

**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

Dear Committee Members

Submission to the **Inquiry into the impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales**

Background

Thank you for the chance for some State MPs to hear my story as the transition to almost 100% wind and solar electricity generation devastates our future in Gulgong as it has for over six years already.

My first visit to Gulgong was in April 2018. My wife and I spent a few days at the Gulgong Showground in our new campervan. Within, 24 hours I fell in love with the place. I have travelled 76 countries and lived and worked in two part from Australia. However the wonders of this small well preserved historic town of 130 heritage buildings, the festivals and many events they hold frequently, the rural lifestyle, but most of all the spectacular scenery and abundant wildlife captured my heart.

Within 6 days we had bought a small acreage on the outskirts of the town. Just a single empty paddock except for thistles, Farmers Friend, Purple Tops and other weeds, and lots of rocks. The property has magnificent 230 degree views of undulating farmland dotted with farm buildings, cattle, sheep, goats, horses, crops, trees and distance hills. We have 20km uninterrupted views to the north, 10 or more kilometres to the west and south. This is where we decided to spend our remaining years.

We sold our modest home of 39 years, which was located on the Northern Beaches of Sydney. We had a cemetery immediately behind the back fence, a sewerage easement down one side, a high voltage transmission line easement across the whole back yard and a high voltage transmission tower a few metres from our side fence.

We spent six years making our property in Gulgong our dream come true. But during that same period our dream became a nightmare. Some MPs and bureaucrats in Sydney decided, without any consultation, to draw lines on a map of NSW and call it a Renewable Energy Zone (REZ).

I can think of many better names. A few that come to mind are: Industrial Destruction Zone or; Rural Life Destroying Zone or; Mental Torture Zone or; Money Pit Zone; or Overseas Theft Zone or; Industrial Wasteland Zone or; Pointless But Costly Energy Zone;

During my 75 years I have personally experienced many traumatic events, including multiple premature deaths of family and friends, nearly drowning a few times, being held at gunpoint and threatened with death for hours, being assaulted, being robbed, experiencing fires, being stranded in flood waters, surviving cancers, surviving two heart attacks, surviving motorcycle accidents caused by careless car drivers, and dealing with a bloody suicide in my apartment.

But all these events were of relative short duration compared to the last six years of endless attack of our home range by greedy and dishonest wind, solar, battery, pumped hydro and transmission developers, bureaucrats and politicians.

I could write tens of thousands of words about Gulgong NSW but they could never truly convey the uniqueness and beauty of our town and its surroundings. Gulgong was founded after the discovery of gold in 1870.

Instead, please see the Attachment "**The Historic Town of Gulgong and its surroundings are under threat**", which is a photo story that I first prepared in mid-2022 and recently updated. Words cannot really express the devastation that is occurring. Hopefully the photos and captions will.

The impacts already of the CWO REZ on me, my wife , my neighbours, our families and friendships are representative of the damage being done across regional and rural Australia.

I will focus on the Gulgong and its hundreds of km2 of surroundings that are being industrialised. However, I know that many of the issues are the same or similar for numerous other communities across Australia..

The Impact of REZ's

After we bought our land:

- we discovered in 2018 that Beryl Solar project was under construction only 4kms from our property; it was commissioned in June 2019
- Late 2019, a solar project was proposed about 1km from my property and only 600m from the Gulgong township; I joined the Gulgong action group to successfully stop it
- Early 2020, our first large industrial solar project with a BESS was announced; a 400MW PV solar works and 200MW BESS was approved and construction is now nearing completion
- The NSW government declared in 2020 that the Central West Orana region was to be a pilot Renewable Energy Zone
- over another 20 wind, solar/BESS, standalone BESS and HV transmission line projects have been proposed, the most recent exhibition period closed this week
- over 22 government inquiries have requested submissions from communities
- currently 10 IPCN hearings and submissions are outstanding or finalised
- our local community group has provided assistance to multiple other communities objecting to over 60 projects so far.

The personal impact of going through the these lengthy planning processes, especially as they often go to the IPCN and EPBC, include the emotions of:

- **work overload** after years of overwhelming never-ending research, attending frustrating drop-in sessions, communicating with developers, disseminating information, writing articles, reading and analysing EIS documents, writing submissions, reviewing Proponent responses to submissions, communicating with the Dept. of Planning, preparing for and delivering verbal submissions at hearings, preparing post hearing written submissions; communicating and assisting other community groups.
- **frustration** at putting in fact-based submissions and presentations containing questions, concerns and identifying EIS omissions, errors, false claims, exaggerations, untruths and unsubstantiated claims that are not addressed by either the Proponent or the Department, despite repeated requests that they comply with the law.

- **fatigue** and many sleepless nights as I grapple with researching, reading and preparing submissions to deadlines that we have to abide by but developers do not; see attachments for submissions on behalf of SOS-Central West for Stubbo Solar/BESS and SOS for Coleambally BESS.
- **deep concern** for the future of my town and its surroundings(see attachment "The Historic Town of Gulgong and its surroundings are under threat"
- **sadness** for all the people, like my wife and I, who are suffering because of the decimation of their homeland, for some the loss of rights to their own property, loss of friends/others and conflicts with family.
- **anger** at being doxed by the Mudgee Guardian newspaper and the Gulgong Gossip monthly magazine, censored multiple times by Microsoft, intimidated by strangers, banned from publishing in the Gulgong Gossip under the SOS banner; being ignored by our local State and Federal MPs.
- **annoyance** that the increased fire risks, increased soil and water pollution risks, health risks from audible and infrasound turbine noise, wildlife destruction are ignored despite the scientific evidence we provide.
- **amazement** that with all the emphasis on emissions reductions that there is no requirement for Proponents to provide their amounts of embedded CO2e in their project, especially when our calculations shows it must be substantial .
- **bewilderment** as to how a proponent can, in their amendment report state *"In addition and as a result of the submission from Save our Surroundings, output calculations were checked and refined. The annual output of the proposal was wrongly calculated at 380,000 MWh if calculated in one charge/discharge per day. This has now been updated to 146,000 MWh."* was approved almost immediately with no questions by the Dept. Planning about the project viability when income is reduced by 60% but the capital cost remains the same. In addition, there were many dubious answers to the questions in our submission (see attachment).
- **disappointment** with the whole planning process when nothing changes and our experts, farmers, business people, residents, supporters are treated disrespectfully and are just treated as tick the consultation box.
- **cheated** when we are lied to about job creation, when local economic benefits are claimed but are no more than a pittance of a return of some of our subsidy money, when our access to services are reduced or are unavailable, and when our roads are damaged.
- **sickened** as we see more and more landscape turned into mono-colour fields of black solar panels dotted with large white out-of-character infrastructure like BESS containers and sub-stations that are also brightly lit up at night.
- **stressfulness** as our years of predicting industry non-viability, steeply rising retail electricity prices, increasing unstable grid, growing waste, grid fragility, grid security, increased uncontrollable fires, and reactive grid management continue to evolve but are ignored.

- **thankfulness** for all the friends I have made and support received from people across Australia, most of whom I have not actually met, e.g. farmers, community group leaders, fire-fighters, politicians, media persons, engineers, scientists, lawyers, councillors, neighbours, business people and leaders of a variety of organisations.
- **satisfaction** from being able to bring my skills and life experiences as an electronic engineer, management accountant (FCPA), management consultant and project manager to the energy debate; my working life was one of innovation and best practice in all my career roles; I consulted to and project managed multi-million dollar improvement and change management projects for the NSW Electricity Commission, Sydney Electricity, City Rail, Boral, Hamersley Iron (Rio Tinto), Westfield, Rexel, Dept. of Finance and Dept of Defence, to name a few.

I have seen and experienced firsthand how wind, solar, BESS projects operating, under construction or proposed :

- change the culture within a community from those that sell out to the developers to those that suffer the consequences, leading to fractured friendships and relationships; Proponents secretly negotiate leases with individual land owners and then ensure they cannot disclose anything about the agreements or say anything negative about the project or developer; it appears that the host landholder has a lot of onerous conditions in the contract, including responsibility for some maintenance, full responsibility for decommissioning, disposal and land rehabilitation; overseas some sites are just abandoned; Australia's first wind works to stop operating became a wind works museum; how many hundreds of 'wind works museums' will we end up with in the years to come?; Proponents must put up an upfront indexed bond for the end-of-life of the project.
- those that benefit and those that don't as some are bought off at the expense of those that subsidised them; Councils charge 1% of capital value for a development application by a resident, but SSD DA's are exempt; a Voluntary Planning Agreement is usually struck but the payments are spread over the life of the project and in total are less than 1%; ratepayers are effectively giving an interest free long-term loan to the Developer
- agricultural land decimated and wildlife habitats too, as burn-off followed by bull-dozing strip the land bare; habitats destroyed, animals killed or displaced
- the cumulative effects of more and more projects, in many cases each project abutting another; huge numbers of heavy vehicles disrupt traffic, increase damage to roads, huge increases in the number of imported workers, expected to be from overseas on temporary visas; impact on rural culture?; impact on services?; impact on crime?
- the massively increase the fire risks, where several fires in and around Beryl solar works occurred in 2022 and 2023; the 18ha fire of 24/04/23 under solar panels was only extinguished due a 180 degree wind change; fire-fighters will not enter a solar works but will try to contain a fire entering or escaping from the perimeter; Dept of planning and the IPC still only specify a 20,000 litre water tank onsite, the same as my six hectares property must have; the 400MW Stubbo solar/BESS works is 1800 hectares; where are the fire hydrants,

the sprinkler systems, a fire-break of at least 100 metres from any boundary or bushland?; a BESS fire of just one battery cabinet is left to burn out over several days with highly toxic smoke; right now a massive lithium battery and solar panel fire is destroying a factory in Melbourne and in WA a lithium mine continues to burn after many days; these fires contaminate land and water; why are our RFS and NSWFR personnel not involved in specifying fire protection? Why is it the HQ based in Sydney signing off on such inadequacies?; who foots the bill for the specialised equipment needed to even attend a solar, BESS or wind turbine fire?

- even a 60MW solar works with a BESS quotes a capital cost of \$208 million, with larger project being over one billion dollars; no public liability insurance will cover a tiny fraction of those amounts for an adjoining land owner
- nearly all the projects will use Chinese manufactured solar panels, batteries, wind turbines, inverters and other components; Chinese companies are significant or total owners of the ships carrying the components to our ports, the Newcastle Port where much of the components are transported to sites hundreds of kms away, Transgrid our major transmission line builder, Energy Australia an integrated energy company; where is the concern for both our energy security and national security when we depend so heavily on one Country?
- having travelled Europe many times, especially Germany, I can assure you that seeing dozens of often still wind turbines before you even drive over the hill is not very appealing; I see no reason why the visitors to REZs will not want to stay or even come as the concentration of hundreds, even thousands of wind turbines on every ridge, hill or plain and with tens of millions of solar panels and battery cabinets turning the land into a two tone landscape of black and white
- over a 60 year period, wind turbines and solar works use many times more tonnes of materials per megawatt of electricity generated than does a super critical High Efficiency Low Emissions coal fired power station, or a super hyper critical Combined Cycle Gas Turbine plant or a nuclear plant, of which there are several types; the latter have longer lives, cost less per megawatt of capacity to build and operate, produce much less waste, have very high capacity factors, long lives, low or near zero emissions and address the energy and national security issues.

In conclusion, I hope the Committee finds my submission informative and useful. Although only a summary of some of the many thousands of hours of effort over six years, I am confident of what I present. I have thousands of files of reports, scientific papers, planning documents, media reports, as well many other experts and groups I can call on.

Yours sincerely