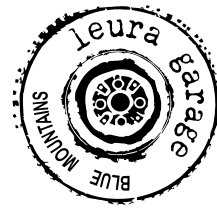


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29th January 2020

Director – Energy Assessments
Planning and Assessment
Department of Planning, Industry & Environment
Locked Bag 5022
Parramatta, NSW, 2124

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

RE: HILLS OF GOLD WIND FARM APPLICATION NO. SSD 9679

Nundle has a future without a Wind Farm and must be preserved! I herein outline my objection to the abovementioned project.

My involvement with Nundle dates to the 1980s. I have worked in agriculture and tourism on family-owned properties “Wyallia” and “Wombramurra” in the district for many years. I no longer live in the community however own a small house in the village that my family and I regularly retreat to during school holidays. My wife and daughters are avid horse riders and enjoy nothing more than enveloping themselves in the tranquillity of the Nundle bush.

We now live and work in the Blue Mountains in the restaurant and tourism sector. I operate the “Leura Garage” restaurant and am currently developing two further restaurant tourism concepts in the Leura and Katoomba area for domestic and international travellers.

I am an advocate for food waste reduction and am currently working with the NSW Environmental Protection Authority (EPA), University of Technology Institute for Sustainable Futures (ISF) and Blue Mountains City Council (BMCC) on finding better ways for the restaurant and tourism industries to divert food waste from landfill. Being a UNESCO World Heritage area, this has special implications for the sustainability of this region’s natural environment as well as its brand perception.

Renewable energy has the potential to diversify and increase supply. I support the NSW Governments Renewable Energy Zone policy aimed at stimulating industry investment in alternatives to fossil fuel generated power. Initiatives that assist the transition away from traditional energy sources, thereby reducing greenhouse emissions, are vitally important for the economy and climate.

With respect, however, the Nundle Wind Farm project is incongruous to the special qualities and character of this area. It places its unique environmental, community and tourism assets under threat due to the imprudence of its proposed location. In my opinion the commercial, social, and environmental costs will be outweighed by the project benefits and I therefore strongly object to its development. I support the case against the project on these well chronicled grounds:

- Potential for Peel River catchment degradation through rangeland destabilisation and erosion leading to soil runoff into waterways. The threat posed raises associated and ongoing risks to soil and water resources throughout the Tamworth region.
- Existential threat to endangered native wildlife and their habitat. It is well documented that rare species live in the subject area that abuts the Ben Halls Gap Nature Reserve and deserve our protection. The proposal will fragment and diminish the populations of animals and plants inhabiting the area.
- Loss of future commercial Eco Tourism potential. The unique attributes of the area are well documented. The area has previously been considered for this use and at one time a “Wildlife Sanctuary” was considered on Wombramurra Station at the “Head of Peel” - such is the quality of the local natural environment.
- Wind turbine placement on top of the local landmark known as the “Head of Peel” is akin to mounting them atop Mt Kosciuszko or Uluru. It disrespects country and the community’s collective sense of place. The “Head of Peel” characterises the special relationship many local people and visitors hold with the area.
- Interruption to the iconic rangeland vista for which the region is renown and is visible from the outskirts of Tamworth. The highly visible impact of wind turbine technology will be overwhelming.
- Reports of human health hazards from wind turbine infrasound emissions.

- Public safety concerns around heavy equipment vehicle movements during the construction phase of the project and the curtailment of public amenity generally within the village.
- Compromising of tourism assets, specifically the natural environment and related attractions. The project threatens to generate negative externalities thereby imposing costs to all impacted third parties. Not all costs can be compensated through a community fund and it is likely that businesses and individuals will be exposed to commercial and social losses.
- Questionable tangible benefits and under resourcing of compensation to the local population through a proposed “community enhancement fund”. Well-conceived and executed community projects that generate enduring social returns are one thing: buying community silence is altogether different.
- Potential loss of tourism related employment now and in the future compared to the relatively small number of wind farm jobs created.
- Downward pressure on residential and commercial farming and retail property values generally and particularly for properties with wind turbine aspects.
- Stifling of population growth in the district and associated economic benefits as prospective new inhabitants elect to relocate elsewhere.
- Disruption to future private, government and corporate investment decisions in tourism capital and infrastructure.
- Questionable long-term viability, efficiency and longevity of wind turbine technology and costs related to future removal of obsolescent equipment as evidenced in countries like Germany with empirical data on the subject.

Of particular concern is the detrimental impact of the project on the local tourism industry. As a former operator in the area, I am pleased to be able to offer my own insights into this important local economic driver.

In 1995 I developed the Wombramurra Woolshed with my family into what is now known as the “Dag Sheep Station”. We successfully redeveloped a working sheep shearing and woolshed complex into an authentic tourism experience. At the time

regional NSW and more generally Australia was emerging as an important destination for independent travellers/ backpackers. My partners in the project were Oz Experience, subsequently majority owned by Tourism Holdings Limited (THL) – one of New Zealand’s foremost tourism organisations and leaders in transport solutions and supply of tour product to the global travel trade.

By linking with this organisation Nundle joined a worldwide tourism network. Sales of Oz Experience travel product, via some of the largest international travel agencies, created awareness and generated revenue for the town. Over 100,000 independent travellers visited Nundle between 1995 and 2003. The business employed dozens of local staff and supported numerous other local businesses, suppliers, and contractors.

Guests to “the Dag” would enjoy typical Australian bush hospitality, campfire dinners, sheep shearing demonstrations, 4WD nocturnal spotlighting excursions, gold panning and underground tours of the Blake Snake Gold Mine, mountain biking, Jackaroo Jillaroo training programs and horse riding in and around Wombramurra Station in the foothills of Nundle’s Hills of Gold.

The Dag Sheep Station exhibited widely, promoting Nundle and regional NSW to a wide international audience. Amongst achievements at this time included: Winners for Best Exhibitor at the Australian Backpacker Expo (Sydney) and Exhibitor at the Australian Tourism Exchange (Sydney). The management team also exhibited at the World Youth and Student Travel Conference (WYSTC) in Madrid, Spain.

Due to its strategic position between Sydney and Byron Bay, Nundle offers a well-known long-haul travel destination and stopover for tourism operators. It fits perfectly into an alternative East Coast itinerary to satisfy this market segment. Past and future organisations such Oz Experience/THL will look to access the Nundle Hills of Gold tourism product for this reason as the international tourism market cycle turns.

Moreover, the innovative “off the beaten track/ hop on hop off” travel product that was Oz Experience pitched Nundle alongside better-known Aussie Icons like the Barrier Reef, Fraser Island and Byron Bay and encouraged visitors to stay longer in the region. It demonstrated just how a small inland regional community can succeed and “make its own luck”.

A stay at the Dag Sheep Station became a “must do” for travellers journeying from Sydney to the far north coast. It was constantly ranked by international visitors as one of their “unexpected trip highlights”. (I retain hundreds of handwritten

Customer Surveys from former international guests if you or anyone wishes to view them at any time). In fact, some liked the place so much they stayed, married, and have brought up families in the wider Nundle/ Tamworth communities thereby adding to the social fabric of the community.

The Dag Sheep Station continues to welcome guests. It is a successful, award winning and sustainable tourism business model. The new owner John Krsulja is a local hero. He has taken the earlier vision for the facility to the next level. His passion and commitment to “the Dag” and Nundle is highly commendable and he and his family deserve to be widely acknowledged.

Destination NSW and Tourism Australia have frequently marketed Nundle domestically and internationally to various market segments. Nundle satisfies the 5 As of tourism like few places in regional NSW i.e., Access, Accommodation, Attractions, Activities, and Amenities.

Given the size of NSW past inventories of the State affirm that unlike Nundle most other districts are lacking in one or more of these attributes. Consequently, they fall well short of what it takes to create the compelling “gravitational pull” of a tourism destination. Destination NSW itself has a policy of “regional disbursement”. It seeks to share the benefits generated by Sydney with the States lesser-known places but without the 5 As well-intentioned governmental policies can fall short and waste scarce resources. Destination NSW has often promoted Nundle as a “best practice” case study of how a small regional town can “help itself” to become a tourism success story and benefit its community.

It took years though for Nundle to build up its 5 As. Just as the commercially rewarding association between the Dag Sheep Station and Oz Experience/ THL built up one market segment it took many initiatives to develop others and help Nundle’s star to rise. Significant risk capital, perseverance and community pride has seen the establishment of the Nundle Woollen Mill, Jenkins St Guesthouse, Odgers and McClelland Store, Nundle Caravan Park, Mount Misery Mine, Black Snake Mine and Nundle General Store just to name a few. These are all businesses that stand on the shoulders of individuals that have contributed to the community through their labours to build enduring tourism assets. Even the Peel Inn Hotel has reinvested over the years to cater for and attract a growing clientele as evidenced by the expansion of the beer garden, public bar, dining room and lounges. Given the towns success it is little wonder that Tamworth Council was keen to amalgamate with Nundle Shire over the Liverpool Plains some years ago.

What underlines all of this is the unifying appeal of a small country town populated by friendly local characters who exist in a harmonious environment. I have watched over the years how “Brand Nundle” has continued to draw in visitors that have heard of “the place”. The scarcity and uniqueness of the tourism assets found here should never be taken for granted or threatened. It must be preserved and rather than exploiting sensitive areas like Nundle we should be protecting them for more compatible future uses.

Thank you for the opportunity to be able to make this submission to you. I trust that I have been able to add value to the debate. If I can be of further assistance to the Department in its determination of this proposal, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours Sincerely

James Howarth (*BEC*)
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