

I object to the development project SSD 9679 “ Hills of Gold Wind Farm” consisting of 70 wind turbines in the Nundle and Hanging Rock district of Northern New South Wales.

I have provided some back ground information of the project site and a number of questions for the proponent that require a response:

Significance of Ben Halls Gap Nature Reserve:

“The park features an outstanding area of tall, high nutrient old growth eucalypt forest. Most of the tall high nutrient forests of the region, and elsewhere in the state, have been cleared or logged.

The mountain gum *Eucalyptus dalrympleana* /messmate *E. oblique* association of the park is rare on an Australia-wide basis because of clearing, and is limited in extent in other conservation reserves. The mountain gum trees in the park are probably the tallest in the state, with many over 40m, and the snow gums also unusually large (Benson & Andrew 1990).

The park is the northern limit of southern cool temperate rainforest.

Sphagnum moss mounds found in some areas of rainforest are significant. The rainforest and areas of sphagnum moss are remnants of a habitat thought to have been more extensive in past wetter climatic periods. The sphagnum moss cool temperate rainforest community within the park has been listed as an endangered ecological community under Schedule 1 of the Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995 (TSC Act). This community contains a new species of ground orchid *Corybas* sp. and may also contain the rare orchid *Adenochilus nortonii* (Metcalf 1995).

Two plant species listed on Schedule 2 of the TSC Act are found in the park plus several other species with unusual distributions. The threatened species are broad-leaved pepperbush and fragrant pepperbush, located in the northern limit of its range in the park and the population is an isolated occurrence between its two other known populations (at Point Lookout, Barrington Tops and Gloucester Tops).

The sub-alpine forests which the park supports have disjunct occurrences in a small number of high altitude locations. The park will become increasingly important for conservation of cold-adapted plant and animal species as climatic warming continues to occur.

The park has a rich bird and mammal fauna for its size. It is located at the overlap of the distributions of many eastern and western bird species. A large proportion of the mammal and bird species recorded are tree-hollow dwellers and the park contains one of the highest recorded densities of the greater glider. This abundance is a result of the high nutrient levels of the eucalypt foliage developed on basalt soils and the number of available suitable sized hollows. The greater glider is a major prey item in the diet of the threatened powerful owl that occurs in the park.

Other threatened animal species recorded in the park (listed on Schedule 2 of the TSC Act) are the tiger quoll, koala, great pipistrelle and olive whistler.

A glider that is either the squirrel glider (a Schedule 2 species) or the sugar glider *Petaurus breviceps* has also been recorded from scat remains.

Barrington Tops and the Liverpool Range appear to be a stronghold for the tiger quoll (Benson & Andrew, 1990). The park is one of the most inland occurrences of the olive whistler and also of the uncommon red-browed tree creeper *Climacteris erythrops*.

The rare skink *Lampropholis caligula* is found in the park. This species has an extremely restricted distribution, occurring only in a few remaining patches of little-disturbed high altitude eucalypt forest.

An invertebrate survey of the park (Gunning, 1995) found it to be very rich in insect species, with a particularly high diversity of butterflies, moths, beetles, bugs and wasps and of soil and ground dwelling insects associated with the large amount of organic matter on the forest floor. Two rare species were identified - an alpine fly and Kershaw's brown butterfly, both of which are significant new distribution records. The mountain katydid was also found in the park. This is an alpine species and its finding in Ben Halls Gap is a significant range extension.

Summary of significance

The park is an outstanding area of tall, high nutrient old growth eucalypt forest which is virtually free of weeds;

The mountain gum and snow gum oblique association is rare on an Australia-wide basis;

The park provides important habitat for several threatened native plant and animal species (broad-leaved pepperbush, fragrant pepperbush, powerful owl, tiger quoll, koala, great pipistrelle and olive whistler), the sphagnum moss cool temperate rainforest endangered ecological community, the rare skink *Lampropholis Caligula* and it is a stronghold for the tiger quoll;

Southern cool temperate rainforest reaches its northern limit in the park, as do several native plant species;

The park provides a refuge for cold-adapted plant and animal communities;

The park is rich in insect species and supports two rare species; and

The park is located at the overlap of the distributions of many eastern and western bird species and has one of the highest recorded densities of the greater glider.

Adjoining areas of native vegetation

Much of the land around the park has been cleared and it is largely isolated from other large forested areas. Significant areas of native vegetation remain, however, adjacent to the eastern, southern and northern boundaries. Retention of nearby forested areas is important for maintaining native animal populations particularly since the park itself is so small. If the park were to become surrounded by cleared land, decline in species abundance and, in the longer term, extinction of some species could be expected. The NPWS will encourage, in association with park neighbours, protection of nearby naturally vegetated areas through such means as preparation of voluntary conservation agreements, Landcare programs and incentives of the Native Vegetation Conservation Act 1997". From the management plan for Ben Halls Gap Nature Reserve for NSW National Parks and Wildlife.

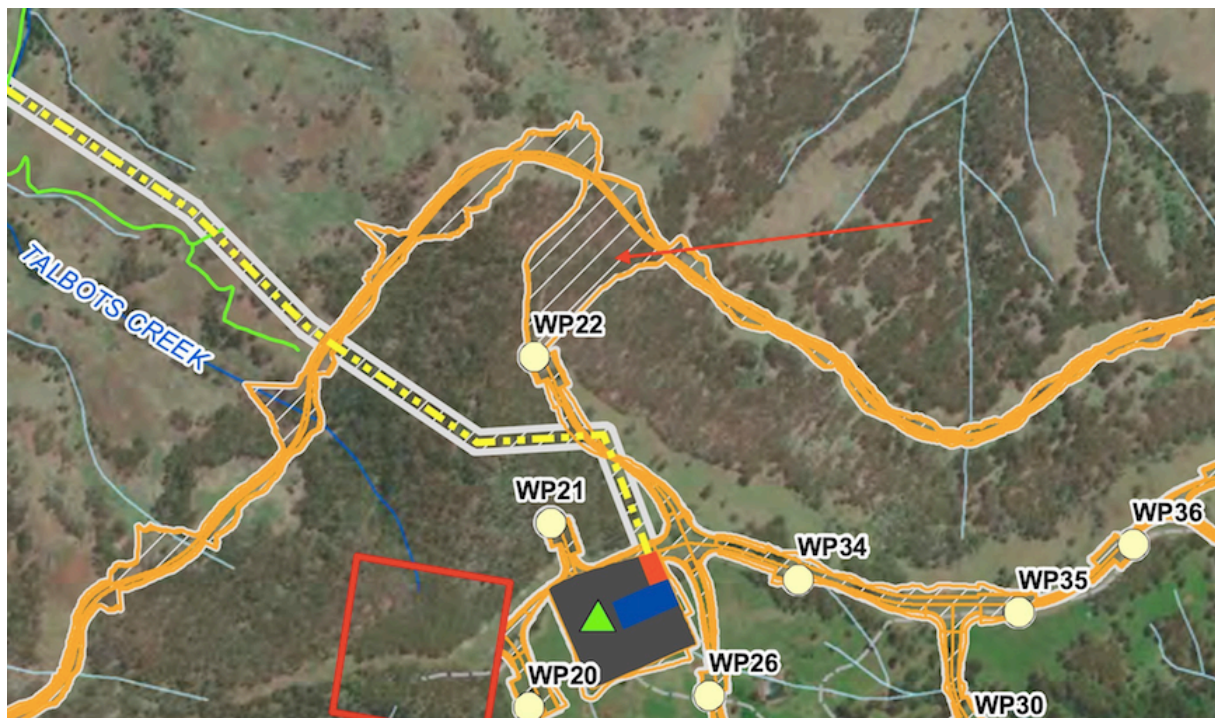
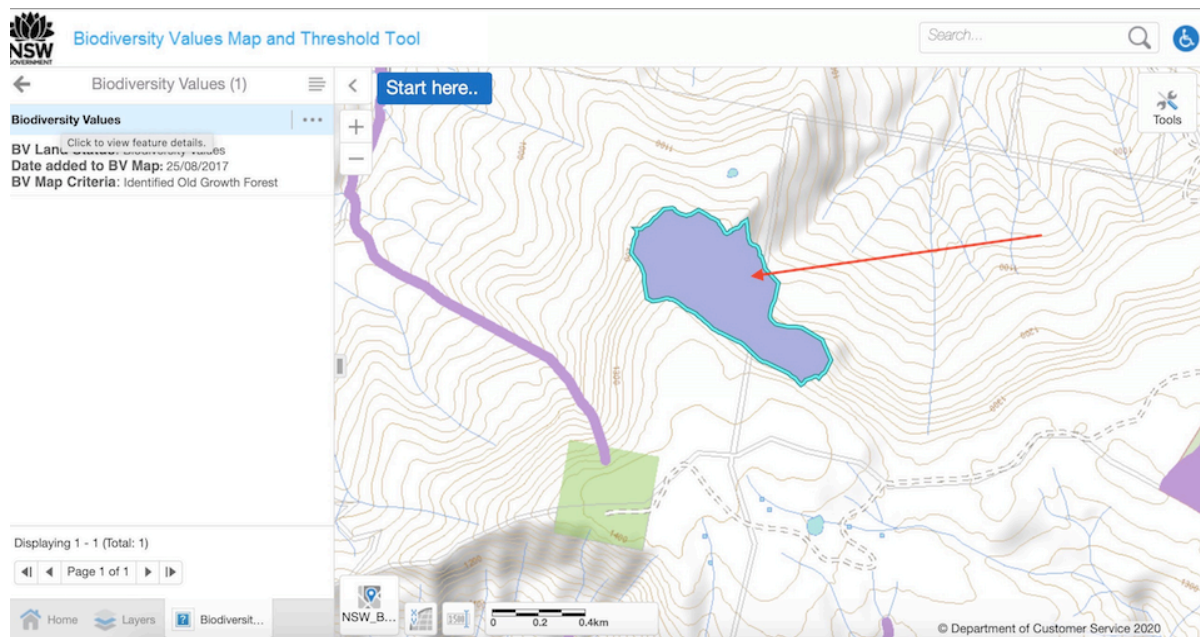
In 1991 the NSW National Trust listed the park area as the 'Ben Halls Gap old growth forest landscape conservation area' in recognition of its outstanding natural heritage features. The park is also listed on the register of the National Estate.

Question 1: Do WEP recognize the significance and status of the Ben Halls Gap Nature Reserve for the preservation of flora & fauna for future generations?

Question 2: Given the status of Ben Halls Gap Nature Reserve what would DPIE, leading ecologists and the proponent expect the minimum distance for buffer zones for turbine placement to the boundary of BHGMR?

Question 3: Given NSW National Parks would like to work with neighbors for conservation what impact would the removal of Old Growth Forest near turbine WP22 from the image below have on biodiversity of the Reserve near WP36?

Question 4: “There are no designated conservation areas within the Project Area”. (Page 73 EIS) In the image below what is the status of this Old Growth Forest?



“Preliminary investigations commenced in 2010 and have since determined the Project Area to have strong potential for a wind farm development. Negotiations with landholders commenced in 2010, with 14 landholders signing agreements to host wind farm infrastructure during the course of concept design and Project layout development between 2017 and 2020”. Page 124 EIS

During the negotiation with landowners and multiple site visits since 2010, the project area has seen significant changes to the landscape. At the presentation in March 2018 at Nundle Hall, WEP was informed of land clearing on the project site and a number of active illegal land clearing cases filed against the major landowner within the project. Visual changes to the ridgeline are very evident and reflected upon the biodiversity study provided in the EIS stating 58% of the development footprint is exotic grassland, ie. developed pasture.

Image below taken in 2017-18 of extensive land clearing within the project area.



Question 5: What changes to the ridgelines and the project area have been evident to the proponent since 2010?

Question 6: How many site visits has the proponent performed since 2010?

Question 7: Is the proponent aware of any previous offences, convictions and ongoing investigations regarding land clearing in the project area?

Question 8: Have all the proponents WEP, Engie and Someva Renewables visited the project area?

Clearing of Ben Halls Gap Nature Reserve:

Estimated timeframe during 2014-15 adjoining neighbor has cleared the highly protected Ben Halls Gap Nature Reserve decimating highly sensitive flora and fauna. The National Park is aware of the clearing and the public is still waiting for confirmation of the charges.



Question 9: What is the result of the investigation into land clearing allegations of Ben Halls Gap Nature Reserve?

Crawney Pass National Park

“The park encompasses an area of steep topography and terraced landscape with scenic values typical of the Liverpool Range. It protects the headwaters of the Isis and Peel rivers. The park is part of a regional corridor providing habitat connectivity along the Liverpool Range and is also located within the broader Great Eastern Ranges Initiative conservation corridor.

The park protects habitat for 13 threatened native animal species and three plant species of conservation significance. Of particular significance is a population of Booroolong frog recorded in the park. This frog has experienced massive population declines in parts of its range and is now highly restricted within New South Wales.” Extract supplied from Crawney Pass National Park Draft Plan of Management.

“At its closest point, Crawney Pass National Park is located 50m from parts of the development footprint for the transmission line corridor. In most sections, there is an approximately 300m buffer from the national park boundary to the development footprint. The national park is just over 310ha in size and contains mostly grassy open eucalypt forests and woodlands, with some smaller patches of rainforest on lower slopes on major creeklines on the southern side of the park (NPWS, 2019). There are no known populations of threatened plants in the National Park however, it does provide habitat for Koala, forest owls, gliders and microbats”. EIS Appendix part D 1- page 20.

In expansion of the above statement please see below list of threatened animals in or near the Park.

Table 2: Threatened animals recorded in or within two kilometres of the park

Common name	Scientific name	NSW status*	National status**
Birds			
Booroolong frog ¹	<i>Litoria booroolongensis</i>	Endangered	Endangered
Black-chinned honeyeater (eastern subspecies)	<i>Melithreptus gulgaris gulgaris</i>	Vulnerable	-
Brown treecreeper ¹ (eastern subspecies)	<i>Climacteris picumnus victoriae</i>	Vulnerable	-
Diamond firetail	<i>Stagonopleura guttate</i>	Vulnerable	-
Dusky woodswallow	<i>Artamus cyanopterus cyanopterus</i>	Vulnerable	-
Glossy black-cockatoo ¹	<i>Calyptorhynchus lathami</i>	Vulnerable	-
Little lorikeet	<i>Glossopsitta pusilla</i>	Vulnerable	-
Powerful owl ¹	<i>Ninox strenua</i>	Vulnerable	-
Scarlet robin	<i>Petroica boodang</i>	Vulnerable	-
Mammals			
Eastern false pipistrelle ¹	<i>Falsistrellus tasmaniensis</i>	Vulnerable	-
Greater broad-nosed bat	<i>Scoteanax rueppellii</i>	Vulnerable	-
Greater glider ¹	<i>Petauroides volans</i>	-	Vulnerable
Spotted-tailed quoll	<i>Dasyurus maculatus</i>	Vulnerable	Endangered

* Status under NSW Biodiversity Conservation Act.

** Status under Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act.

¹ Species recorded in the park.

Question 10: Crawney Pass National Park is a non-host property boundary, why is the turbine placement inside the required 460-meter buffer zone?

Question 11: Given the threatened animal list recorded above, in the Park or surrounding buffer zones, under the Biodiversity Conservation Act a wind farm development must take into account species likely to occur within available habitat based on existing records. Why has the proponent failed to address the fauna within and around the Crawney Pass National Park?

Ben Halls Gap State Forest

Currently operates as a lease from the NSW Forestry to a neighboring property owner. The lessee has restrictions upon use and grazing rights however due to the natural grasses of the forest little grazing opportunity exists. The forest is a well-known bird and wildlife corridor along the ridgeline and to the Ben Halls Gap Nature Reserve.

The photo below of the boundary of Ben Hall's Gap State Forest (right) and neighboring landowner highlights the narrow ridgeline for turbine placement and natural timbered forest that offers sanctuary for the abundant fauna of the area.

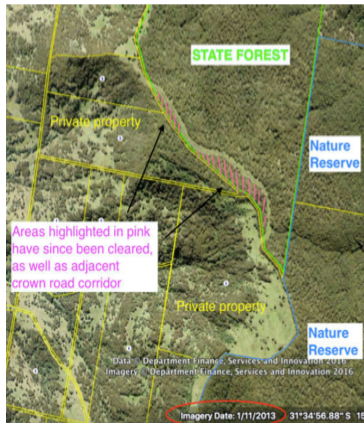


Pictured below shows the clearing of the ridgeline including Ben Hall's Gap State Forest and Crown Road has been fenced into the neighboring landowner property. There is some dispute about the boundary and turbine placements in landowner 6 or State Forest land.

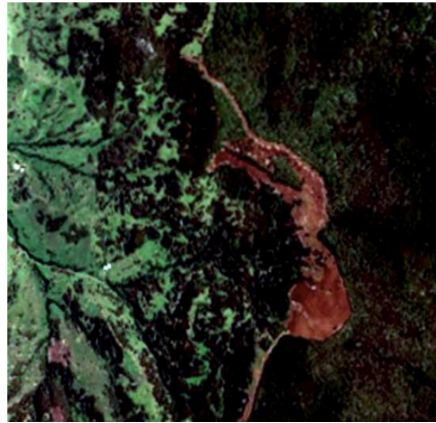


Pictured below highlights the alleged clearing of the State Forest and clearing of the “Old Growth Forest on the landowner’s property.

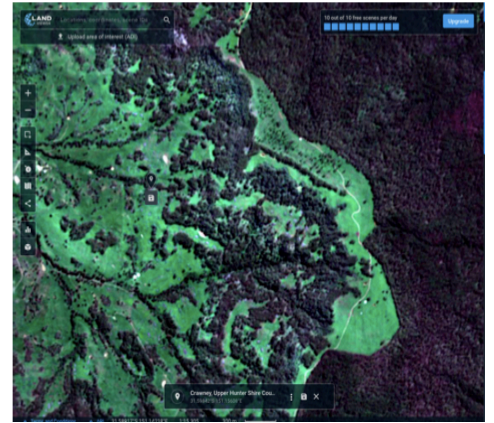
Imagery from 2013 shows the state of vegetation on the border of Ben Halls Gap State Forest and adjacent private land prior to the alleged clearing.



Satellite images taken during the summer of 2016 - 2017 show the alleged clearing of State Forest, adjacent Crown Land and private land in progress.

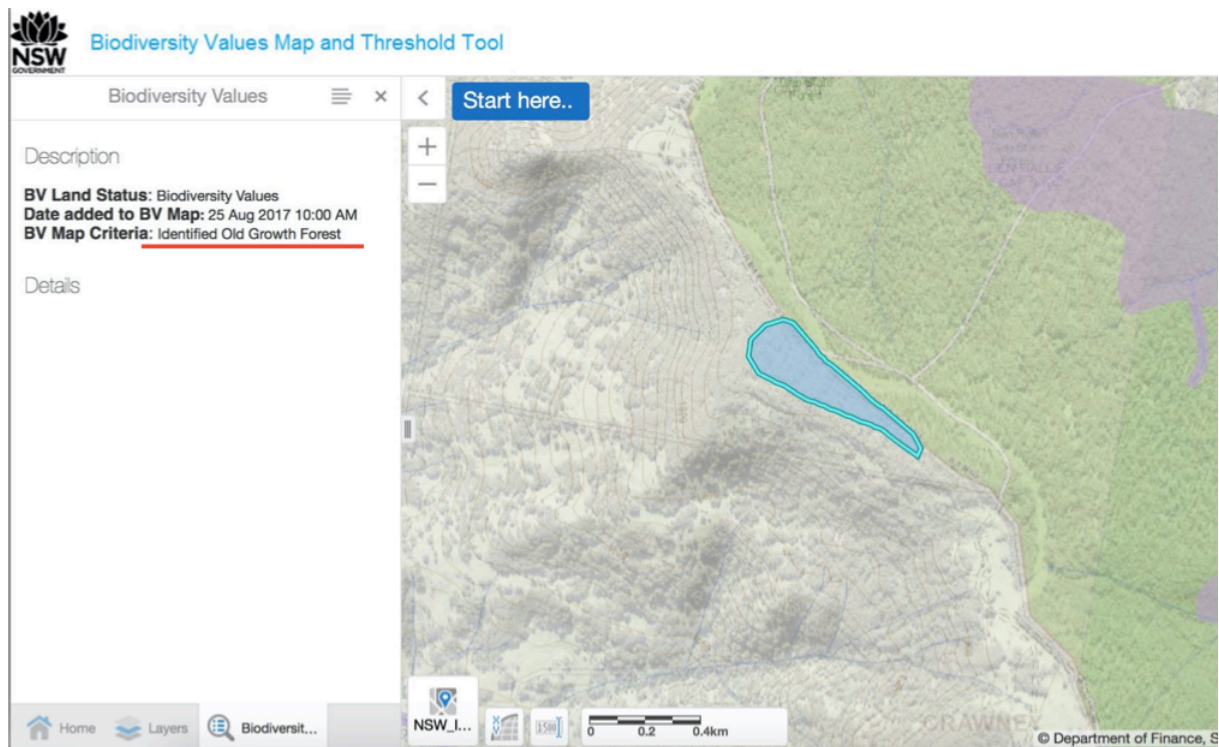


Satellite images taken in 2020 show the finished result with the allegedly cleared Forestry and Crown land already re-pastured and included into adjacent private landholding.



Turbine placements WP 47,48 & 49 have been made possible by the alleged illegal clearing of the Old Growth Forest, Ben Hall’s Gap State forest and the Crown Road.

“Old Growth Forests are extremely important in the maintenance of biodiversity (fauna, flora and insect diversity) and ecological functions (nutrient and water cycles)”. Department of Environment and Climate Change.



The images below look west/east along the ridgeline from Ben Halls Gap State Forest showing the narrowness and reasons for Turbine placements so close to boundaries creating extreme issues for wildlife movement within known habitat corridors and creating extreme bush fire risk.



Question 12: Please show detailed road infrastructure and turbine placements adjoining landowner 6 and Ben Halls Gap State Forest?

Question 13: Please show agreement with Crown Roads about road access and removal of vegetation upon such road adjoining Ben Halls Gap State Forest and landowner 6?

Question 14: Is the proponent aware of the alleged illegal clearing of crown roads and Ben Halls Gap State Forest?

Question 15: Is the proponent aware of the alleged illegal clearing of Old Growth Forest on landowner 6 adjoining Ben Hall's Gap State Forest?

Question 16: What effect on field surveys is the removal of Old Growth Forests?

Question 17: Ben Halls Gap State Forest has no signed landowner agreement with NSW Forestry therefore a non-associated entity, what is an acceptable turbine placement distance from the boundary?

Question 18: What is WEP response to the image below showing extensive clearing of the Substation, BESS and O&M facility site areas in preparation of project approval? Additionally the site is situated on one of the major tributaries to the Perry Creek running through non-associated dwelling NAD 01, what is the proponents comment?



Question 19: What is an acceptable boundary distance of turbines from the State forest to reduce bush fire risks as evident below of the Ben Hall's Gap Nature Reserve fire in 2019.



“Image below highlights recent clearing (Dec 2020) around turbine placements WP21 & WP22. In my opinion there is no justification for clearing this landscape other than project infrastructure for the wind farm.”

Question 20: What is the proponent’s response to the clearing in the image below?



page 210 EIS states the following:

The BDAR confirms that there are no serious and irreversible impacts from the Project. This is because:

- there is sufficient habitat availability in the wider landscape and study area to continue to support threatened species known to occur within the development footprint; **This statement is misleading as the development footprint is 513 ha which 58% has already been cleared and sown to pastures. The wider project area is 8316 ha and has not been assessed. This statement is contrary to NSW National Parks, which promotes retention of suitable biodiversity regions with neighbors to help maintain the viability of species within the Parks and Nature Reserves.**
- the Project design has been refined so that the majority of vegetation impacts occur on areas that contain exotic grassland; **The majority of the project area is in the development footprint and has already been cleared.**
- the Project design avoids areas of breeding habitat for threatened microbats, by locating all infrastructure outside of the mapped cliffs and steep areas; **This does not make sense as infrastructure would always avoid cliffs and steep areas, however microbats do fly!!! Also not supported by the Data drawings 013 Appendix. D**
- impacts to high quality vegetation communities, containing higher quality fauna habitat have been minimised through the location of infrastructure; **Really what about Old Growth Forest near WP 22?**
- residual impacts associated with the project will be offset in accordance with the NSW Biodiversity Offset Scheme and the EPBC Act Offsets Policy. Once these offsets are applied, no net loss to biodiversity should be achieved. **Who is determining the residual impacts ?**

Question 21: Please respond to the above comments in Red?

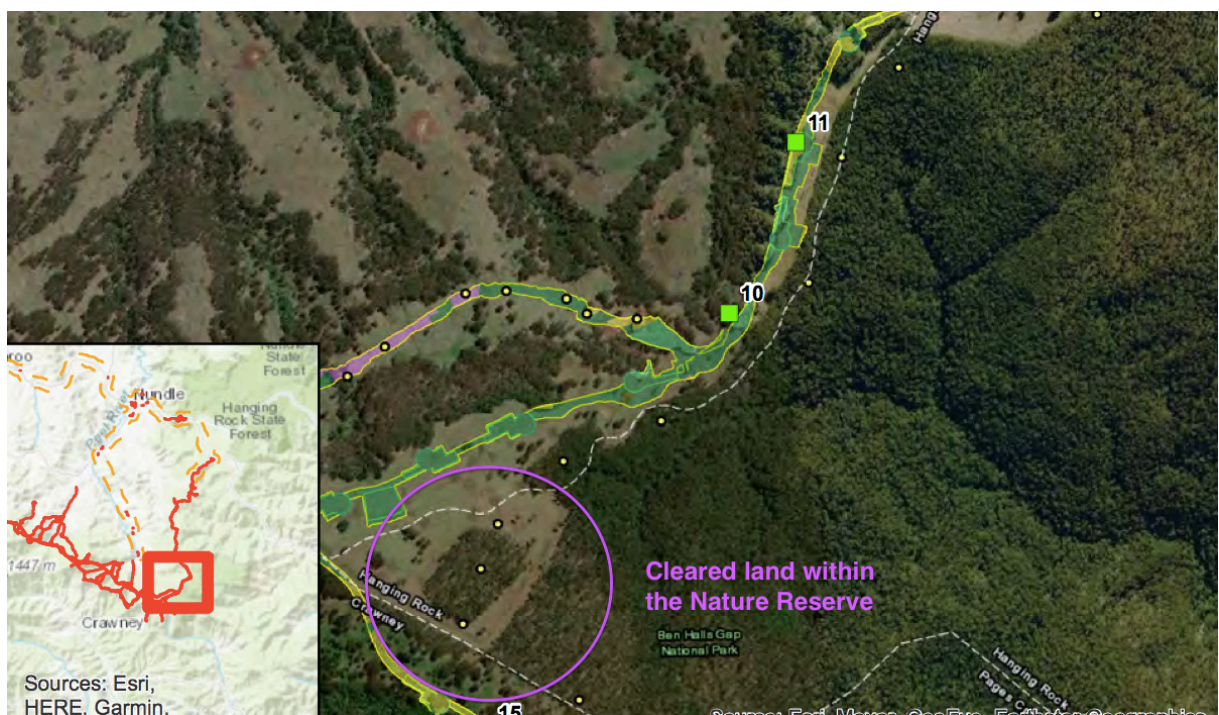
Survey Analysis:

The field survey lacks knowledge of the area, terrain and general bush tracking skills based on animals, bird nesting & flight patterns. Survey points look like they have been carefully selected based purely upon limited flora and fauna opportunities with site selection based upon open land areas cleared and pastured, sprayed lands and recently cleared landscapes. Additionally during the worst drought experienced on the eastern seaboard for over 100 years in 2018 & 2019 followed by extreme bushfire event along the ridgeline late 2019 any common sense person would accept the data would and could not represent an accurate assessment of the project area.

Extensive clearing within the project area has heavily distorted the field surveys of flora and fauna.



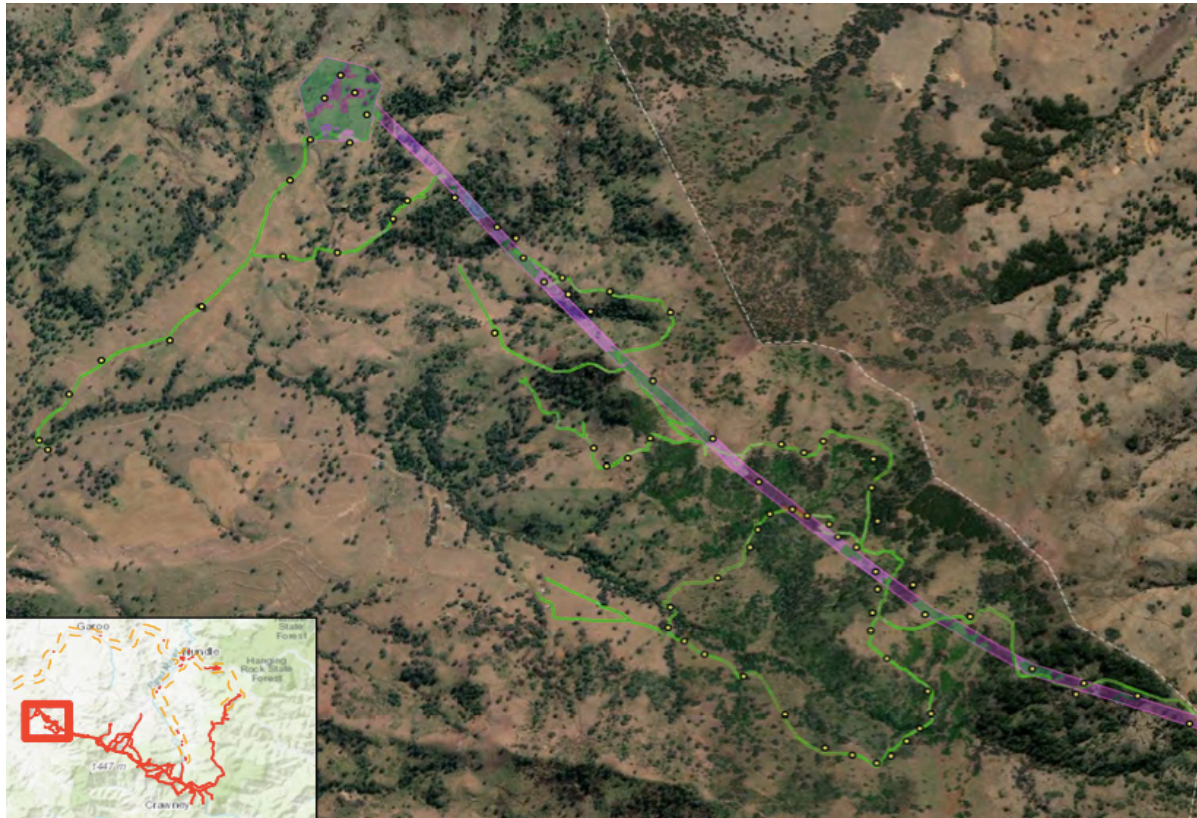
As evident in the image below PCT collection points represented by the yellow dots have been selected from cleared land, some collection points inside the BHG NR are located on the alleged illegally cleared areas.



The image below shows extensive PCT collection points for the transmission line, located on generational, open & heavily grazed landscapes.

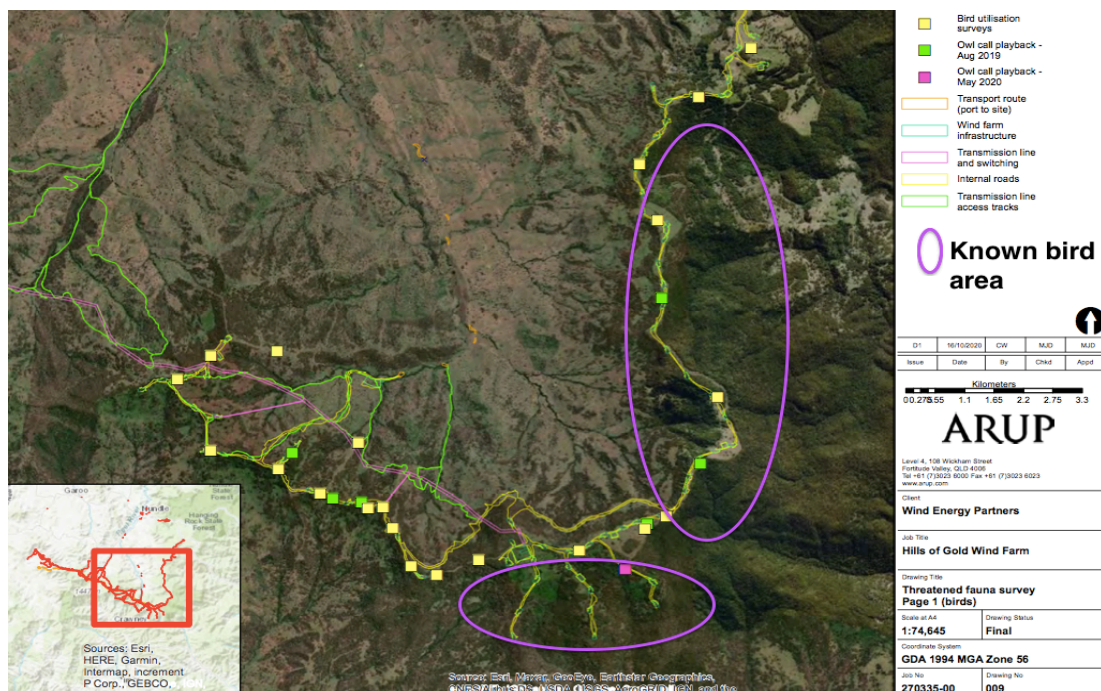
Question 22: Why so many PCT collection points for the transmission line?

Question 23: Why collect PCT data within cleared land?



The image below highlights the lack of collection surveys in the appropriate locations and well-known bird corridors have been ignored.

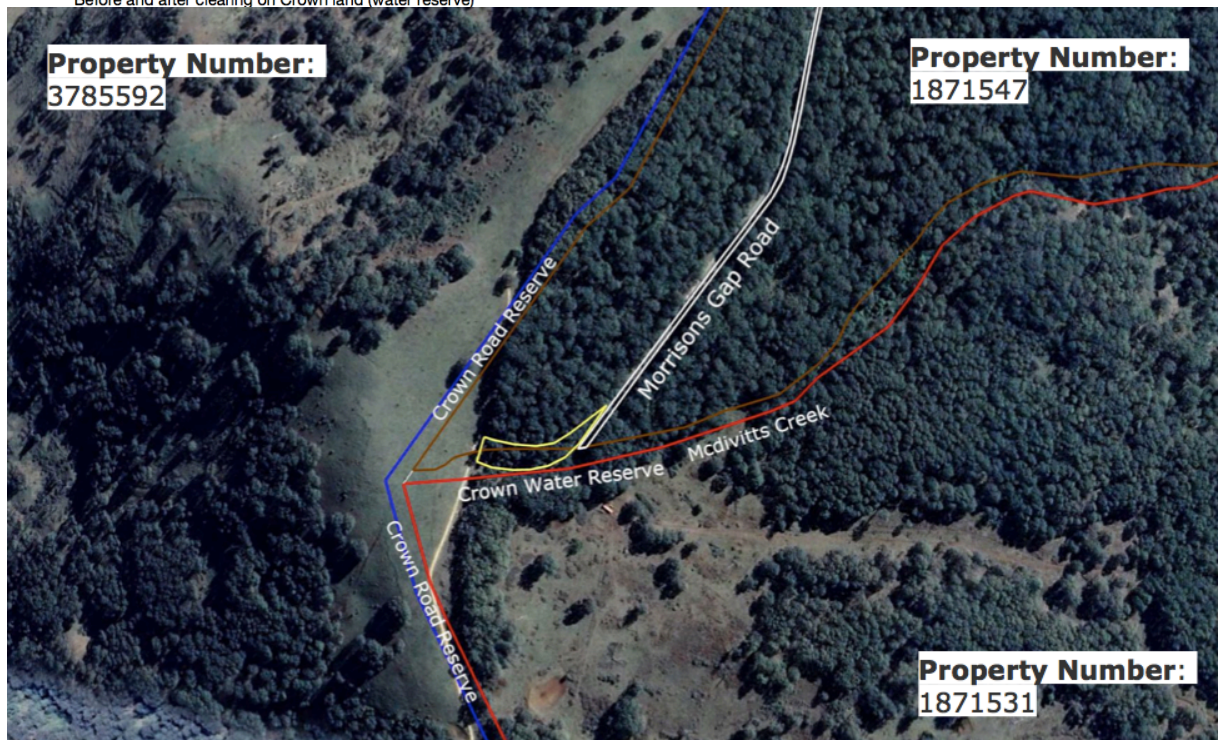
Question 24: Why limited bird surveys for the purple ringed areas below?



Following diagram indicates the location of the clearing performed from 20th to 22nd of February 2020. The area cleared is highlighted in YELLOW and is located mostly on Crown Water Reserve (headwaters of Mcdivitts creek) and partially on private property identified as the Trout Farm at "Malonga" 52 Shearers Rd, Hanging Rock. Property Number: 1871547. The section cleared represents an area of old growth forest with trees up to 1 meter in diameter. Fragrant Pepperbush (*Tasmania Glauciflora*) forms the under-storey and is listed as vulnerable.



Before and after clearing on Crown land (water reserve)





Fragrant Pepperbush (*Tasmannia glaucifolia*)

Question 25: Headwaters to Mcdivitts creek located on associated landowner 14 within the development footprint and major access point for the project near WP 58. The road access was heavily cleared in February 2020 was the proponent aware of this clearing?

Question 26: What is the proponent's response to this clearing? And the response regarding removal of Pepperbush in the image below in red?



In conclusion:

The ridgelines over the past 10 years appears to have been systematically cleared by the major land host holder (who indirectly controls 53 of the turbines) in anticipation of approval of the “Hills of Gold Wind Farm”. To say the turbine and infrastructure placements have been located and designed based upon environmental and minimizing impacts upon important diversity areas is simply not true. If that were true why would turbines be located in close proximity to nature & state reserves. The project design is not about the environment but about maximizing the number of turbines within the wind source and the actual placement is restricted by the landscape of the ridgeline, which is very narrow, and in certain places very steep.

Question 26: What changes to the ridgelines and the project area have been evident to the proponent since 2010?

Question 27: How many site visits has the proponent performed since 2010?

Question 28: Is the proponent aware of any previous offences, convictions and ongoing investigations regarding land clearing in the project area?