

SUBMISSION – Hills of Gold Wind Farm Application No. SSD-9679

Overview of project

On 21 January 2018 we had a visit from the facilitators for the then titled 'Hills of Gold Energy Project' who informed us that an industrial sized wind farm was being proposed in our area. Needless to say we were shocked and immediately had several major concerns with the project, especially as the 230 meter high turbines were to be sited on a long section of the beautiful and spectacular Great Dividing Range near Hanging Rock and above the tourist village of Nundle. The presence of the turbines would completely change the character of the village, especially as tourists approach the town, seeing it dwarfed by the turbines sitting on the 1200 –1400 metre section of ridgeline. This range is affectionately known locally as 'The Hills of Gold' and is promoted as such in tourist brochures. The Developers also appropriated 'Hills of Gold Wind Farm' as their project name, which did not impressed the locals!

My wife and I have lived for 32 years on a small rural residential subdivision located on Morrisons Gap Road, Hanging Rock, which runs along the top of the Great Dividing Range. The road follows the ridgeline and is narrow and unsealed. It is currently the Developer's preferred access route to the site. The Developers have acknowledged that if the proposal is approved the road will need to be widened with clearing and lopping of native trees. They also informed us in a recent email, 5 days prior to EIS Lodgement, that Morrisons Gap Road is "mis-aligned in some parts and our preference will be to resurvey the road to where it currently is rather than rebuild to where it should be". During the time we have lived here we have seen how clearing, both legal and illegal, have markedly changed the character of the ridgeline and surrounding area. It appears that the host property has already been selectively cleared to accommodate the turbines prior to lodgement of EIS.

Since the announcement of the Hills of Gold Wind Farm we have visited White Rock, Sapphire and Bodangora wind farms. All these do not have the same access problems as the Hills of Gold Wind farm, with totally different topography and minimal clearing required. They are also some distance from the nearby towns of Glen Innes, Inverell and Wellington and sited on very large rural properties with minimal residential dwellings affected.

Transport Route Assessment – Appendix G

Access Route Option 1 (Nundle to Southern site entrance)

Access Route Option 2 (Nundle to Northern site entrance) –

Access to the proposed wind farm site is proving to be a major problem for the Developers. The commissioned Transport Route Assessment by **Rex J Andrews, Engineered Transportation**, deems **Option 2 (Northern route)**, as "high risk and does not have the capacity to take the towers even if the blades could be transported in a lifter".

Option 1 (Southern Route) is considered to be "the only realistic route out of both, despite requiring an extensive amount of work". For some reason the Developers appear to have rejected the Transport Assessor's **Route 1** option and are now proposing to build a "new private road" on a section of **Route 2** to avoid the difficult and incredibly steep Devil's Elbow hairpin corners. (See Appendix G Traffic & Transport Assessment). The Developers have also acknowledged this route will impact upon the LEP Heritage Listed Black Snake Mine.

The EIS Historic Heritage Page 305 Table states "It is proposed to clear a new portion of road through the LEP listed Black Snake Mine. This will involve vegetation clearance, cut and fill activity and road construction". The Black Snake Mine has a Consequence Rating 4 – Major (Red Category). The Assessment also states "The proposal would result in major impact to the listed heritage item".

The proposed route for the new road would also go through beautiful bushland. This route is also incredibly steep and the Developers have advised even with a new road they will still require push and pull trucks to reach the top of the new road. The road would also be constructed in designated Crown Land and is one of the most popular areas for tourists fossicking and bushwalking. There are also numerous old mine shafts and tunnels in this area. This is the history and heritage for which Nundle is famous and why most tourists visit Nundle.

Access via Morrisons Gap Road

After approaching the top of the range on the proposed new road, the transport route continues up the mountain through Hanging Rock village to the junction of Barry Road and Morrisons Gap Road. This is the point where the route encounters yet more difficulties. The commissioned Transport Route Assessment states "Large amounts of work are required" on this corner and that Morrisons Gap Road needs widening in sections. Access for transportation relies on the Developers securing agreements from private landowners to access their properties for fence relocation, hardstand, tree pruning and removal. Some landholders at key points along the road may not agree to give access. Page 71 Appendix G Traffic and Transport, states "Morrisons Gap Road does not follow road reserve on the cadastral map. In these locations it is intended to work with Council and local landowners to resolve existing issue". Judging from the minutes of a Zoom meeting between TRC and the Developers held on 18 August 2020 it would appear that TRC would rather not get involved in these negotiations and considers it a matter between the Developers and private property owners.

The final hurdle for the Developers is a major roadwork above the dwelling at 225 Morrisons Gap Road, potentially one of the more complicated earthworks for the Developers. For some reason, they did not include the proposed work in their EIS. When I questioned them about this in a recent phone conversation, their answer was that they did not know what size blades they would be using. This seems odd, given the EIS provided technical drawings for two blade sizes at the corner entering Morrisons Gap Road. I feel the Developers have not addressed this section of the road in the EIS as they really don't seem to have any idea how they will negotiate this corner.

After studying the EIS I decided to concentrate my efforts on the transport reports and all of its associated access problems.

To sum up my feelings, I am distressed at the thought of what damage could be done to the landscape on the transport route alone, let alone the actual site itself. Is all this destruction worth it for a maximum of 70 turbines and a project lifespan of a mere 25 years?