

# **Watts Family: Submission to the Department of Planning: Objecting Against the ‘Hills of Gold’ Wind Turbine Project Development**



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## 1. Summary Statement

We are the residents of 281 Mountain View Road, Crawney (property name 'Montana') and we write this submission to object to the proposed 'Hills of Gold' wind turbine project based on the following items:

1. **Consultation Process:** The lack of consultation by the proponent with local community members during their process.
2. **Visual Impact:** Significant visual impact.
3. **Noise Assessment and Impact:** Noise assessment and impact on our family's health.
4. **Impact to Waterways and Water Sources:** The environmental impact to significant waterways, tributaries, and ground water supplies.
5. **Impact to Local Animal Species:** The impact on local endangered species of flora and fauna.
6. **Impact to Property Values:** Significant impact to our own property value and ongoing commercial operation.
7. **Impact to Agricultural Operations:** Impact on ability to perform agricultural activities.
8. **Bushfire Risk:** Impact on the risk of bushfires and the capacity of the Rural Fire Service to defend property.
9. **Community Impact:** The impact to local community and constituents.

## 1.1 Consultation Process

Our family found out about the proposed project through discussion with a local farmer in 2017. We had heard nothing of the project otherwise and did not hear from the proponent of the project until two years later after we had contacted the proponent directly to seek further information. Through the process we have not been visited by the proponent other than for them to take some photos from our property and to attempt to complete a sound impact assessment to support their submission. We have asked others in the local area and they too have had little to no contact from the proponent as well. We would have expected that an organisation that is proposing such a significant impact upon local community members who have been farming in the local area for many years would take the time to understand our concerns. Our family has invested all our energy, time, and savings in the area, and they have invested nothing. Despite this the proponent seems to feel as though they can simply come to the area and destroy our lives to their benefit without even speaking with us.

The area south of Crawney Pass seems to have been ignored by the proponent through the consultation process up to the last six-month period which has seemed to be a rushed effort to complete their submission to the Department of Planning. We expect this may be because of the significant impact it will have to the local area and the people who have lived here for generations.

Any of the public events and meetings held to inform the local community have been completed in the town of Nundle with Timor and Crawney simply left out of the process and largely ignored.

The proponents conduct and manner through the engagement and the approach adopted has been disrespectful and rude. For example, their lack of co-ordination around completing tasks such as sound assessments and inability to answer simple questions about the project. There have been a number of examples of poor communication including:

1. an offer of money in return for ensuring our concerns are vetted by them prior to presenting them for broader discussion, and
2. an indication by a sound assessment engineer that he was contracted to provide the proponent with the figures they need to get the project approved.

Both items suggested to us that the proponent was aiming to buy our silence and additionally worked with contractors to support their submission who would provide favourable data in return for payment.

## 1.2 Visual Impact

When our family purchased our property over a decade ago, we searched for a property with expansive views of the area. The advertisement that outlined the property talked about the capacity for building a house with spectacular views of the valley and Crawney Pass mountain range. Having purchased our property, we have since selected a house site and built our dream family home with breathtaking views of our property and the Crawney Pass Mountain Range. We also have a view of the western side of the range in front of where the proposed BESS is to be located and to the South towards Scone.

Over the past decade we have been blessed by our spectacular views both night and day as we look at the stars at night and our wonderful sunsets and sunrises in the evenings and mornings. The value of our property is significantly enhanced by the untouched natural views our property possesses and is the cornerstone of why we enjoy living at our home in Crawney. Page 206 of the EIS indicates that our house is in an elevated position and has expansive, uninterrupted views in all directions. The EIS further suggests that our dwelling is oriented to the North, (as most houses are), and has views of the vegetated hills associated with the project area. The EIS then indicates that there will be 31 turbines visible along the ridge to the North.

If we review these statements, we can ascertain that our dwelling faces the north and is in an elevated position with expansive views in all directions. This is a terrific selling statement for our property until we add the proponent's comment, '31 wind turbines will be visible from the house'. The beautiful family home that we have built with spectacular views will be a house that our family wakes up in each morning to look at and hear 31 or more >220-metre-tall wind turbines. Our house is less than 3 kilometres from the turbines and in areas of our property we are hundreds of metres away from the turbines.

It has been our life's dream to build and live in this beautiful property and produce beef cattle. After years of relentless effort and work we are finally starting to achieve our goals. Each day we look at the views from our house and enjoy the lives we have invested so much in building. Our views are open and wide and spectacular in every way, views that we paid for when we purchased our property and invested substantially in when building our house in such a spectacular location. The following photographs taken from the North facing side of our house illustrate the spectacular views we have from our property.







**Views to the North-East without Turbines – Photo taken with mobile phone.**





**View to the North without Turbines – Photo taken with mobile phone.**

The photos shown below were presented by the proponent as a representation of what they feel our view will be like following installation of the wind turbines.



Existing View



Proposed View

**Proponents representation of our view with the Wind Turbines installed.**

Based upon our assessment these representations significantly understate the impact these will have to our current views. The second photo of the proposed view shows turbines to the left of the cropped area. Interestingly there is a wind testing tower installed in this location presently that is 110 metres tall (half of the height of the proposed turbines) that is significantly taller than the turbines in the picture of the proposed view presented by the proponent. We would welcome that the department visit our property to complete this assessment and visualise the impact upon the visual amenity that has been so dramatically understated by the proponent. These turbines will be hundreds of metres from parts of our property and will be taller than all but two of the tallest sky rise buildings in the Sydney CBD. They will dominate the ridgeline and be visible for



more than 40km away. This should indicate the impact they will have on our view based on their size and proximity.



Proposed View - 60 degree Field of View

#### **Proponents representation of our view with the Wind Turbines installed.**

The cut out above shows the turbines to the North-East which are again understated regarding the impact they will have on our visual amenity; we would add that the sun rises over this mountain range and as such the blade flicker will be constant in the morning as the sun is low based on the location of the turbines to the North East in the morning. We would expect that all turbines to the North-East that cause shadow flicker are removed from the project as we do not want any shadow flicker occurring, particularly due to the impact this may have on the health and well-being of our family. There are a substantial number of turbines from Turbine 19 – 45 which may have the impact of creating blade flicker. (refer to blade flicker video at this URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OOksc1-5Zoc>)

The World Health Organization conducted research on this specific topic and concluded that the average risk for depression will be increased by a rate of forty percent in those who are affected by the shadow flicker of wind turbines. This is due to the visual disturbance that is frequently caused by the unusual lighting within nearby homes and facilities.

Additionally, those who suffer from the shadow flicker effect do not have a good view outside of the window. Although the wind turbines do not physically block the view of the windows, the annoyance of the constant shadow flicker will cause most people to keep their curtains closed at some point when the effects of the lighting become too much to bear.

As proven in previous scientific studies, a deficiency of sunlight is directly linked to depression or the risk thereof. Therefore, if those who experience the flickers caused by wind turbines are constantly keeping their windows closed tightly to avoid the nuisance that comes with the unstable lighting, they become more at risk for depression than they would be in most other living situations.



The project will have a significant impact on the views from our property and occupy the full main view from our house and the orientation that it was positioned to face. Essentially this will cause the following to occur:

1. Our family will be depressed and upset. We will not want to live in our dream home anymore.
2. The value of our property will reduce significantly.
3. We will find it difficult to find a purchaser for our property in the future which will be imminent as we will not want to live here anymore after over a decade of hard work and dedication.
4. The blade flicker that occurs will cause issues for the mental and physical health of our family.
5. If the turbines are installed, they will fundamentally change the skyline in the area due to the enormity of them and the number of turbines. They will dominate the skyline and ruin the visual amenity for our family. The beauty that this property holds for us will be lost forever and those who seek to live in this area.
6. On a day-to-day basis we will not enjoy being on our property as we will see the turbines constantly from every aspect.
7. Our view of the skyline at night will be fundamentally changed as it will be populated with numerous red aviation warning lights. As it stands today, we do not see a single light at night from our house. This is what we sought when we purchased our property, and the turbines will ruin this aspect for us.
8. There will be an ambient glow created at night by the substation and BESS at the top of the mountain that will ruin viewing stars and the night sky. This glow will be seen for possibly 40 km from the site.

## 1.3 Noise Assessment and Impact

We worked with the proponent over several months to co-ordinate a time for their technician to visit our property to complete a noise assessment. This process was a debacle and they needed to continue to change dates and reschedule. To the point that on the day they were supposed to attend our property I needed to call their Adelaide office myself to determine whether they were even coming. When the consultant did arrive, I asked the question, 'Who are you contracted by and what are you commissioned to supply to the proponent?', his response was, 'I am contracted by the proponent to provide them with the figures they need for the project to be approved'.

This was off putting as it indicated that they were paid to provide the data they proponent required without any impartiality. Further to this the technician indicated that they would not place noise assessment equipment anywhere other than near our house and machinery sheds (interestingly this is where most of the background noise will occur). We asked the technician to leave and come back on another date when there was an interest in locating the assessment equipment in the areas we spend our time in around the property, and further requested confirmation that we can publicly view any results they collect.

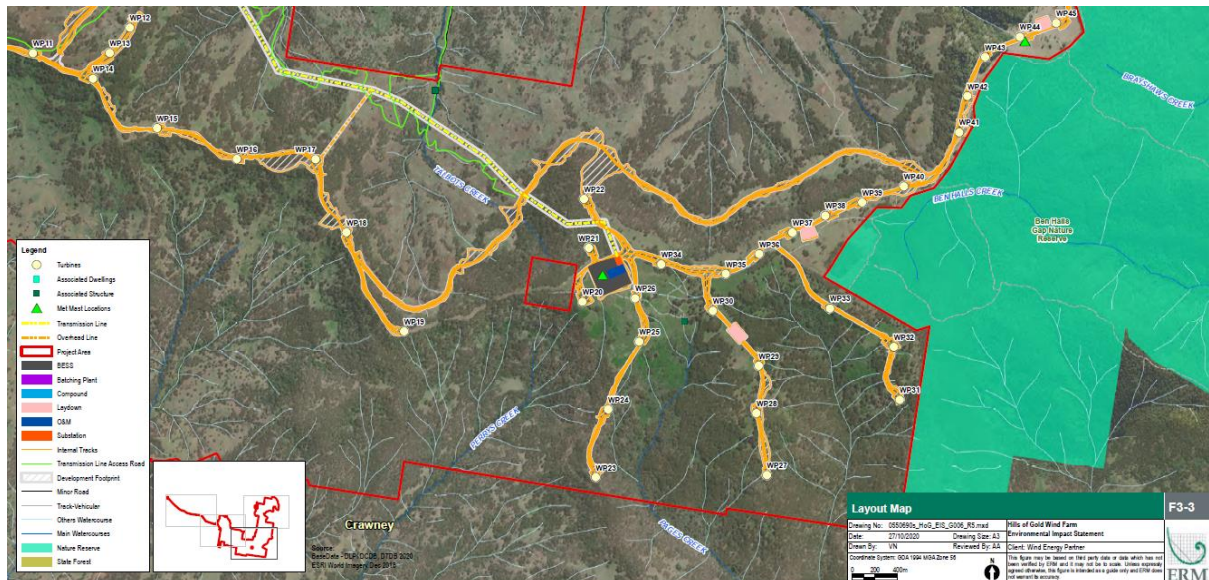
The proponent then indicated they would not complete a sound assessment at our property and did not complete any other sound assessments on the southern side of the range.

Regarding noise in the area. We can hear farm equipment such as quad bikes, vehicles, voices, dogs, cattle, deers, and all manner of sounds more than 3 kilometres away from our house. If we can hear a vehicle with the naked ear more than 3 kilometres away it would indicate that the valley transmits sound extremely well and across vast distances. We will see 31 turbines from our house which will be less than 1 kilometre away from us in parts of our property. We are extremely confident that 31 >220-metre-tall wind turbines in concert in a valley that amplifies and transmits sound vast distances will be extremely overwhelming and audible to the human ear and will have a significant impact on our physical health and well-being. One can imagine over 30 massive wind turbines turning and the resultant sound that will prevail. The impact of low-level sound such as infrasound and the impact on health and well-being and sleep quality is well documented with cases in Australia recently being determined in favour of those impacted by the sound.

This aspect of the EIS has been substantially overlooked with those sites where sound data has been collected demonstrating substantial background noise at the location. Noise monitoring has also occurred exclusively on the northern side of the project which is further away from the site of the proposed turbines. The proponent has failed to collect any data which will allow them to evaluate the potential noise impact on those properties on the southern side of the range who are considerably closer to the project. We believe that our family and those in the local areas will be impacted by the noise created by these turbines and therefore our personal health and the health of those in the area will be impacted.

## 1.4 Impact to Waterways and Water Sources

The ridgelines proposed for this project feed many waterways which represent the catchment for the Peel and Hunter rivers, as well as supporting the agricultural activities are numerous properties. These waterways are shown on the map below. The construction of this project has the potential to significantly impact the sustainability of these water sources and cause irreparable damage to critical water sources due to the extensive drilling and turbine installation construction work. We do not feel the EIS has effectively assessed the impact as demonstrated by the fact that Perry's Creek and Dead Eye Creek are not even mentioned in the document.



**Map from EIS showing turbine locations at the head of Perry's Creek and Dead Eye Creek**

Perry's Creek and Dead Eye Creek are a key water course for our property. Turbines 20, 21 and 25, 26, 34 and a substation will be located at the head of Perry's Creek (Illustration for EIS below). Turbines 15, 16, 17, 18 and 19 will have an impact on Dead Eye Creek due to construction, drilling and blasting on the ridgeline at the source of the creek.



The maps show that the BESS and Substation are to be constructed near turbine 20 which is the head or source of Perry's Creek on the ridgeline. The EIS does not indicate that the proponent has taken any steps to understand the impact of this or to evaluate current flow. If this water source is damaged or affected it will also then have a knock-on effect for springs, bores, and other water sources in the area. This in turn may render agricultural land useless as water sources are impacted. An evaluation of the potential impact of the proposed project on these critical waterways traversing our property is essential and should be recommended by the Department in any further submission by the proponent.

Our views are further enhanced by the tributaries and creeks that run to our property off the Mountain Range. Perry's creek creates a waterfall in the mountain side. Refer to picture below:





The waterfall that occurs in Perry's Creek is a regular occurrence following rainfall. This creek is a major tributary into the Isis river which ultimately runs into the Hunter River. As stated above, the EIS presented by the proponent does not mention Perry's Creek or Dead Eye Creek, which are two major tributary creeks that flow into the Isis river and pass through our property. The BESS and Substation and a number of turbines are proposed to be constructed directly at the beginning of Perry's Creek at the top of the ridgeline (Turbines 20, 21 and 25, 26, 34), yet we understand there has been no assessment of the impact this project may have on the creek, the water table, and the flows into the river systems in the area. Turbines 15, 16, 17, 18 and 19 will be constructed near the head of Dead Eye Creek and will again present a risk to the continuation of this water source. Perry's and Dead Eye Creek are valuable sources of water to the Isis river and a source of water for stock in the local agricultural area. The recent drought proved that when this creek stops many rural properties will be without water for stock. The proposed site of the BESS and substation represent a material risk for the water supply of our property and many of our neighbours.

Further to this there are several waterways that flow into the Nundle area and feed the Chaffey Dam water source. At a time when water preservation is key to our area, this project presents a potential catastrophic impact on the continued collection and preservation of water in the area.

Furthermore, according to the publication from the Office of Environment and Heritage for the NSW Government – 'The land and soil capability assessment scheme' the land upon which the project is proposed is classified as Class 8 soils. According to the Office of Environment's directives this land is therefore unsuitable for a major infrastructure development and should be retained for natural vegetation including water supply, catchments, wildlife refuges, national and state parks, and scenic areas.

This land has already been classified by the NSW Government as a water catchment area. The entire project area sits on Class 8 soils, thereby making it non-viable based on the government's own directives for preserving our natural environment.

## 1.5 Impact to Local Animal Species

Construction of the Project will involve industrialisation and massive excavation and land clearing of 8,316 ha of land with the Development Footprint being 513 ha of prominent high value habitat of the Liverpool Range ridge line.

There are countless species of animals and plants that are unique to the area due to the dense vegetation and elevation of the area. Even the EIS notes that the risk of threat to protected species is 'high'. Many of these species are protected and highly endangered requiring that habitats are preserved and protected for future generations. The following animals have been seen on our own property and must therefore be in abundance throughout the project area:

- Koala (Conservation Status – Vulnerable)
- Tiger Quoll/Spotted Quoll (Conservation Status - Near Endangered)



**Spotted Quoll seen at our property near our machinery shed.**

- Tawny Frogmouthed Owl
- Glossy and Red-Tailed Black Cockatoo
- Booroolong frog
- Greater Glider,
- Southern Myotis
- Large-eared Pied Bat
- Little-Pied Bat,
- Eastern False Pipistrelle
- Eastern Coastal Free-tailed Bat
- Little Bent-wing Bat
- Large Bent-winged Bat
- Greater broad-nosed Bat
- Eastern Cave Bat and Grey-headed flying-fox
- Booroolong Frog
- Border Tick-tailed Gecko
- Eastern Pygmy Possum and Squirrel Glider.

The field surveys also identified two species of raptor most at risk of collision, Nankeen Kestrel and Wedgetailed Eagle.

Much of the project area and surrounding countryside is pristine, and often ancient, bush with a multitude of wildlife. The project will jeopardize many of the habitats and breeding areas for these species and others and will place additional pressure on some of Australia's most recognised and valuable animal species.

The proponent undertook to assess the potential impact on several species, but we can find no mention of these in the EIS. This is a further example of the proponent's failure to comply with its obligations as part of this process.

We have an enviable view over the ridge and see wedge-tailed eagles soaring over the project site every day. The topography of the land creates updrafts which provides an ideal hunting ground for these birds. There are numerous articles citing the impact that wind turbines have on bird and bat populations. In particular, this article [<https://www.thecourier.com.au/story/5850494/eagle-deaths-confirmed-at-moorabool-shire-wind-farm/>] cites the dramatic impact they can have in relation to a wind farm of only 14 turbines which are 80m in height. This is a considerably smaller project than that proposed for this sensitive region. Similarly, the Hills of Gold project will pose a significant threat to the Wedge Tailed Eagle populations in an area where they are seen to hunt and soar most days of the year.

Having reviewed the EIS there seems to be a dependence upon a raft of activities being completed by the proponent and the contractor to ensure the preservation of flora and fauna species and use of an offset strategy that will not rehabilitate land to replace what is destroyed but merely lock up nearby land and therefore result in an overall loss of habitat and plant species.

From an outside perspective it would seem that based upon the sheer numbers of endangered species of plants and animals in the area it would be a catastrophic decision to industrialise an area with a project of this nature. Locations that have far less endangered species with landscapes and areas that are more benign would present a more suitable location for a wind turbine project as already identified in the states designated renewable zones.

## 1.6 Impact to Property Value

Over the last 11 years we have invested significantly in putting in the necessary infrastructure for a commercial cattle property, and in building a high-quality home for our family to live in ongoing.

Infrastructure has included machinery sheds, cattle yards, bores, and troughs, fencing, road works and amounts to over \$1m over the last decade. All of this is so that we can produce cattle for the commercial market and many of the items we have invested in assist in managing vital drought-mitigation approaches. No evaluation has been conducted by the proponent of the potential impact for drilling/works to site the turbines on underground water courses which may jeopardise the continuity of these sources.

We will not benefit commercially from the project. We have been offered a token amount of funds by the proponent on the condition that any objections we have are disclosed to the proponent company and discussed before they are tabled more broadly in the community. This was in essence 'Hush Money' offered by the proponent and meant that if we accepted the money we lost our rights to object to the project. Even if we were offered compensation for the project we would not accept it as this is the wrong location to place a wind turbine project and industrialise one of NSW most unique and beautiful locations.

We have completed some research into the impact that having wind turbines near your property can have on the commercial value of the land. In each instance the feedback is that the value of the property can decrease by as much as 50% in certain circumstances and that the real issue is that the difficulty in being able to find a purchaser of the property magnifies significantly. Moreover, there is only a select group of purchasers who are willing to risk their health and potential resale of a property due to the proximity of a wind farm near the land.

With the above in mind, we stand to lose potentially half of the value of our property which would financially ruin our lives and prolong, potentially indefinitely, the ability for our family to identify a purchaser of our land when we seek to leave our property. This is in contrast to the small group of land holders who will prosper financially from the project, driving those who have invested their lives and savings in the area away from the location with their financial security in doubt.

Our family is in favour of renewable projects, we simply believe this location is not the correct location for the project to be implemented and will leave many local farmers, graziers and families who depend on the value of their properties and the production they generate from these properties for their livelihood.

We will be seeking to obtain valuations for our property in the coming weeks.



## **1.7 Impact Upon Agricultural Operations**

Part of managing our property includes the use of aerial spreading of fertiliser and seed due to the extreme nature of the landscapes and steep hillsides and ridges. If the turbines are installed in their proposed location along the ridgeline this will present significant risks for aerial activity, and likely preclude the use of aerial spreading. The productivity of the land will decrease due to inability to apply seed and fertiliser for pasture management and rescuing injured people from the area increasingly difficult.

If restrictions are placed upon use of aerial spraying and fertilising then the project will certainly place a production cap on many large scale beef and sheep operations in the area including our own.

## 1.8 Bushfire Management & Risk

The area is heavily forested and a location with the propensity for frequent bushfires. In the beginning of 2020, we were personally affected by bushfire with fires coming into and around the yard surrounding our house. For over a month we fought the bush fires which affected thousands of hectares in the local area and the project area.

During the bush fires we were supported by the Rural Fire Services and additionally aerial support and water bombing by at least two helicopters and small aircraft completing fire assessment activity. The following photos demonstrate the impact the fire has had in 2020 which we are still recovering from. The 2020 fire is one of three significant bushfires that have occurred in the past 12 years in the area. The area is heavily impacted by bushfires due to lightning occurring during the Summer months and the volume of bushland in the area which forms a veritable tinderbox of fuel for fires should they occur.



**Bushfire at our house in January 2020**



**Bushfire at our house in January 2020**



**Rural Fire Service Support in January 2020**





**Fighting fires less than 500 metres away from the project site.**



**This is a 3-kilometre wall of fire directly below the proposed substation and BESS location on the ridgeline in January 2020.**





**Fire spreading in January 2020 – this fire moved across the ridgeline for the project site in 30 minutes.  
(Photo taken from our house)**



**The fire engulfing the entire ridgeline below the proposed substation and BESS. This is directly near the BESS and between the proposed project ridgeline and our house. (Photo taken from our house)**

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The location that the project is proposed is extreme in many ways. The weather patterns are variable and extreme, the landscape is steep and treacherous, the bushland is dense and in parts impassable. All these conditions mean that fighting fires requires significant investment and commitment from Rural Fire Services. Last year's fire saw the use of multiple plans and helicopters to dump water on the fire and numerous land vehicles including 3 bulldozers and countless RFS personnel.

If the aviation assessment determines that there is limited access for helicopters and aeroplanes it will make fighting many fires virtually impossible. This will put lives at risk and the protection of this valuable agricultural land.

We would suggest that this area is without doubt one of the most awkward and impractical locations for the installation of a wind turbine project and will inevitably result in increased difficulty around agricultural operations, fire-fighting and potential injury of people. Further to this there is evidence indicating that the turbines are a source of fire generation due to malfunctions and this may cause bushfires in the area.

Aerial Fire-fighting support to the ground crews is critical on these, otherwise, often inaccessible slopes. Without aerial support damage from fires will be catastrophic. In the 2020 fires there were countless waterbombs dumped on the fire from overhead helicopters.

The EIS report indicates that "Wake Turbulence" will be up to 2,720m around these Turbines (Appendix H Page 61), and additionally this impact will be further magnified by "mountain waves" or "oscillations caused by high ground" (Appendix H Page 63). This will effectively mean that ground fire-fighting on those heavily wooded slopes, will not be able to be supported by aerial activities.

If this Project goes ahead, fires in those areas will not be able to be contained, as they are today, and will place many local residences, including our own, at increased risk of being destroyed by Bush Fire.

Residences will most certainly be destroyed, and potentially human lives will be lost, by future fires in this area. This is totally unacceptable. This is not mentioned at all in the EIS. The location of these proposed Wind Turbines is totally inappropriate and puts this community at great risk.

We have had no consultation on these impacts.

## **1.9 Community Impact**

The project will ultimately benefit a very small number of people and some very large multinational corporations. Any benefit extended to the local community would seem to be piece-meal or tokenistic almost to pacify those with objections. The job creation figures presented by the proponent would seem to be in opposition to the job creation that has resulted from any other project in Australia. More so the real definition would seem inaccurate as many of the jobs created for the project require specialisation in construction and wind farm operation demanding FIFO models with very little ongoing employment post project construction.

The promotion of the project to obtain approval has been oversold and the technical assessment and feasibility across many areas of the project and the resultant impact it may have is light.

## 2. Conclusion

The proposed project significantly impacts us as explained above and we object to the project.

The proponent has invested very little time in consulting with us and the people and families that live on the entire southern side of the project, despite this significant impact. It feels as though consultation was limited because of the severe impact this project will have on the community members that live and work on the southern side of the project.

There are a multitude of technical deficiencies in the EIS which further indicate the attitude of the proponent towards the potential impact of this project on an area of outstanding natural beauty and biodiversity.

The community on the southern side of the project is 40km from Nundle but will be confronted by a wall of turbines that can be seen from 45 kilometres away. These will be less than a kilometre away from us while we work on our properties on a daily basis and destroy the visual amenity of the area we live in. We own our properties for the lifestyle, the enjoyment of nature, and to realise a commercial return from agriculture. The project provides us with no commercial, lifestyle or environmental benefit, only significant impact to our financial security, health and well-being and enjoyment of our properties and lifestyle. Further to this is will detriment the productivity of our properties and capacity to sell our properties in the future should we decide to.

The project also leads to potential environmental impacts to waterways and sources, decimation of protected and endangered animal and plant species and will industrialise a location that is renowned as being a place people live in and visit to feel that they are in a place that has not been industrialised, that is still a place that manufacturing and development has left alone, and traditional agriculture and nature are the features that they seek to see and engage with.

Our family selected this location to spend our lives because it is a place that feels time has forgotten and is timeless. This area is a place that people come to in an effort to escape industrialisation and find tranquillity. NSW only has one Nundle, Crawney and Hanging Rock, if this project goes ahead, considering the incompatible location, it will mean that there is no location that a wind turbine project cannot be built in Australia and that the Australian Government is open and willing to allow industrialisation to take a precedence and priority over our heritage and the unique, natural and beautiful landscapes our country possesses. Our children and future generations will simply need to accept an industrialised world absent of the pristine locations our state possesses.

There is value in renewable energy projects when they are sited in the correct location, this project is not proposed in the correct location and will destroy one of NSW's most unique agricultural, tourism, heritage and environmental wonderlands.