



AWA submission to public exhibition of the Rye Park Wind Farm RTS

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The Australian Wind Alliance supports the Rye Park Wind Farm and its enhanced Environmental Assessment (Response To Submissions).

About AWA

The Australian Wind Alliance (AWA) is a community based organisation that has over 600 financial members and around 11,000 Facebook followers. Our members include landholders, farmers, small businesses, and members of the community, including many neighbours to existing wind farms. The Wind Alliance encourages best practice community engagement and supports wind farms for the contribution they make to reducing Australia's carbon emissions and the benefits they bring to regional Australia. We are satisfied that this wind farm is well sited and is well designed and will be positive for surrounding community. The response to the submissions is diligent and we believe the proponent has adequately addressed all the issues arising.

AWA supporters in the Yass/Boorowa region

The Australian Wind Alliance has numerous members and supporters in the Yass/Boorowa area. Many of these supporters have no financial interest in the Rye Park Wind Farm and still support this development in their own backyard. Wind Alliance representatives have been speaking with community members and local businesses over the last month to assess the mood of the region towards the Rye Park Wind Farm. We have spoken to over 150 people and businesses in that time. The overwhelming response to our enquiries is one of support for the project. The main issue raised with us is to ensure the local community gains the maximum possible benefit from the turbines. The vast majority of comments have been very complimentary towards the transparency, availability of and communications from the proponent.

NSW Renewable Energy Action Plan

The NSW Government's Renewable Energy Action Plan supports the achievement of a target of 20% renewable energy by 2020 by attracting renewable energy investments and projects to NSW. The role wind farms such as the Rye Park Wind Farm can play is critical to achieving this objective. Wind farms are the cheapest and most efficient form of generation of renewable energy. A recent report from Pitt and Sherry identified that wind generation in Australia reached record levels in May 2016, with South Australia producing 49% of its electricity from wind over the entire month. NSW's generation was a measly 4.8% from the same wind resource. If NSW wants to achieve significant levels of electricity generation from wind then we have to build more turbines. There have been no turbines constructed in NSW for 18 months, mainly due to planning and economic uncertainty. The Rye Park Wind Farm can assist in significantly boosting NSW's wind generation capacity. The wind farm is expected to generate 1,192 Gigawatt hours (GWh) per annum. This is enough electricity to power 130,000 homes, the equivalent of removing 260,000 cars off the roads per annum. AWA notes that you would need to cover about 525 ha's with solar panels to produce the same amount of energy as this project. By contrast, this project impacts a maximum of 220 ha's of the total project site of 13,500 ha's.

A goal of the Renewable Energy Action Plan that AWA strongly endorses is to engage communities early and effectively in renewable energy projects such as the Rye Park Wind Farm. We are satisfied that the proponent has achieved this. The opening of a shop-front in Yass to encourage direct contact with the community was effective and something we would welcome in future projects. We were also impressed that the proponent made a substantial commitment by having staff on the ground around the site communicating with locals for more than a year. Their negotiation of commercial agreements offering remuneration to wind farm neighbours is a highly commendable commitment and something the Wind Alliance enthusiastically endorses. The Wind Alliance has been campaigning for this type of benefit sharing for many years now. This initiative should be strongly encouraged by all parties.

Flora, fauna and native vegetation

The Australian Wind Alliance notes the concerns expressed by local residents and in the submission to the original EA from the Office of Environment and Heritage. AWA strongly supports the conservation of endangered and threatened species of flora and fauna. In the EA there are detailed discussions of the impacts the wind farm will have on various species of flora and fauna. We note that the number of turbines in the Rye Park Wind Farm has been reduced from 126 to 109, a reduction of 13.5%.

Where any impact on bird species such as the superb parrot, the swift parrot, many species of robins, wedge-tailed eagles, and other species is identified, the Rye Park Wind Farm EA has outlined detailed management plans to minimise and manage these impacts. The deletion of four turbines and the relocation of a fifth from the original EA in response to the submission from OEHL will contribute to the preservation of these species.

This also applies to the preservation of native vegetation, with the revised document indicating minimal clearing of valuable species. Only 30 ha's of over 1,400 Ha's of valuable eucalypts on the site need to be cleared for the wind farm. This equates to 2.1% of standing vegetation of this type. There are substantial offsets for this clearing of standing trees, which more than account for the minimal disturbance to the site.

Risks to the endangered Pygmy Perch are indirect through the potential for sediment and erosion during construction. These risks will be managed through a Construction Environmental Management Plan, as well as the requirement to obtain NSW Fisheries permits prior to construction. These permits and plans will require strict sediment and erosion management controls and spill protocols.

We also note that the planning for this project has required many additional flora and fauna surveys to be completed. This will significantly add to the understanding of the natural capital of the area and facilitate further studies such as the monitoring of any future impacts of the turbines on local flora and fauna.

The Australian Wind Alliance notes that the largest threat to these species of flora and fauna is from climate change, not from the wind farm. The construction of the wind farm will assist in minimising the impacts of climate change and thus have a positive impact on the survival of all threatened species. The construction of the wind farm will also allow local farmers to manage their private land in a much more ecologically and environmentally sustainable manner. The passive income stream from the turbines will give landholders, both hosts and neighbours, the financial capacity to install tree corridors and preserve remnant forest on their private land. This will increase the biodiversity of the area and assist all threatened species.

Community Enhancement Fund

For much of 2015 and 2016, the Australian Wind Alliance has engaged with local councils in the Yass/Boorowa region to assist them in constructing Community Enhancement Fund (CEF) policies. Yass Valley Council has been particularly progressive in developing a formal policy for this process. Other councils in the region have indicated they will follow Yass Valley's lead. The proponent has committed to a formal CEF program with the three councils who have jurisdiction over this wind farm at a respectable level of \$300,000/annum, indexed to CPI. The contribution from the proponent is larger than any other contribution to this region's economy than has ever been made in the past. This fund alone will see a significant boost to the economy of Rye Park. We commend the agreement struck between the proponent and local councils to direct at least 20% of the fund into an education fund, to be accessed by deserving students from the Rye Park region. The lack of government support for regional students who wish to further their studies in large, expensive cities is a huge impediment to regional education.

AWA believes it would be more efficient and much more cost-effective to have only one s355 committee to oversee the CEF instead of three committees, one for each council area. We also strongly recommend that a small percentage of this funding should be invested in perpetuity into a trust fund for the future. This will ensure the benefits of the wind farm outlive the physical presence of the turbines.

The CEF program will also allow local conservation groups such as Landcare to apply for much-needed funding for specific projects to further advance the restoration and protection of local flora and fauna ecosystems.

Support from local businesses

AWA representatives have been seeking public comment on the Rye Park Wind Farm from local businesses and people in Yass and Boorowa for the past two months. We have spoken to the Yass Chamber of Commerce, the Yass Lions Club, and more than 50 small businesses in the area. In addition to this we have canvassed opinions of people in the street. As stated earlier in this

submission, we have been pleasantly surprised with the overwhelming support for the proposal, particularly within the business and farming communities. There is also a very solid groundswell of support from the “silent majority” of the community. It is worth noting that most of these people will not put a submission forward to the Department as they don’t see anything detrimental in it. This point must be noted by the Department when it is assessing the submissions.

Farming and resilience

For many years the Australian Wind Alliance has been promoting the benefits wind turbines can bring to landholders, both hosts and involved neighbours, in assisting them to run economically, and thus environmentally and ecologically sustainable farms. The passive income stream generated by the turbines underpins these farming operations and fundamentally changes the economic base of the farm and hence the region. This income is not dependant on the vagaries of the weather. Local farmers will receive over \$2,000,000 per year for the next 20 years, a total of \$40,000,000, adjusted for CPI. This will dramatically increase the financial resilience of local farmers and help them manage periods of drought and fickle commodity prices.

Neighbour agreements

It is very pleasing to see the proponent has taken the progressive step of offering “neighbour agreements” for the Rye Park Wind Farm to any residence within 2 kilometres of a wind turbine. This agreement is a public document and the proponent has posted a copy on their web-site. The Australian Wind Alliance welcomes this transparency. We enthusiastically endorse the sharing of the benefits of the turbines more widely into the region and encourage the Department to support and further encourage this thinking for other wind farm proposals.

Economic benefits to the area

At the information night held in Rye Park on 8th June 2016 the Department indicated that they will consider the economic benefits and impacts of the wind farm as part of their assessment. Points for the Department to note include:

- The Rye Park Wind Farm project is a \$600 million project. It has the potential to add economic value of \$163 million in NSW, \$45 million in the ACT and \$49 million to the Yass/Boorowa region over the construction period.
- The project is forecast to create over 350 jobs in the region during the construction phase, significantly increasing the number of people living and working in the area.
- 35 ongoing full time roles will be created in operations and maintenance, providing long term job opportunities for locals
- More people working in the community will improve the viability of local schools and sporting teams and mean more money will be spent in the community. This stimulates business and creates jobs.
- There will be a direct injection of over \$3 million per year to the local community through payments to landholders, permanent staff, local councils, and the community. This includes the \$300,000 which will be paid every year directly to community organisations through the legislated Community Enhancement Fund contribution. This Community Enhancement Fund payment will

occur every year for the life of the wind farm. This is a sum of \$6,000,000 over the expected 20 year life of the wind farm. No other business or firm has contributed anything like this amount directly to the Rye Park community.

- Local businesses will have the opportunity to supply goods and services including accommodation, catering, meals, engineering, motor vehicle servicing, earthworks services, fuel supplies, fencing and landscaping.
- Local farmers will receive over \$2 million every year for the next 20 years, either in lease payments or through neighbour agreements. This will dramatically increase the financial resilience of the local farming economy and help farmers manage periods of drought and fickle commodity prices.
- The construction of the Rye Park Wind Farm and associated infrastructure will have negligible impact on the existing grazing activities. The wind farm will mostly use existing farm tracks, that will be upgraded by the proponent at their expense. This will increase the efficiency of the existing farming and grazing operations by providing faster and easier access to many parts of farmers' land.

Revised travel routes

The Australian Wind Alliance notes the revised travel routes proposed in the RTS. These revised routes will ease pressure on the local road network by predominantly using the existing major road network. Many of these roads will be upgraded by the proponent to a standard required to handle the overweight loads during the construction period. These upgraded roads will then benefit the local communities of Rye Park, Rugby, and Boorowa into the future.

AWA notes that any damage caused to existing roads will be repaired at the proponent's cost. Past experience indicates this repair work is often done by the local council road crews, providing additional work for council staff and easing the pressure on councils' budgets.

Water

The Department needs to be aware of the discussions within the community about the lack of water resources in the region. This has two implications for the wind farm. The first is the amount of water used in construction of the wind farm. The proponent has made it very plain that if the water is not available for construction then the wind farm will not be built. There will be no draw on valuable local water resources unless the water can be used sustainably and the resources used will be recharged, either naturally or by the proponent.

The second implication is far more important for your consideration. Once constructed, wind farms do not use water. Unlike all fossil fuel based generation, they produce electricity without the need for massive amounts of water. In a relatively dry region such as Rye Park, this is just one more reason why this wind farm makes sense.