



7 February 2024

Mr Bill Stinson
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

By email: [REDACTED]

Dear Mr Stinson

Hills of Gold Wind Farm SSD-9679

The nominee of the Chair of the Independent Planning Commission for this application, Professor Neal Menzies AM, has asked me to respond to your letter received on 5 February 2024 on his behalf.

In your letter you assert that you apprehend bias on the part of Ms Clare Sykes, the Chair of the Commission's Panel determining the above application.

The basis for this apprehension is Ms Syke's membership of the Advisory Board of the Newcastle Institute for Energy and Resources (**NIER**). The NIER was established in 2010 as an Australian Government initiative and is currently situated at the University of Newcastle. The connection you make between the NIER and the development application is a statement on page 15 of NIER's 2022-23 Annual Report that provides:

'The generation, transmission, and storage of replacement energy sources is critical to delivering NetZero by 2050 and the Central-West and Orana REZ will be key in replacing the state's coal powered electricity generation over the next 15 years. The region is suitable for a variety of renewable energy projects including wind, solar, bioenergy and pumped hydro.'

The Commission Chair's nominee has considered this matter in accordance with the Commission's *Conflict of Interest Policy* (accessible [here](#)).

Without criticising your honestly held conviction, it is the nominee of the Commission Chair's view that a fair-minded lay observer would not reasonably apprehend that Ms Sykes might not bring an impartial and unprejudiced mind to exercising her functions as Panel Chair. This is because:

- Ms Sykes had no direct role in settling the language used in the extract of the NIER 2022-23 Annual Report cited above.
- NIER has had, to the best of Ms Sykes's knowledge, no involvement in the present application.
- The extract is expressed at a very high level of generality without any reference to the application or to its specific location.
- The extract does not materially go beyond describing the policy position of the NSW Government (see, for example, Table 3 of the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure's Assessment Report for the application, accessible [here](#)) and the zoning of – inter alia – the site of the present application under the Tamworth, Upper

Hunter and Liverpool Plains Local Environmental Plans, which provide that wind farms are permissible with development consent on the applicable land.

Accordingly, the nominee of the Commission Chair declines to recuse Ms Sykes from the present Panel.

Your letter and this response will be published on the Commission's website with redactions of your address and contact details.

Yours sincerely



Dr Samantha McLean

Executive Director