

Contact Name: Mathew Pringle
Contact No: (02) 6540 1139
Our Reference: OUT- 6541/24



15 August 2024

NSW Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure
Locked Bag 5022
PARRAMATTA NSW 2124

Attention: Tatsiana Bandaruk

Dear Sir/Madam,

New England Renewable Energy Zone Network Infrastructure Project – Scoping Report

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the scoping report and draft SEARS for the New England Renewable Energy Zone (REZ) Transmission Project (SSI-74175972).

It is understood that the proposal includes the development of:

- a new double circuit 500 kV overhead transmission line between Bayswater Power Station substation and the New England REZ;
- three 500 kV and one 300 kV energy hubs within the REZ;
- a new 500 kV overhead transmission line between proposed energy hubs; and
- ancillary infrastructure such as site offices, construction compounds and accommodation facilities, internal roads, and grid connection to the transmission network.

Council has reviewed the draft SEARS and scoping report in relation to the proposed development and is satisfied that the key environmental issues have been included. However, it is requested that particular attention be given to the following matters in the EIS:

1. Cumulative impacts

A detailed assessment of the cumulative impacts of this project along with the other proposed SSI and SSD projects in the Upper Hunter LGA. Cumulative impacts include, but are not limited to, impacts on local roads, communities, workforce accommodation and other services and infrastructure.

2. Traffic impacts on local roads

- a) A comprehensive assessment of the potential traffic impacts on the capacity, condition, safety and efficiency of the local and state road networks, detailing the nature of the traffic generated, transport routes, traffic volumes and potential impacts on local and regional roads;

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



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- b) A description of the measures that would be implemented to maintain and/or improve the capacity, efficiency and safety of the road network (particularly the proposed transport routes) over the life of the development; and
- c) Evidence of consultation with Upper Hunter Shire Council regarding road upgrades and maintenance.

3. Hunter Regional Plan 2041

The EIS should consider the relevant provisions of the Hunter Regional Plan 2041, particularly the Upper Hunter District planning priorities and the Scone and Equine regionally significant growth area place strategy outcomes. The regional plan includes a number of strategies aimed at protecting the environmental and scenic values of equine and viticulture critical industry cluster land. The scenic and landscape values of equine cluster land in the Upper Hunter Shire LGA is recognised as being an important part of the local equine industry's international reputation. The EIS should demonstrate how these values will be protected.

4. Employment and Accommodation Strategy

The draft SEARS requires the EIS to address the social impacts of the project, including how the construction workforce will be managed and accommodated. In order to address this requirement, we recommend that a workforce and accommodation strategy be prepared as part of the EIS. The strategy should consider the cumulative demand for workers and accommodation from all major infrastructure projects approved and planned in the area and provide a clear strategy for how and where the workforce will be housed. The strategy will inform other parts of the EIS (eg traffic and transport impact assessment) and enable a more accurate assessment of the impacts of the project.

5. Opportunities for connection of Renewable Energy Projects

The proposed transmission line is approximately 350 kilometres in length, the majority of which is outside the New England REZ. The project presents an opportunity for renewable energy projects to be established outside the REZ and connect into the grid. The EIS should consider how the project could facilitate these opportunities along the route of the transmission line.

6. Legacy Infrastructure

The project involves the construction of a range of ancillary infrastructure including roads, electricity, communications and utility infrastructure as well as accommodation camps that could continue to benefit local communities following completion of the project. Opportunities for legacy infrastructure should be considered as part of the lifecycle of the project and its contribution to a circular economy, waste minimisation and transition to net zero.

If you have any questions, please contact Council's Director Environmental & Community Services, Mathew Pringle on 6540 1139.

Yours faithfully



Greg McDonald
GENERAL MANAGER