

OBJECTION TO THE HILLS OF GOLD WIND FARM PROPOSAL SSD 9679.

Nundle and the surrounding "Hills of Gold" is a place of aesthetic natural beauty with historical and social values embedded from past to present.

TOURISM

As a business owner in Nundle, I have been actively involved with a community that highly values and have retained to a high standard of its existing assets. From the numerous heritage listed historic buildings scattered around the town, to old mining sites and the high scenic quality of its surrounding landscapes, places such as Nundle and its surrounding "Hills of Gold" are becoming a rarity in our country.

I have established a retail business in town and have reopened my property's in-house museum to host open garden events. Both tourists and locals highly value this event and have interests in revisiting a place that has significant meaning to their ancestral ties.

Historic tourism is listed in the top 5 under the Destination Choice category by Tourism Australia; wind farm tourism was not listed on the report.

My business has been operational since 2012. Over the past eight years, feedback from tourists travelling to Nundle and Hanging Rock are for the following reasons:

- Scenic Drive;
- Nature and Wildlife;
- History and Heritage;
- No delays in traffic with easy access to town centre with nature walks and attractions;
- Friendly community.

Whilst Nundle is a small community, it has successfully maintained its identity as leader in historic and heritage tourism within the North West Region of NSW. Our small town in conjunction with the Nundle Business Tourism and Marketing Group Inc., has worked hard as a community to build various events in driving tourism to the area through marketing the surrounding pristine and natural landscape set in a historic environment. Thousands of tourists travel to our town for this reason. Covid-19 boarder restrictions has contributed to a surge in increased visitation to our village with Hanging Rock Lookout and Sheba Dam camping grounds as the major tourist attractions.

A proposal to develop a large-scale wind farm in this community would cost dearly upon the businesses and to our community. The EIS proposes to develop a large scale wind farm with 70 x 230m tall wind turbines located on top of the ridgeline between Hanging Rock and Crawney Pass with an existing elevation between 1,200 to 1,400m above sea level. It is estimated that after construction, the highest turbine to tip blade will measure at 1,646m (EIS pg. 248). The 70 gigantic steel structures will wrap around Nundle village with maximum visual impact hindering the natural and historic ambience to the area while visually vandalising the Hanging Rock lookout and noise disturbance to the quiet and serene Sheba Dam camping grounds. The wind turbines will be clearly visible on approach to Nundle from Lindsay Gap Road and along Nundle Road heading towards the town. This view driving into Nundle and Hanging Rock is breathtaking and is one of the unique beauty that tourists return to Nundle and Hanging Rock year after year.

Can the Proponent prove to the local businesses with credible tourism statistics that wind farm site visits are more popular than historic and nature tourism?

TRANSPORT

The proposed transport routes through the village of Nundle and Hanging Rock as outlined in the EIS is outrageous. The traffic assessment gives no consideration to safety concerns for residents and tourists and no thoughts given in how to best maintain the existing assets surrounding the

Nundle and Hanging Rock village. The proposed influx of traffic and destruction to our roads will be detrimental to both our Tourism industry and to the local community.

Nundle is a safe and quiet town with no traffic lights, no roundabouts and minimal traffic. The streets are lined with aesthetic established trees planted and donated by the Nundle Garden Club and others trees that have stood there for many decades. It is enjoyed by both tourists and the local community.

The restructuring of streets with the anticipated removal of street parking in the main streets will be deemed unsafe. There are several essential services located on our main streets that require street parking at all times. My business is located on Jenkins Street, and the proposal is unacceptable as it will have a negative impact to the way my business will operate.

The proposed transport route during construction period will deter tourists from travelling to Nundle and Hanging Rock. Extra traffic volumes and heavy truck movements coupled with existing log trucks movements will cause further excessive travel delays. This disruption will be damaging to local businesses. Decrease in tourism would make operating my business in Nundle unviable.

The Traffic Assessment in the EIS and must be reassessed. This will reveal that the roads to the project site is impossible without adding enormous costs to the Capital Investment Value of the project which is already valued at \$826m.

COMMUNITY

'Selective community engagement' was the Proponent's approach for the Hills of Gold Wind Farm. I was angry but not surprised when I read in the EIS pg. 85: *"...the Project has received support from the local communities of Nundle and Hanging Rock."*

The Proponent has actively engaged with a few "Friends of the Wind Farm" members throughout the 2 year community consultation period and is engaging these members consistently during the submission period in Nundle and Hanging Rock through secret organised meetings. The wider community have not received any direct communication from the Proponent since March 2018. Engie ANZ have not engaged with the local community since their acquisition of Hills of Gold Wind Farm.

As an alternate member of the Hills of Gold Wind Farm CCC. I have not been engaged effectively during the community consultation process. CCC meetings held were vacated by a CCC member in five instances and were not replaced with an alternate member to engage with the proponent Wind Energy Partners. The CCC guideline states that all CCC meetings will be attended by the maximum amount of committee members at all times (7 community members) - hence the need for alternate members to be elected. I am aware that I am not the only alternate member but the concern here is that no alternate member was invited as a replacement in these instances. The non-replacement of an alternate member happened three more times after I had relayed this concern to the Chairperson of the CCC.

I was excluded from communications to CCC meetings. Meeting agendas and minutes were not circulated to alternate members. Recently, I was informed secondhand by another CCC member that I had been excluded from a site visit promised by Wind Energy Partners to the Western end of the project. It is also totally unacceptable to exclude 5 CCC community members from attending this visit when we have been selected to represent our community. The matter has not been resolved to date. The second site visit was not conducted before the end of the EIS submission period.

During the EIS exhibition period, a number of local community members have asked the question of why they were not consulted by the Proponent regarding a transport route that will have high impact on their residences. They are confused, frustrated and upset at the poor level of community engagement by the Proponent.

This in my opinion is not best practice in community engagement for a \$826m state significant project that will affect greatly upon the lives of members of this community if approved.

The Nundle and Hanging Rock Community does not support the Hills of Gold Wind Farm.

Despite the fact that the Socio Economic report surveyed only 11 community members, it provides conflicting information to the statement made in EIS regarding community support for the project.

In the EIS; the Proponent concluded:

"There is extensive community support for the Project and "Friends of the Wind Farm" signs are visible across up to residences around Nundle and Hanging Rock." (EIS Page xvi)

But the Proponent failed to mention that there are also "Preserve Hills of Gold" signs displayed at residences around Nundle and Hanging Rock who oppose the project.

Also contrary to the above statement in the EIS, SGC's report states:

*"Engagement Outcome
At the time of interview, there were a variety of responses towards the proposed development. Out of sample of 11 people interviewed as part of the study - 3 out of 11 supported the wind farm, 2 respondents were neutral; 5 respondents were opposed, 1 respondent did not disclose a position." (Appendix P page 64)*

The majority of the community signed a petition against the Hills of Gold Wind Farm and this has been lodged with the State Member for Tamworth Kevin Anderson MP in November 2020. This petition is continuing to grow over the submission period.

SGC report on community concerns for Visual Amenity; again the community members surveyed is not supportive:

"Three respondents felt the proposal would impact well being. 2 respondents agreed it was 'industrialising' the landscape. In contrast 2 respondents felt the proposal represented progress. Two were awaiting final layout clarification." (Appendix P page 65)

SGC reports also conclude that the majority of the community member surveyed does not support wind farm tourism and the project would damage the existing heritage tourism economy (Appendix P page 69).

With the poor level of community engagement and a conflicting community support report by SGC, the Proponent should not be making a presumptuous statement that there is extensive community support for the project in the EIS.

The Proponent should acknowledge the level of opposition and the non-acceptance from the community to The Hills of Gold Wind Farm.

HISTORIC AND HERITAGE

The most mesmerising part of living in Nundle is being surrounded by its Heritage and Cultural assets.

There are over 26 Heritage Items in the Nundle Hanging Rock Area. This lists identifies 24 items of local significance, 3 items on Register of National Estate, 1 item in Environmental Conservation and 1 on State Government Agencies under s.170 of the Heritage Act.

Not all heritage items have been assessed on the Hills of Gold Wind Farm Cultural Heritage Assessment Report. It is of utmost importance that the Proponent should consider and respect

the Community's social cultural heritage value of Nundle and Hanging Rock within their Heritage Assessment.

Alterations to roads, existing infrastructure and a development of an industrialised structure will destroy the historic rural character of our town.

Ben Halls Gap Nature Reserve is located on the development corridor.

In the EIS: Appendix N Historic Cultural Heritage Assessment - N.2 Statement of Heritage Impact:

"2.2.3 The Register of National Estates:

The Register of the National Estate (RNE) is now an archive of information about more than 13,000 places throughout Australia including many places of local or state significance. The RNE was closed in 2007 and is no longer a statutory list. The closure of the RNE does not diminish protection of Commonwealth heritage places. The RNE is maintained on a non-statutory basis as a publicly available archive and educational resource. RNE places can be protected under the EPBC Act if they are also included in another Commonwealth statutory heritage list or are owned or leased by the Commonwealth. In addition, places in the RNE may be protected under appropriate state, territory or local government heritage legislation.

Black Snake Gold Mine is listed on the RNE as an 'Indicative Place' (ID 101052), recognised for its historical and geological significance. Mapping of the RNE Indicative Place, identified in the SHI, deviates from the LEP listed curtilage, placing Black Snake Gold Mine exclusively south of Barry Road and east of 'Devil's Elbow' (see Figure 1.2). It is noted that this mapping provides no statutory protections."

Whilst the Black Snake Gold Mine Register no. ID 101052 has been identified in this report, the Proponent has failed to identify Ben Halls Gap Nature Reserve ID 17784 in the same report. The proposed EIS shows the location of approximately 5 wind turbines placed on varying setback distances of 80m to 150m from the boundary of Ben Halls Gap Nature Reserve and several more along the boundary of Ben Halls Gap National Park. Construction and placements of these turbines will have major impacts to Ben Hall Gap Nature Reserve.

Managed and protected by NPWS and valued as a historic landmark and environmental conservation area; Ben Halls Gap Nature Reserve should have been included for major impact assessment in Hills of Gold Wind Farm Historic Cultural Heritage Assessment Report.

Turbines located near Ben Halls Gap Nature Reserve should be removed from the EIS.

BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

The proponent met with Nundle Business Tourism and Marketing Group Inc. members in October 2020 (at our request) and failed to convince the group that the project could offer benefits to the local businesses that would outweigh the current economic structure in Nundle and Hanging Rock.

The project proposes to offer jobs; but not directly to the Nundle and Hanging Rock community members.

The project proposes to offer a Community Enhancement Fund (CEF); but the amount offered does not outweigh the current financial value that the community is able to provide through its own established community events and fundraisers. In fact, the financial value offered through the CEF would be less than what Nundle volunteers could raise with the CEF being divisible between Nundle, Hanging Rock, Crawney, Timor and Wallabadah. The biggest downside to the CEF is that there will be no volunteers willing to administer it. Currently, there active community members willing to volunteer their time and provide endless hours and hard work to co-ordinate and run these events. However, the majority of these community members opposes this development; therefore I ask the question of:

How can a CEF that offers the community less money than what the community could raise; and with no volunteers to administer the fund can be deemed as a benefit to the local community?

Nundle's businesses and community members have a high social and cultural value to its existing assets. The proposed Hills of Gold Wind Farm development will put an enormous risk to the high exponential growth in its existing heritage tourism framework. This small rural community was a happy and vibrant place with people that have chosen to live in a natural and pristine environment with magnificent views of the Great Dividing Range. Please do not further divide this community and disregard the community's concern for their lifestyle choice by developing a renewable energy product that is unsuitably sited in Nundle and Hanging Rock.

The majority of this community do not consent to the development of Hills of Gold Wind Farm.