

## **Re Uralla and Walcha Renewable Energy Projects**

**My husband and I moved to the New England area several years ago, attracted to its spectacular scenery, four beautiful seasons and rural lifestyle. We did extensive research with federal, state and local governments, real estate agents, internet research and discussions with locals. We were greatly relieved to hear that no major developments were planned for this scenic area. As “tree-changers” we were very keen to escape the industrialisation of the Newcastle and Hunter areas and settled on a small parcel of land in Salisbury Plains (halfway between Uralla and Walcha), ecstatic to have found our piece of paradise.**

**We were deeply shocked to hear recently of the UPC and Walcha Energy Project renewable energy developments in this area and have since heard of the ‘gag’ orders placed on landholders who had signed leases for both solar and wind plants on their properties. Had they been allowed to discuss their involvement in these projects openly, we may have been able to find out more about these projects before we purchased. Had we known we would have settled elsewhere.**

**Whilst in favour of renewable energy, the scale of these projects is staggering and the placement concerns us greatly. We have a number of objections to the New England area being used as for solar and wind plants and they are outlined below:**

**Most of the New England area is prime high rainfall agricultural land. We have a finite amount of this precious land type which is a major part of Australia’s food and fibre production particularly in regard to cattle, lamb and wool. To cover up vast areas of this landscape in solar panels defies logic. There is much of Australia that is very marginal or unsuitable for agricultural use and that is virtually unpopulated. This type of land could be used to accommodate larger scale solar and wind plants.**

**The New England area is a very scenic part of Australia. To blanket this area in thousands of solar panels and wind turbines is a travesty. Not only will the visual amenity be ruined with the panels and turbines, but the infrastructure of the electrical power line upgrades required to transport the power generated will also be impacting the visual beauty of this area. People who are receiving rental income from these inappropriate developments may be tempted to overlook the negative impacts in return for**

financial gain. Indications that the community may be in favour of large scale wind and solar projects may be based on such biased views.

We fear town and rural property prices will drop due to the development of these proposals. We have noticed a gradual increase in property prices since moving here, which in part is due to new people moving to the area. We believe that once these industrial landscapes are built, the attraction to move here will be permanently destroyed and our lovely country towns will start to wither and die.

Some areas that we feel require further research and investigation before major projects such as UPC and Walcha Energy Project are considered in any detail, include:

- What long term socio-economic benefits are there for the Uralla and Walcha communities?  
Employment is mostly FIFO staff during construction, the operation is done remotely once built and maintenance is done by only a couple of people over its lifecycle. Will agricultural jobs be lost as agricultural land is industrialised? The paltry community fund offers very little to compensate for the negative impacts.
- How are weeds controlled under solar panels? Grazing is not a realistic option. Long term herbicide use can be harmful to soil, groundwater and waterways as well as lead to growth of herbicide resistant weeds.
- What radiation impacts exist for both stock and farm workers?
- What are the impacts of chemical cleaning of solar panels on soil, groundwater and waterways?
- What are the impacts of altered microclimates under solar panels on insects and soil microbiology?
- How will erosion control occur from concentrated runoff from solar panels?
- Who removes defunct panels, turbines and other infrastructure if the company meant to be responsible for them disappears in years to come?
- What can land be used for after completion of project? What remediation/decontamination is required to restore paddocks back to grazing use? Who pays for it (especially if the company disappears)?
- What are the impacts on humans from wind turbine droning, both audible and non-audible? The media has reported some serious health impacts for those living in the vicinity.

- What are the impacts on animals from wind turbine droning, both audible and non-audible? The ABCs *Catalyst* program highlighted the importance of communication of insects at different sound wave frequencies. Does the noise made from wind turbines interfere with insect communication? If we lose entire species from areas, what are the flow-on impacts re pollination, pest control, food source etc. on the whole ecosystem?

We believe large renewable energy projects should be located within very large landholdings on very poor agricultural land where the impacts to surrounding landholders and townships would be negligible. Consultation with whole communities, not just a biased few, should take place as a first step in a large project. Identifying the New England region as a “renewable energy zone” seems to be an error in judgement by someone. The impact on many individuals and communities is likely to be negative at best and catastrophic at worst. Please consider these concerns when making decisions for the New England area.