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Your Reference: SSI-70610456

29 May 2024

Ms Lauren Clear
Energy, Resources and Industry Assessments
Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure
GPO Box 39
Sydney NSW 2001

Dear Lauren

DPHI request for Advice – Hunter Transmission Project - SEARs

I refer to your request for advice from Singleton Council on the Hunter Transmission Project (the Project) Draft Secretary's Environmental Assessment Requirements (SEARs).

Council staff have undertaken a review of the Scoping Report, associated appendices and draft SEARs. The following matters should be included within the SEARs and assessed as part of the Environmental Impact Statement to support the Project.

Strategic Planning

The Environmental Impact Statement should include consideration and discussion on the following strategic planning documents relevant to both the Singleton local government area and the broader Hunter region:

- Hunter Regional Plan 2041
- Singleton Local Strategic Planning Statement
- Singleton Community Strategic Plan
- Singleton Local Housing Strategy

- Singleton Sustainability Strategy 2019-2027

Cumulative Impacts

Singleton Council acknowledges the importance and significance of the Hunter Transmission Project to securing the energy needs of the future. The Singleton Local Government Area (Singleton) is located centrally within the Hunter Renewable Energy Zone (REZ). Singleton is currently experiencing significant development pressures, including expansion of existing coal mining operations, wind and solar project development, construction of the Hunter Gas Pipeline as well as the Hunter Transmission Project.

Coupled with development within the local government area, significant renewable energy development is taking place in the Central West Orana Renewable Energy Zone and the New England Renewable Energy Zone. These developments are all expected to commence construction between 2025 and 2030.

Several cumulative issues have been identified by council in our assessment of these developments, the combination of which will significantly increase the demand for infrastructure and services in the Singleton Local Government Area, these include:

- The relationship between this Project and other approved and/or under assessment projects within the Singleton LGA and broader region, and the cumulative impacts on:
 - o State and local road networks, including Cessnock Road/Broke Road and capacity for OSOM vehicles to use these transport networks;
 - o The use of Lemington Road as a transport route for OSOM and/or local vehicles where, if approved, the Hunter Valley Operations Continuation Project intends to relocate. Should the Hunter Valley Operations Continuation Project not be approved, Lemington Road is not considered a sustainable transport route for OSOM vehicles;
- The need for, and capacity to provide, short term rental accommodation and/or other types of accommodation to support construction workforces;

These cumulative impacts should be considered a matter requiring detailed assessment.

Benefit Sharing

The recently exhibited Energy Policy Framework included a new Benefit Sharing Guideline. This Guideline proposed to exclude transmission projects for the benefit sharing arrangements.

Council supports the principles behind benefit sharing as set out in the Guideline and agrees that traditional contributions schemes are unlikely to cater for these types of developments, that the local rating system does not generally cater for renewable improvements (in the same way mining projects do) and that, once constructed, renewable energy projects have lower levels of ongoing employment.

The Project is proposing a suite of benefit sharing options that include:

- Funding for strategic initiatives to directly benefit local communities affected by the Project;
- Strategic benefit payments to private landholders hosting transmission infrastructure (in addition to regular compensation agreements);
- At least 1.5% of the design and built contract value to go towards increased income and job opportunities for local Aboriginal communities;
- Maximising the employment of locals and the purchase of local goods and services;
- Creating education and training opportunities for the community to participate in the transition to renewable energy; and
- Delivering strategic offsets to enhance biodiversity values of the Hunter.

Council has developed a Planning Agreement Policy and supporting templates that align to the NSW Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure Planning Agreements Practice Note. Council's Policy applies a 1.5% of the Capital Investment Value of any State significant Project as the starting negotiation position for a Planning Agreement.


Council understands that EnergyCo will also potentially apply regional benefits as described under the *Electricity Infrastructure Investment Act 2020* and supporting Regulations. It is not clear in the Scoping report whether this Project will be subject to regional benefits fees, and if so, whether these fees will be collected, the apportionment of fees across affected LGAs and the mechanisms for disbursement and oversight. Whilst it is noted that these benefits fall outside the EP&A Act requirements, the Environmental Impact Statement should include a statement as to the extent to which the Project is subject to regional benefits payments.

The Project is yet to discuss any public benefit arrangement with Singleton Council, and council seeks consultation on this prior to the submission of the Environmental

Impact Statement. The Project proposes to traverse several local government areas, the EIS must include how the Project intends to consider apportionment of any public benefit funding across the impacted local government areas.

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide advice into the Hunter Transmission Project Draft SEARs. If you have any further enquiries, please do not hesitate to contact Mary-Anne Crawford on telephone 02 6578 7290 or email mcrawford@singleton.nsw.gov.au.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several overlapping loops and a long, sweeping tail that extends downwards and to the left.

Mary-Anne Crawford
Manager Development and Environmental Services