



## **Response to Application Submitted by: Paling Yards Wind Farm**

**Application Number: SSD-29064077**

**Date: 11 November 2023**

My name is Garrick Hawkins and through a family-owned entity, I am the owner and developer of Mayfield Garden ("Mayfield").

Outlined below is further information on Mayfield and the significant role that it plays not only in the Oberon community but also across the broader Central West and the State of NSW.

Also outlined below are my objections to the Paling Yards Wind Farm project which, if it goes ahead, will almost certainly result in the downfall and ultimate closure of Mayfield Garden.

I am also acutely aware that Paling Yards Wind Farm is an entry level development that will clear the way for Forestry and other renewable energy companies to come into Oberon and completely desecrate the environmental, economic, and social fabric of our community with further massive wind farm developments.

As such, development of the Paling Yards Wind Farm will destroy tourism in our region and lead to the downfall of many related businesses and the significant loss of jobs.

### **About Mayfield Garden**

Located a few minutes from Oberon town, Mayfield Garden is Australia's most significant private garden and the largest cool climate garden in the Southern Hemisphere. It is a garden of international renown, and arguably the most significant horticultural destination in the Southern Hemisphere.

Mayfield currently attracts 80,000 visitors per year, with many travelling from Sydney, Interstate and Overseas to explore the 65-hectare estate that is unique and unmatched in scale and importance by any other garden Australia.

Mayfield also has a renowned garden restaurant and offers a luxury glamping experience at different times of the year.

Mayfield is a unique destination not only in NSW, but also throughout Australia and the Southern Hemisphere. No-one in these markets has established a European-style cool climate garden of this scale, and as such Mayfield has created its own unique visitation market for the Oberon community. In many ways, it has put Oberon on the map, and certainly the tourist trail.

Mayfield currently employs more than 50 staff, covering horticulture, hospitality, marketing, administration, and facilities management.

It also has supply agreements with another 50 companies in the region.

This family is also proposing to take the garden to a new level with the establishment of a 60-room eco-retreat together with a glamping ground, as well as wedding and conference facilities.

The Hawkins family has already invested close to \$100 million into Mayfield since the property was acquired by Garrick Hawkins in 1984.

The family is financially committed to continue investing in Mayfield's position as the pre-eminent tourist attraction in the Central Tablelands, provided that the Oberon district is able to avoid the environmental, economic and social impacts that will come with the bombardment of renewable energy infrastructure.

It would be a complete waste of money to build an eco-retreat with a significant wellness focus on a district that has been polluted with massive amounts of renewable infrastructure.

### **Current plans for Mayfield Garden**

Mayfield has been progressively opened up to the public since 2014, and whilst the business is trending in the right direction in terms of visitor numbers, the family continues to face an annual financial shortfall.

To accelerate the financial independence of the business, the family is exploring the opportunity to develop a 60-room eco-tourism facility within the gardens.

This proposal includes the addition of a best-in-class eco-tourism facility, including enhanced accommodation offering inclusive of traditional and camping (glamping) forms, new function and hospitality centre primarily catering to wedding and corporate markets, and an extension of the garden landscaping.

Total project cost of \$40-50 million will not only deliver significant ongoing tourism benefits, but it will also deliver a timely injection to the local building industry and broader regional economy.

New accommodation and event products will create an additional 50 jobs, bringing total number of employees at Mayfield to more than 100.

Any new facility would be in keeping with the statutory planning framework, best-in-class sustainability practice and the world-class horticultural credentials already established by the family business.

Through a mix of traditional accommodation and Glamping, Mayfield will be capable of hosting 200 overnight guests, which will be a particularly attractive proposition for corporates and weddings.

### **What the new eco retreat will deliver**

Modelling shows that the addition of an eco-retreat to Mayfield will not only create the equivalent of additional 50 full-time positions but is anticipated that visitor numbers to the garden will increase by 50,000, bringing total annual projected numbers to 130,000.

It will also inject many more millions into the local economy. The local construction industry will be immediately impacted, whilst other local suppliers and tourist destinations will receive ongoing benefits from the increased visitation numbers and expanded product offering at Mayfield.

A key challenge for the tourism industry in the Central Tablelands is the development of quality accommodation – Mayfield’s proposed eco-resort will fill this gap with a 4.5-star accommodation offering reinforced with a higher-end food and beverage offering.

Another key objective of the local tourism industry is accelerating the range of tourism activities and destinations in the region to ensure it attracts more multi-day visitors. The introduction of accommodation at Mayfield and the attractiveness of a multi-day stay at a high-quality eco-retreat will drive the number of long-stay visitors across the broader Central Tablelands.

With the platform of a 65-hectare extraordinary example of European horticulture, Mayfield is not only capable of delivering a unique accommodation, wedding, and conference experience, but it also has capacity and infrastructure to host music and arts festivals; food and wine events to showcase the local region; international horticulture shows, such as Floriade or even the Chelsea Flower Show; and a range of wellness offerings focused on nature.

Mayfield’s proposal to develop an Eco Retreat and associated event and conference facilities is closely aligned with the NSW Government’s objective to ‘accelerate the development of high impact tourism and events infrastructure that will increase the international appeal of destinations in regional NSW and boost the visitor economy through increased visitation and job creation’.

## **My Objections to the Paling Yards Wind Farm**

### **Consultation**

Our family and business have never been consulted on the Paling Yards project, even though we have invested close to \$100 million of family money into a garden destination that has basically anchored the tourism industry in The Central West and contributes significantly to the ongoing robustness of the local economy.

Yet we have been kept in the dark on the Paling Yards project.

We are now being told that we should have read the Oberon Review for the details of two meetings held in Black Springs over 12-months ago.

Or that we should have visited the Oberon Farmer's market on the one occasion that the proponents set up an information stand there, again about 12-months ago.

And now we have multiple thousands of pages on the Paling Yards Wind Farm dumped on our community – including an Environmental Impact Statement - and we have been given a measly 28-days to respond.

The unreasonableness and bullying nature of this process is breathtaking.

By my calculations, the Paling Yards Wind Farm has been in gestation for over 8,000 days, and we have been given only 28 days to assess the project and lodge a submission.

This is an extraordinary situation, and a process that I will legally explore if the Paling Yards Project is approved without additional engagement and consultation opportunities.

### **NSW Planning Portal**

Many members of our community as well as employees at Mayfield and members of my family have all pointed out to me that the NSW Planning Portal is faulty, and much of the information about the Paling Yards project has not been available for review.

I found this hard to believe, until one of my family members demonstrated the fault to me.

I have been in business for more than 50 years and as such have been exposed to many legal processes and regulations, but never before have I known a Government institution to promote to the public a process that they knowingly understand to be faulty.

This is a situation that reeks of arrogance, incompetence and contempt for Oberon residents and the broader community.

### **Traffic**

To give you some context, Mayfield Garden is a three-hour drive from the Sydney CBD.

It is also situated away from any main highways, and therefore does not receive the passing traffic that towns like Katoomba, Bathurst and Orange enjoy by virtue of their being located along a significant highway out of Sydney and into the Central West.

Therefore, we have always faced the challenge of asking Sydneysiders to drive three hours each way to visit Mayfield Garden.

Both Destination NSW and your own common sense will acknowledge that a three-hour drive each way is probably the outermost limit for a day-tripper.

Therefore, we are very proud and appreciative of the fact that we have been able to build an annual customer base of 80,000, in spite of the geographic challenges we face.

This highlights a point almost as significant as that of the desecration of the community landscape.

If we add more traffic hurdles to what is already a challenging drive, our business will basically be destroyed.

And adding traffic hurdles is exactly what the Paling Yards project will do – 40,000 additional vehicle movements and over 500 major truck movements along the route to Mayfield Garden will drive visitors away and basically bring our business to a standstill.

An additional 30 minutes each way caused by local traffic snarls will stop Sydneysiders from visiting Mayfield – we can't feasibly expect families from Sydney to make a seven-hour round trip to visit Mayfield.

Every visitor to Mayfield Garden enters from either O'Connell or Abercrombie Roads, both of which are on the route that will deliver the giant blades and towers from Newcastle. As we know, these roads cannot be accessed by other vehicles if the giant 65m trucks are using them – which means we could quite feasibly have a situation whereby hundreds of Mayfield visitors are simultaneously being forced to park at the side of the road waiting for giant wind tower trucks to crawl along the only arterial roads towards Mayfield Garden.

There is no doubt that word will get out very quickly – “Don't go to Mayfield Garden or Oberon, it is a renewable energy worksite” – and consequently the tourism, retail, hospitality, and hotel sectors in Oberon will quickly collapse.

### **Social Licence**

Oberon people have already strongly indicated that renewable energy companies do not have a social licence to enter our community.

Oberon is located in a beautiful corner of NSW that in many ways remains authentic and undiscovered.

We have built a unique community on the back of agriculture, timber, and tourism, and we are increasingly recognized and visited by people outside of the region who are beginning to understand why we are so passionate about living here.

Any decision to drastically alter the social fabric of the community - which is what an influx of renewable energy infrastructure will do – does not take into account the population shift in Sydney

and the important role that Oberon will play in the future as Sydney sprawls directly towards Oberon. The explosion in higher density housing through the north-west corridor means Oberon will play an important role in providing a more spacious, appropriate outlet for Sydneysiders looking for an authentic regional experience to supplement their more urban existence. It doesn't make sense to develop a renewable energy industrial park on Sydney's doorstep – it shows a lack of foresight and is symptomatic of the short-term thinking that is accompanying the rollout of renewable energy in Australia.

No-one should be given the right – or the social licence – to come in and desecrate what we have built from the ground up since the 1830s.

And what is particularly galling is the fact that our community and local elected officials have little say in the final planning decision.

One of the great fears about introducing wind towers to the Oberon community is that it will destroy the authentic, unspoiled Australian countryside we are known for, which will lead to a reduction in tourism and small farmers, which in turn will reduce the size of our economy and, of course, this will negatively impact house and land values.

There are hundreds of renewable energy projects in the pipeline in Australia and many of them are causing severe angst and divisiveness among regional communities.

Establishing renewable energy infrastructure at any cost lacks consideration for communities like ours - it is a process that is reckless and needs a better solution. We can't have Government policy that is tearing rural communities apart.

## **Summary**

Here is a summary the key reasons I object to the Paling Yards Wind Farm, and why I believe that the project cannot be approved:

- Mayfield Garden and the Oberon community have not been consulted in a meaningful way. A couple of meetings out of town and a stall at the farmer's market one Saturday morning can hardly be classified as community engagement.
- The lack of community engagement makes the measly 28-day exhibition period look even more preposterous. And on top of that the NSW Planning Portal doesn't work properly!! This is a significant project with massive ramifications for the Oberon community – it would be borderline criminal for NSW Planning to let the Paling Yards proponent slide by with minimal consultation.
- Over 500 massive truck movements along every road that leads to Mayfield – together with an overall increase of 40,000 vehicle movements – will strangle our business beyond repair.

- Oberon is a unique and authentic regional destination that will quickly become a renewable energy wasteland if this crazy chase for carbon ground zero continues without more considered, sensible policy. Currently, there is no social licence to enter our community, and there is no thought being given to the significant role our region will play as Sydney continues to grow directly towards us.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any questions related to this submission.

Regards

Garrick Hawkins  
Owner, Mayfield Garden