SUBMISSION OF OBJECTION TO THE PR0P0SED OVEN MOUNTAIN PUMPED HYDRO STORAGE PROPOSAL

Application Number SSI-12422997; EPBC ID Number 2020/8850; Assessment Type Critical State Significant Infrastructure. Exhibited as EXH-62250958

THANK YOU for the opportunity to share my concerns regarding this pumped hydro project located in a special place with a lot of history, beauty and value in its present state and where I have spent a good deal of time for over 50 years.

Many years ago, Bob Hayes, a brilliant engineer and proposer of the original scheme, based it on the fact that coal-fired power stations could not be shut down and re-started at the drop of a hat, which resulted in the waste of a lot of power through the night and a source of low cost or free electricity, as the power generators continued to run.

With peak power usage early mornings, middle of the day and 5pm until 9pm in the evenings a 600MW pumped hydro power scheme, which could supply power at peak periods and use cheap (or waste) electricity to pump water from the bottom dam near the river up to the top dam on the plateau, showed great promise.

Water, being heavy, definitely needs a low-cost power supply to pump it from the bottom dam to the top.

The scheme was virtually a battery providing power when needed at peak periods from water being recycled from two dams which would need minimal top-up from the Macleay River and had a very low-cost power source for the pumping operation.

The First Attempt

Lend Lease took an option on this scheme and decided against proceeding on the main grounds that cost of the power lines would be prohibitive, as the site was a long way from where power was needed as well as the difficult terrain/access.

[*It would probably be a worthwhile exercise to contact Lend Lease for details, even though it was a long time ago, they did a considerable amount of work on the project.*]

The Second Attempt

The present application has seen a major expansion of the project from 600MW to 900MW, which would require more power to pump water up the hill, have a greater impact on the environment with larger dams, increased need for additional water from the Macleay River and is being proposed at a time when the low-cost coal and gas-power source is being phased out.

An experienced engineer told me years ago the Kempsey-Armidale Road would always be a problem, as there was too much unstable land on the route. This is obviously true, with the continual road closures due to land slips.

The proposal to change the worst section of the road to the southern side of the river would bypass much of the unstable land area, although the need for two extra bridges across the Macleay River would be an improvement only if the bridges could stand the strain, as the Macleay River (when in flood) is the second-fastest flowing river in the southern hemisphere.

No doubt the cost of this road and bridge work would not be borne by the developers of the hydro scheme. On top of this, how much of the provision of power line costs would be covered by taxpayers?

With the extremely likely chance of major cost blow-outs in a project such as this, coupled with the fact that when completed, the facility would be overseas owned. It seems Australian taxpayers will be taking all the risks for no payback at the end of the day.

Conclusion

I am in my 80's and not an expert on any of the matters I have commented on. I do have lived experience in not only the region of this project and also being a witness/participant in major tecnological changes throughout my life.

It is fair to say most people resist change. It is also fair to say that if we don't actively evaluate and consider change, then it will bite us on the backside.

The Oven Mountain Pumped Hydro Storage proposal is 20 years out of date and, right now, is redundant. With a five-year construction phase (plus a year for hold-ups and other problems) we would be lucky to get four years of production from the scheme before other technology would close it down and leave a massive debt.

While there are many other shortcomings to this project, I believe the points outlined are sufficient reason to give very serious consideration to the viability of this proposal.

There are already more efficient, cost-effective and less disturbing alternative technologies which have, and are, developing rapidly which make this scheme unviable.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this submission. I look forward to an outcome which will achieve a good result for the community, economy, environment and water quality.

Yours sincerely,

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