

Paling Yards Wind Farm Submission

Project Name: **Paling Yards Wind Farm**

Application Number: **SSD- 29064077**

Assessment Type: **State Significant Development**

Development Type: **Electricity Generation – Wind**

Local Government Area: **Oberon**

Re: O’Connell Valley Community Group objection to the Paling Yards Wind Farm Project.

My name is Roger Darlington and I am the Vice President of the O’Connell Valley Community Group Inc. (OVCG). I represent the Group in wishing to lodge a strong objection to the proposed construction of the project called Paling Yards Wind Farm.

The goals and objectives of the O’Connell Valley Community Group are to protect and conserve the natural and cultural beauty and significance of the historic O’Connell Valley and to enhance community welfare and harmony in our rural community of 653 residents, 183 families and 261 private dwellings (2021 census). Highly valued hubs of community activity, education, support and essential service are the O’Connell Primary School which has 75 students, seven teachers and five support staff members; the popular historic O’Connell Hotel (1865) and the O’Connell Rural Fire Service shed.

The O’Connell Valley Community Group objections include:

- The Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Project is deficient in that it has not included an environmental assessment for O’Connell or any area outside the Project site.
- The EIS for the Project is deficient in failing to fulfil statutory requirements for inclusive community consultation. There has been no consultation with the community of O’Connell and district held at O’Connell with the Proponent. The Proponent has failed to engage with the O’Connell Valley Community Group in any way. OVCG holds monthly meetings which are advertised each month in the Oberon Review.
- O’Connell is on the 654 kilometre transport route for the delivery of the huge turbines and blades and associated wind farm infrastructure from the Port of Newcastle to Paling Yards south of Oberon. The O’Connell Road stretch of the route passes through the historically significant O’Connell ANZAC Memorial Avenue of 120 Desert Ash trees. The century-old trees will require far more than the “trimming” which “may be required” (as stated in the EIS) for the passage of vehicles up to oversize over mass (OSOM) dimensions.
- The EIS is deficient in not including a detailed statement regarding the extent of severe pruning required for transportation of the base towers. The dimensions are up to 6 metres wide and 5.7 metres high. (EIS Transport dimensions for GE158 Rex J Andrews Route Study Newcastle to Paling Yards). This means that the proposed road envelope clearing through the O’Connell ANZAC Memorial Avenue would extend almost as wide as from gutter to gutter – a width of eight metres to allow sufficient clearance for OSOM vehicles. The height of at least six metres of pruning would destroy the canopy of the Desert Ash trees where the

high branches form an arch resembling a Cathedral. This symbol of grandeur and honour is deeply significant to the community of O'Connell and district.

The proposed pruning amounts to the beauty and significance of the Memorial Avenue being destroyed. There would be an irrecoverable loss of the Cathedral effect of the connecting tree canopies together with a weakening of the stability of the trees which would be unbalanced with the potential loss of most major boughs on one side of each tree.

The O'Connell ANZAC Memorial Avenue is a living war memorial dedicated to the men and women from O'Connell and district who served during the First World War. There are sixty-six known men and women of the area who enlisted, twelve of whom were killed in action. The Avenue is of rare historical significance as it is one of only a few surviving First World War Memorial Avenues in rural New South Wales. It is particularly noted for the planting of Desert Ash trees (*Fraxinus angustifolia*) which are native to northern Africa and southern Europe. Desert Ash were chosen for their hardiness and links to World War I battle sites. The link between the Desert Ash and the Middle East Theatre of War, in which many O'Connell volunteers served during World War I, is a highly significant reason why the O'Connell ANZAC Memorial Avenue should be protected from damage. There is also the historical association with Field Marshall Lord Allenby, British Commander of allied forces in the Middle East, who officially opened the Avenue in January 1926.

Avenues of Honour are a unique Australian tradition. Many Avenues were planted nationwide, particularly by rural communities dealing with the devastating loss of young men and women and the tragedy of the Great War of 1914-1918. Trees have long been symbols of life, growth and resilience. Thus the planting of trees to create a memorial avenue is a meaningful and picturesque lasting tribute.

The trees were raised from seed imported from the Middle East by the Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney, and grown at the Bathurst Experimental Farm. The project was the initiative of the men and women of the O'Connell community. Dances and musical events were held to raise funds for the commemorative cause undertaken by the O'Connell Progress Association.

The trees were planted between 1926 and 1927. Remarkably, most of the trees have survived the vagaries of the seasons of a century. There have been a few replacement trees grown from cuttings taken from the original Desert Ash trees of the Avenue and cared for by the community.

Residents of the O'Connell Valley have a long history of protecting the Avenue and maintaining it as a revered and enduring symbol of the sacrifices made by our local service men and women. The O'Connell ANZAC Memorial Avenue is a cherished sentimental setting for the community and district ANZAC Dawn Service and Remembrance Day Commemoration Services held each year.

The O'Connell ANZAC Memorial Avenue is a key element within the O'Connell conservation area as it links several groups of historic buildings within the heritage area. As an item the

Avenue is the predominant element of the cultural and physical landscape within the O'Connell Valley. First named O'Connell Plains in 1813 by Assistant Surveyor George Evans, the O'Connell Valley is a recognised scenic cultural landscape in the heart of Australia's earliest beginnings of European settlement inland from the Great Dividing Range.

The historic settlement of O'Connell was classified as a conservation area by the National Trust of Australia (NSW) in 1974 and in 1978 it was listed on the Heritage Register of the National Estate. It is protected by its listing as a heritage item on the Oberon Council Local Environment Plan.

The O'Connell ANZAC Memorial Avenue and associated historic buildings are listed on the National Trust Register of Australia (NSW). The Memorial Avenue is listed on the NSW War Memorials Register and has state and national recognition,

- OVCG is concerned about potential long term structural damage to O'Connell's fragile historic early earth buildings along O'Connell Road caused by vibrations from the OSOM vehicles in particular. The historic colonial Hassall property, Lindlegreen, is situated on the northern entrance to O'Connell ANZAC Memorial Avenue at the intersection of O'Connell Road and Beaconsfield Road. Lindlegreen Barn (1827) was listed on the State Heritage Register (2018) and is believed to be the oldest surviving early earth building in Australia together with a pise homestead, Wanstead Park, in Tasmania. The Barn is a valuable historic landmark of 1820s settled O'Connell and is a rare example of early cob structures surviving in Australia.
- The EIS is deficient in its omission of a traffic study of the O'Connell area which will be greatly impacted by the transportation of equipment for the Project. The O'Connell Road is the main route between Oberon and Bathurst and is a high traffic volume road. There is no mention of increased traffic and how essential service vehicles, school buses, delivery transport, private vehicles commuting to work, appointments, social outings etc, will be effected by road closures and general traffic disruption throughout almost two years.
- The EIS is deficient in its inclusion of outdated information – for example, the out of date Census data quoted.

The O'Connell Valley Community Group Inc respectfully requests a meeting with the Independent Planning Commission to discuss the Environmental Impact Statement prepared for the proposed Paling Yards Wind Farm Project.

Yours faithfully,

Roger Darlington

Vice President

O'Connell Valley Community Group Inc.

C/- O'Connell Rural Fire Service Shed

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