

**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

When the Central West Orana REZ was initially announced it was with a proposed generation of 3GW. The power generation for the Central West Orana has been increased from 3GW to 6GW with a “stroke of the pen” and there are no assurances that further increases will not happen. This is despite Government requirements to have a public fully informed regarding these matters. The proliferation of projects that are being considered can only be described as a “Gold Rush” – there appears to be no restrictions or caution used in the number of these proposals.

When the REZ was first announced it was after no consultation at all. There were no approaches to landholders that were to be affected to gain any knowledge of the local position. When the Renewable Energy Zones were first proposed there was a committee established. This however, did not include any member of any representative Rural body or any representative able to inform the committee of the effects on the landholders that were necessary for the establishment of the projects. These stakeholders were only considered/consulted/contacted after all of the legislation and groundwork had been completed. The first time we in the Elong Elong area became aware of the possible impact of the REZ was in February 2021 when Transgrid held a community meeting at our local Hall. There was no mention then of the size or the scope of the projects and only people who were considered to be potential hosts were approached after that by the developers of the schemes. The rest of the local community was totally ignored until it was suddenly realized that the village of Elong Elong - by the way the only larger small village in the area had not been consulted at all, after a committee of concerned citizens requested a meeting with Squadron Energy. This was held on the 15/05/2024 well into the development of the project. I attended this meeting with two other concerned citizens and we were informed at the conclusion of the meeting that that was that and we needed to address our concerns to the IPC when the project came up for approval. Which we duly did so. These people were representatives of Squadron Energy who are signatories Clean Energy Council best Practice Charter. At all times the community Consultation Process has been conducted with a complete disregard of local community feelings with community engagement being conducted with a “tick the box” attitude. Total disregard for the effect on the remaining occupants of the REZ. It is for the “Greater Good” and someone has to pay for the transition to Net Zero

The Approval Process is made to assess the Community/Environmental Impacts of each individual project and these are not assessed as a whole – therefore the full impact of the projects together are not considered especially where projects run parallel/alongside each other creating an Industrialized landscape, and multiplying the impact on the landscape/community. This is a fragmented approach that needs to be addressed urgently so that the community is adequately informed of the extent and impact of all the projects. The IPC process cannot assess the projects as a whole but must do so individually regardless of the accrued effects on the region.

There is a valid concern regarding the proposed water use by these projects. Each project has its individual water requirements and these are not assessed as a whole to gauge the effect of the projects on the water table or water availability in the Central West Orana REZ. Increased Water usage in an area that is traditionally dry land cropping with access to underground water for stock and domestic - these projects will have an enormous effect on the availability of water for the general population with the projects having no restrictions on water usage.

These projects will totally transform the socio/economic makeup of the area. The influx of temporary workers will affect all public services – schools, medical/health services, housing, land use and waste and garbage. The purported benefits of this increased population must be outweighed by the short term nature of the increase and the damage caused to local infrastructure when the population then decreases back to pre-project levels and even less with the inevitable drop in rural production and resultant rural jobs within the area.

The creation of division within the community - the "haves" and "have nots" being the hosts and the others that are left to carry the burden of the development with negative results. These include reduced land values – studies have shown that land values are decreased by up to 30% - increased road traffic and disruption, increased rates for repairs to rural roads caused by heavy equipment and increased traffic as the majority of the projects are only accessible by rural roads.

There are numerous other factors to consider as well. These include Increased Weed and Feral Animal infestations due to the creation of corridors to enable these infestations to spread. The lack of an effective Weed/Animal Plan that can be adopted over all of the REZ's to create a uniform approach to these concerns and also a regulatory framework that all project developers have to adhere to. Increased erosion is inevitable with the clearing and baring of country to enable the large scale projects to be installed/built. This will also have an effect on water flow throughout the catchment therefore changing the traditional water flow into the creeks and rivers. These matters do not have a regulatory framework that the developers must follow. It is imperative that this matter is addressed.