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Submission Opposing Energy Connect (NSW-Eastern Section)

Application Number SSI-9172452

I am an affected landholder in the section of the development described as Buronga to Four Corners.

I run a family business on 12,700ha consisting of dryland grazing and a Farm Stay tourism operation. My third-generation family and I are impacted by this development running for 8.8km through our property and within 1.9km of our home and closer to our Farm Stay accommodation.

A summary of the reasons for our opposition are

1. Disruption to agricultural and tourism businesses leading to major reduction in income.
2. Visual and Amenity impacts
3. Health and wellbeing impacts on people leading to stress
4. Disturbance to livestock leading to reduced production
5. Impacts of traffic access and haulage routes
6. Methodology for route selection
7. Electromagnetic Field exposure limits exceeding ICNIRP reference level
8. Noise and Vibration impacts
9. Compulsory Acquisition Timeline
10. Landholder Consultation Process

1. The EIS states that disruptions to agricultural land during construction will be temporary and of short duration. As we have 8.8km of transmission line through our property and with the estimated tower spacing we will have approximately 20 towers. Based on Figure 6.3 Duration of construction at each individual tower site, there is 9 weeks of work spread over a 40-week period. Multiply that by 20 towers and even with work on multiple tower sites at once there is significant long-term disruption.

Our Farm Stay tourism business will have permanent detrimental affects from this development. This business targets the fly in market and a high voltage powerline within 2km of our airstrip will deter visitors. The accommodation for our guests is in our renovated shearers quarters that's whole outlook is towards the new powerline. Our guests visit us to

enjoy the natural landscape and iconic vistas of the Hay Plains this will be impacted significantly by this development.

Our land value will be significantly and permanently reduced having a huge impact on equity and affecting our succession plan.

My suggested solution to some of these issues is to schedule construction in blocks in consultation with the landholders to reduce the duration of impact during construction. Schedule these blocks outside of critical management periods for the landholder. This schedule must be binding. To reduce the impact on the view of the vistas of the Hay Plains for us and our guests, mandate that the towers must be of the same construction type as the existing 220kV line, (self-supporting towers) and at the same spacing with the new towers next to the existing. This will have a huge impact on visual amenity. Consider those landholders, families and businesses that have to live under this line for the next 50+years and a little less about the cost.

2. When assessing visual and amenity impacts this was done as a desktop study and only assessed the impacts from the residence. As we are farmers, we spend approximately 14 hours per day away from the residence working across the whole property. The impact on our residence has been assessed as low however we can see the existing 220KV transmission line from all points of our property including the furthest point 15km away. The new line is proposed to be 15 meters taller than the existing line which will have a greater impact. Had this assessment been ground truthed the outcome would be significantly different. This has already been exposed, as when we requested a physical assessment for land valuation purposes, it highlighted the inadequacies in the desktop approach. The visual impact is also stated to be low due to the fact that we have an existing transmission line across our land. We did not want the first transmission line across our land so why is it justified by you that we have a second transmission line across our land. We feel like we have done our bit for the State with 35 years of enduring one powerline that will be here for ever and now you harness us with another. Effectively the State Government, 35 years ago declared us second class citizens and now you are calling us third class citizens for ever. This has a huge impact on the generations to come. This is not a term of Government; this is a generational family business that will be here well beyond any ones term in Government.

The EIS keeps mentioning mitigation measures that can be implemented such as screening. As this is the treeless Hay Plains and that is what our guests are coming to experience this would not be appropriate.

This development significantly and unreasonably reduces the amenity enjoyed by us, and our guests who are paying to see the natural landscape. This is not limited to on the ground as the development will be highly visible to our fly in guests, across the landscape from the air as identified in the EIS.

Mandating that the alignment of the new towers is to line up with the existing would go a long way to reducing the visual impact especially when viewed at 90 degrees as is the case with our farm stay and also from the air.

3. The health and Wellbeing Impacts are being seen within my family and the community. There is a huge issue with disturbance, multiple agencies all wanting access to properties day and night to carry out surveys. We are unaccustomed to having multiple people and agencies wanting to access our land. We live here for the serenity and that is what our guests are paying for. Consultants from TransGrid pestering us to sign the Access Agreement, the “divide and conquer” mentality of the consultants, only wanting to meet with individual landowners not as a group. Using aggressive/arrogant tactics like saying to individuals that everyone else has signed the Access agreement. Once construction starts there will be an estimated 250 people on our property each day for the duration. This also raises anxiety levels regarding issues such as the movement and construction starting bushfires and disturbing our animals.

The management of the infrastructure of the existing 220KV line has been disgraceful. This line was constructed in 1986 with no compensation to land owners. There has been no weed control and no maintenance of gateways or fence structures even though a lot have failed completely. This is adding to the stress for land holders regarding how this new line will be managed.

I have requested multiple times that an “act of good faith” by TransGrid would be to address all the issues we have with their existing infrastructure and then we may be more willing to work with them on this new project. The Property Management Plans need to be developed now with the landholders that forms a binding document that covers the whole life of the line. Setting out the schedule of maintenance and replacement of assets that affect landholders such as gate and stock grids. All we hear from TransGrid currently is that they want to develop a PMP for construction only and an ongoing one will be developed later. That will be too late for us to negotiate and we will be left with the cost of maintaining their assets as we are now.

4. Due to the noise and vehicle movements during construction livestock will not graze within 1+km of the construction area and will not be able to access water points within that distance. There are potential significant losses to lambing and calving percentages if construction is carried out during these periods. Estimated losses of up to 50% are expected in affected areas. I am sure TransGrid would not like to be responsible for this type of animal welfare disaster. This also is a huge financial burden on land owners. Even we do not enter our lambing paddocks for the 6–8-week lambing duration to reduce disturbance. We are unable to move lambing ewes away from the construction area due to the requirement to lamb in small mobs to maximise lamb survival. All paddocks are utilised.

This problem is easily overcome by a binding schedule of construction and maintenance. Our lambing and other critical management operations are set years in advance and cannot be changed without significant animal welfare issues.

5. The ESI states that “there would typically be a low overall increase in peak hourly traffic”. This is hard to understand as on the Boooroban-Tchelery Road that runs through our property there is expected to be a 300% increase in traffic during construction, as stated in

the Technical Paper 11 Traffic and Transport. This road is also described as a Primary Haulage Route and is described as a two-lane road. In fact, this is a single lane road with a 4-meter-wide seal with clay shoulders. Heavy vehicles cannot pass in wet conditions. This road also has multiple 4-meter-wide single lane stock grids.

The EIS also states that the road condition will be assessed in conjunction with councils prior to construction and at end with a requirement that the road is repaired to pre-existing condition. There is no mention of stock grids along these roads that are owned and maintained by the adjoining landowners. These must be assessed and repaired also.

I would suggest the volume of traffic, particularly heavy traffic such as concrete and crane trucks will deteriorate all of the grids to the point that they will need replacing. I would suggest that this is part of the budget and is announced to the landholders to assist with the project moving forward.

6. The methodology for route selection appears to be largely based on the fact the we already have a transmission line across our land, described as a “previously disturbed areas”. Does this mean that because we have put up with the disruption of construction and 35 years of issues relating to lack of maintenance of gateways and controlling weeds, we have earned the privilege of have a second line across our land? If I have broken my right arm, does it not matter if I break my left arm? Is the assumption that the extra impact will be minimal? This powerline is going to be here for generations as is my family. This Powerline will impact this land forever.

This has also been described as the most cost effective and value for money route. Would it not be appropriate that the cost savings are shared with the land holders affected in the form of some significant compensation that is somewhat relative to the expected 50+ year life of the line? I suggest the cost savings could be used in the extra cost to have the towers in alignment with the existing towers and the grids scheduled to be replaced.

The EIS state that the route “was broadly acceptable to landholders and key stakeholders”. I am in contact with the landholders along the 100km of route near me and I know of only one landholder that has agreed to sign the Access Agreement. Does that sound like “broadly acceptable”? What are you going to do to address this? I could suggest that you mandate that this route has enough detrimental impact on landholders and that any future powerline development is elsewhere.

7. In Technical Paper 13 Electric and Magnetic Fields exposure limits for electric and magnetic fields are discussed. The ICNIRP International Commission for Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection reference level for exposure of the public for electric fields is 5kV/m. The technical paper states “330kV and 500kV lines typically do not fully comply with the 5kV/m reference level”. TransGrid has used an Exposure Limit of 9.1kV/m. This is nearly double the International Commissions Reference Level.

There is medical evidence stated in the technical paper that exposure to Magnetic Fields greater than 3-4mG could be responsible for 0.2-4.9% of Leukaemia cases worldwide. TransGrid has an Exposure Limit of 2000mG, over 600% greater.

I suggest that the State Government of NSW does not want to fund a State Significant Infrastructure Project that does not comply with International standards with regard to human health. We are not a Third World Country and should comply with world best practice. It should be mandated that TransGrid comply with world standards in regard to Electro Magnetic Fields.

8. Technical Paper 10. Noise and Vibration Impacts highlights the issues with RFI Radio Frequency Interference. We have no mobile phone coverage away from a booster at the house and we receive no FM radio frequencies. The powerline will create interference to our AM radio reception when within its vicinity that makes the radio unreadable. This is a huge issue as in times of emergency the only form of receiving severe weather, bushfire or other emergency information is via AM radio. Because of the length and location of this powerline across our property we spend a lot of time working in its vicinity.

I have inquired multiple times about the option of having Telstra mobile service available along the transmission line. This would be of immense value to TransGrid for telemetry to monitor conditions along the line. This measure would also overcome the major connectivity issues for landowners along this part of the line. I have been advised that TransGrid are working towards this, several times in the last 18 months. I would like some sort of guarantee this is going to happen, as this would also go a long way to getting landholders to support this project.

9. The Compulsory Acquisition Timeline needs to be reset. In September 2020 we requested a physical inspection of our property for the purpose of ground truthing the desktop valuation used for determining compensation. This inspection was carried out by one of TransGrid, JLL valuers in October 2020, we received this new valuation in January 2022 that is 15 months later. I would call this valuation out of date with the way property values are moving. We now need to get our own independent valuation which will take some time.

The Compulsory Acquisition process was due to commence in February 2021, I have an email that states the commencement date will be extended however I have never been issued with a revised commencement date.

I assume the State Government would rather not engage in a large number of Compulsory Acquisitions in relation to this major project and I hope some of my suggestions may help alleviate the need for such action.

10. The Landholder Consultation has been floored from the very start. In March 2020 when consultation started with JLL, engaged by TransGrid, they were very adamant about landholders signing the Access Agreements. So keen to get us to sign that they were telling us that everyone around us had already signed. This was in fact incorrect and I know the large majority of other affected landholders in this area that still have not signed the Access Agreement to this date.

Many times, we have raised the issues in relation to the management and maintenance of fencing infrastructure and weed control on the existing 220Kv line. None of these issues

have been addressed. The feeling we have is we are just signing up for more of the same treatment from TransGrid. We have already put up with this for 35 years.

The Property Management Plans are to be prepared in consultation with landholders prior to construction and to be the mechanism to highlight all issues landholders have with the construction of the new line. These Property Management Plans need to be valid for the life of the powerline and set out schedules for ongoing maintenance and weed control. They also need to include minimum timeframes for repairs and document an agreed standard of repairs and maintenance. Also include “no go” periods so maintenance can be scheduled outside of critical management periods such as lambing.

We are located in the South West NSW Renewable Energy Zone; my concern is that as wind/solar farms increase the demand for powerlines will also and based on the methodology for siting this line we will be the favourable route for any future powerlines. Is there no consideration for the fact that we have been living in the shadow of a 220Kv line that is of no immediate benefit to us, for the last 35 years and we are about to have the horrific experience of having a second, even bigger powerline constructed through our front yard? I would also like to highlight that all this development has absolutely no impact on the ever-frequent power disruptions we have on our local Single Wire Earth Return (SWER) line. The privatisation of the State power system has meant that our local linesman is now located 2 hours drive away when previously he was only 40 minutes. We are doing the hard yards here for the State/Nation and getting less service in return.

Compensation to affected landholders should be similar to how landholders are compensated for hosting a wind or solar farm. Payments should be annual, based on a per tower basis and continue for the life of the line. Indexed to increase annually with CPI. This would overcome issues relating to reduction in land value. This would mean that the future generations of my family here are still getting compensated for the detriment of having this monstrosity across their land.

The EIS makes not mention of the lifespan of the development. We have endured the existing 220kV line for 35 years and TransGrid cannot tell me what useful life it has left, nor can they tell me the serviceable life of the new line. Some of these issues would be overcome with an annual compensation system while the line is in service.

There is no mention of end of useful life removal/disposal of the infrastructure. Will it just be left to rust and fall down on our land? Will it be refurbished and continue in service for 100+ years? This needs to be addressed in the EIS. We cannot construct anything these days without a plan for end of useful life disposal. As landowners we need to know there is a plan.

I read in the EIS in several places that landholders will, have opportunity to have input in the “finalisation of the project”. We have not been informed of this and any input we have had to this point has fallen on deaf ears. This process needs to be documented and acted upon.

In closing I would like to thank you for the opportunity to do a submission. I hope through this process we can improve the engagement with stakeholders for a better outcome. I

hope we can use the 35 years of abuse of landholders' rights as an opportunity to get the process right this time and in the future.

Please remember we are individuals, families, communities and business owners that make a significant Socio/Economic and Political contribution to this State and this Country.

I look forward to your response and I am more than happy to discuss or elaborate on any of the points I have raised in this submission. Please do not hesitate to contact me via the details above

Peter McCrabb