

OBJECTION to the HUNTER TRANSMISSION PROJECT (SSI-70610456)

I vigorously oppose the Hunter Transmission Project due to its permanent detrimental impact on strategic agricultural land and farming enterprises.

My husband and I operate a productive agricultural enterprise with beef cattle, cropping and hay production at Mount Thorley and are to be affected landholders of the proposed Hunter Transmission Project. As an impacted landholder of a farm operation, the HTP presents very few potential benefits, but many more concerns. Our land is our livelihood and no amount of compensation offered for hosting a high voltage transmission line could ever compensate for the loss of such valuable land and visual beauty.

I ask that all of my following concerns and criticisms be taken into consideration.

Consultation & Engagement

“In 2022, the NSW Minister for Energy declared the Hunter Transmission Project to be a Priority Transmission Infrastructure Project under the *NSW Electricity Infrastructure Investment Act 2020* and appointed EnergyCo as the infrastructure Planner for the project. As the Infrastructure Planner, EnergyCo is the proponent of the project and is responsible for carrying out detailed planning and design, selecting a network operator, consulting with the local community and key stakeholders, and securing the necessary environmental approvals”.

This is a brief summary of our experience of the “consulting” conducted by EnergyCo for the Hunter Transmission Project (HTP).

In November 2023 a Spring 2023 HTP North corridor fact sheet/pamphlet was received by way of a letterbox drop. It was via this pamphlet that I initially became aware of the Hunter Transmission Project and the first indication that our property may be affected. In the brochure our property was located within a balloon-like area. My husband then attended a Drop-In session in Singleton on 6th December 2023 and from there a meeting was arranged at our residence with two HTP Community Team members for the 14th December. Upon arrival, my husband met the Team Members in their vehicle near our farm buildings which has an expansive view overlooking the river flats and surrounding mine-owned farmland. My husband’s intention was to illustrate his strong belief that the HTP and its transmission line did not belong over such rich alluvial river flats and prime productive agricultural land. The EnergyCo team members showed disinterest and enquired as to where the residence was. An overview of the HTP was explained at which it was stated the “proposed corridor is not yet determined”. My husband explained the property’s family history and its sentimental value, his close connection to our property and the surrounding area. They were only introduced by first names and we were given a card with the EnergyCo HTP 1800 number and community team email. My husband submitted a public submission letter on 18th December opposing the current preliminary corridor due to its critical impact on private properties and business operations.

On 26th April 2024 an invitation (via email) was received from the HTP Regional Reference Group (RRG) Secretariat to attend the RRG meeting on 6th May 2024 as a ‘potentially’ affected private landowner to give a 10-minute presentation for the group to hear directly about our concerns or opportunities. Our presentation for the meeting outlined the hurried and less than informative consultation process and concerns there was little opportunity to influence the project and much uncertainty as the corridor image was approximately one kilometre wide at Mount Thorley. The group heard presentations from other affected HTP individuals that same day. Our neighbour attended our presentation, as we did his, after seeking approval from the Chair, Bob Pynsent who made it quite clear that we would only be given ten minutes for each and no longer. It was at that meeting where we were introduced to Kelly,

who we would later find out to be Kelly Lofberg, HTP Director Strategic Communication and Engagement, and a meeting would be later arranged at our neighbour's property for the 9th May 2024.

It was at this meeting on 9th May with Kelly Lofberg and David Kitto, that a possible proposed corridor across the two properties was presented via a satellite map on a laptop to our neighbour, my husband and I. We were never given a 'hard' copy and all three of us had to view it from the one laptop. This map indicated two towers on our property, one of which being no more than 100 metres from our residence. It was indicated we would not be able to live in our house. Understandably, my husband and I were concerned, as was our neighbour, and upset by the location of the HTP corridor. The proposed alignment was going directly across our properties, in effect cutting the farm in half, requiring all movements, including livestock, machinery, workers; everything and everyone, the need to travel beneath the transmission lines multiple times a day. Alternative routes were suggested and the feasibility of underground queried – all of which were swiftly rejected and dismissed.

There have been several changes since that initial proposed corridor, and many more meetings, emails, many questions raised by us and our neighbour in the time since that meeting in May last year. Responses have been slow and some questions are still waiting on answers. It has been extremely frustrating as the various EnergyCo HTP team members and engineers have very little knowledge or understanding of intense farming and agricultural practices in general. We are having to continually explain the constrictions a 500kV transmission line will impose on our farming enterprise. A recommendation would be to employ staff with the relevant field expertise to match the communities they are consulting in order to conduct more meaningful engagement.

There was an unauthorised entry to our property by a fieldwork team in July 2024. We are currently on our fourth Place Manager and it has only been in the last three months that we have been given a direct mobile number and email address for our respective place manager. An opening acquisition letter with a copy of the proposed alignment was issued December last year, but the alignment has since been altered. The new alignment has been disclosed to us and is said to be 'locked in' at this point, but as of writing this submission, the official opening letter which will include the new alignment map across our property has not been received. **An alignment which is not included in the EIS.** This again highlights the frustration at the lack of transparency of the entire consultation and engagement process with EnergyCo.

Technical Report 6 from the EIS - Social Impact Assessment on pages 36/37 indicates where a total number of 197 engaged participants stated regarding the project engagement at the time the sentiment analysis was conducted (March 2025): **53% were negative**, 26% of the responses were neutral, 19% were mixed and 3% were positive (Figure 4.3). My husband and I did participate in this assessment, but it is very clear that many others shared similar negative experiences regarding EnergyCo's consultation and engagement.

In Section 6.1.1 'Perceived lack of ability to influence project and government decision-making processes' of Technical Report 6 of the EIS - Social Impact Assessment states 'this SIA revealed persistent themes of disempowerment and dissatisfaction with EnergyCo's planning and consultation process. This was one of the most frequently raised issues during the SIA engagement, where matters relating to engagement and relationships were raised **98** times. Concerns of relevance include: a perceived lack of transparency in decision-making and route selection, inconsistent messaging and unmet commitments around information provided and limited opportunities for meaningful input, with some viewing the consultation process as a 'tick box' exercise'. It then goes on to say 'Participants in SIA interviews, as well as the broader community survey, have expressed views describing a perceived lack of empathy and respect for rural livelihoods and values. These sentiments have been heightened

by stressors such as uncertainty over easement widths, tower placements, and the acquisition process and timeframes. Similar themes were echoed by broader community participants, with several noting low awareness of the project outside directly affected areas, and a desire for more accessible information and locally tailored engagement approaches’.

The above paragraph from the technical report effectively sums up the whole engagement experience with EnergyCo to date and there appears to be a common consensus and concern amongst those affected by the HTP. Many people in the local area are not aware of the HTP, it is a case of “if it’s not in your backyard”.

Employees of EnergyCo would only ever give their first name. Their full name and company position would seem to be on a “need to know basis”. As *directly* impacted landholders from the very onset, I would have thought that entitled us to that privilege.

As mentioned previously, we have only in recent months been given a direct mobile phone number and email for our place manager. Contact previously was made via the HTP 1800 number and to leave a message with the very polite call taker or by way of the HTP Community email mailbox. This being the same point of contact as for anyone from the general public.

The unauthorised entry to our property displayed a total disregard by EnergyCo to both common courtesy and the potential bio security risks posed by entering farmland. Reading transcripts from a recent and ongoing Parliamentary Inquiry into the Impact of Renewable Energy Zones on Rural and Regional Communities and Industries in NSW, ours is not an isolated case, even for the HTP. This incident only heightened our anxiety and distrust of EnergyCo and its ‘employees’ and the Hunter Transmission Project in general.

The whole ‘consultation’ process and interaction with EnergyCo and the HTP have caused us much distress and frustration, sometimes occasioning out of character behaviour. The emotions my husband and I are experiencing with regard to the HTP and its proposed corridor over our property are those associated with grief – sadness, anger, shock, denial and depression.

Impact on Agriculture & Operations

The EIS Technical Report 5 (Agricultural Impact Assessment) states the agricultural land within the HTP impact area covers 874 hectares. Of this, an estimated 817 hectares is dryland grazing, while an estimated 57 hectares is irrigated land on highly fertile alluvial soils adjacent to the Hunter River. An area of approximately 113 hectares of this high quality agricultural land lies within the operation impact area and would be permanently removed by the project. Of this 113 hectares, 110 hectares is land mapped as biophysical strategic agricultural land (BSAL).

BSAL is land with a rare combination of natural resources that are highly suitable for agriculture. Some 2.74 million hectares of BSAL was mapped in NSW for the protection and management of proposed competing land uses. Any State significant mining or coal seam gas (CSG) proposal on BSAL was subjected to an additional level of scrutiny. Amendments to the *Electricity Infrastructure Investment Act 2020 No 44* enabled such energy infrastructure as required by the HTP permissible on BSAL.

How could such legislation have been passed?? All of our strategic agricultural land must be warranted protection from all forms of development. If our farming capabilities are lost, we lose the ability to feed our nation and its ever-increasing population.

The HTP Executive Summary states ‘around 98% of agricultural lands that intersect the project impact area are located in the Singleton local government area.’ This is where our property is located and the proposed alignment is across BSAL irrigated land. The alluvial river flats are under irrigation by varying

methods including pivot irrigator, side-roll and spray lines. As of writing this submission, we are still determining how, if and by what method we are to be able to irrigate/water within the easement. There is much uncertainty in regard to the full impact. No water = no crop.

Farming is weather driven and seasonal, spring/summer being the busiest time. Will that coincide with construction or stringing lines?

Cattle by nature are creatures of habit and do not cope well with a change of routine and environment. They have a natural curiosity, keen hearing and vision. The addition of a high voltage transmission line overhead with its associated noise, a tower to their environment and the likelihood of 'stray voltage' are all factors that will have a negative effect on an animal's behaviour, health and in particular milk production. The construction process in particular poses a great concern for our beef enterprise and that of our dairy farmer neighbour, with regard to how the cattle will react to the noise, vehicles and people.

Electric fencing is used extensively as both permanent and as temporary fences. There is an extensive network of electric fences within the properties. It is how we feed our cattle herds via 'strip cell grazing' on the alluvial river flats. Australian Standard AS/NZS 3014:2003 states that electric fence crossings with overhead power lines must be avoided wherever possible (HTP EIS 13.4.3). This creates another concern.

Biosecurity is a major issue for rural areas. There is the potential for the spread of noxious weeds and pathogens during before and during construction and following the completion of the HTP. There are measures outlined in the EIS, but there is always the fear of someone doing the wrong thing. We have already encountered that by way of an unauthorised entry to our property by the field work team.

Visual Impact

Beauty is very much in the eye of the beholder. My residence (HTP ID264) and the other dwelling (HTP ID270) on the property have according to the Landscape and Visual Impact assessment (Appendix H: Private dwelling intermediate viewpoint assessment) a 'moderate' scenic quality.

Our farm is an extension of ourselves; many city/town dwellers may feel the same about their house and home. During the COVID19 lock downs I was acutely aware of how blessed I was to have such wide-open spaces and beautiful vistas to enjoy every day. Yes, the property may be located on a busy arterial road, have surrounding coal mines, industrial area and a coal corridor, but we have learnt to co-exist with these developments. The rich alluvial river flats as featured in the Social Impact Assessment (photograph 5.4 Hunter River Floodplains – Technical Report 6 SIA) are the very vista I view each and every day. Those very river flats, productive agricultural land and high hill providing floodproofing have made our property ideal for a farm operation and gratifying place to reside for my husband's family for nearly 100 years.

The beauty of the river flats (or flood plains) has brought much solace, comfort and sense of place for the 25+ years I have lived here. My husband has spent his entire life living in the immediate area, as his grandfather's initial parcel of land was some 365 acres and included the property on which we now live and own. For my husband, this property has tremendous sentimental value, and he has a very real connection and love of the highly productive fertile land with its visual beauty of uninterrupted river flat views.

My husband and I were offered the opportunity for a Visual Impact Assessment (VIA) to be conducted on the property, at which was declined. It was noted on the VIA fact sheet that the visual assessment specialist would take photographs of the residences and note its orientation and the location of key

living spaces and that the VIA prioritises views from dwellings on private property even while there may be locations where the project would be seen on the property, but photographs from these locations would not be included in the VIA. My question to our place manager and the HTP team was: How is that depicting a true visual impact assessment from my husband's and my perspective??

As farmers, much of our time is spent outdoors on our farm and land and we do not have the luxury of enjoying views from our 'key living spaces'. The proposed project with its 70+ metre towers and transmission line will be very much in plain view, front and centre, from every angle in our workplace, that is our home. Doesn't that warrant a visual impact assessment??

The alignment shown on all of the maps that are part of the Technical Report 3 for Landscape character and visual impact assessments is along the Hunter River (Appendix A: Topography - sheet 4 of 9; Appendix F: Viewpoint location plan - sheet 4 of 9; Appendix J: Viewpoint assessment results summary plan – sheet 6 of 16). This alignment has been altered since these reports were compiled, so some of the report and its findings regarding neighbouring properties, in particular in the Hambledon Hill area, will now show different results as the alignment has been moved away from the Hunter River.

As mentioned in the SIA – Technical Report 6, 'environmental features and landscape qualities underpin quality of life'. Given the new alignment location, which is approximately 420 metres from my residence is very much going to diminish our quality of life. The very thought of having our incredible panoramic views interrupted by steel lattice towers and double circuit 500kV transmission lines cause me much angst and anxiety.

Electric & Magnetic Fields (EMF) Exposure Risk

The alignment over our property as shown in the EIS is at the very back of the property along the Hunter River. This alignment was selected by EnergyCo after much discussion with the design team regarding the operations conducted on our farm. This alignment greatly reduced the risk of EMF exposure due to the greater distance from the dwellings and have less need to travel beneath it. The location also made it possible for the cattle to not have to pass under or along the transmission line and the visual impact would have been significantly reduced due to the tree line along the Hunter River.

The updated alignment as mentioned previously, is just 420 metres from the residence and located at the beginning of the river flats meaning in order to carry out any and all farm activities, we will have to travel beneath it multiple times a day. There is also the very real concern of how the cattle will interact and react to having to travel and 'cell' graze beneath the transmission lines in all weather conditions.

EnergyCo states in Technical Report 17 – EMF's Assessment (4.5; Page17) to have adopted a design philosophy of "prudent avoidance" in line with Energy Networks Association (ENA) Management Handbook (2016). In Australia, prudent avoidance was defined by the former Chief Justice of the High Court of Australia, Sir Harry Gibbs, as *"doing whatever can be done at modest cost and without undue inconvenience to avoid the possible risk to health"*.

The very proposition of having a 500kV double circuit transmission line crossing our property is already having an effect on our mental health and wellbeing.

As to whether there are adverse effects associated with EMF's from living close to high-voltage power lines has been debated for many years. While research indicates large risks are not present, the possibility of any amount risk cannot be conclusively excluded. An article published in the British Columbia Medical Journal revealed in a study of almost 30 000 match case-controlled pairs of children living in the UK in homes as far as 600m from power lines had an elevated risk of leukemia. An increased risk of 69% for leukemia was found for children living within 200m of power lines while an

increased risk of 23% was found for children living 200 to 600m of lines. This study was notable in that it found some elevation of risk at much greater distances than in previous studies (Draper G, Vincent T, Kroll ME, et al. Childhood cancer in relation to distance from high voltage power line in England and Wales: A case-control study). This is a very real concern for our grandchildren and future grandchildren living on this property with a high voltage power line easement.

EnergyCo members presented graphs and fact sheets to my husband and I, as well as our neighbour, detailing calculated EMF strength at our residences and directly under the lines. All of which were within the ARPANSA basic reference level. EnergyCo are suggesting the EMF levels fall within the guidelines, so therefore there is minimal risk of any poor health outcomes from living and working near such 500kV transmission lines as required by the HTP and that I am in most likelihood subjecting myself to more EMFs through household appliances.

In all of my research, I am yet to find any lifelong EMF exposure case studies. There are discussions regarding NSW Train Drivers and a cancer cluster caused by the overhead power lines. Another family member mentioned a friend with a child suffering from constant migraines and when the family moved from their house that backed onto power lines, the migraines ceased. I understand these are not documented cases. My argument is; nothing can be dismissed.

It is our adult son, and the future generations that my husband and I am most concerned about. Farm children enjoy the freedom of the outdoors and are never far from or more often with their parents helping with the farm duties. Farmers live and work on their farms, so if you are continually being exposed to potentially harmful EMFs your entire lifetime, the odds are that adverse consequences or health problems could appear and sooner. On a whole, many farmers are generational and live on their farms for most if not all of their lives, just as my husband has.

Conclusion

The EIS Fact Sheet, September 2025 states 'following consideration of the EIS, Submissions Report, and any Amendment Report, the NSW DPHI will complete its final assessment'. I suggest the Amendment Report should be placed on public exhibition, so all changes to the proposed transmission line, which includes that going over our property, can be viewed and commented on by the community.

The significance of renewable infrastructure projects, such as the HTP, for energy security is continuously being emphasised, but it is just as critical to get their placement correct. These are to be a forever piece of infrastructure that will be replaced and upgraded in the future as the easement will have been secured. The inclusion of a high voltage transmission line across our property will have a very negative impact on our property value.

The irony of the HTP, is that the energy being transported by the high voltage 500kV lines with their associated hazards and health risks is not for the benefit of the landholder and the local community, but for the metropolitan population on the east coast of NSW. The land will be acquired regardless, either by mutual agreement or compulsory acquisition.

Why hasn't it been made a requirement for every industrial building in Metropolitan NSW to host solar panels and a mandate for inner city car parks to do the same? This is where the energy is needed the most and would free up our important agricultural land needed to continue to feed and clothe our nation.

Yours sincerely,

Myree Russell.