

Attention: Mr Iwan Davies, [iwan.davies@planning.nsw.gov.au](mailto:iwan.davies@planning.nsw.gov.au)

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## Winterbourne Wind Farm EIS (SSD-10471)

Dear Iwan

Thank you for your correspondence of 15 November 2022 and the opportunity to provide comment on the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the proposed Winterbourne Wind Farm in Walcha Shire and high voltage transmission line in both Walcha and Uralla Shire Councils.

The NSW Department of Primary Industries - Agriculture collaborates and partners with our stakeholders to protect and enhance the productive and sustainable use and resilience of agricultural resources and the environment. The following issues are raised for your consideration and potential amendment to the EIS:

- The EIS describes Walcha as '*sparsely populated*', a '*predominantly rural landscape that has not been identified as significant or rare*' (6.3.4.7, p175). However:
  - The gross value of agricultural production was over \$131 million in Walcha, and Uralla \$50.2 million in 2021<sup>1</sup>. Walcha is well-known for beef breeding and fattening enterprises and the merino sheep breeding industry, producing exceptional fine wool that is sought internationally.
  - Walcha has a higher livestock carrying capacity than most districts in NSW due to soil type, pasture management, rainfall, and high-altitude climate. The area is also relatively unencumbered by fragmentation for lifestyle development and land use conflict.
  - While the project is not expected to disrupt agriculture, it would be useful for the EIS to demonstrate the importance of agriculture to Walcha and Uralla and reinforce the need to mitigate any impacts on communities and industries.
- Walcha is part of the Namoi Regional Jobs Precinct, a government-led initiative investigating potential for further investment in intensive agriculture and value adding. Recent research<sup>2</sup> shows that Walcha's climate and location has potential to establish controlled environment horticulture and orcharding to complement existing extensive agriculture. This reinforces the unique agricultural conditions in Walcha and the importance of the area for food security, particularly in a changing climate.
- The EIS estimates there is approximately 325 ha of Biophysical Strategic Agricultural Land (BSAL) in Walcha LGA, with 22.5ha being utilised in the development footprint and therefore removed from production potential for the life of the project. It would be prudent to consider

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<sup>1</sup> ABS 2022, <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/industry/agriculture/value-agricultural-commodities-produced-australia/>

<sup>2</sup> RMCG 2022, Namoi Horticulture Feasibility Final Report (unpublished)

moving infrastructure away from BSAL given the scale of the project and relative scarcity in the wider New England region.

Other matters for consideration:

- It is suggested the photo montage on page 32 include images of the predominant agricultural landscape around Walcha and the project site.
- We note the extension of the EIS submission timeframe to January 2023. Effort should be made to mitigate the issues arising in Walcha, for example workforce housing arrangements, community benefit fund distribution, local procurement, visual impacts, use of water resources, disruption to transport routes, decommissioning and rehabilitation.
- In relation to decommissioning, we note the EIS refers to the removal of structures and infrastructure to 200mm below ground surface. NSW DPI requests that underground infrastructure is removed to a depth of 500mm to allow land to be used for agriculture post project retirement.

Should you require clarification on any of the information contained in this response, please do not hesitate to contact me on 0487 023 845 or by email at [landuse.ag@dpi.nsw.gov.au](mailto:landuse.ag@dpi.nsw.gov.au).

Sincerely



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8 December 2022