

U W & I G TINKLER

Pokolbin Mountains Rd
Pokolbin 2320 NSW

22 September 2025

Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure

Submission on Hunter Transmission Project

I object to the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Hunter Transmission Project due to EnergyCo's failure to acknowledge or address the the impacts to Pokolbin Mountains Road in terms of impacts on vineyards and cumulative impacts on the road infrastructure.

I have lived and worked on Pokolbin Mountains Road for most of my 72 years. The road was constructed in the 1920s to provide motorised access to landholders, replacing a dangerously steep route. The road had single cross fall and no subsurface cross drainage pipes which was adequate until the opening of the Pokolbin State Forest in the 1960s. With only limited widening and subsurface drainage pipes in the 1960s, the road has suffered from chronic drainage issues and unsafe access conditions since then.

Heavy vehicle use—including logging trucks, communication tower maintenance, and military access for the Singleton Army Range—has further degraded the road. Recent upgrades for Rural Fire Service access led to collapses in sections of the road. Despite this, the EIS does not propose any upgrades or mitigation measures to make the road fit for purpose during construction or operation of the transmission line.

I paid road contribution fees in the 1990s to improve the first 600m of road for access to the retail produce and later wine. It is grossly inequitable that EnergyCo, as the more recent in a long line of impacts by the NSW Government on the local community and as a major user of the road for infrastructure development, is not required to contribute to its maintenance or upgrade. This inequity must be addressed through enforceable commitments to road maintenance and upgrade funding.

Despite repeated engagement with EnergyCo—including attendance at drop-in sessions, small group discussions, and walking the road with engineers—there is very limited mention of our group or the issues we've raised in the EIS. There appears to be a disconnect between EnergyCo staff engaging with the community and those responsible for preparing the EIS. Despite direct engagement and technical walkthroughs, none of the concerns raised have been reflected in the EIS. This undermines the integrity of the consultation process and the credibility of the EIS.

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The first 1.3 kilometres of Pokolbins Mountains Road are flanked by mature grapevines that have been cultivated for over 50 years. These vineyards are not only a vital part of the local agricultural economy but have also produced award-winning wines, including the best white wine at the 2025 Hunter Valley Wine Show.

The EIS fails to address the significant risks posed to these vineyards by increased heavy vehicle traffic during the construction and operation of the Hunter Transmission Project. These risks include:

- Dust generation and grape health: Dust from unsealed or poorly maintained roads can settle on grapevine leaves and fruit, impeding photosynthesis and increasing susceptibility to pests such as grapevine scale. Once scale infestation occurs, it can take multiple growing seasons to bring it under control.
- Spray drift and chemical sensitivity: Vineyard spraying is a highly sensitive operation, constrained by temperature, humidity, wind speed, and the risk of rainfall. Increased traffic and dust can interfere with optimal spraying windows, and heavy vehicle movement may cause unpredictable air currents that increase the risk of spray drift, which has potential health impacts for road users and construction workers.
- Biosecurity risks: Increased vehicle movement may introduce or spread pests and diseases not currently present in the area. The EIS does not include any biosecurity protocols or mitigation strategies to protect high-value vineyards from such risks.

Over the past century, Pokolbins Mountains Road has been subject to a series of decisions by various NSW Government agencies that have cumulatively degraded its condition and increased the burden on local landholders and community. These decisions, while often made in isolation, have had compounding effects that are not acknowledged in the current EIS:

- The road was originally constructed in the 1920s to replace a dangerously steep track, but it was built with minimal engineering—basic gravel and crossflow drainage, without subsurface piping. This foundational inadequacy set the stage for decades of drainage and erosion issues.
- The decision to open the forest for logging and recreational use introduced heavy vehicle traffic without correspondingly adequate upgrades to the road. logging trucks, tower maintenance vehicles, and military access for the Singleton Army Range all contributed to accelerated wear and safety risks.
- Despite the road's growing strategic importance, successive governments failed to invest in meaningful upgrades. Maintenance was reactive and piecemeal, addressing damage rather than preventing it. No long-term planning was undertaken to make the road fit for purpose.
- The most recent government-led upgrade for rural fire service access led to partial road collapse, further demonstrating the fragility of the infrastructure and the consequences of inadequate planning and engineering.

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- The current EIS continues this pattern by proposing major infrastructure works without addressing the road's condition or its historical context. There is no recognition of the cumulative impact of past decisions, nor any commitment to rectify the legacy of underinvestment.

These decisions reflect a systemic failure to value Pokolbin Mountains Road and the surrounding local community as worthy of investment and protection. The cumulative impact has left landholders bearing the cost—financially, operationally, and environmentally—while the NSW government and metropolitan energy users benefit without contributing to its upkeep.

Sincerely

Ian Tinkler
Vigneron