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This submission is a response to **ERM's Submissions Report** of 20 September 2024 and **ERM's Amendment Report** of 3 October 2024, submitted on behalf of Winterbourne Wind.

I OBJECT to the Winterbourne Wind Farm Amendment Report for the reasons outlined below.

The amendments to the project appear to be predominantly around the relocation of turbines due to a host landholder withdrawing, a change in the traffic route from Oxley Highway to Thunderbolts Way for OSOM vehicles and an increase in the construction time from 30 months to 52 months.

Winterbourne Wind has had over 20 months to justify these amendments with updated consultant reports that amount to over 1000 pages. The Council and the Community have only 28 days to digest this information and provide submissions on the information contained within the reports. The information that can be gleaned from the Amendment Report is often misleading, inaccurate and in places contradictory.

Further, the staff of Winterbourne Wind and Vestas have not engaged with the Council and Community in any meaningful way regarding these reports. No meaningful responses to the 900 initial submissions and no updates about the so called amendments outlined above.

The last Project Update # 16 issued by Winterbourne Wind was July 2024. No mention of change in traffic routes, increase in construction time or change in project layout. Nothing has been updated on the Facebook site since June 2024, again nothing relating to submissions or amendments.

The NSW Planning Department advertised a full page about the exhibition of the amended development application for Winterbourne Wind on 9th October 2024 advising that submissions need to be made by Monday 4 November 2024.

This included the **"Description of amended proposal Reducing the overall number of wind turbines to 118, amending transport route to avoid the use of Oxley Highway for inbound over-dimensional heavy vehicles, addition of an onsite quarry and amendments to the external transmission alignment, wind turbine layout and associated infrastructure."**

This is more information about the project than the Developer has provided to the community since the EIS was submitted in October 2022.

Winterbourne followed with a half page advertisement on 16 October 2024. Still no mention of what the amendments are or their implications for the local community.

The poster features a background image of a wind turbine in a green field under a blue sky with clouds. On the left, the text 'Winterbourne Wind Farm' is in bold blue, and 'Amended State Significant Development Application' is in bold orange. On the right, the 'Winterbourne Wind' logo consists of three white wavy lines above the text 'Winterbourne Wind'. The bottom half of the poster has a light beige background with black text. The bottom-most section is a dark blue bar with white text.

**Winterbourne
Wind Farm**
**Amended State
Significant Development
Application**

**Winterbourne
Wind**

An Amendment Report for the proposed Winterbourne Wind Farm has now been lodged with the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure (DPHI) and is on public exhibition from Tuesday 8 October 2024 to Monday 4 November 2024.

Hard copies of the report and technical appendices are available in the Walcha Library and Uralla Library. You can also view the documents and make submissions online at <https://www.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/major-projects/projects/winterbourne-wind-farm>

Visit winterbournewindfarm.com.au for more information

It is procedurally unfair that the Walcha community to have to find out about the significant impact to our town by way of wading through 1000 pages of PR spin and technical jargon.

The community is becoming confused about what is being asked of them. The process is unclear. We are getting limited information from the Developer and the Department appears to be assisting the Developer with this Development Application for 118, 230 metre tall turbines within 6.5 km of our town.

CONSTRUCTION

Of concern is the increase in the construction time and the ever-shifting time line. It appears that the construction time has increased from 30 months to 52 months. This was known by the Developer by March 2024, however it does not appear to have been acknowledged by the Developer to the Councils involved, the community members, impacted non associated neighbours and host landholders. This increase in construction time has significant impacts to the VPA, traffic and transport.

ERM in their report released 3rd October 2024 at Table 9 gives an indicative timeline of construction starting 2026, mechanical completion by late 2029 and testing/commissioning early 2030. Throughout the report it is inconsistent when construction will commence, some say late 2025 and at other places it is the 1st quarter of 2027. However, throughout the report the duration of the construction phase is ‘about 52 months’¹

Peak construction is also inconsistent but would appear to be ‘of 20 months’.

Construction to the Developer appears to begin with the set up of temporary construction compound areas and ancillary facilities, the upgrade of existing access tracks and construction of new access tracks, followed by the phasing of the Wind turbine assembly and installation. There is no mention in the report relating to the timeline of the development of all the necessary road and bridge upgrades, including Thunderbolts Way, necessary prior to construction commencing.

The issue around the construction timeline is further obscured by “**Construction of the wind farm may be staged subject to factors including but not limited to the availability of contractors, equipment, workers and housing, equipment transport constraints, equipment and contractor pricing, energy market pricing and availability of energy offtake, project funding requirements, the final project as approved, and relevant development consent conditions.**”²

In the report the Developer outlines that should they decide to stage the project, it will be built in 2 stages, with the western and northern portions of the project constructed as a first stage, and the southern portion of the project constructed as a second stage. The north and western turbines would be built first because of the connection to the transmission line and associated infrastructure to the north of the project. The turbines to the south would be delivered as a second stage.

Unfortunately, this identifies that the VPA and Community Benefit Fund payments, which are not clearly defined with start and end dates, may not be paid. It also means that non associated neighbours and host landholders may not receive payments well past the project completion and commission date post 2032, if at all.

The **commissioning of the Project** is outlined in the amendment report and requires checks on all high voltage equipment prior to connection to the existing TransGrid transmission line network. Once the electrical reticulation network has been successfully energised, each WTG will be separately commissioned.³

It is further identified that TransGrid requires freehold title to the switchyard lot(s) in order to proceed with the construction of the relevant electrical connections and infrastructure. The Project would require the future creation of title(s) in a subdivision

¹ Appendix A Table 9

² Appendix A page 166

³ Appendix A ERM

of Lot 114 of DP755829 to enable land ownership of the switchyard assets to be transferred to TransGrid. **TransGrid will obtain freehold title through either transfer, dedication or acquisition.** The Project may require the creation of title(s) to enable land ownership of the substation assets as follows: • North substation: Lot 1 of DP1090942; and • South substation: Lot 95 of DP1128816.⁴

This indicates that the Developers do not have a contract to connect to the existing Transgrid transmission infrastructure and that they have not negotiated with the host landholders regarding the requisite freehold title that Transgrid will require. This in itself is alarming as it confirms that Vestas are planning to on sell this project and retain the turbine sales and O & M contracts. It also leaves a number of host landholders and non associated neighbours in a precarious situation regarding the long term agreements they have with the Developer and the income they hope to receive.

CHANGE IN TRAFFIC ROUTE

The change in the route for incoming OSOM vehicles from Oxley Highway to Thunderbolts Way is unsurprising to the community, given that we drive that road regularly and are aware OSOM vehicles would never make it down that road, let alone across some of the narrow bridges. However, the change to the Thunderbolts Way does not in any way alleviate the issues that the community and councils have already outlined in their previous submissions.

In Appendix I, Amber Organisation in investigating the transport route found that crash search indicates that there are no discernible crash trends within the surrounding road network, and the crashes are widely distributed on the network with no 'Black Spots'. Whilst the crash search indicates a large number of crashes, including some resulting in fatalities, the crash results are not unexpected when considering the large search area, the associated traffic volumes on the roads, the road classifications, and the high speed and rural nature of the State and Regional Road network. Overall, it is concluded that the road network is currently operating in a relatively safe manner.⁵

What happens to our relatively safe road network, with a large number of crashes, when traffic increases during peak construction the Project would generate up to 512 light vehicles and 142 heavy vehicles per day, 6 days per week??? and this does not include OSOM load carrying vehicles.

⁴ Appendix A ERM page 174

⁵ Appendix I Amber Report page 32

Thunderbolts Way is approximately 22.3km in length from the proposed Uralla Bypass to the township of Walcha at the intersection with Jamieson Street. Thunderbolts Way is a regional road designated as a 26m B-double route and is a responsibility of the Uralla and Walcha Councils to manage the roads, TfNSW will contribute to any maintenance activities. **It should be noted that according to the NHVR Portal, a majority of Thunderbolts Way is not approved for OSOM load carrying vehicles travel.**⁶ Engagement has been undertaken by icubed consulting, Vestas and Zenviron with Walcha Shire Council on Thunderbolts Way. A site visit by icubed consulting confirmed that Thunderbolts Way has clear deteriorated pavement sections located within segments of road and limited safety barriers in place for constrained segments. Further, from this assessment, it was clear that upgrades are required at all local intersections required for HV/OSOM use in the Walcha Council. Upgrades would likely comprise of additional pavement widening and the existing services and road furniture.

The large increase in the number of OSOM and HVs using the minor roads in and surrounding Walcha will likely generate impacts to the road pavement (e.g. loss of pavement materials, deterioration and potholes) as in their current state they will be inadequate to cater for the increase in pavement loadings from the freight task.⁷

In Appendix I, Amber identified that **the Project Area does not currently have access to the Class 1 OSOM approved road network, with all roads connecting to the site unrated for OSOM vehicles.** Roads that are not approved on the map require an access permit from the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator or the relevant road manager. It is noted that Oxley Highway, New England Highway and a 25km section of Thunderbolts Way south of Uralla are part of the approved network, although the following travel conditions are applicable along New England Highway south of Bendemeer: Condition applies to Southbound only. Police escort required when width exceeds 3.5 metres. It is understood the Applicant will seek approval for Class 1 OSOM vehicles to utilise the relevant unrated sections of the network following determination of the Project.⁸

In the Rex J Andrews – Route Study the approvals still required to be obtained by the Developer are outlined at a minimum and they represent significant upgrades of road modifications, upgrade to pavement, bridges and underpasses. The following approvals are required for approval to access the route from the Port of Newcastle to the project area:

⁶ Appendix I icubed consulting page 33 -34

⁷ Appendix I icubed consulting page 38

⁸ Appendix I Amber Report page 29-30

- NHVR
- RMS
- Newcastle Council
- Muswellbrook Council
- Tamworth Regional Council
- Walcha Shire Council
- Uralla Shire Council
- NSW Police
- Ausgrid
- Essential Energy
- Telstra
- CRN JHG (Rail)
- ARTC (Rail)".⁹

The Report outlines the required road upgrades between Tamworth and the Project Area which includes the 950m of road to be built between Staces Road and Thunderbolts Way, Uralla and then the corner of Thunderbolts Way and Jamieson Street, Walcha but no mention of the almost 25 km of road in between.

In Appendix I – Amended Traffic and Transport, exactly the same paragraph has been used as a cut and paste **in both Rex J Andrews Report and the Conclusion of Amber Org Report.**

“The intersection of Thunderbolts Way / Jamieson Street is proposed to be upgraded by Walcha Council with the proposed design provided within Appendix E. The upgrade includes a new seal and linemarking including a dedicated right turn lane from Thunderbolts Way which would exceed the Austroads turn treatment requirements for this Project. The intersection is provided with adequate sight distance to allow vehicles to safely enter the Regional Road network.” Conclusion of Amber report pg 85 and Rex J Andrews – Route Study page 29.

Still no mention of any proposed upgrade to Thunderbolts Way to enable OSOM vehicle movements but ample identification of the intersection in Walcha to be

⁹ Appendix I Rex J Andrews Traffic Route page 105

upgraded by Walcha Council, when we are lead to believe there is no current agreement between Walcha Council and the Developer for any upgrades to the regional and local roads.

The Amended Project states that “the inclusion of an onsite quarry has significantly reduced the number of heavy vehicles travelling on local roads as raw materials for construction can be sourced within the Project area. Similarly, the use of existing onsite groundwater bores will further reduce the number of heavy vehicles travelling on local roads.”

During the construction phase there has been identified an increase in water from 113 megalitres on page 90 of EIS to 800 megalitres on page 171 of Amendment Report.

The cut / fill volumes are estimated to be approximately 1,258,600 m³ and 898,700 m³ of material, respectively on page 89 of EIS and the cut / fill volumes are estimated to be approximately 1,734,920 m³ and 1,617,710 m³ of material, respectively on page 170 of Amendment Report.

Approval for the quarry is being sought as part of an amendment to the Project (however, it really is a new development application) and an Environment Protection Licence (EPL) would also be required. These have not as yet been granted and so all of the vehicle movements on the roads are still uncertain and unknown.

CUMULATIVE IMPACT

Nearby Major Projects are identified in the project area **as proposed, under construction, or operational** and include wind farms, solar farms, BESS facilities, and a pumped hydro energy storage project.

The Projects that have been highlighted in a table have the potential to generate additional vehicle movements along New England Highway and/or Oxley Highway during the construction period. Solar Farm, Middlebrook Solar Farm, Armidale East BESS, Eathorpe BESS, Oven Mountain Pumped Hydro Energy Storage Project, Kingswood ¹⁰

Thunderbolt Wind Farm, Hills of Gold Wind Farm, Bendemeer Solar Farm, Tilbuster Solar Farm, Middlebrook Solar Farm, Armidale East BESS, Eathorpe BESS, Oven Mountain Pumped Hydro Energy Storage Project, Kingswood BESS.

However, there is **no mention of the proposed EnergyCo transmission project, nor Ruby Hills Project in the report on cumulative impact**. Both of these projects

¹⁰ Table 15

are known to the Developer and have been left out of the report which is misleading, at the very least.

CONCLUSION

What is apparent is the Developer still has an enormous amount of work to do in terms of approvals, road, bridge and overpass upgrades, management plans, accommodation strategies, development applications for quarries, water and noise assessments, further refinement of project design, procurement and commercialisation, the list goes on and on.

What is enormously challenging and disheartening is to attempt to read each section of Amendment Report, noting that it is still largely deficient in detail and the significant impacts this represents to Walcha Shire Council and the Walcha community. Ultimately, this further confirms the Developers misuse of the planning process and complete lack of merit against the objects of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979.