

20th January 2023

Director Energy Assessments
Mr Iwan Davies
Planning and Assessment
Department of Planning and Environment
Locked Bag 5022
Parramatta NSW 2124

Dear Iwan,

**Winterbourne Wind Project
Application Number SSD-10471
WalchaEnergy Submission on the EIS**

WalchaEnergy fully supports the Winterbourne Wind Project.

One of the partners of WalchaEnergy was invited to Walcha in 2004 to meet with a group of landholders in the Winterbourne area to discuss the possibility of hosting a wind energy development in the area. Over time balanced agreements were developed that recognise the needs of the landholders and the developer. A generous community benefit scheme was an important part of the agreements before these became common practice. Wind monitoring began in 2009 and early site layouts and investigations were undertaken. A quiet community engagement process began at that time, along with a presentation to Walcha Council in 2010.

WalchaEnergy is a joint venture between MirusWind (the originator of the Winterbourne Wind Project) and Energy Estate which began JV operations in 2018. The Winterbourne Wind development site was sold to Vestas (a Danish company – the largest wind turbine manufacturer in the world) in 2019. They are taking the development through the planning process. WalchaEnergy is developing a number of renewable energy projects in the New England REZ including Salisbury Solar, Ruby Hills Wind and the Dungowan Pumped Hydro Project.

WalchaEnergy has had an office in Walcha for three years and a principal of WalchaEnergy has owned a house in town for four years. Over the long development timeframe for the Winterbourne Wind Project and the other projects, WalchaEnergy has developed a close relationship with many people in the Walcha Community. The engagement with the community has been open and transparent with group meetings where all participants can talk to each other directly and view maps of the development. There is a large group of individuals in Walcha that support renewable energy and the Winterbourne Wind Project.

The urgent need to address the causes of climate change has been evident to us all, especially over the last few years with devastating droughts, bush fires and more recent flooding events. Electricity generation from coal and gas is one of the largest contributors to climate change and the transition to sustainable and renewable energy generation is a key component of ensuring safe and prosperous futures for ourselves and future generations.

The NSW goal is to have a 50% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 (relative to 2005 levels) and we are far from achieving this. This large project alone will provide about 3% of the reduction required to achieve this goal. As described in CSIRO's annual generation cost report, wind energy is far cheaper than new fossil fuel generation whilst also reducing emissions to near zero. The closure of Liddell Power Station this year and the largest generator in NSW (the 2,880MW Eraring Power Station) in 2025 mean that there is an urgent need to build new generation now. Wind projects like Winterbourne Wind provide the fastest and cheapest way of delivering this new replacement generation.

The NSW Electricity Infrastructure Roadmap legislation was supported by all the major parties and sets out a plan to gradually transition from coal fire electricity generation to renewable generation. The New England Renewable Energy Zone (NE REZ) has been declared by EnergyCo who are undertaking the strategic planning of the REZ. The large Winterbourne Wind Project is in the southern half of the NE REZ and does not need new REZ transmission to be constructed. It needs to be supported to deliver on the vision of NSW Roadmap and help fill the generation gap before Eraring closes.

There will be many local benefits that will flow from this project. These will help to reverse the slow decline in population and aging of the population in Walcha. These include

- 16 permanent operational jobs will bring new families to Walcha. In a small town like Walcha this will make a significant difference. The reverse of the effect when the sawmill closed.
- Between 200 and 400 construction jobs whilst the project is being built.
- There will be opportunities for local companies to participate in the construction of the project. Just as local company Tobco worked on the New England Solar Farm.
- A Community Benefit fund of \$750,000 per annum minimum would be one of the most generous in NSW for the size of the project.
- Rental income for host landholders will mostly be reinvested in their farm businesses and spent in the local community. This will help drought proof their properties and assist all businesses in town. There will be broad direct and indirect economic benefits to the local region over a long timeframe.
- Other towns in NSW close to wind farms like Glen Innes have seen an increase in tourism. Since the development is out of town this would enhance the tourist traffic in Walcha.

The NSW process for the approval of state significant renewable developments requires the EIS to be done in accordance with a number of guidelines. The noise guideline is one of the most stringent in the world and the visual guideline is also one of the most comprehensive anywhere which quantifies the effects of a very difficult topic that is open to much subjective interpretation. From any one location the undulating countryside of Winterbourne masks much of the development. The town of Walcha is surrounded by low hills and since the closest wind turbine to the edge of town is over 5km away it is outside the area of highest visual concerns. Vestas have undertaken extensive studies for the EIS to ensure that the proposed development complies with these requirements and have displayed their results to the community regularly.

As with any large development there will be issues that need to be addressed in the construction phase of the development. As the largest wind turbine manufacturer in the world who has installed and/or constructed over 40 wind projects in Australia, Vestas is well placed to overcome any construction issues that may arise. The transport route has avoided the centre of Walcha by using periphery roads that currently host three large transport and haulage companies.

This project will see hundreds of millions of dollars spent in regional NSW, creating jobs and skills for the future economy.

We urge DPE to approve this project to meet the urgent needs of NSW electricity supply.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'm. waring', is positioned above the printed name.

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