

Submission: Hunter Transmission Project - SSI-70610456

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on the Hunter Transmission Project (the Project). I am a local resident who will be directly impacted by the construction and operation of the Project, specifically with regard to the use of Pokolbin Mountains Road as a key access track to facilitate construction and maintenance activities. I object to approval of the Project on the basis that:

- the Project description provided within the EIS does not adequately characterise the proposed construction,
- technical assessments have not adequately considered local impacts of the development
- recommended post approval mitigation measures within technical assessments:
 - provide inadequate detail and insufficiently address the requirements of the Secretary's Environmental Assessment Requirements (SEARs)
 - push the onus of actual assessment through to post approval management plans or detailed design.

Refer below for concerns that should be amended within the assessments.

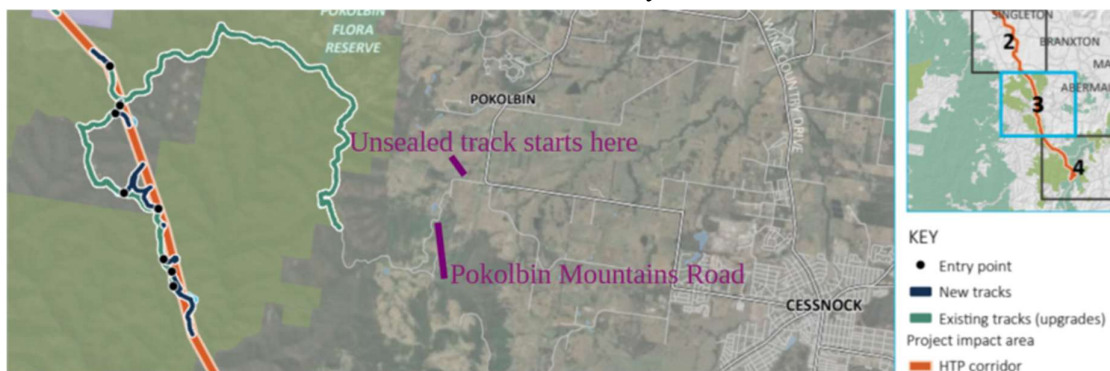
EIS has not adequately characterised Project, including the definition of Pokolbin Mountains Road.

The EIS states: *'It is conservatively assumed that any part of the project impact area may be impacted (directly or indirectly) by the HTP, which allows flexibility for future design refinements while ensuring a robust impact assessment.'*...

It is not clear how a 'robust impact assessment' can be completed if not even a concept design is provided for key project elements such as the key access track of Pokolbin Mountains Road, where road widening, passing bays and intersection upgrades are proposed.

The term 'access track' is defined by the EIS as *'Temporary and permanent tracks used to access the project'*. Table 4.8 of the EIS states *'Existing tracks include **well-established unsealed local roads**, forest roads and tracks maintained by Forestry Corporation of NSW or Transgrid, or unsealed property access tracks, generally suitable for heavy vehicles. Some existing access tracks may require maintenance activities or upgrades along the formation, such as resurfacing or grading, or drainage work.'*

However, Figure 4.14 of the EIS does not demarcate Pokolbin Mountains Road as an access track, despite this road being a 'well-established unsealed local road' meeting the definition for access track. It is also the only access track from Pokolbin with no alternatives once vehicles enter Pokolbin Mountains Road from McDonalds Road/ Oaky Creek Road.



The EIS does not describe what assessment has been undertaken to characterise which access roads and tracks will require resurfacing, grading or drainage work, nor how the impacts of these

activities on local receptors would affect us or would be mitigated. The EIS document reports the following upgrades (Table 4.9 and Table 4.10):

- Various sections between McDonalds Road and Broken Back Road in Pokolbin, widening for one lane movement for 19 m heavy vehicles with traffic control required
- McDonalds Road/Oakey Creek Road/Pokolbin Mountains Road Intersection requires widening for 2-way/2-lane heavy vehicle movements

As a flow on effect from the project description being unclear, insufficient detail is provided within the technical assessments regarding the assessment of Pokolbin Mountains Road. Concerningly, with no clarity in project description, the assessments fail to consider the actual potential impacts of the project nor any material control or mitigation measures for the Project, particularly in relation to access tracks such as Pokolbin Mountains Road.

Air quality assessment and mitigation measures are insufficient.

Assessment

Construction dust was assessed as part of the Air Quality and Green House Gass Impact Assessment (AQGHGIA). Earthworks, construction and track-out were determined to be **medium-risk** activities for dust soiling, human health impacts and ecological impacts in the AQGHGIA.

However, it is not clear that the assessment adequately considers the dust generation of vehicular movements along unsealed (dirt) access tracks, including Pokolbin Mountains Road.

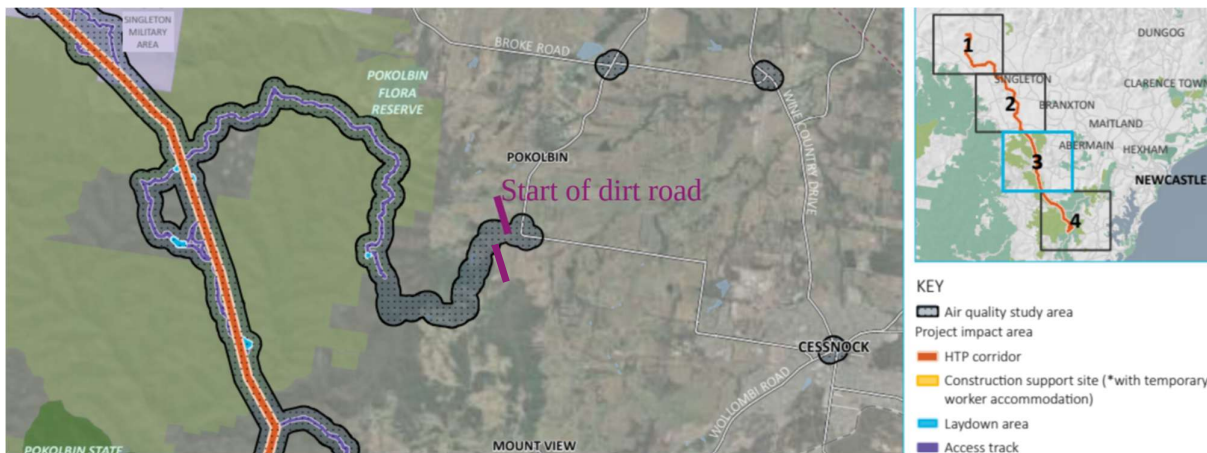
The assessment does not adequately consider dust-related impacts for the following:

- The air quality study area (Figure 3.4) includes the Pokolbin Mountains Road. However, none of the businesses, vineyards, residences (including roof drinking water sources), livestock drinking water sources (including Foxy Gully, Muggyrang Creek and farm dams) or public recreational use areas (such as the Great North Walk) were mapped or considered within the assessment. The receptors assessment conducted is therefore insufficient.
- The impact and use of the unpaved Pokolbin Mountains Road, from the transition of the asphalt wearing course to the start of the dirt road (refer figure below). Heavy vehicle movements will use this access route (no actual numbers have been provided for Pokolbin Mountains Road in the EIS). There are no alternative access routes once vehicles turn off McDonalds Road onto Pokolbin Mountains Road. Therefore the impacts to receptors start at the beginning of the dirt road and have not been assessed. The AQGHGIA states:

'For the transmission line, the majority of the access routes used by vehicles are unsealed roads which span over many kilometres. By IAQM convention, track-out is when dirt and mud from construction sites and unsealed roads are deposited and accumulate on public highways (sealed roads). Therefore, track-out is only considered for receptors along sealed roads which connect to the unsealed roads used for access to the construction sites.'

Pokolbin Mountains Road is not listed as being potentially affected by track-out impacts, despite a transition to asphalt wearing coarse occurring on this road and it being the only access into the proposed access track in the Pokolbin State Forest from Pokolbin. There are receptors within 20-50 m of this potential trackout location which are not considered by the assessment. It is also evident that the assessment does not consider the potential impacts of dust generated along unsealed portion of Pokolbin Mountains Road.

- The impacts of dust on receptors near proposed road works. The EIS (Table 4.9) nominates widening for one lane movement for 19 m heavy vehicles with traffic control on various sections of Pokolbin Mountains Road and Broken Back Road. As mentioned above, none of the residences or businesses along this road are included within the assessment.



Mitigation measures

The AQGHGIA recommends a Construction Air Quality Management Plan for the construction phase of the Project. The ‘mitigation measures’ summarised include:

‘...ensuring that exposed areas are kept moist, ensuring that vehicles entering and leaving the site are covered to prevent escape of materials during transport, logging dust complaints, carrying out regular inspections and recording any exceptional dust generating events and associated actions. The proposed mitigation measures are considered sufficient to effectively manage off-site impacts from the project. Therefore, the residual risk for impacts on the surrounding area following mitigation will be ‘not significant’.

It seems the only true mitigation measures proposed for the heavy vehicle movements along Pokolbin Mountains Road will be the covering of vehicle loads, which is merely a requirement of law rather than a real mitigation measure. The other ‘mitigations’ applicable to the road are reactive and would occur in response to the dust generating activities and rely on community complaints and physical inspections.

As discussed above, as the definition of Access Track should extend to Pokolbin Mountains Road from the transition to the unsealed, dirt road to the Access track mapped in the Pokolbin State Forest. The below mitigation measures need to be included within the Construction Air Quality Management Plan and should be actively applied during the construction phase of the project:

- Dust suppression (application of water) to all dirt roads accessed by heavy vehicles should be included in the Construction Air Quality Management Plan and the Construction Surface Water Management Plan and enforced during the construction of the Project. There are several human receptors which will be sensitive to dust (accessing roof-harvested drinking water) and livestock receptors (accessing drinking water including Foxy Gully, Muggyrang Creek and farm dams) that need to be considered to ensure that no impacts to drinking water sources occur.
- Include track-out mitigation measures for track-out impacts to Pokolbin Mountains Road, including:

Water-assisted dust sweeper(s) will be used to remove, as necessary, any material tracked out of the project impact area onto public roads

As discussed above, Pokolbin Mountains Road was not identified within the AQGHGIA as a potential track-out location. There is a transition between unsealed and sealed roads and at least one receptor within 20-50 m of this location.

I am concerned that if multiple heavy vehicular movements occur per day along the dirt road, with no real mitigation measures applied we may be affected as none of the residences or businesses have been considered in the impact assessment along Pokolbin Mountains Road. Pokolbin Mountains Road must be formally recognised as the access track and included in all dust and track-out mitigation strategies. Anything less ignores the real and immediate risks to the health, water supplies for those who live and work along this road.

Traffic and transport impact assessment is insufficient

The construction traffic impacts are assessed within the Traffic and Transport Impact Assessment (TTIA).

The TTIA baseline assessment does not sufficiently characterise the usage of Pokolbin Mountains Road, with survey on McDonalds Road occurring between Tuesday and Wednesday 5:00 am–10:00 am and 3:00 pm–7:00 pm (TIA, page 21). The EIS states construction hours for the project would occur between 7:00 am and 6:00 pm (Monday to Friday), and Saturdays 8:00 am to 1:00 pm. As a tourism and recreational area, Pokolbin Mountains Road is subject to the highest traffic over Fridays and Saturdays and the school holidays. A more detailed survey and impact assessment needs to be undertaken to characterise the traffic and usage of local roads in the vineyards district.

This is evidenced by the active transport assessment provided in the TTIA. Table 5.13 characterises the potential active transport impacts for McDonalds Road, Pokolbin: *‘Limited interaction and impact. However, there are accommodations, wineries and recreational places in this area where walking and cycling activities are observed. Construction traffic would use the road to travel between Wollombi Road, the Wollombi Road construction support site, and the HTP corridor off Pokolbin Mountain Road. During induction, all workers would be educated on the activities along McDonalds Road and Broke Road and the safe driving practices to be expected on these roads.’*

On Fridays and Saturdays, Pokolbin Mountains Road (adjacent Muggyrang Creek) is especially busy with up to 20 cars parking (at a time) on road shoulders and many more ascending Pokolbin Mountains Road and Watagan Track for trekking the Great North Walk. These activities are undertaken in the location of the proposed passing bay. Stock movements across Pokolbin Mountains Road are also conducted between these areas which have not been considered within the traffic and transport assessment. It is evident that consultation was not undertaken with these respective road users and as the survey did not consider ‘peak’ workdays for the tourist area, observations were not made for the use of McDonalds road or Pokolbin Mountains Road for active transport. These impacts have not been adequately characterised as surveys were not conducted over a representative period.

The TTIA describes Pokolbin Mountains Road as a bidirectional, unsealed likely 60 km/hr road. Pokolbin Mountains Road is single lane in some sections (there is signage) and typically unsafe to travel more than 40 km/hr along the majority of the road. Two way traffic directions for light vehicles are proposed (refer to figure below) with proposed passing bays and one way for heavy vehicles.

For unsealed roads, including within State forests, light and heavy vehicle movements have the potential to impact road condition, including during wet weather or prolonged dry weather periods. Pokolbin Mountains Road is maintained by Cessnock City Council periodically, including the recent geotechnical and grading works completed by council in relation to a land slip occurring at approximately half way along its length. However, the condition of Pokolbin Mountains Road has varied and readily deteriorates due to a lack of drainage controls and wet weather. The road condition is strongly influenced by runoff from the roadside escarpments and the upper catchment,

with limited to no culverts or drains present. As a result, the road regularly washes out making access treacherous for light vehicles. As part of post approval commitments:

- EnergyCo should commit to dilapidation surveys (including geotechnical survey) of Pokolbin Mountains Road and supporting rock to ensure public safety will not be compromised during and after the construction phase as a result of heavy vehicle movements.
- EnergyCo should commit to installation of permanent drainage controls (including culverts) for Pokolbin Mountains Road to be maintained for the construction phase and passed over to Cessnock City Council for maintenance following completion of construction.

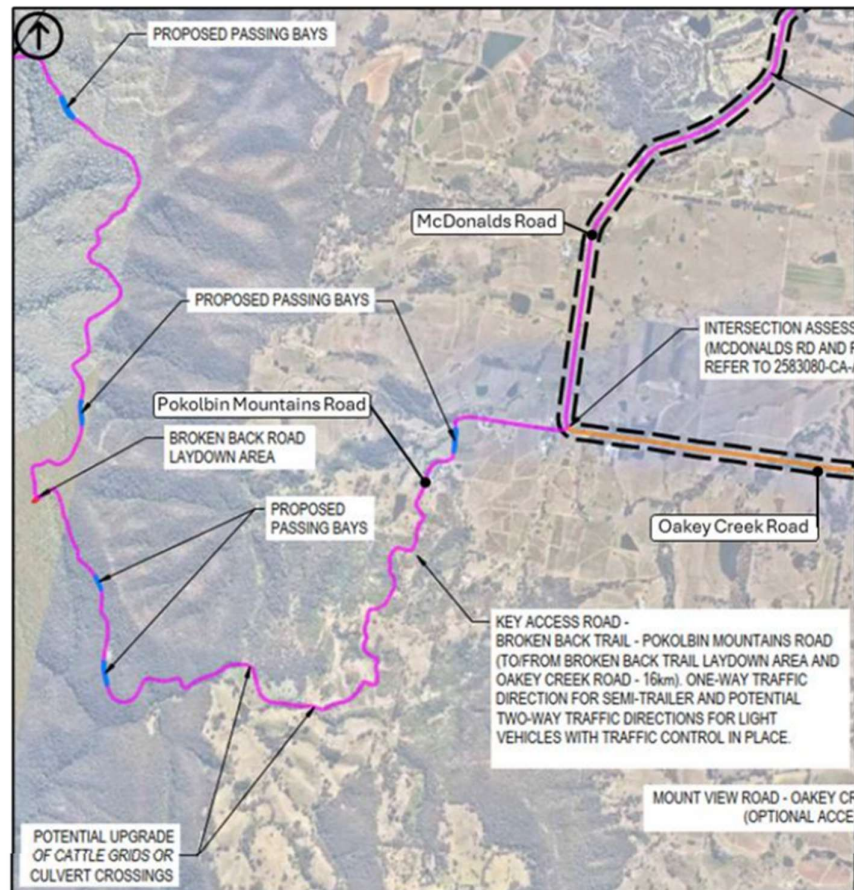


Figure 5.10 Proposed passing bays on Pokolbin Mountains Road

Surface water impact assessment and Soils and Land Assessment

The SEARs for the Project require:

- *a description of the erosion and sediment control measures that would be implemented to mitigate any impacts in accordance with Managing Urban Stormwater: Soils & Construction (Landcom 2004).*

The EPA advice on the SEARs require:

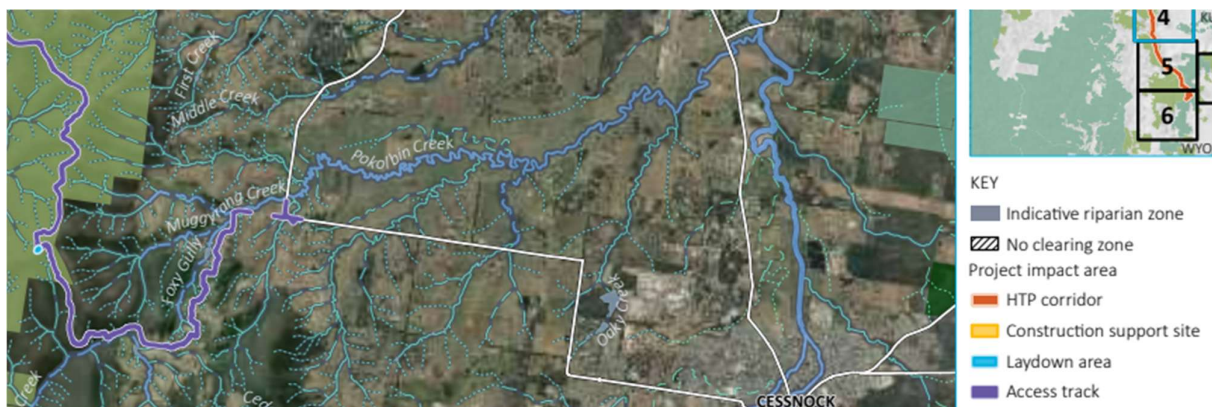
13. Detail the erosion and sediment controls to be implemented to minimise erosion and sediment mobilisation at the site which have been designed in accordance with the requirements of the publication *Managing Urban Stormwater: Soils and Construction* (Landcom 2004). The EIS should show the location of each measure to be implemented for the construction and operational phases of the project. The measures to be considered include:

- Sediment traps
- Diversion banks
- Sediment fences
- Bunds (earth, hay, mulch)
- Geofabric liners
- Other control measures as appropriate

Heavy vehicle usage of unsealed dirt roads/access tracks (including Pokolbin Mountains Road) will exacerbate the erosion of unsealed roads and increase sedimentation of nearby waterways. In the current condition of Pokolbin Mountains Road, following rainfall events the surface of the road erodes, polluting the adjacent Muggyrang Creek with sediment laden runoff.

Given there are passing bays, heavy vehicle usage, road widening nominated for Pokolbin Mountains Road, a concept plan (as part of the SWIA) should be provided for public consultation for all proposed erosion and sediment controls for road sediment generating activities, including road widening for access and passing bays.

Erosion and sediment control measures for access roads/tracks were not nominated in either the SWIA or the Soils and Land Assessment. As the access tracks form part of the Project, the requirements for drainage controls, particularly on unsealed roads such as Pokolbin Mountains Road should be described, as required by the SEARs. Refer below figure which shows Pokolbin Mountains Road mapped as an access track, Figure 6.1 of SWIA.



The Soils and Land Assessment rightly provides a suite of mitigation measures specific to the management of soil erosion. However these apply to only the construction works (such as stockpiling) with minimal descriptions of the proposed mitigation measures for drainage controls provided. No in-text references to the requirements of Landcom (2004), including ‘*a description of the erosion and sediment control measures that would be implemented*’ that are required by the SEARs are made. The relevant documents *Managing Urban Stormwater, Volume 2 C, Unsealed Roads* (DECC 2008) should be referenced and included in the concept design to for the best practice management of erosion and drainage controls. An example of the relevance of this is provided below:

'Effective surface drainage is required on unsealed roads and tracks to minimise erosion by controlling runoff. All unsealed roads and tracks should be constructed with adequate permanent drainage. The design peak flow discharge should be calculated on a site by-site basis and will depend on the type of unsealed road, the sensitivity of receiving waters and the environment, and other consequences of drainage structure failure. These structures are commonly designed to convey a 5-to-10-year ARI design flow'. The above should be included in the concept design and concept ESCPs (which should have been provided within the EIS per the EPAs requirements).

Lastly, the SWIA defers the assessment of local impacts to SWMP's and ESCPs:

*'A project specific SWMP will be developed as a sub-plan to the construction-phase EMS. It will provide mitigation measures to minimise impacts on soils and water. **The SWMP will identify foreseeable risks relating to soil erosion and water pollution during construction and describe how these risks will be managed.** It will include a description of soil and water management approaches, **methods for impact assessment and monitoring, and mitigation measures.** At the completion of construction, relevant measures will be carried into the Network Operator's EMS'*

Local risks and impacts relating to soil erosion and water pollution during construction and a description of how these should be managed should be provided within the SWIA or the EIS and form part of the concept design to key access tracks such as Pokolbin Mountains Road.

Please act on all points raised in the above.

Regards