

Submission
No 275

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

Organisation: Pasture Agronomy Service

Date Received: 25 July 2023



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26th July 2023

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY RE UNDERGROUND TRANSMISSION INFRASTRUCTURE

Key points to be considered for supporting underground powerlines vs overhead towers.

1. The Riverina is a “food basket” for Australian and this is due to:
 - Reliable seasonal rainfall with 85% spring rain probability. This is due to its unique locality west of the Snowy Mountains and movement of westerly fronts across mid NSW / Victoria. This country is last into drought and first to emerge from it.

Evidence to support this:

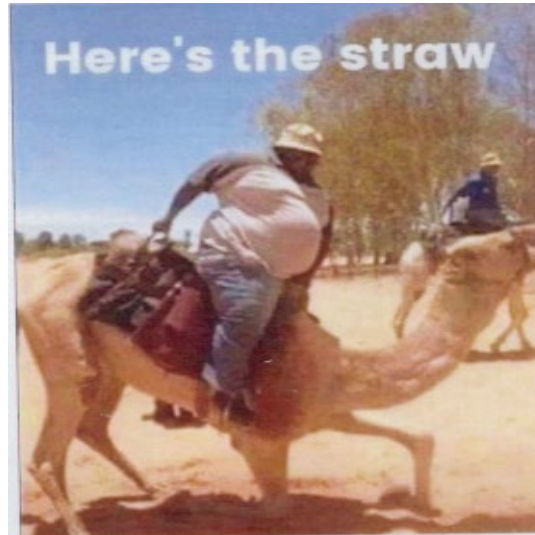
- Largest weekly lamb selling complex at Wagga Wagga
- Top 10% of weekly cattle sales across NSW
- Largest concentration of feedlots across the Riverina of NSW

2. Farmers are uniquely and individually connected to this highly productive land that they have significantly and sympathetically conducted as profitable business’ over the past 40 years. This I have witnessed in my role as a farm consultant.

Evidence to support this:

- Business intensification and adoption of technology
- Direct drilling of pastures from 1984 onwards. Aerial pasture establishment from 1988 onwards
- Increased stocking rates (4 fold) due to pasture improvement
- Protection of sensitive / riparian areas via government programs ie LANDCARE
- Tree plantations and landscape management
- Business modification to respond to industry change ie production of feeder steers (450kg) for feedlots and away from merely selling weaners directly from the cow. This change takes significant effort and planning to achieve.

3. The majority of producers are generational farmers who develop annual incomes with intent to “will” property to sons and daughters into the future. Farming is a personalised business which has always adapted to threats and challenges both internal and external. It is by overcoming these and moving forward that has imbedded a strong realisation of “connection to country”, however, Transgrid proposal may be the straw.....



If farmers no longer wish to be custodians because they have been broken – what will happen??

Past and present threats:

- Development of Blowering Dam in the 1960's dislocated hundreds of primary producers for the good of Australia.
- VISY purchase of high quality farming country
- 2019/20 Dunn's Road fire
- Drought
- Floods
- Low prices for products
- Rising costs
- Transgrid is a real threat on land values, business conduct, amenity, landscape (scenic destruction) and mental health.

Farmers challenge trust:

- Escalation of landscape industrialisation
- Overhead powerlines into areas where “Hills are heroes”
- Lack of understanding of landscape erosion via tower erection / long term maintenance
- Concern of biosecurity – weeds/disease with foreign vehicle access
- Understated risk of fire and its management with overhead powerlines. This is a real concern due to our warming weather patterns and our district's productive environment.
- Inadequate “tree offset” from Transgrid by the removal of mature trees that contribute to the amenity, livestock protection and bird life

- Inadequate assessment of property value depreciation after a lifetime of work
- Further resumption of farming land if future development requires increased corridors for energy transmission
- The compensations are subject to tax and therefore classed as off farm income

4. Impact on communities:

- Further escalation of the region's industrialisation, especially after the VISY's impact on air quality
- Distain in reference to further mismanagement of landscape that revolves around National Parks/Forestry and farmer boundary
- Governments non recognition of state pine plantation's moisture requirement contributing to lack of water in the Murry darling Basin
- Insufficient engagement with town residents regarding their thoughts on the loss of visual amenity to their scenic district

5. Lack of engagement and understanding by both Transgrid representatives, affected landholders and communities on:

- Why the overhead powerlines cannot go through National Parks and State Forests. Aren't these owned by the people and it is these people who will benefit?

Its construction and impact should be shared by everyone, not just a few who will be inadequately compensated. Are the reasons truly valid for dismissing National Parks and State Forests?

- Double standard – Lobs Hole settlement and its underground electricity installation within a National Park

At an agricultural level, if you respond to industry change it must be done sustainably. Any landscape modification needs to embrace the highest level of environmental best practice.

The best practice for Transgrid would be to go underground because:

- It is safer
- Minimal impact on farming practices
- No visual disturbance to landscape for future generations

In terms of safety, it relates mostly to fire. Communities' acknowledgement and accept that farmers fight fires not only for their own property protection but that of the region and towns. Farmers willingly join Rural Fire Brigades, undertake training so they can be equipped to manage fires, often risking their own lives, to assist in keeping the landscape, livestock and community safe. One cannot overstate the importance of going underground to reduce potential fire risk. You only need to watch the world news to see how climate variability is impacting the environment.

Overhead 86 metre power lines would obviously evoke higher risk to the district by hindering access by helicopters, planes and on ground, by vehicles.

The scars of the 2019 - 2020 fires are still too raw to deny. The undergrounding of power is logical and in line with modern overseas conduct.

Personally, I feel that if Transgrid were to go underground very few of the above concerns would exist. Farmers and landholders need to be valued by both Transgrid and the government for our contribution to the economy, society and management of landscape for future generations.

Farmers never give up.

Yours faithfully,

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