



# Parliamentary Inquiry into the Impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) on Rural and Regional Communities and Industries in New South Wales.

Armidale | 17 July 2025

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Submission notes from the presentations made by  
**Cameron Greig and Damien Timbs - Voice for Walcha**

# Submission to the Inquiry - CAMERON GREIG

I thank you for conducting this inquiry into the impacts on community – I am going to focus on Walcha.

We have all heard about the impacts of the renewable energy rollout on communities and industry in the Central West Orana REZ. We expect to see similar impacts in the NE REZ because Energy Co do not seem to be addressing any of these issues.

Our concern is that Energy Co are proposing the Central South Hub at Walcha, with the capacity to connect 4 GW of project. For perspective, this is almost the same scale of development seen across the entire Central West Orana REZ - but CONCENTRATED into the Walcha area.

The Central West Orana Region has a population of over 50 times the Walcha LGA population.

Central West Orana REZ includes the city of Dubbo and the towns of Coolah, Dunnedoo, Gulgong, Mudgee, Gilgandra, Wellington, Narromine - and many more.

Central West Orana, have already encountered serious concerns with healthcare coverage of workers - Walcha has a single, multipurpose facility, with very limited hospital services.

The Central West Orana have already cited concerns with crime and adequate policing levels. Walcha does not have a full time police presence.

Central West Orana have cited major concerns with worker accommodation, trying to house 5000 workers across the region, in their towns and cities – Walcha has an adult population of 2000 to host the same workforce.

There are many other widely reported concerns – water, waste, traffic and roads, biodiversity to mention a few.

CWO, with all its resources, is struggling to absorb the level of development brought about by the renewable transition. What will be the impacts on our small community facing that same level of development as the entire Central West Orana Region?

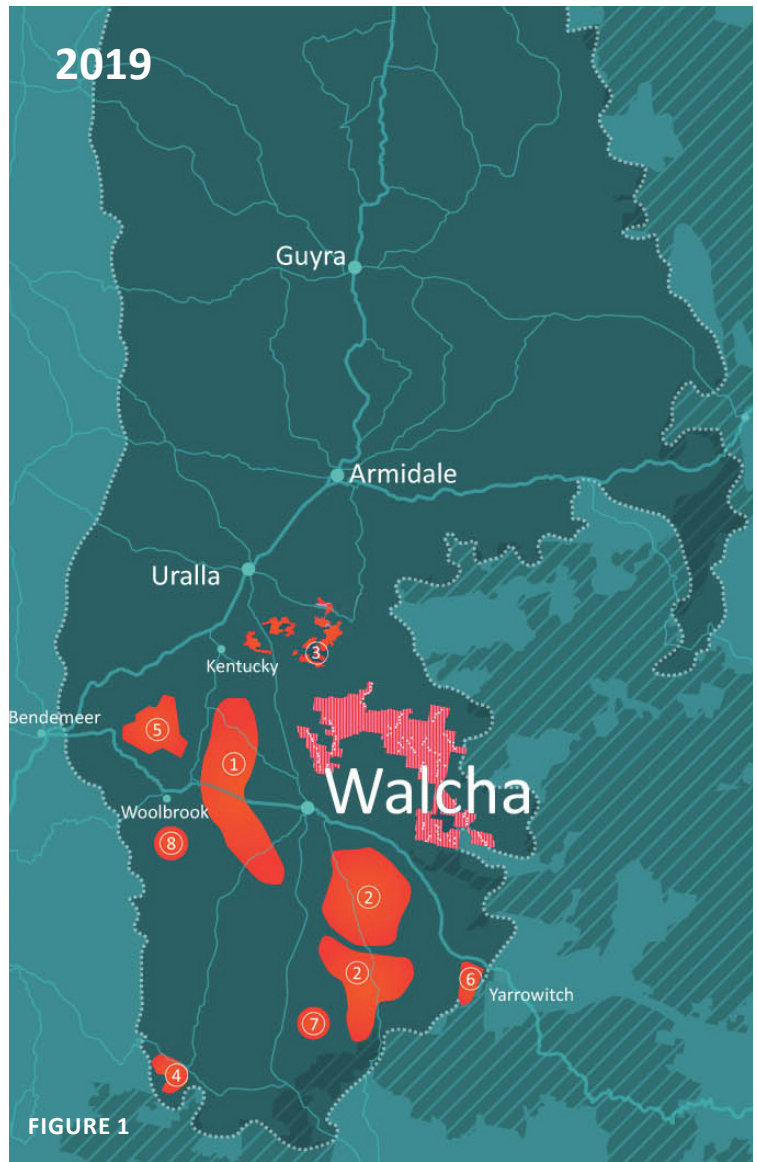
Energy Co have claimed that they will build infrastructure where there is developer interest. This concept makes sense – where there is genuine developer interest, and where there is a practical ability to pursue the design. The case of the Central South hub is different – there was only ever tokenistic generator interest, which has now disappeared. This is detailed in the tabled document. The Walcha Plateau was never suited to 4GW of Wind development.

Energy Co must recognise that this resulted from a complete lack of proper planning, and consultation with the community, and revisit the planning table.

**This is a broken, wasteful and burdensome design that needs urgent reconsideration.**

> **Figure 1** shows in red proposed projects by Walcha Energy surrounding Walcha c.2019

> **Figure 2** shows in 2025, that all projects with the exemption of 2 have disappeared. The remaining 2 projects have no need of the Central South hub - so why is it still on the drawing board?



## Supporting Facts – tabled information.

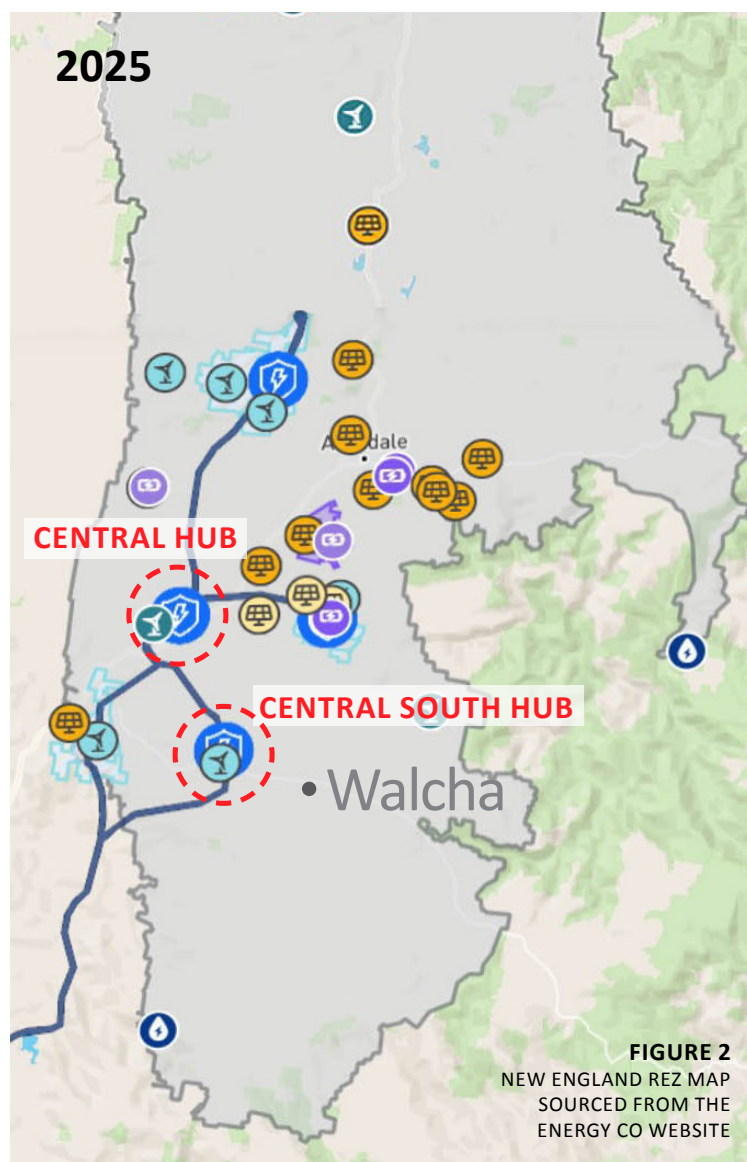
### POPULATION OF REZ ZONES

The population of the Central West and Orana region of New South Wales is approximately 170,000 people. This region is also referred to as the Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone (REZ), which is a designated area focused on renewable energy generation. While the REZ itself doesn't have a separate population number, it's located within the broader Central West and Orana region. The region is geographically diverse, encompassing areas like the Central Tablelands.

The New England Renewable Energy Zone (REZ) does not have a specific population associated with it, as it's a geographic area defined for renewable energy development, not a defined population center. The population of the broader New England region of New South Wales is approximately 185,560, with over a quarter living in the Tamworth Regional Council area. The REZ boundary has been brought inwards on the western boundary, reducing the area from the broader New England boundary. This removes Tamworth, Moree, Narrabri, Inverell etc. The likely population of the NE REZ is around 60,000.

### HISTORY OF DEVELOPER OR GENERATOR INTEREST AROUND WALCHA

In 2019, Walcha Energy claimed to be developing a 4GW series of wind projects on the Walcha Plateau. This was a fanciful, unresearched, and impractical dream. Neither the land hosts or the community was consulted at this time. Never the less, this was used by Energy Co as a signal of “generator interest” to base their design of the 4GW Central South Hub at Walcha, along with 50km of transmission deviating from the main spine of transmission, to get to Walcha.



Fast forward, and these projects have all but evaporated. Landholders have rejected the proposals. The challenges are too great to access Walcha either along the winding and mountainous Oxley Highway from Bendemeer or under designed and LGA council maintained Thunderbolts Way from Uralla. The high value biodiversity challenges have made the prospect impractical. The originator has disappeared as a result. The projects have been removed from the register.

The only remaining project around the Central South hub is Skye Ridge and we have little reason to believe it is a viable project. If it does proceed, it can connect to the Central hub to its north, in any case, with 10km of transmission line.

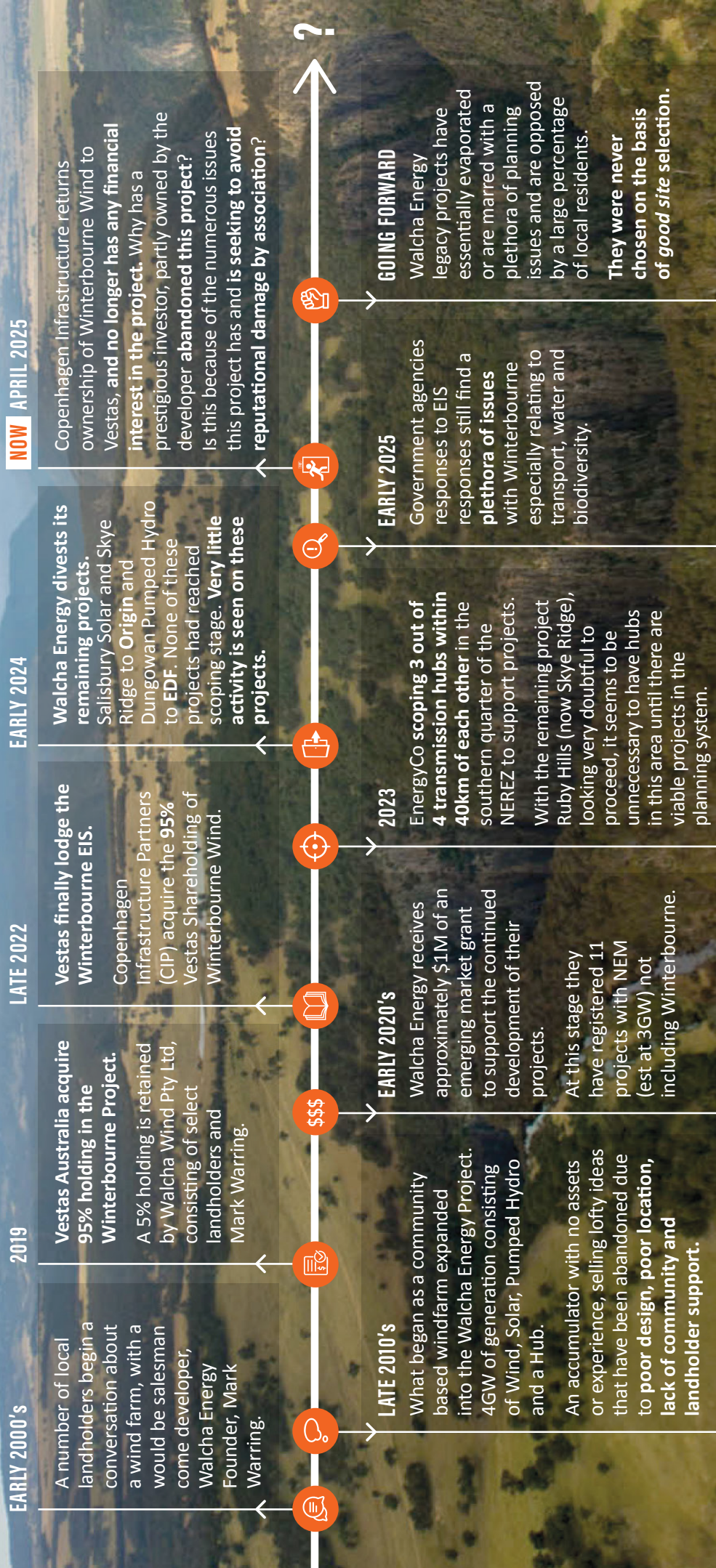
These facts have made the Central South Hub, and the 50km of transmission to access it, obsolete and redundant – yet Energy Co persist in maintaining it in the design brief. They refuse to acknowledge the changing environment from the initial “generator Interest”, that was never properly researched and supported in the first place.

On the one hand they state that they will not build redundant infrastructure, and then immediately state that they will be proceeding with this design. This is a total contradiction.

Please refer to the 2 one page documents over:

- **Walcha Casestudy** - Walcha Energy Timeline
- **Road to nowhere** – The Energy Co Timeline

# Walcha Case study | WALCHA ENERGY TIMELINE



Over arching this we have minimal community support for these projects and most do so due to a promised financial nirvana. Friends and families no longer talk. Much of this is to do with the lack of real and genuine consultation by the developers and landowners.

The council is under resourced and takes the position of *“the freight train is coming and we can’t stop it”* supported by developers promises and Energy Co deliveries of cash.

We hope that Energy Co can reassess their spending in the NEREZ based on the most up to date information and projects and avoid the spending of billions of dollars of public money with little or no return on investment and the collateral damage that hosting communities will suffer.

**Transition promptly!**  
**Transition where communities are supportive!**  
**Transition based on good planning!**

# Road to nowhere

## THE ENERGYCO TIMELINE

2024

Voice for Walcha continue to question EnergyCo's justification of the Central South hub and associated transmission network in the New England Renewable Energy Zone Network project. The following timeline highlights how the flawed generator registration of interest process, has resulted in the inclusion of the unnecessary 330/500kV Central-South hub that threatens the community of Walcha. The Central-South was included in the original EnergyCo transmission design to service the proposed 4000MW Walcha Energy Project. This project no longer exists.

The infrastructure project is being constructed to support proposed renewable energy in the New England REZ. If built, the central-south hub will not be supporting proposed projects but will be drawing large-scale development to an area with limited access, high-value biodiversity and will result in an unacceptable level of community impacts.

2019



Walcha Energy proposed the development of **Walcha Energy Project** – a large-scale hybrid project generating 4GW of wind, solar and pumped hydro, equivalent to up to 15% of NSW total electricity demand. Commissioning of Winterbourne Wind Farm expected to be 2022.



Walcha Energy projects shown in red  
Source: Cumulative Map - V4W

17 DEC 2021



**New England Renewable Energy Zone was formally declared** with an intended capacity of 8GW.



New England REZ shown in red  
Source: EnergyCo Interactive Map

2022



By May 2022, Walcha Energy had submitted **12 projects around Walcha** to NEM (National Electricity Market) Generator Registration of Interest. Note that there was no cost or barrier to entry at this stage.

EnergyCo began investigating transmission routes.

At this time, the Walcha plateau was identified as a key area for generation, based on information gathered from the Generator Registration of Interest.



2023



In May, EnergyCo preliminary study corridor released. From July 2023, **Walcha Energy started deleting their Walcha projects from the NEM registrations of interest.**

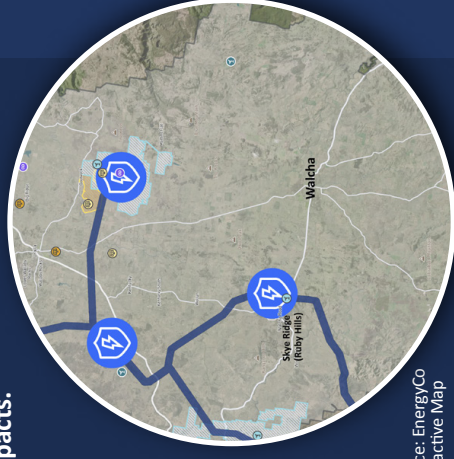


Preliminary Study Corridor  
Source: EnergyCo

In July, a scoping report for **New England REZ Network Infrastructure Project** was published, including the 330/500kV central-south hub south-west of Walcha with the capacity to support 4000MW of large-scale renewable projects. **This hub is currently supporting only 1 project which has not reached scoping stage.** Central-south hub is proposed to be built in Stage 1 of the NE REZ project.



This hub and the associated transmission lines results in poor outcomes for all EnergyCo's planning pillars – people, environment, economics, strategy, technical – compared to the original western bulk corridor. It also poses a threat for the Walcha community by drawing development to an area that has already proven to be a poor location for development based on access, biodiversity and community impacts.



Source: EnergyCo Interactive Map

## Submission to the Inquiry - DAMIEN TIMBS

I am here as a representative of our community group - Voice For Walcha.

This group was established four years ago out of a seen need to disseminate and distribute information from renewable developers to our community.

The group now has 350 endorsing members and some 500 subscribed members from our community of around 3000.

Walcha sits high on top of the Great Dividing Range, southeast of Armidale and northeast of Tamworth. It falls into the southern part of the new England Renewable Energy Zone. It is a district rich in history and community. The agricultural, arts and tourism industries thrive.

The landscape boasts some of the most productive grazing land in New South Wales due to its high rainfall and productive soil types. The natural beauty of the area is enhanced by the fact the Walcha Plateau is bordered on the East by the world heritage Oxley Wild Rivers National Park.

### The impacts of the REZ on our community

The impacts to date have been huge. Our community has informed itself and whilst accepting of the renewable transition have strongly advocated for projects to be of the right size in the right place and developed by the right Developers.

In regard to large scale Wind projects we have demonstrated in several different ways now that between around 75% of our community don't support such developments.

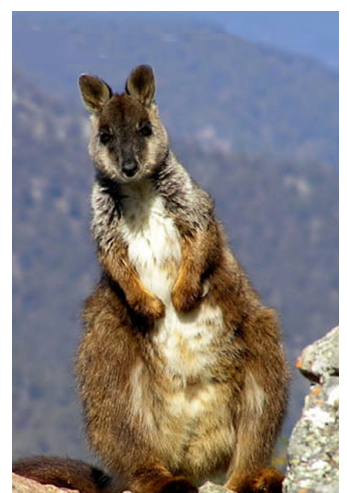
The reasons are many but for the purposes of summary are:

- Biodiversity impacts
- Road access
- Social impacts such as wages, housing and living affordability
- Cumulative impacts of numerous generator and transmission projects

### BIODIVERSITY IMPACTS

With the current project Winterbourne Wind as an example, we can assume that a large-scale wind project will cause devastating and irreversible impacts to the natural environment.

The Walcha plateau has 2.5 times the natural population of Eagles and raptors of any other proposed wind project in NSW. We have protected woodlands that will be destroyed killing native fauna and flora. Large scale wind projects on the Walcha plateau cannot be deemed to be in the public interest due to these impacts.



## THE CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

Back in the early 2000s a group of around 8 local landowners started discuss the concept of building a wind farm, that would help to diversify farm income, help to tackle climate change, and involve community ownership, so as to share the potential income with the wider community. A chance meeting in a local pub saw the meeting of one of the landowners and a business man from Sydney. This would eventually see the formation of Walcha Energy and Walcha Wind.

As a result of an unqualified, un capitalised and overzealous developer the community of Walcha has been burdened by the impacts of some 660 proposed wind turbines. This proposal was conceptually developed by Walcha Energy. The developer came from Sydney with no experience and certainly not enough money to build and operate the multi billion dollar dream. When the REZ was declared, the first project of 40-50 turbines with the support of 8 local farmers grew to over 500 turbines and a pumped hydro system. Walcha Energy have since left the district taking \$1million in an emerging market grant and the \$ from the sale of their projects Winterbourne Wind (EIS exhibition phase) and Sky Ridge (pre scoping stage), but their legacy remains.

Energy Co have proposed and will include the “South Central hub” in their upcoming EIS. This hub has the capacity to connect 4000megawatts of projects, the amount they proposed in the 2018 developer expression of interest. **The bulk of these projects no longer exist.** The remaining project, SkyRidge has a low probability of being built, and a low priority by it’s current owner Origin. So we have a situation where our community of 3500 people continue to be strangled by developers, Energy Co being the worst. The state stands to build a piece of infrastructure costing \$billions of taxpayer money. This hub is a redundant piece of infrastructure. Energy Co has prioritised the completion of its EIS, and is planning to undertake an independent cumulative impact assessment after the lodgement of the EIS. It seems that to design, plan and seek approval for its construction in the absence of knowing what the community and environment can handle is a somewhat counter intuitive process. As an example, 3 of the 4 proposed transmission hubs are within 36km of the Walcha CBD.

The impacts of this disproportionate amount of developer interest on the Walcha plateau have been generational. We have friends no longer speaking to each other, social structures falling apart and what was once a tight knit community in distress. All this while projects may never get up due to unique build constraints, costs and social impacts. How can this be deemed to be in the public interest.

## THE SOCIAL IMPACTS

Currently our population of 3000 residents, 2000 adults including 900 full time labour units are facing a tidal wave of change.

The proposed South Central hub could be like a honey pot of change to our district. We could see more short term construction workers saturate our labour force. There could be 2000 workers that come to our town if the south central hub is built. What would this do to our families that currently work on farms, or on our council or have long term secure employment in our trucking industry. What would it do to our rents. How could the teacher or nurse currently paying \$300/week rent be able to stay in Walcha when this complete social imbalance happens. Demand and supply models would suggest that rents could soar above \$1200/ week. What happens when the REZ is built? Will Walcha ever be the same again?

In the public interest is an independent cumulative impact study request. We need to understand where projects will be built. We need to understand what the impacts of 4000megawatts of projects will have on a small town of 3000 people/ we need to understand what a fiscally responsible rollout from Energy Co in the States transmission rollout is.

In conclusion we have a situation where the negative impacts of the REZ are of little benefit to the local community, and create State Budgetary Impacts for NSW taxpayers. Walcha is being strangled and Energy Co continue to waste the public purse without a commensurate return for the people of NSW. The REZ is broken and we need brave politicians to pull the concept up and revisit the planning table.

# Other Topics of Conversation

## IMPACT ON ROADS

Thunderbolts Way is a Walcha Council owned and maintained road. It is not designed for high volume of traffic flow. The pavement is not adequately to carry heavy project vehicles.

This is our major road to Armidale schools, medical services, and for many commuters and shoppers. It is the major access road for sale of livestock to northern markets, feedlots and processors. It is the north south access for travellers between Brisbane and Sydney, and significant and important source of tourism and service income for Walcha Businesses. This is a road the Walcha community and economy cannot afford to be choked up with project traffic – OSOM trucks, and general project vehicles and trucks.

## IMPACT ON BIODIVERSITY

Walcha is located in one of the most productive agricultural areas on the Eastern Seaboard. It composes a complex ecological environment, a well timbered landscape with many endangered and protected species of ground and flying species of fauna, as well as important stands of native timber and grasslands. The New England REZ abuts directly onto the Oxley World Rivers National Park and Gondwana World Heritage Area. This highlights the risks of damage to flora and fauna throughout the region. Winterbourne Wind has struggled to overcome these challenges with their project design, and Skye Ridge will undoubtedly encounter the same challenges as they work towards producing their scoping report.

## IMPACT ON HOUSING

Trying to house 5000 workers around a town that currently has a population of approx 2000, with a rental vacancy that rarely rises to 5 vacant homes in the region, is a pathetically unviable proposition. To imagine that this will not put serious pressure on housing and rental costs would be highly naïve and misleading.

We have previously closely observed the impact on housing when a project employing 400 workers operated near Miles in QLD, a town of 2000 population, in the 2010's. Rental costs for a 4 bedroom house moved from \$350/week to \$1200/week for a sustained period of time. This process led to the desertion of the community, as they could obviously no longer afford to live there. Council workers, teachers, nurses, business employees all

left Miles and never returned. Home owners sold up, not wanting to remain, and taking advantage of the housing demand. This process kills communities and these impacts have not even begun to be dealt with by Energy Co.

## IMPACT ON SOCIAL SERVICES

Health Services in Walcha are limited to a Multi-purpose centre, with limited hospital services for our population of 3000, yet we are being asked to provide services for 5000 workers, plus any partners or family that are living in the area, in addition to our own population.

Child care, pre-school and primary school are all similarly limited.

## IMPACT ON WATER

Walcha has limited water supply, and at this stage, Winterbourne Wind have still not moved away from the position that they may require water from the Walcha Water Supply, despite Council denying access to this supply.

## IMPACT ON WASTE

Winterbourne Wind, the only project with an EIS in place, has no established plan for waste disposal. Waste from these types of projects is significant, and needs to be addressed.

## DECOMMISSIONING

Winterbourne Wind still has no plan for decommissioning, with enormous quantities of waste, mainly in the form of shattered Fibreglass blades, having no where to be processed, or buried.

This is a shortened list, with many other impacts not detailed here.



Voice for Walcha is a group of interested and passionate members of the community who value the local environment, the area and the people to such an extent, that we feel it is worth fighting for.



[VOICEFORWALCHA.COM](http://VOICEFORWALCHA.COM)