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NSW Department of Planning and Environment

Department of Planning and Environment, Locked Bag 5022, Parramatta NSW 2124

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Subject: Objections/Concerns Regarding Spicer's Creek Wind Farm

Dear Members of NSW Department of Planning and Environment,

I hope this message finds you well. I am writing to express my concerns and objections regarding the Spicer's Creek Wind Farm that is currently under consideration. While I fully appreciate the efforts and intentions behind the project, as a concerned resident, business operator and mental health clinician I believe it is crucial to address the following issues before proceeding further:

1. Social impact on affordable housing in small communities: While Squadron Energy is estimating that dwellings will be used only over brief periods of 6 to 12 months, many local families are already having difficulty accessing affordable housing without greater demand on housing in the local area. Estimate of 320 direct jobs with up to 90% non-local employees, how can this be reasonably sustained without having significant social effect in towns such as Dunedoo, Wellington, Dubbo and Gulgong? Has Squadron Energy considered the average mean income of local family's v's the average mean income of their employed workforce and how able local families will be able to sustain housing in this market? For example, Remplan (<https://app.remplan.com.au/dubboregionalcouncil/community/housing/dwelling-type?state=nE86IE!x1rzlNLdXS4nY8aSe6dElspTGFqPXS1FRF7FrtBF9Db>) identify 0 unoccupied private dwellings in the Dubbo regional council area. As a mental health clinician working in the Dubbo area for the last 5 years, I have seen the direct impact on mental health for families and individuals that cannot access stable housing due to market forces, with these individuals more likely to express thoughts of suicide or self-harm. This observation has also been supported by research conducted by the *Australian Housing and Research Institute* <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/analysis/brief/understanding-links-between-mental-health-housing-and-homelessness#>. I would like:

- The NSW Department of Planning to thoroughly review where the identified housing will be sourced for the proposed workforce required for the Spicer's Creek Wind Farm project.
 - Squadron energy need to identify if they plan to build accommodation for workers, where this will be located and go through the approval process for such as project prior to the approval of the Spicer's Creek Wind Farm EIS.
 - To see how Squadron Energy have considered the cumulative impact on housing from the many other renewable energy projects that have been proposed, approved or are in stages of construction.
 - To see a pause on all new and proposed projects until the social impact of a significant transient workforce accessing accommodation in the Central West Renewable Energy Zone has been completed.
2. Mental health impacts of a disrupted sense of community: Based on Squadron Energy's own identification of the local communities of Gollan, Spicer's Creek and Elong Elong being 'tight knit', how does Squadron Energy propose measuring the social and psychological impacts on these communities through the forced disruption Squadron Energy have caused through their contracts that have been issued to local land holders directly involved and neighbouring the Spicer's Creek Wind Farm project? I have received a 'Neighbour Agreement' that I have not signed, in that agreement it stated I could not object to the project or cause actions that may cause others to object. In discussions with community members who wish to remain anonymous due to the nature of these contracts, do not feel they can talk to other affected community members due to a sense of duty to uphold confidentiality. They have stated that they are concerned about the withdrawal of financial offering that Squadron has negotiated with landholders. Topics that other community members have spoken to me about in the past have included things like stressors, their mental health, and significant changes in their lives. Sense of social connection is a key indicator of well-being and a known protective factor against mental health conditions such as anxiety and depression. This is supported through research from numerous health and mental health bodies including *BeyondBlue* and *The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare*. NSW saw an increase in number of suicides in 2022, with almost half of all suicides occurring in regional NSW. A reduction in protective factors such as social connection and exacerbation of mental health conditions such as depression and anxiety are a leading cause of suicides in regional areas. I strongly believe such contracts have skewed the data Squadron Energy are proposing about the acceptance of the Spicer's Creek Wind Farm project by the community, as I have previously mentioned, residents directly involved with the project are not able to voice their objections. I would like:
- To see how Squadron Energy directly surveyed using approved measures that accurately evaluated perceived stress, social connectedness, and general well-being of affected community members that were either directly or indirectly impacted by the project.
 - Squadron Energy engage with an external mental health organisation to complete measures with community members to ensure data collected and presented is unaltered and true measures that can be presented to the NSW Department of Planning and Environment.

- Squadron Energy present unaltered 'Host' and 'Neighbour Agreement' contracts to the NSW Department of Planning and Environment for the department to assess the impact to these documents on community members.
 - Squadron Energy to identify how they will continue to survey and measure directly and indirectly affected community members to monitor the impact the Spicer's Creek Wind Farm project has on mental health and well-being.
 - Squadron Energy to identify appropriate and evidence-based practices it will undertake to support any impacts on mental health and well-being that arise from the Spicer's Creek Wind Farm project.
3. Accessibility to health and mental health support: As identified by Squadron Energy in their EIS report, there is likely to be a high impact on existing health and mental health resources available in the Dubbo Regional and Warrumbungle local government areas. While Squadron Energy propose to provide a financial contribution toward local resources, based on the previously unmeasured point on social connectedness, and Squadron Energy unable to identify their workforce proponents, how are Squadron Energy proposing they will be able to adequately financially contribute to the essential local services? Based on my involvement with the Primary Health Network (PHN), Marathon Health and Centacare, there has been a significant gap in services for all communities within the Dubbo Regional and Warrumbungle's local government areas for several years. With the added strain of existing renewable projects and approved projects that are yet to commence, none of the services available have increased capacity. Local health and mental health services do not have capacity to support the significant transient workforce that the Central West Renewable Energy Zone is introducing to the local areas involved. With decreased access to crucial health and mental health services, local residents are more likely to experience adverse health and mental health outcomes. I would like:
- The NSW Department of Planning and Environment to cease approval of this project and any additional projects until essential health and mental health services meet the needs of the current population within the Central West Renewable Energy Zone.
 - Squadron Energy to address the concerns I have already raised around impacts on the local resident's mental health and well-being with identified evidence-based practices.
 - Squadron Energy to better scope the proposed workforce and use health assessments to accurately determine the health and mental health needs of its workforce.

I would appreciate the opportunity to discuss these concerns in more detail and explore possible solutions. I am deeply concerned about the impacts of the Spicer's Creek Wind Farm project, with community disconnection already occurring prior to the project's approval, thus I am opposed to this project until I see action on the points and actionable recommendations I have made in the above submission.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Glencross