

**Supplementary
Submission
No 18a**

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

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Subject: Supplementary submission to Inquiry into Feasibility of Undergrounding Transmission Infrastructure

Supplementary Submission to Inquiry into the Feasibility of Undergrounding the Transmission Infrastructure for Renewable Energy Projects

We ask the Committee's patience as we submit the following brief points after hearing and reading the other submissions to date, and attending and speaking at the Committee's hearing at Tumut on the 26th July. We urge the Committee to consider the following:

1.



Above is a photo taken on the 4th January 2020 in the Gilmore Valley. This was the day the region around Batlow was catastrophically impacted by the Dunns Road bushfire. The photo was taken by our neighbour in the valley below us. Our property is along the ridge line in the background, where the flames are visible. Towering over the scene is a massive fireball, possibly several hundred metres high, having ignited the volatile gases from the burning natural eucalyptus forest. Just behind the crest of the ridge is a 330kV high tension line operated by TransGrid.

In his testimony to the Inquiry into the Feasibility of Undergrounding, TransGrid CEO Brett Redman correctly stated that no high-tension line was de-energised during that fire. The cables, unsurprisingly, were damaged in the fire and about 18 months later TransGrid replaced several kilometres of damaged cable on this line and on another line on the Snubba Range on the eastern side of the Gilmore Valley. One can only surmise that the cost of the complex engineering project we witnessed was very high, and this cost would have been passed on to the consumer.

We share this image with you as a visual case study in (a) the vulnerability of overhead lines to fire damage, no matter how high they are; (b) the impossibility of sending firefighting vehicles under or near energised lines in thick smoke because of danger of flashover (arcing); (c) the mortal peril to anyone cut off on the wrong side of an overhead line in these conditions; (d) the amplification of vulnerability, danger and repair cost should TransGrid build HumeLink as an overhead line.

2. The Inquiry heard from Mr Redman and other witnesses that the cost of constructing HumeLink is to be borne by electricity consumers, and that construction of this and other high voltage infrastructure thus imposes no budgetary load on Government. However, if high voltage infrastructure is overhead, recent experience shows that a government must be prepared for heavy imposts on their budget through:

- Disaster grants
- Clean-up operations
- Underwriting properties uninsurable because of fire risk
- Loss of revenue due to businesses closing in tourism-related areas
- Loss of revenue through decreased farm production
- Compensation to farmers (current scheme \$10,000 p.a. per kilometre for 20 years)
- Increased chronic and acute mental health problems

None of these costs accompany an underground installation.

3. Brett Redman in his testimony (transcript, page 35) said he had “no doubt the AER would not approve undergrounding”. This may well be true – if the AER were working with costings supplied by TransGrid. This is a classic feedback loop. The expert witnesses in Tumut very effectively dismantled it when they explained the detail of costing and the application of latest technology.

4. We think that the Committee has now seen through the façade of “corporate-speak”. When commercial, profit-making entities like TransGrid speak of “community consultation” and “stakeholder engagement”, this language is meaningless. Committee members have seen for themselves that the reality is a mix of intimidation and unresponsiveness designed to lead “stakeholders” to a state of impotence, resignation and acceptance. If there had been genuine consultation, HumeLink would be on public land away from communities and farmland or underground – and work would probably have already started.

5. We note that after the dozens of oral hearings and hundreds of written submissions and signed petitions to this Inquiry, only one sole entity has proposed a nett benefit in overhead transmission:

TransGrid. 3½ years of resolute community activism have now culminated in close scrutiny from a politically diverse Committee. Hundreds of varied voices are giving a single, clear message: undergrounding is not only feasible, but the absolute will of the people. The Committee can unequivocally report to the Government that their constituency is unanimous. In the words of Wagga Wagga MP, Dr Joe McGirr, “It’s never too late to do what is right”.

Thank you very much again for viewing this brief supplementary submission.

Douglas & Berlinde Rand