camping sites used by family and friends and future plans to establish tourism accommodation.
3. Rita Jones block
 - a. Communicated with Rita and Deb Robinson re plans for the line. They are both adamant that they do not want the line near their house. The old house has significant sentimental and heritage value. Renovations have begun to provide future farm accommodation for family and friends and possible tourism.
 - b. Historical site of graveyards, churches and school.
4. Aged mature trees...gums, ironbark and box trees would need to be removed.
5. Area of possible Aboriginal significance along Running Creek (Birthing trees identified by Dominic Nowlan LLS Dubbo).
6. Rita's block is a heritage site of significance with slab house, former churchyards and graveyards.

7. Over the last three years we have begun our regen journey targeting the northern western paddocks, investing in more fencing, establishing a watering system with piping and troughs to create better soils, improved pasture and less erosion.
8. Our future plans are to gain certification and verification that we are farming sustainably, looking after our land, animals and our people. We plan to use this certification to sell our products (meat, wool and eggs) We wonder what will the ramifications be on animal health, marketing etc???



Bruce and Pam Davis

Bruce and Pam own a 255 acre farm located in the path of the proposed transmission lines. The easement is estimated to consume around 45 acres of their property. This represents just under 20% of their farm and will have major impacts on the existing land use. The proposed route consists of two 500kV lines and one 330kV line through a portion of their property switching to one 330kV line along the entire length of the property.

1. The proposed route is straight through a developed shelter belt. This is critical in providing shade and shelter for livestock. On many other larger farms, they would be many shelter belts and shade trees, however, being a smaller holding, this is the only shelter belt on the property making it a very large impact. 50 of these trees are between 150 and 200 years old. The loss of these trees is simply not replaceable in any sort of meaningful timeframe.
2. This property also has very good, well drained soils making it hard to find suitable locations for dams. The proposed route would likely impact one of these precious locations. Water security is a vital part of any farm enterprise. To lose an excellent dam will have a major impact.

