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Our Reference: OUT-515/21

29 January 2021

Department of Planning, Industry & Environment
4 Parramatta Square
12 Darcy Street
PARRAMATTA NSW 2150

Attention: Anthony Ko

Dear Sir,

Hills of Gold Wind Farm (SSD-9679) - Environmental Impact Statement

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the development application and accompanying environmental impact statement (EIS) for the Hills of Gold Wind Farm project (SSD-9679) near Nundle.

Upper Hunter Shire Council (UHSC) is generally supportive of renewable energy projects and acknowledges that the project represents the potential for a significant investment into the region.

Council has reviewed the EIS and provides the following comments for the department's consideration:

Community Enhancement Fund

The EIS indicates the intention to establish a Community Enhancement Fund (CEF) (in lieu of a Voluntary Planning Agreement (VPA)) to which the project owner/operator will provide funding towards local environmental, social and community initiatives led by local residents residing within 20km of the project.

The proposed contribution of \$2,500 per turbine per year towards a CEF is insufficient and is less than the contributions paid by other recently approved wind farms including the Liverpool Range Wind Farm which established a precedent of \$3,000 per turbine per annum. Council would accept a minimum contribution of \$3,000 per turbine per annum calculated as follows:

Flat rate of \$500/turbine/MW/annum indexed with CPI.

This method of calculation would ensure that the contribution is linked to the turbine capacity and therefore minimise the impact of any future reduction in the number of proposed turbines and associated increase in turbine capacity on the total contribution payable towards a CEF.

All correspondence to:

General Manager | Upper Hunter Shire Council | PO Box 208, Scone NSW 2337

Phone: **Scone Office** 6540 1100 | **Merriwa Office** 6521 7000 | **Murrurundi Office** 6540 1350

Email: council@upperhunter.nsw.gov.au



The legal and governance framework around the proposed CEF is unclear. As such, it would be preferable for the proponent to enter into a joint VPA with Tamworth Council, Liverpool Ranges Shire Council and Upper Hunter Shire Council to enable the payment of development contributions by the proponent towards a CEF which is administered by the Councils and a CEF committee. The CEF committee should operate within an appropriate legal and governance framework such as that provided for under Section 355 of the Local Government Act 1993 to ensure full accountability, transparency and financial probity.

Traffic and Transport

It is noted that the proposed development does not intend to utilise any local roads within the Upper Hunter Shire Local Government Area (LGA) during construction or operation of the project. In this regard, should the application be approved, it is recommended that a condition of consent be imposed restricting the use of roads for the purposes of the project to those assessed in the EIS.

Visual Impacts

A review of the visual impact assessment raises some concerns in relation to the visual impacts of the wind farm on properties within the Upper Hunter Shire LGA. The proposed wind turbines are densely spaced along the ridgeline forming the LGA boundary and will be highly visible from a number of properties. Consideration should be given to reducing the number of turbines and/or increasing the spacing of the turbines in areas where they are highly concentrated (eg. WP20 – WP39) to mitigate the potential visual impact.

Biodiversity Impacts

The loss of native vegetation (particularly high condition vegetation) within the development footprint and the impacts of the proposal on Threatened Ecological Communities (TEC) and Threatened Fauna Habitat (TFH) (including Koala habitat) are of significant concern to Council. Whilst biodiversity offsets will be required to ensure no net loss of biodiversity overall, the proposal will result in the loss of biodiversity within the locality. We recommend that the proponent consider reducing the development footprint in areas containing high condition native vegetation, TEC's and TFH to further minimise impacts.

Community Concerns

Council has received correspondence from residents of the Timor area raising significant concerns with the proposal and the extent of community consultation undertaken by the proponent. Specifically, concerns have been raised in relation to the following issues:

- high risk of irreparable and devastating impacts on threatened species and flora habitats in the affected region.
- unacceptable risks and threats to local natural water sources (in a community that is still suffering and has been utterly devastated by drought conditions over the past few years).
- high potential for wind turbine nightlights/disruption.
- noise and vibrations impacts.
- significant visual impact.
- threat of erosion and landslides.
- reduction of fire-fighting capability in escarpments due to aerial support restrictions.

- risks and diminution in land values.

It is understood that the residents will be making separate submissions to DPIE in relation to these concerns.

Upper Hunter Shire Council is supportive of renewable energy projects in principle and acknowledges the need for such projects to be implemented to enable a response to climate change and the call to reduce CO2 emissions.

We trust the above comments will be given due consideration by the Department in its assessment of the proposed development.

Please do not hesitate to contact Mathew Pringle, Director Environmental & Community Services, should you have any questions regarding the content of this submission.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'GM', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Greg McDonald
GENERAL MANAGER