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Objection to Central West Orana Renewable Energy Zone Transmission

I am a member of the Central West Orana Renewable Energy Zone (CWOREZ) Community Reference Group (CRG) representing my community of Wollar and the Central West Environment Council. I am objecting to the CWOREZ project because of the scale of the impacts in the region, the fast-tracked nature of the process and the failure of the EIS to identify, assess, address or mitigate all impacts. The vast majority of decision-making and final impact analysis is being pushed out beyond the public exhibition of an unfinished project design.

The fact that the transmission line easement alignment has not been finalised and will be left to a 'detailed design' process and a significant amount of other information will not be publicly available for comment is of great concern to the public, particularly in communities significantly impacted by the project.

The CWOREZ project has continued to grow in size and impact since the CRG was formed. The consultation has been piecemeal. The process has had a sense of 'moving feast of change' with the Central West being used as the 'guinea pig' for the process across the rest of the state.

The number of 'unknowns' with the project impacts is very concerning. The fast-tracking of the process has meant that the assessment of the environmental, social and economic impacts is deficient on many fronts. The cumulative impact assessment in Main Report Appendix E is a good indicator of the scale of impacts of proposed development in the region. However, the specifics of many of those impacts are not adequately assessed in the various technical reports. There is a very strong indication that the key purpose of the assessment has been to downplay the severity of the impacts or to leave the analysis of key impacts until a later process with no public input.

An example of the scale of cumulative impact is on biodiversity. The estimated loss of 9,859 hectares of native vegetation from one of the most heavily cleared regions in Australia will add to the extinction pressures for many critically endangered species. The lack of a Biodiversity Offset Strategy in the EIS is an example of decisions being pushed beyond the public comment process. Technical Paper 4 fails to identify that the transmission easement through Wilpinjong Coal Mine will be impacting on existing offset arrangements for the critically endangered Regent Honeyeater.

Other assessments in technical papers, eg traffic and transport, bushfire, are highly inadequate and do not properly assess all impacts or correctly identify current conditions.

There is no assessment of the scale of transmission losses or the additional generation required to make up this shortfall.

The EIS also fails to assess alternative options such as underground transmission line easement or better ways to produce and provide electricity needs to large populations. Demand management, stand alone solar, micro grids, leasing out large roof areas in urban environments are all options that should have been included in a comprehensive assessment of this project.

I have supplied my own electricity needs through a stand alone solar system for over 30 years. Cost of living issues associated with higher electricity prices has not been an problem for my family over this period of time. I do not believe that this project will provide cheaper power to families in NSW because all the providers are international energy generators that are here to make a profit.

My community of Wollar welcomed the Wollar Solar Farm project connected to the existing 330kV transmission line. We have also had the impact of the existing 500kV transmission line between Bayswater Power Station and Mt Piper. However, we feel that the scale of an additional two 500kV transmission lines and a new, large substation in our remote rural district is too great an increase in industrialisation.

Current extreme weather events from climate change already impact on electricity networks across the landscape. A more sensible approach to renewable energy provision and security is to concentrate on the local and individual scale. The very slow effort to move away from fossil fuels as an energy source has severely restricted the options now available. Climate change mitigation and adaptation requires a less centralized approach because communities are now more frequently isolated through flood, bushfire, storm damage and other extreme weather impacts.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "B. Smiles". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Bev Smiles