

**INQUIRY INTO IMPACT OF RENEWABLE ENERGY
ZONES (REZ) ON RURAL AND REGIONAL
COMMUNITIES AND INDUSTRIES IN NEW SOUTH
WALES**

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

To whom it may concern,

I am a sixth-generation farmer born and raised in the Dunedoo region of New South Wales. My family has lived and worked on our farm in the Merotherie area, between Dunedoo and Gulgong, for over a century, embodying a legacy of resilience, hard work, and a deep connection to the land. From a young age, I spent afternoons after school helping in the yards, moving stock, and working paddocks on tractors. This upbringing instilled in me a profound respect for the land, an appreciation for hard work, and a commitment to producing high-quality food and fibre products that support our growing global population. Inspired by my parents, who not only managed our family farm but also operated a contracting business supporting local agricultural enterprises, I pursued tertiary education to expand my skills and knowledge. I chose to study a Bachelor of Veterinary Science at Charles Sturt University in Wagga Wagga. Now entering my final year of study, I have travelled across Australia and internationally to gain diverse experiences, preparing myself to serve rural communities as a well-rounded veterinarian. My long-term goal is to return to the Dunedoo region to continue our family's farming tradition and provide high-quality veterinary care to the community, addressing a significant and ongoing need for veterinarians in the area.

However, this dream and the future of my family's farming legacy have been profoundly disrupted by the development of the Central West Orana Renewable Energy Zone (REZ). In mid-2022, my family was approached regarding the potential purchase of our property, "Round Camp," for the construction of a substation to transmit power generated by upcoming wind and solar farms. What followed was a prolonged and deeply challenging consultation process that spanned over a year. The process was marred by misinformation, a lack of transparency, and coercive tactics including threats of compulsory acquisition that strained relationships within our family. Threats of compulsory acquisition loomed, creating immense pressure to expedite the sale. Ultimately, despite our resistance, the property that had been the heart of our family for generations was sold, leading to significant familial discord and personal heartbreak. These actions caused significant strain on our family, leading to a breakdown in relationships and trust. Sadly, this has not been an isolated experience, as many families in the region have faced similar challenges during this renewable energy transition. The repercussions have been devastating. Our once close-knit family, comprising my grandparents, my parents, and their siblings, has fractured, with communication now strained or non-existent among many members. As the only remaining link between my immediate family and my extended relatives, I have borne witness to the emotional toll this process has exacted. A more inclusive and transparent approach from EnergyCo and other stakeholders could have prevented much of this damage, ensuring that families like ours were treated with the respect and dignity they deserve.

The sale of "Round Camp" forced us to vacate the property in May 2024. We had no choice but to sell our nucleus sheep flock, which represented years of breeding and investment in prime lamb production, due to a lack of available land for agistment or lease. The logistical challenges of relocating machinery, equipment, fencing, and essential resources such as work dogs and horses added financial and emotional strain. My parents, now renting and seeking alternative land, face immense difficulty due to the limited availability of farmland in the region. Securing alternative land has proven difficult due to tight availability and longstanding family ties to properties in the region. My parents have been forced to seek external income and diversify farm operations to sustain their livelihood, which has placed considerable financial and emotional strain on them. The stress of this situation, compounded by financial pressures and the need to diversify income streams, is deeply concerning for their welfare and for the sustainability of our family's farming operations.

Compounding these challenges, promises made by governing bodies to support affected communities have largely gone unfulfilled. Promises of community grants, financial investments, and

mental health support remain largely unfulfilled, leaving many residents feeling abandoned. Further promises of mental health support for affected individuals has been promised and many members of the community have tried to work with EnergyCo to attempt to put a system in place that will support the mental health of people in the area, however this hasn't been pursued and promises have been empty from those bodies. This brings me great concern, especially when a large number of affected individuals are farmers and their families. Farmers have a high suicide rate in general likely as a result of the high stress of farming and the isolation of the job. This is an essential role that people are playing, providing food and fibre for the people of the world. How long do we continue to ignore those crying out for help and support in these small towns, especially those on the land trying to make ends meet? Farmers, already grappling with high stress levels, volatile markets, and unpredictable weather conditions, now face additional challenges posed by the REZ development. In 2024, poor stock and wool prices, combined with suboptimal crop yields due to frost and patchy rainfall, exacerbated these challenges, placing farmers under unprecedented strain. These additional pressures have left many farmers feeling unsupported and overwhelmed.

Environmental concerns have also been inadequately addressed. The removal of trees, disruption of biodiversity, and potential impacts on water systems and soil quality pose long-term risks to both the environment and agricultural productivity. As a veterinarian studying the possible risks of inadequate biosecurity, the ongoing availability for appropriate biosecurity for farms is deeply concerning threatening the viability of agricultural land. While environmental studies have been conducted, the scope and accuracy of these assessments remain questionable, given the limited consultation and transparency throughout the process.

The construction of renewable energy projects has also disrupted valuable community initiatives, such as the Dunedoo Central West Cycle Trail. This 400-kilometer loop showcased the beauty and resilience of rural areas, providing an opportunity for off-farm income and tourism. The trail's possible closure due to construction is a significant loss to the region, as it served as a vibrant symbol of our farming community and its hospitality. This initiative also provided off farm income for a number of people located along the trail. We operated an Air BnB for some time to service those wishing to stay along the bike trail and others on our road were running morning tea and lunch services as well. The construction and ongoing renewables in the area may force this trail to no longer exist which is deeply concerning and disappointing for our region and the farmers affected. This was a great showcase of our farming community.

Furthermore, the lack of community consultation throughout the renewables process has caused division among families and neighbours. The lack of genuine consultation has created divisions among neighbours and families, particularly as decisions regarding wind turbines, solar panels, and transmission lines pit landowners against one another. The absence of clear guidelines for the decommissioning of solar panels and wind turbines raises concerns about long-term responsibilities and liabilities. Decisions regarding transmission lines, solar panels, and wind turbines have been made with minimal input from affected landholders, leaving many feeling disregarded and disrespected. This has fostered resentment and mistrust, eroding the sense of unity that once characterized our region.

In closing, the renewable energy initiatives in our area have come at a significant cost to families, communities, and the agricultural landscape. As a proud member of the Dunedoo community, I am deeply saddened by the strain these projects have placed on families, ecosystems, and the broader community. I urge governing bodies and stakeholders to take meaningful steps to include local voices in the decision-making process, ensure transparent communication, and prioritize support for those directly affected. The long-term sustainability of our agricultural land and the well-being of our rural communities depend on a collaborative and respectful approach. Families like mine, who have

dedicated their lives to the land, deserve better. It leaves me wondering what sort of agricultural land will remain in 10 years time for me to continue farming and what sort of community will remain to be involved in. I have loved growing up in a small country town that barely gets a mention on the map, and it saddens me that this may not be an ongoing possibility for my children one day.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my experiences and concerns. I hope you will consider the ongoing and far-reaching impacts these projects are having on individual families, communities, and the future of agriculture in the region. It is not too late to address these issues and work towards solutions that balance progress with the preservation of our land and livelihoods.

Sincerely,