

Hills of Gold Wind Farm: SSD 9679 Submission

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission opposing the Hills of Gold Wind Farm. I oppose this wind farm for many reasons:

- Hills Of Gold. A beautiful rural landscape on the Liverpool Range referring to the gold mining history of the area and the golden glow of the setting sun on the majestic hills towering up to 600m above the valley floor. A stunning landscape of natural beauty. A beautiful valley that gladdens the heart and rests the soul. Yet, this development proposes to turn a picturesque rural setting into an industrial zone.
- It will destroy the features that attract visitors to the area, diminish the heritage and festival experience and have a negative effect on the local economy.
- The severe impact on biodiversity including threaten species is unacceptable and the project should be refused on these grounds alone.
- The strike risk to birds and bats is intolerable and has been given scant consideration by the proponent.

This proposal for a wind farm was ill-conceived over four years ago and despite the land grabs, illegal land clearing, design changes with turbine layouts and fanciful attempts to devise a suitable transport route to deliver turbine bits to the ridge line, it remains a ludicrous proposal.

The proposed site is unsuitable for a wind farm because of the steep terrain with little or no opportunity to realistically address the impacts of such a development.

A dominating industrial landscape

The turbines follow a sweeping U-shaped ridge line on the Great Dividing Range towering up to 600m above the valley floor, creating a virtual amphitheatre of turbines which will dominate the landscape in every direction.

High impacts

The latest amendment to the EIS has uncovered more dwelling sites that will be impacted by the proposal, yet the proponent still maintains that:

- This is a sparsely populated area
- Vegetation screening will block views of towering turbines. The EIS overplays the effectiveness of vegetation screening to reduce visual impacts. And by disregarding the cumulative impacts of multiple turbines, the assessment of visual impact in the EIS is perfunctory and underplays the true impacts.

In a desperate attempt to find a feasible transport route the proponent suggests turbine traffic would:

- Meander through Nundle and/or around the back of the pub
- Shortcut straight up the Great Divide from Crawney Road on a road so steep that extreme cut and fill is needed leaving a huge scar on the landscape prone to erosion and subsidence.

High vertical batters will be needed to hold turbines in precarious positions on the ridge line adding to the visual impact.

Added to which the turbines are unusually close together so the visual scarring of the hillside and ridge line will be severe.

The cluttering effect of multiple layers of turbine blades spinning at different angles and speeds at both ends of the wind farm will also increase the visual impacts even more and increase noise levels.

The amended EIS has deleted one turbine and micro sited a few others which will not reduce the visual impacts.

In summary, the turbines will dominate the landscape for many kilometres, despoil the visual amenity of a beautiful valley, highly impact the community who live there and will be at odds with the tourist activities. And let's not forget the obstacle lighting illuminating the ridge line at night.

Impacts on biodiversity and the environment

This proposed wind farm will share a border with two national parks.

The impacts on the biodiversity and threatened species in the area is unacceptable.

The minor changes to the turbine layout does nothing to reduce the bird and bat strike risk. The southern end of the BHG Nature Reserve is where the cluttering effect is at its worst with 17 turbines in 3 overlapping fingers. This wall of overlapping turbines forms a dangerous and impenetrable barrier for the species which fly to and from the Nature Reserve.

Crawney National Park on the western side of the wind farm also has a cluster of turbines within 1km or so of the park boundary.

The amount of required clearing may have been reduced but does little to reduce the impacts on the 18 or more threatened species on the EPBC Act lists.

The proponent has given scant consideration of these impacts.

Community Consultation

The local community are critical of the proponent's lack of communication and this proposal has created much tension in the community.

The proponent is in denial about the true extent of community opposition and the real impacts this wind farm will have on lifestyle, existing land uses and the tourism industry.

Meetings of the CCC have been few and far between and the minutes are suddenly no longer accessible on the web.

Reading of the early minutes suggests that the Chair:

- has an ongoing partiality towards the proponent
- tends to answer for the proponent in such a way as to suggest the proponent can take their time answering questions thereby implicitly telling the community their concerns can wait
- has mislead the community by providing incorrect interpretations of Departmental guidelines as they apply to wind farms.

However my main concern is that observers were not allowed to attend meetings including the alternate committee members who were then not up-to-speed on issues when asked to stand in at a meeting.

The proponent clearly lacks credibility and has failed to gain the trust and confidence of the community.

In Summary

There could not be a more inappropriate site for an intrusive wind farm. Turbines on ridge lines - as many as can fit into the space – an amphitheatre surrounding the Peel Valley on three sides where people live and work. Turbines so close together that the cluttering effect of layers of turbine blades spinning at different angles and speeds will create an unusually high visual impact for many people and put birds and bats at risk.

The Peel Valley and the Hills of Gold are an inappropriate place for a wind farm. This wind farm is too close to too many people and significant natural resources and must be refused.

Far better, as the National Wind Farm Commissioner suggests, to locate wind farms on large holdings away from neighbours and towns.

The development of the NSW renewable energy zones and the push to develop renewable energy means that proper siting of wind farms is more important than ever and require intensive scrutiny.

This project must be rejected.

Pam Handyside