

**Submission
No 300**

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

Name: Sally Dye
Date Received: 16 August 2023

Sally J Dye
'Murgha'

The Hon Emily Suvaal, Committee Chair,
Inquiry - Feasibility of undergrounding the transmission
infrastructure for renewable energy projects
Standing Committee on State Development
NSW Parliament House
6 Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

15 August 2023

Dear Committee Members,

**Inquiry - Feasibility of undergrounding the transmission infrastructure
for renewable energy projects**

I welcome this inquiry as it will ensure the feasibility of undergrounding transmission infrastructure is a decision made by the government for the people and a safer, productive future - not a decision made by a foreign owned Transmission Network Service Provider for the benefit of its shareholders.

Background

We live about 70 km from Deniliquin with the Edward River forming our southern boundary and the marking the northern one. Our nearest neighbours are 18km east or west. We love our flat, open natural landscape of grassy- shrub land spotted with clumps or trees on the depressions and love that we can stand in the middle of our property and see no sign of mankind.

It breaks our hearts to now be faced with the reality that Transgrid VIN West propose to run 80m high 500KW powerlines right through the middle of our property, not only taking away our greatest joy, but severely impacting on how we run our business.

In these large open spaces we use a gyro-copter to check our sheep and stock waters and ag planes over our cropped irrigation. If the Transgrid VIN West proposal proceeds above ground the adverse impacts on our operation and lives will be huge, however if the transmission was underground they would be insignificant.

It is worth noting that the Transgrids proposal had 6 options, and not a single one showing an underground option for comparison purposes despite being aware of this enquiry and the potential for NSW to order the undergrounding.

It is galling that this current proposal wasn't even an option until the Victorian Minister for Energy and Resources issued Orders under the National Electricity (Victoria) Act 2005 in May forcing Transgrid to forget their preferred 150km shorter option at the time which was to cross the Murray River into near Moama.

If the Victorian Minister can determine by Order where the Transmission lines cross into NSW, ignoring Transgrid's preferred much more direct shorter option, then the NSW Minister must be able to Order the lines underground wherever physically feasible in NSW.

Climate Change Extreme Weather events

Climate Change is clearly upon us as evidenced by more extreme climatic events and the increased bushfire severity and the resulting damage.

Article 3 of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) establishes that

"parties should take precautionary measures to anticipate, prevent, or minimize the causes of climate change and mitigate its adverse effects." ...23 Oct 2020

The transmission of electrical power to the cities using overhead poles and wires is old world technology and exposes the entire network to increased disruptions caused by extreme weather events as was seen on 28th September 2016 when the entire state of South Australia was without power when the power poles twisted, warped and collapsed. Extensive power outages also resulted from damage caused to the overhead network during the 2019 Black Summer fires. In both cases this would have been avoided if underground cables had been used rather than overhead wires.

NSW needs to apply the Precautionary Principal and demand that all major power transmission in NSW is done using underground cables to mitigate the adverse effects of climate change.

Social Licence to operate

Farmers are continually working to maintain their 'social licence' to operate to produce food & fibre for the world. We invest in new technologies and world's best practice to minimise our environmental footprint whilst maximising production to benefit the world's population. We therefore expect other producers, including electricity producers, to work to maintain their social licence using world best practice to operate as well.

The AEMC clearly understands that the need for social licence as demonstrated in their media release dated 04 May 2023 titled:

Transmission planning reform to improve social licence and boost energy transformation.

The regulatory process for new transmission projects must be improved to strengthen social licence and speed up the multi-billion-dollar expansion of the grid that is critical to the transformation to cleaner energy, an Australian Energy Market Commission (AEMC) review says.

By proposing Overhead Lines (OHL) instead of Underground Cables (UGC) Transgrid with the VIN West proposal is not world best practice, and is not operating with social licence of the communities and landholders that will be impacted.

Fire Risk and Insurance impacts

More extreme events predicted with Climate Change's hotter and dryer outlook poses a very severe fire risk here. In this extremely sparsely populated hot & dry area fires tend to come from lightning strikes and run fast, particularly when getting to them takes time.

Not being able to use aerial firefighting because of the presence of the power line will result in further damages and stock losses before a fire can be controlled.

A previous fire started by power lines and a birdstrike burnt from the Cobb Highway north of Wanganella 100km to the Newell highway north of Jerilderie in just one afternoon, with one death and 100's of thousands of hectares denuded and stock killed.

I asked Transgrid representatives about their Fire Insurance Policy and their liability for all stock loss and damages caused when their infrastructure causes a fire. After asking the question again, they said they'd get back to me. That was a month ago.

Fire insurance costs are escalating as is all insurance as a result of Climate Change, making it prohibitive for landholders insure stock and fencing. We needed to ascertain that Transgrid understand the full risks that this overhead powerline proposal are to us in this area with more extreme heat, wind and storms.

Cost: Benefit

We have been repeatedly told that the cost of construction using over head wires is much cheaper than undergrounding, however I believe that is an over simplification. The construction cost may be cheaper, however the full costs including easement acquisition and compensation for devaluation, change of business management (from not being able to use drones, agricultural aviation) change of landuse from irrigation, and a myriad of other impacts, would I suspect end up making the costs substantially more comparable.

Benefits of undergrounding electricity transmission

- Reduced fire risk
- Reduced compensation payments needed as
- Nullify the ghastly impact of the aesthetic value of our environment
- Reduced or no devaluation of surrounding assets
- Reduced impact on landholder equity with banks.
- Greatly reduced 'change of landuse' compensation required
- Reduced impact on the environment, both flora & fauna
- Reduced Easement acquisition costs as shorter route along roads and public land
- Reduced construction cost by being able to take a more direct route so reduce km's.
- Reduced fire insurance costs or pass through cost to electricity consumers.
- No impact on agricultural aviation
- No exposure to extreme weather events outages.
- No arcing in dust storms or bushfire smoke
- Reduced risk of system failure
- Increased mental health from maintaining beautiful natural aesthetic landscapes
- Social Licence to operate improved.
- Reduced flow through impact on the community from lost primary production.

To the committee members I would like to say thankyou for coming to Deniliquin and listening to some community members.

NSW needs to apply the Precautionary Principle to transmission of power by ensuring worlds best practice, prescribed in other countries, and ensure that all major transmission lines are undergrounded for a safer and more productive future.

Your faithfully