

Winterbourne Wind does not have a social licence to proceed with their industrial wind development in Walcha. As a non-associated neighbour, I strongly object to the size and scale of the project. It is not in the public interest to approve this application. There are many reasons. I highlight the following:

- **Change of transport route from Oxley Highway to Thunderbolt's Way:**
The revised transport route (from a state highway to regional Walcha/Uralla Council maintained road – how that is possibly an adequate solution?) If the Oxley Highway is now considered not suitable (responding to public submissions – eg page 81 an example “*Those living on these roads such as the Oxley Highway, will have their daily commutes significantly impacted as once quiet and safe roads are trans[ff]ormed into highways swarming with oversized, slow vehicles, encouraging unsafe driving and overtaking from commuters*”). How is Thunderbolt's Way more appropriate? These same issues impact those who use it. This is not the solution – indeed it is much worse.

Thunderbolt's Way is the only access road for Walcha & surrounding residents to travel to Armidale – our closest major regional centre and place of significant employment, schooling, major retail, larger hospital and medical facilities, courts etc. Thunderbolt's Way is not as well maintained as the Oxley Highway. It is a local single lane council road with high levels of commuter traffic and multiple school buses, with no passing lanes and no proper edges/verges for heavy vehicles/cars/bikes to pull over. Road shoulders are generally cracked and remain unlined in some sections; it's often potholed after rain and gets a lot of wear and tear from current commuter traffic. Acknowledging that ‘*road upgrades required for the Project will be assessed again closer to construction commencing and in consultation with road authorities*’ (p 81) is completely insufficient. The current road (Thunderbolt's Way) is not up to standard now and the 52 months quoted for construction doesn't include the months of disruption for the road upgrades required to be able to handle the increased volume of traffic and the enormous OSOM vehicles with their 5 support vehicles. There is NOT ‘*adequate capacity in the road network to accommodate the Amended Project*’ (p. 102).

A child from Walcha who commences high school in Armidale as many do could potentially spend their entire 6 years of high school travelling on a bus over 120 klms a day on Thunderbolt's Way with construction vehicles of Winterbourne Wind constantly interrupting the journey, creating traffic snarls and increased damage to the road, delays, adding travel time to an already long day. Think about it.

This crazy proposal to use Thunderbolt's Way rather than the Oxley Highway is proof of a wind development that is in the wrong place.

- **Environmental destruction:** Winterbourne Wind has downplayed the impact to biodiversity of this project to such a degree that they arrogantly state in the amended project *‘there are no serious and irreversible impacts’* (p. 101) – what rot. The amended project (p. 25) will clear 128 ha of habitat for the Spotted-tail Quoll; clear 122.9 ha of habitat for Koalas; clear 106.5 ha of potential habitat for the Squirrel Glider and 101 ha for the Greater Glider; and 7.8 ha for the Glossy-Black cockatoo!! These hectares include New England Peppermint and White Box/Yellow Box/Blakely’s Red Gum etc.

Yes, the Winterbourne Wind proposed project is being developed *‘on land which has been previously disturbed and historically cleared for agricultural purposes’* (p. 100 Amended Project). BUT most of the turbines are situated on the ridges that remain forested! The project infrastructure and industrial turbines will destroy what precious trees we have left. Due to our harsh winters, trees take years to grow, yes, some land has been cleared and we’ve suffered from dreadful tree depletion due to eucalypt ‘die back’ in the 1970s, which makes the trees we have left and the animals that live in the diverse biosphere all the more important and precious to conserve.

The deliberate destruction of our precious environment, flora and fauna and the negative impact on our biodiversity in order to situate a renewable energy project such as Winterbourne Wind makes a mockery of the Australian and NSW government’s credentials in hosting the first Global Nature Positive Summit (8-10 October 2024). The 2021 State of the Environment Report recommended *‘significant investment in conservation and restoration to reverse the decline in Australia’s natural environment’*. How can Minister Pilibersik state that *‘we’re committed to stopping nature’s decline’* to achieve *‘a nature positive future’* and Minister Penny Sharpe argue that *‘Government and community cannot simply be the managers of steady environmental decline – we must be the stewards of actively protecting what’s left, turning around the loss and restoring biodiversity’* and then approve a destructive development such as Winterbourne Wind? A project that sites wind turbines 600 metres from the Oxley Wild Rivers National Park, part of the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia’s World Heritage Area! This makes no sense and is not good policy. The location of this proposed project is not in the public interest.

- **Encroaching renewable developments 10klm from Walcha township:** The Minister for Climate Change & Energy, Chris Bowen in June 2024 has set the new standard in visual amenity for wind farms. In response to submissions, he increased the distance for an offshore wind farm on the Illawarra coast from 10 to 20 klms and reduced the area too. *‘One of the concerns raised was visual amenity in this beautiful part of the world. To ensure that visual amenity is*

protected, we have moved the zone to 20klms away'. We strongly believe that our visual amenity in this beautiful part of New England should also be preserved. We deserve to be treated at least the same as other NSW residents. Why is the Illawarra's visual amenity considered more valuable than ours? It is not unreasonable, therefore, to move this massive wind development a minimum 10 klms away from the Walcha township boundary. Party politics should play no role in the siting of renewal energy projects. This is unequitable and extremely unfair. In addition, there are obviously sound impacts for residents having the turbines so close.

Turbines that need to be removed/re-sited are: B021; B172A; B045A; B034A; B044; B033A; B036; B037; B038; B039; B024A; B025A; B028; B029; B030; B032A; B167A; B026A; B027A – 19 turbines

- **Cumulative Impacts:** the cumulative impacts are significant and numerous. I will mention three - 1) why has Winterbourne Wind made no mention of the 140 turbine Ruby Hills proposed wind farm in their Cumulative Impact Assessment? This is an extraordinary omission and cannot be accidental. Ruby Hills runs along the western side of Walcha and is the most advanced proposal in the Walcha area apart from Winterbourne Wind. There is also the proposed building of the South Hub as part of Energy Co's transmission infrastructure. 2) Implications for our already stretched health resources – local hospital and doctors – with the increased construction workforce employed by Winterbourne Wind, there is no mention in the Amended Report as to how this development will seek to address the strain on our already stretched health resources in Walcha.
- 3) The extensive delays and proposed almost doubling of construction timeline will have significant negative impact on the local community which increases the negative impact on people's mental health (not mentioned at all in the report). This is not ameliorated by the VPA signed in haste by the Walcha Council in June 2024 particularly as it's unclear when the ongoing payments will commence. It has taken Winterbourne Wind 18 months and 5 extensions to submit their inadequate Amended Report. How much is a small rural community expected to take? Something is really wrong here. We implore the NSW government to reject the wind farm.
- **Negative engagement:** Regarding the statements made in the Amended Report (pp. 30-32). As a non-associated neighbour, Winterbourne Wind has only paid lip service to our concerns, and we have had almost no interactions with anyone from the project for at least two years. We have been actively engaged in trying to get information about the project since 2020 and as a non-associated neighbour, we have been very disappointed by the lack of information and responses. Since April 2024, we have asked at least 3 times

for an updated photomontage of our view of the wind turbines (14) as they have moved significantly in the amended proposal. We get fobbed off and our emails ignored. Winterbourne Wind is only interested in engaging with the hosts and associated neighbours who through the pernicious confidentiality agreements favoured by renewable industry developers such as Winterbourne Wind have effectively bought their silence. This has caused enormous distrust in the local community. There is significant community discord that has pitted neighbour against neighbour, turned friendships upside down, created division that small rural communities like ours can ill afford.

- Part of the distrust in the local community is the secrecy demanded by Winterbourne Wind. Non disclosure agreements; the lack of information about wind industry incidents (eg partial blade failures, fires, etc), the divisions wrought by this proposed development are largely due to Winterbourne Wind's opaqueness and arrogance. Winterbourne Wind refused to hold a community forum to explain the amended project once it was released on 8 October 2024. [Despite the amended project and response to submissions being well over 1,000 pages long].
- We note that the NSW government's Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure has experienced first hand the inability of Winterbourne Wind to meet any of your prescribed notification requirements which confirms their unsuitability to manage such a complex project. Given their track record to date, few in the Walcha community have any confidence that they will meet any conditions of consent that the Department may set or any notification requirements by other Departments (eg roads, police etc). They are carpetbaggers selling dreams. They are not responsible renewable energy developers and are simply in it for the money.
- NSW already has over half (53%) of renewable energy generation <https://www.energy.nsw.gov.au/nsw-plans-and-progress/major-state-projects/shift-renewables/renewable-energy-nsw> [accessed 30 October 2024] Why would the NSW/Commonwealth government approve such a complex, expensive, and poorly situated industrial wind development such as that proposed by Winterbourne Wind? It is not economically, environmentally, and socially viable. This wind development is not in the public interest. Why not encourage the township of Walcha, its surrounding residents and small businesses, with small-scale solar? Invest in research and development for energy and battery storage?

30 October 2024