

OBJECTION to Victoria to NSW Interconnector West (SSI-72887208)

I strongly object to the Victoria to NSW Interconnector West (VNI West) transmission project being proposed by Transgrid.

Not unlike the Central West Orana Renewable Energy Zone (CWO REZ) transmission project, I believe there is a lack of social license concerning VNI West – which I have no doubt will be evidenced in submissions from landowners and community members who live in the region where the project is proposed. Regrettably, rural and regional communities are being sacrificed in the name of “clean”, “green” energy infrastructure that will not provide the cheap and reliable electricity that Australia used to be known for.

The “rapid transition to renewable energy” is the catalyst for thousands of kilometres of new high voltage transmission lines – the scale of which we have not seen in this country! These transmission lines are often proposed to be constructed on valuable agricultural land and pose real threats to food and fibre production in Australia through the loss of productivity. Not only are we losing productive and valuable agricultural land, we are sacrificing the environment – all in the name of saving the planet.

Landowners unfortunate enough to be saddled with transmission lines traversing their properties are being threatened with compulsory acquisition if they do not negotiate an agreement. Being threatened by compulsory acquisition is a very stressful situation – exacerbated by terrible treatment from Government authorities and developers. Compulsory acquisition is a tool that should be left as a last resort, not trotted out during initial meetings with landowners just so they know who has the power!

While the Strategic Benefit Payments Scheme (SBPS) provides landowners forced to “host” new transmission projects with some income, along with compensation provided under the Land Acquisition (Just Terms Compensation) Act 1991, what is not being taken into consideration is that in a lot of cases nearly half of that money provided, to compensate the imposition, is being taken back by the Government under the guise of taxable income. The compensation, and payments through the SBPS, should be tax free! The SBPS should also be for the life of the project, not only 20 years.

It is acknowledged in the EIS that the project would have direct impacts on individual landowners, but also suggests that the impact of the project on agricultural production would be minimal during operation. The loss of 34 hectares of irrigated land is a major loss of production, and the restrictions placed on other landowners eg. aerial operations, drone use, crop spraying, machinery use, will forever alter some agricultural enterprises causing lost revenue. When considered in isolation the losses to the agricultural industry may not be deemed significant, but when the cumulative impacts of all transmission projects, and other large scale renewable energy infrastructure projects being planned and constructed will inevitably have a negative impact on Australia’s ability to feed and clothe itself. It will also have negative impacts on the economy given the contribution the agricultural industry makes to Australia’s gross domestic product.

All of the Government commitments to Net Zero, both local, state and federal, are causing major harm to Australia’s industries, not least agriculture. We are heading for a situation where energy will be too expensive for the majority of Australia’s population (especially the vulnerable), we will have no industry and farmers will have walked off the land and Australia will not be able to feed nor clothe itself. Caution and common-sense are needed!