

## **Engie and the Hills of Gold wind farm**

I was part of a community that fought strongly against the Jupiter wind farm, in the Southern Tablelands. The Spanish owner withdrew the application just before the IPC Meeting. Since then I have maintained an ongoing interest in NSW wind farm proposals especially where local community opposition is strong.

Should the Hills of Gold wind farm be approved, a big casualty, in my opinion, will be the Engie brand. Most of those opposed to the wind farm will not hold an ongoing grudge against Clean Energy Partners or Someva or ERM. All parties will eventually move on.

It is distinctly possible that the DPE will make a pragmatic decision, given the opposition, and produce a negative Assessment. They may not and it will then be up to the IPC.

If approved, the DPE and the IPC will not be too harshly condemned, long term, for their Assessment and Recommendation, respectively, because that is what they do, whatever the merits of the wind farm.

Not so for Engie (the real Proponent).

As the only culprit remaining, all focus will be placed on Engie and associates.

By associates I mean subsidiaries and current and future large customers.

Engie will firstly be remembered as the company that had the chance to stop this industrial monstrosity in the face of trenchant community opposition, but didn't.

You (Engie) have chosen to enthusiastically follow the net zero path. It must be becoming clear that this goal is unattainable, not just in Australia. In fact once we have had the projected further massive electricity price increases, to go with our petrol price rises and widespread blackouts (even before Liddell closes completely early next year), more than half the community will be questioning the whole climate change theory.

Engie starts off behind the eight ball, being a foreign company. Pressure is slowly mounting on those that control our infrastructure. It would appear that there are already pro and anti Engie factions.

You can predict what is coming. There would appear to be a large number of opposing community members who can't be bought. There would appear to be, judging from the submissions, a major host (your main partner) with alleged scant respect for land clearing regulations. The Crudine Ridge saga relating to vegetation clearance along Aarons Pass Rd must have cost CWP Renewables north of a million dollars in delays and changes. Cut down one more tree than you are entitled to and the writs will fly. Or, someone on one of your suggested weekend guided buggy tours along the ridge will notice a variation to the terms of the Development Consent.

Clearly, new wind farms in NSW have been on the nose for the last few years. As you would know, and in more detail than I do, your French competitor Akuo Energy claimed it was no longer "actively pursuing" the Granite Hills wind farm (the Department got the real message and wiped all traces of it from the Register)

Surely there are better options for you, starting with another wind farm in a more friendly state in a less scenic position.

You would also know through your Silverleaf solar farm application that solar is, or should be, a much easier and acceptable option than a wind farm in NSW.

Then, of course, you have the experience to benefit from gas fired electricity. Gas is rapidly becoming “clean”. At some early stage, the community and the bureaucracy and the State and Federal politicians will be looking for an acceptable out. Take advantage of your expertise.

The pressure will start to increase with this set of submissions. Then they will be followed, one would reluctantly assume, by the IPC meeting with its live and written submissions. The IPC submission themes will change. Someone will research and present on the suggested terms of the Development Consent. Many will point out the deficiencies in the DPE Assessment. I assume I will not be the only submitter on the subject of the proponent, although I am tempted to write extensively on the illegal false or misleading components of the documents presented to the Department, starting with the Scoping Report and from the Department to the IPC. Clearly, you through your agents, have provided much ammunition.

Who knows what then follows. Legal challenges for a start?

What is clear to me is that many in the local community have been misled, either deliberately or accidentally, for example, in relation to ongoing Operations & Maintenance job levels but also in many other areas such as how far the Community Enhancement Fund will spread and what projects the community thinks are “on the table”. Or the free electricity for the local community. It is free, isn’t it? Clearly, many have been promised a return to the past for Nundle - local medical practice etc.

Whilst it is not illegal for Engie to publish false or misleading information unrelated to DPE, the research will be performed and published.

Some of us would like to understand more about the culture of your parent company that apparently allowed planning for a wind farm on the WW1 battlefields where the location of the graves of many allied soldiers remains unknown. Whilst admirable, it matters not that you later changed your mind, especially to an Australian country town where many of your current supporters are old enough to have family connections with those that volunteered.

Nundle was spared with few WW1 battlefield deaths, but not so other similar Australian country towns who will react badly to Engie once the knowledge spreads. Here we are, over a hundred years on, and there was a very strong reaction to the potential cancellation of Anzac Day celebrations in some states during the Covid 19 pandemic

There is a huge upside for your company. Stop this project and the news will rapidly spread through NSW that Engie listened to a wind farm community.

There is no interim step. To sit there with an approval and not do anything for years (Capital 2, Conroy’s Gap, Glen Innes etc) will be worse. We can see this community and its supporters across NSW, getting stronger and more vehement in their opposition.

This does not look like a community that will give up upon receipt of an initial adverse decision. That is the start of phase 2 with aggressive goals: if it’s approved, it won’t be built. If it is built, it won’t operate. If it operates it will be shut down.

Further, on the potential for community legal challenge, it would not be a surprise if they took such a decision to the Land and Environment Court. From a review of some of the powerful submissions in opposition, they may have the skills to mount their own case. The case just about writes itself. Most of the research is done, save for what is in the Assessment and Recommendation. There will be no conciliation compromise. Their position will be “no wind farm”, rather than the more normal, delete a turbine here or there. What have they got to lose?

You will also be remembered for blowing up the Hazelwood Power Station and the consequent loss of jobs and the electricity price aftermath. The job losses are on the record and will not be made up in any way by your proposed new battery. The Latrobe Valley community may now love you. I don't know, but we will find out.

Concerning electricity price increases, the Australian Energy Regulator then chair Paula Conboy said in an AER Press Release, March 29, 2018 headed "Wholesale electricity prices higher since Hazelwood exit":

"The impact of the Hazelwood closure has been, and continues to be, significant right across the NEM. In Victoria, average spot prices for 2017 were up 85 per cent on 2016 and up 32 per cent in South Australia for the same period. New South Wales and Queensland were up 63 per cent and 53 per cent respectively.

"High wholesale prices in the NEM are not unprecedented and indeed have been higher in the past, but the 2017 increases were sustained over the year and occurred simultaneously across the NEM," Ms Conboy said.

The report found that price increases associated with the need to replace Hazelwood's output aligned with expectations.

"The replacement of Hazelwood's low cost brown coal generation by higher cost black coal, gas and hydro generation – coinciding with rising black coal and gas fuel prices during the period – was found to be the underlying driver of the wholesale price increases," said Ms Conboy.

The case could be made, and probably will, that the current electricity price levels are attributable in part to Engie's destruction of the Hazelwood power station.

You will be remembered by friends and foe alike for promising a level of local jobs and not delivering.

Communities will unite should you propose a new NSW energy project.

Even if you sell the HOGwf during its operating life, it will follow you. I predict this will be a decades long grudge.

Over to you.

Anthony Gardner