

Community Engagement Review Taskforce  
GPO Box 3090  
Canberra ACT 2601  
Attention: Andrew Dyer

28.09.23

Dear Mr Dyer

We thoroughly object to the New England area being made a Renewable Energy Zone (REZ) by someone(s) with apparently no community or local Council consultation and the subsequent proposed transmission lines by Energy Co. Our Walcha area will be crippled. We consider them linked, and therefore we cannot look at one without the other. The subsequent influx of developers to the area with proposals for up to 800 wind turbines and many solar installations will cripple our community. At present, Winterbourne Wind and Ruby Hills projects intend 283 towers – the largest in Australia, apparently. The “consultation” with the community has been minimal – and almost laughable, if it were not so serious.

**They are not wind and solar FARMS. They are industrial installations** and they, together with the transmission lines needed to support such installations, will denude prime agricultural land. There is no more land being created on Earth. It is a finite resource. Our agricultural industries – and food – will be diminished. Does that not bother politicians and bureaucrats at all?

**SECRECY.** When farmers who sign contracts for \$1,000 are not able to discuss ANYTHING about the wind installations, with neighbours, family, friends or the general community, it raises the question “Why?” Is there something to hide? What is the hidden agenda here? This has divided the whole community- neighbours against neighbours, friends against friends, families divided. Walcha has had a wonderful community. This simple secrecy issue, combined with the reluctance of the developers to engage with the community in forums has exacerbated this division.

**SOCIAL LICENCE AND COMMUNITY CONSULTATION** There has been NO prior community consultation before the REZ was announced. We were presented with a “fait accompli”. There is little community consultation even now. Developers and Energy Co have made presentations, yet when questioned cannot or will not provide answers. Their “consultation” has consisted of a glossy overview, but the community has had to dig elsewhere for answers to specific concerns. Similarly, the developers do not address simple and (we consider) fundamental issues such as road suitability and huge transport disruptions – that comes apparently when they get approval. Isn’t this the wrong way round and a complete waste of time and taxpayers’ money? Should not these fundamental issues be considered FIRST?

**LOSS TO AGRICULTURE** There are 8 billion people in the world, and we produce clean, green food in our “Pasture Wonderland” of Walcha, as it has been called since the 1950s. We have highly productive agricultural land. This will change with wind installations all over our area, plus the power lines needed to transport the electricity for up to 800 turbines with even more roads carving up the land. Aerial agricultural activities will be compromised, making land less able to be fertilised, and weeds controlled from the air.

**BIOSECURITY.** If we have the number of trucks and people in and around Walcha from anywhere bringing the towers and the blades from Newcastle plus all the sand, gravel, cement, water the possibility for huge biosecurity issues arises for weeds, disease etc to be brought to our farms. This is unacceptable.

**TRANSPORT.** This is a very real problem, and one that will impact on Walcha for a very long time. Oversize, overlength trucks with their accompanying vehicles will hold up traffic in each direction, wherever they go, whether the New England Highway, Oxley Highway, Thunderbolts Way and all the smaller roads to traverse till they reach their destination. This will impact everyone in the community especially first responders – police, fire, SES, ambulance etc, and the local people trying to get to medical appointments, work, or simply around Walcha etc.

The Winterbourne Wind EIS states that there will be minimum disruption. I believe that each turbine needs a base of 900 cubic metres of concrete. Each tonne (T) of concrete needs 10 cubic metres of material (sand and gravel) not counting dry cement. Each turbine (if 900T concrete needed) will need 1,800 T material FOR EACH TURBINE. How many trucks? Thousands! Too many. Not to mention carting water. OSOM vehicles for turbines and blades have been calculated at **3679 movements** to Walcha from Newcastle. A summary of **total vehicle movements** for Winterbourne Wind and Ruby Hills projects **entering the Walcha LGA is 724,179 movements. Not disruptive?? These projects have not done their homework. These facts can be verified.**

**WATER.** Water is a huge problem, and a great deal will be needed. Where will it come from? NOT Walcha's domestic supply, not local dams, so WHERE? Will it be trucked in as well? More trucks on our roads!!

**DECOMMISSIONING.** Decommissioning will be done by the developers, they say, BUT what if companies change hands. Some have already been onsold 3 times. Ultimately The NSW Department of Planning has said that it is the responsibility of the owner of the land. How can that be? Apparently, the NSW Government does not have a policy on decommissioning similar to the mining industry. If not, why not? And would it then be possible that no one removes the turbines at the end of their short life and we are left with "dead" wind turbines that no one will remove? Whatever happens, each huge concrete mass will remain in the ground.

**TIME FRAME.** 25 years is very short term for an installation of this size, associated transmission lines and cost and disruption to prime agricultural land. Why is it so short lived? Is it because it is becoming old technology? We suspect so when looking at other countries.

**HEIGHT ISSUES.** Walcha is to have the biggest wind turbines in Australia. Average height (in feet) for China – 33 feet, USA – 262, Germany, seems to have the tallest at 492 feet , India – 279, Spain - 130. (Source Climatebiz) Average heights in other countries vary, but are much smaller and only the off shore turbines seem to be as big as we would have: we would have giants. **Ours would be 230 metres (755 feet) and up to 260 metres (840 feet).** That is a huge difference and a big blot on our landscape. But height alone is no real reason to object.

Being sited on ridges near National Parks creates aerial firefighting issues – extremely difficult with smoke obscuring the turbines. Aerial fertilising and spraying will be almost impossible at the heights flown (a few feet to 100 feet (30m)). To go above them would be impossible to do the job. General Aviation would also be compromised in inclement weather. The area often has clouds on the hills, obscuring visibility. We believe there will be aircraft accidents caused by the turbines, and we have been involved in aviation for over 50 years.

**COMMUNITY BENEFITS.** Walcha Energy, Winterbourne Wind and Ruby Hills say that there will be community benefits – e.g., \$1 million at the start of installation and \$750,000 per annum thereafter. This is tiny compared to their expected profits. Walcha is supposed to benefit from the installation with local tradesmen and labour used. This is a farce as it is impossible to get tradesmen at present. There is very limited accommodation and so workers will live elsewhere and support those areas, which will mean even more vehicles on the roads, travelling to and from the turbines. IF there is some rental accommodation available in Walcha, it will push up prices and exclude those disadvantaged Walcha people. We can see no advantage for Walcha in any of this.

**FOREIGN OWNERSHIP.** It seems we will also import all the components (more transport costs) and then export most of the profit - a lose/lose situation instead of a win for Australia, and Walcha in particular. Why should we have foreign ownership of Australian resources?

**UNKNOWNNS.** There are many “unknowns “ -

Who will the developer be at the end of the projects? Will they honour previous agreements?

Long term impact of health of those close to turbines and large power lines. More evidence is coming to the fore on these issues, which now are shrugged off by the developers.

Impact on the township and community long term.

Would the payments made to the community REALLY compensate for the huge upheaval?

**SUGGESTIONS.** Why not construct more wind installations between Bathurst and Mudgee? The wind installation is already there, the infrastructures are already there. Because it is not prime agricultural land there would also be less disruption to land owners and there seems to be room for more turbines.

Why not have more wind turbines off shore near the cities that need the power OR ALONG THE RIDGE BETWEEN Sydney and Wollongong, rather than disrupting huge amounts of prime agricultural land which is a food bowl, and necessitating the immense cost of power lines to take it to the cities – with the obvious electricity “leakage” as it travels long distances.

Why not use other alternative forms of renewables which are more sustainable and do less damage? There are many other options, some in the development stage – e.g. smaller wind turbines that can perhaps be attached TO EXISTING STRUCTURES (how about existing power pylons? All the infrastructure is already there.) Surely, like mobile phones, turbines will become smaller and more efficient as technology develops.

Set up small community “hubs” of solar and (much smaller) wind turbine to be self-sufficient.

Investigate wave power – near where the electricity is needed.

Investigate more Hydroelectric power near where the electricity is most needed.

**We must look at nuclear energy as base power**, if we do not have coal fired power stations. It has come a long way since the early days. Surely the small modular reactors (SMRs) around now could easily be positioned where the coal fired power stations. Infrastructure already there – and it’s emission free and LONG TERM, unlike wind and solar! Surely cheaper in the long term?

Since we were declared a Renewable Energy Zone, surely **ALL THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENTS should be assessed together**, so we can see the cumulative effect of the impact to our town and our area, rather than the piecemeal approach the NSW Planning Department seems to take.

**CONCLUSION** Initially we supported the idea of some wind installations in the area. However, the more we delved into facts, the more we worried. There are many others in Walcha who feel the same. The proponents for the Winterbourne Windfarm say this installation will put Walcha on the map. We agree – but it will be for all the wrong reasons, making Walcha far from the wonderful town and community it is at present and THAT is why we thoroughly object to this whole proposal without much more consultation to arrive at much saner projects that WILL benefit all..

**Walcha deserves much better.**