Submission on Uungula Wind Farm (SSD-6687)

Wednesday, 8th July 2020

The Australian Wind Alliance (AWA) is a community based organisation of around 500 financial members, with an extensive supporter, online and social media following. Our members include farmers, small businesses and members of the community. The Wind Alliance encourages best practice community engagement and benefit sharing as keys to maximising benefits to regional Australia and lowering Australia's carbon emissions.

After consideration of the details of the proposed Uungula Wind Farm, the Australian Wind Alliance supports the project. Situated in the southern section of the proposed Central West Orana Renewable Energy Zone, the wind farm will supply up to 400 megawatts of battery-firmed clean energy and help move New South Wales towards its target of zero net emissions by 2050.

The fact that the project has evolved significantly since its commencement in 2011 suggests the proponent has been responsive to community feedback and the findings of their various surveys. Improvements in wind turbine technology over the last decade mean the presented project can supply the same amount of energy as the original proposal but with a layout a third of the size smaller and with 60% less turbines. The new project has a vastly smaller environmental footprint and nearly 100 less households in close proximity to the project.

We see the project benefits as follows:

Climate and environment

- The project is expected to generate enough power for over 170,000 homes, saving over a million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions every year.
- The more wind and solar power plants we build in New South Wales, the quicker we can shut down coal plants that are contributing to dangerous climate change.
- Two multi-year courses of environmental surveying suggest that the land is predominantly cleared, grazing farmland. There are, however, flora and fauna unique to the area. While there will be some biodiversity impacts from the project, they will be offset in accordance with the NSW biodiversity offsets system which will involve the setting up conservation areas on private land in the region.

Energy

- The project would be part of the state government's Central West Orana Renewable Energy Zone, forming a key component of the state's plan to replace polluting coal-burning plants with clean energy.
- A 150 megawatt battery would be one of the largest in the country. It would continue technological improvements that are already seeing wind and solar power plants contribute to grid services and increase the flexibility of their supply to the grid. It would further demonstrate wind farms' ability to contribute to vital system security and reliability.
- The project proposes to connect to the grid through an existing transmission line in the near vicinity. Not being reliant on new transmission or transmission upgrades means the project is more likely to come online earlier.

Community benefits

- The project is expected to create 250 direct and 400 indirect jobs during the 2.5 year construction period, which could begin in 2021.
- 12 full-time equivalent jobs would be created to operate the wind farm.
- An estimated $5.6 million economic boost would be expected to the local economy around Dubbo and Wellington during construction, from work going to local contractors and suppliers.
- As well as lease payments to farmers and voluntary agreements with neighbouring landholders, a community fund is proposed to pay for community projects over the life of the wind farm.
- We note that the quantum of the community enhancement fund is yet to be finalised with Dubbo Regional Council. As a guide however, the proponent, CWP Renewables, has agreed with Yass Valley and Hilltops Councils around its Bango Wind Farm project to contribute $2,800 per annum for the 25 to 30 year life of the project. A similar quantum would see contributions of up to $270,000 each year to the Uungula fund which would have a material impact on the local community's ability to fund projects of importance to the region.