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Director – Energy Assessments,
Development Assessment,
Department of Planning and Environment,
4 Parramatta Square,
12 Darcy Street,
Parramatta NSW 2150

Dear Sir/Madam,

**SUBMISSION IN RESPONSE TO THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT OF THE
HUMELINK PROJECT – APPLICATION NO SSI-36656827**

I hereby submit this response to the HumeLink Environmental Impact Statement report.

I object to the HumeLink proposal on a number of grounds, as follows:

Background

We own 120Ha property “Mount Fitton”, 130 Storriers Lane, Bannister, where we run a sheep grazing enterprise in conjunction with a nearby larger holding. We derive 100% of our income from farming. HumeLink will be constructed across our property, with one tower also proposed to be on our land.

We support greater use of renewables in power generation, and recognise that transmission infrastructure needs to be upgraded. However, we see Transgrid’s current overhead HumeLink negates many of the environmental gains, and threatens our ability to farm sustainably.

Impacts on vegetation, biodiversity and sustainability

Prior to us purchasing the property 27 years ago, the land was used for growing potatoes. As a result, little of the original vegetation remained. We identified an area of significant remnant vegetation on the farm, fenced it off to exclude stock, and have not grazed that area for over a quarter of a century. We have undertaken continual control of weeds and feral animals. That block contains at least 167 mature trees of at least 7 species, including one found nowhere else on the property or in the immediate vicinity. That tree is estimated to be over 100 years old, and is surrounded by several seedlings.

Natural regrowth has been encouraged, with more than double that number of trees now present as seedlings or juvenile trees. There are also at least 10 species of native grasses and forbs present.

Transgrid has advised us that this ENTIRE stand of remnant native vegetation will be destroyed to make way for HumeLink.

This highly significant loss of local biodiversity, and bird and animal habitat, is dismissed by HumeLink as a small part of the hundreds of hectares being cleared to make way for this transmission line.

This protected and nurtured area of native vegetation, with its trees, shrubs, and grasses, is a key part of the sustainability of our grazing enterprise. It was intended to help substantiate our future claim to net zero emissions from our farm. There is no compensation to our business for this loss.

Previous experience with clearing of power easements on our land has shown weeds, particularly serrated tussock and Sifton bush, quickly colonise the disturbed soil. Even with efforts to reseed with pasture, these weeds take hold and require significant and concerted control efforts over several years. I see no provision for this.

Destruction of significant, dense areas of native vegetation, such as will occur on our land, will release tonnes of stored carbon into the atmosphere, for which no allowance has been made. Transgrid told us that land-clearing contractors would likely recover the bulk of our trees for firewood.

It is disingenuous that this EIS has been released as a carefully researched, final document, at the same time as a “cultural heritage and ecological team” was visiting our property (on 4 October 2023) to carry out assessments.

Visual impacts (S8)

In the EIS, HumeLink is shown to have a *low* visual impact on our two dwellings and the majority of our holding. As part of a previous renewable energy project on adjoining land, one of the existing 330kv steel pylons was replaced with a 70m high steel tower, similar to HumeLink. Unlike the existing 330kv pylons, that new tower now dominates the landscape, its visual impact being anything but *low*. In addition, HumeLink will remove a significant number of existing mature trees from our property, further exacerbating the visual impact of this megastructure.

Destruction of visual amenity, both on our farm, and district

The Bannister district straddles the Great Dividing Range, and has immense natural beauty, stunning sunrises and sunsets, and views to the horizon. At 945m altitude, our property is one of the highest in the district. To spoil these vistas with 80m high towers each supporting 24 conductors would be hideous. The existing line, with towers less than half that height, is more in proportion with the existing tree species; the proposed overhead line would dominate the landscape, as it cuts a wide swathe through existing and planted tree lines.

Erosion of land value far in excess of compensation

First impressions are key to buying a property. The HumeLink overhead powerline will always be “in the face” of potential buyers. And for a significant proportion of the population, there remains uncertainty about the medical safety of electromagnetic radiation from such high voltage overhead lines. It is a difficult argument to refute if you’ve ever stood underneath, especially during rain. Given the option, buyers would totally avoid a property transected by overhead HumeLink.

Compromised fire fighting

During periods of extreme fire danger, Rural Fire Service policy prefers rapid deployment of aerial fire fighting appliances, to attempt to quickly contain fires. Such aircraft will not operate in the vicinity of

the proposed overhead powerline. With official predictions that periods of fire danger will become more extreme and for longer, the proposed overhead powerline will threaten the safety of residents and the livelihoods of landholders by interfering with bushfire suppression activities.

Increased risk of fires

A large proportion of the most devastating bushfires in southeastern Australia in recent decades have been caused by powerlines. CSIRO predicts increasing severity of adverse weather conditions, both longer drier weather, and more intense storms with stronger winds. A windstorm in 2021 flattened several steel electricity pylons northeast of Yass. The Bannister district has been chosen as a preferred site for wind turbines for power generation, based on the strength and frequency of wind; any climate-induced increase in intensity of this wind will put the proposed HumeLink overhead line at high risk for starting a bushfire.

Noise from HumeLink transmission line

One of the two dwellings on our property has been identified as likely impacted by noise from the line. This impact has never previously been raised or addressed during consultation with Transgrid representatives, and comes as a surprise. The 'suck it and see' approach to noise mitigation is unacceptable.

- I acknowledge and accept the Department of Planning and Environment's disclaimer and declaration.
- Declaration of political donations: Nil.

Yours faithfully,

Bill Johnson
For W&A Johnson
Mount Fitton
BANNISTER NSW
10 Oct 2023