



TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

RE: HILLS OF GOLD WIND FARM (SSD-9679)

PUBLIC MEETING - DAY 2

PANEL: CLARE SYKES (CHAIR)
JULIET GRANT
DUNCAN MARSHALL AM

OFFICE OF STEVE BARRY
THE IPC GEOFF KWOK

NAME MS SALLY EDWARDS
ATTENDEE MS EMMA BOWMAN
MR TOMMY TAYLOR
MR CHRIS EAGLES
MR GREG CHAPMAN
MR GREG CHAPMAN (ON BEHALF OF DR ROB
BANKS)
MR BRIAN TOMALIN
MS MEGAN TROUSDALE
MR MARK FOGARTY
MR RUSSELL SYDENHAM
MS SUSAN ROBINSON
MR PETER WHITE
MS NICOLE BREWER
MR SCOTT DE KEIZER

LOCATION: NUNDLE MEMORIAL HALL

DATE: 9:30 AM – 1:30 PM
FRIDAY, 2 FEBRUARY 2024

<THE MEETING COMMENCED

MS SYKES: Good morning, and welcome to the Independent Planning Commission's Public Meeting into State Significant Development Application for the Hills of Gold Wind Farm SSD-9679.
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I am speaking to you today from Kamilaroi land and I acknowledge the traditional owners of the country on which we meet today. I pay my respects to their Elders, past and present, and to the Elders from other communities who may be participating today.
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My name is Clare Sykes and I am Chair of this panel. Joining me are my fellow Commissioners, Juliet Grant and Duncan Marshall. Panel members have made conflict of interest disclosures and the Chair of the Commission has determined that the panel can consider this application. A copy of that decision document is available on our website.
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We have a limited and specific role. At the end of the planning process, we decide if an application should go ahead and, if so, on what conditions. We consider the Department's Assessment Report, the Application, your written and oral submissions and other materials that the planning law requires us to consider. All of these materials are either already publicly available or will be made available on our website.
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In making a decision on this case, the Commission must obey all relevant laws and consider all applicable policies, and the public interest. We're also obliged to consider public submissions, and that is the purpose of today. We want to hear what you think about the merits of this application. This is not a forum for submissions on whether you like or approve of the Applicant, the laws we must obey, or the policies that we must consider.
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You will all have been sent some guidance from the Commission about expected conduct at this public meeting. If we consider that guidance isn't being followed, we can remind you of what's expected and, if necessary, direct you to end your submission and provide the rest of your submission in writing. If we do that, you need to comply promptly so that we can hear from your fellow community members as well.
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The application has already been assessed by the Department on our behalf. Many of you may have already participated in the Department's process, and thank you for your participation. There is no need to repeat your previous submissions; they are all available to us for our consideration. The Applicant and the Department have considered your submissions and taken them into account in the application and assessment and recommended conditions that we're considering today.
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Today we want to hear your response to the Department's assessment, recommendations, and the recommended conditions. Even if your submission

today objects to the application being approved of at all, we encourage you to tell us whether any of your concerns could be addressed, either wholly or in part, by the imposition of conditions.

5 Your consideration of alternatives does not in any way compromise your submission, and it enables the panel to consider all options. We will first hear from the Department - so, in terms of today, we will proceed to hear from our registered speakers, and we will hear from the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure as well as the Applicant at the conclusion of the day.

10 While we will endeavour to stick to our public schedule, this will be dependent on registered speakers being ready to present at their allocated time. I will introduce each speaker when it's their turn to present to the panel. Everyone has been advised in advance of how long they have to speak. A bell will sound when
15 a speaker has 1 minute remaining. A second bell will sound when a speaker's time has expired.

To ensure everyone receives their fair share of time, I will enforce time-keeping rules. Extensions may be granted on a case-by-case basis by the panel Chair.
20 However, in the interest of fairness to other registered speakers, an extension may not be granted. If you have a copy of your speaking notes or any additional material to support your presentation, it would be much appreciated if you could provide a copy to the Commission staff here today. Please note that any
25 information given to the Commission may be made public. The Commission's Privacy Statement governs this approach to managing your information, and it is available on the Commission's website.

Exits from this venue, in the case of emergency, are located along the right side of the hall, and the toilets are located outside the venue in the car park. So it's now
30 time to call our first speaker. If I could call Sally Edwards.

MS EDWARDS: Thank you to the Chair and the panel of Commissioners for allowing me to speak today. I am grateful for this opportunity and I intend to share my experience and knowledge of small rural communities and my concerns about
35 the Hills of Gold Project and the impacts and opportunities it presents.

My name is Sally Edwards. I live on a farm in a renewable energy zone near Coolah, another small rural and divided community, with my husband and teenage kids. While I don't live here now, Nundle is a place I love, and a town that has
40 been part of our lives for over 25 years. My husband and I grew up at Gloucester, and Nundle was a place we visited regularly with friends. 20 years ago we lived in the Garoo district, and Nundle became our local community.

Next slide, please. I can say that to this day, we have never lived in a more
45 intentionally connected community as the Garoo area. To have a 12-month social calendar hanging on the fridge which said who was hosting the district's get-together that month and when, was something incredibly unique and special.

All were welcome even if anyone had visitors: it was always the more the merrier. At the time I worked at Hanging Rock at the Arc-en-Ciel Trout Farm. Today we have friends who call Nundle home and Sheba Dams is a place our whole family loves to visit.

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Slide, please. Nundle is not unlike many small rural communities across Australia and it is my connection with the Nundle country, love for the Nundle community, and my deep care for small rural communities that has me standing here today.

10 Firstly, having grown up on a dairy farm, married into a fourth generation beef cattle family, and now a farm owner myself, I cannot accept or contribute to a wider community acceptance that solar and wind energy generation projects be called farms. It is simply not true. Farms produce and grow plants and animals for the purpose of food and fibre, and they work in symbiosis with the environment
15 and weather.

Secondly, our home and farm is completely off-grid. We utilise diesel and unleaded to power vehicles and farm machinery. We use solar and battery storage to provide our electricity which powers our home, sheds, and farm water supply.
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I consider myself an environmental advocate where balance, practicality and cost benefit consideration are important factors when looking at sustainable ways to preserve our environment and ultimately save the planet.

25 I spent the last 15 years working as a community development coordinator with a number of non-government organisations in the Warrumbungle region. A lot of this work had me working alongside both State and Local Government, fundraising and sourcing and attracting funding to achieve community projects, initiatives and aims.
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I have come to learn respect, and in many cases value, the very foundational principles of community development, of small town revitalisation, and the associated governing criteria of many funding programs. This understanding indicates to me that the manner in which projects such as ENGIES' project are
35 proposed, funded, consulted, planned and eventually delivered, goes against the very foundation of sustainable rural community development.

It is this foundation that I wish to demonstrate today, to evidence that the Hills of Gold Wind Project, while on the surface appears to provide many opportunities for
40 Nundle, particularly economic, will in fact be a continued significant cause of loss of community character, loss of economic control and ownership, and, most importantly, loss of community connection.

I believe the very naming of this project was a tactical move by Wind Energy Partners to demonstrate a perceived connection with the Nundle community.
45 Initially, I imagine the community would have been quite taken aback with this name. But over time, the familiarity of the term Hills of Gold with the history of

Nundle manipulatively increased the familiarity and ultimately acceptance of the project.

5 I also believe the name is insinuating. The insinuation that by building turbines on these Nundle hills will be hills of gold. For who? A company or an organisation who genuinely respects and cares for a community does not make such bold and offensive insinuations, even by mistake.

10 An important foundation I wish to address is need. To successfully deliver a community project or initiative, you must adequately demonstrate and evidence that the community has a real recognised and even measured need of the project.

15 Next slide, please. The need for this project is not a Nundle community need. It appears to me to be a purely commercial need, ultimately driven by a national need, the need for new energy generation, and also a global need towards net zero. Due to this, the location selection was identified through a purely commercial process, exclusively without the involvement of the Nundle community, and initially without the community's consent. It only required the landowners' consent. This is what I know to be a top-down model of community development
20 where a project is developed with no active involvement or ownership by a community.

25 Currently our government has identified these needs without the involvement of the Australian people, and through the Renewable Energy Electricity Act 2000 and the Declaration of Renewable Energy Zones has encouraged and promoted commercial interests by large corporations, many of which are foreign owned or government owned, and propose to plan and build these industrial energy generation projects.

30 Hypothetically, if the national need was indeed identified and supported by a majority of the Australian people to develop new and renewable energy generation sources, imagine if our government were to encourage and potentially fund localised community-owned energy generation projects across the country to allow communities, suburbs, even industries like mining, to develop their own
35 energy generation sources, and storage if needed, at the same time contributing any excess into the grid.

40 This would (a) boost local economies, (b) provide community ownership, control and energy sustainability, and (c) contribute to a successful national energy transition. Imagine if these localised energy generation projects incorporated diverse energy generation practices, and at a local level significantly reduced energy prices and provided valuable security for base load power. Power rationing would likely not be a challenge our communities would have to face in the future.

45 In understanding rural economies, I acknowledge I have a shared belief and wish with all those who support the Hills of Gold Project and with those who object, and that is to see the Nundle community grow and flourish. Wanting a thriving

community and a boost to the economy is part and parcel of loving your community. You want to see your community grow, and to do that you need support for goods and services.

5 Next slide, please. Through this meeting, you will hear many, many concerns:
concerns around loss of wildlife and native vegetation, construction disruption,
water usage and consumption, loss of landscape and visual amenity, increased fire
risks, loss of aerial firefighting capabilities, pressure on already struggling public
services - accommodation, health, education - and the employment battle. What
10 industries will find it hard or impossible to compete, agriculture or tourism?

The concern that I have and that I am most equipped to speak on is the already
significant loss to Nundle of friendships, relationships, fractured
communities - sorry, fractured committees, and of community connection. This
15 loss, this division, will inhibit the Nundle and Hanging Rock communities' ability
to manage through the disruption and interruptions of construction.

Through the physical changes to the environment, emotions will be high. When
animals are displaced, emotions will be high. When roads are blocked and traffic
20 issues arise, emotions will be high. When there are unexpected challenges or
outcomes, emotions will be high. Throughout this time, the community will be
called to support each other. If the community remains divided, it cannot possibly
face these challenges together successfully.

25 In conclusion, I urge the IPC to not grant approval to this project based on the
enormous and obvious community divide. ENGIE must address this division.
They must put solutions on the table to repair the damage that has occurred in this
previously connected, caring and active community. The project shouldn't be
approved until they have whole-of-community support, otherwise the division will
30 only grow and the capacity and capability of the whole community will continue
to decline.

Last slide and last sentence. There should be robust collaborative discussion
between all community members as to what could constitute a project that the
35 whole community embraces and supports. What would that look like? What places
would need to be avoided? What places are acceptable? I would suggest this
would start with discussion around a significant level of community ownership
and significant reduction in local energy costs. 280,000 per annum community
enhancement fund based on 47 wind turbine generators is merely an international
40 hand reaching out with a small bucket of money at the cost of your community
cohesion, your landscapes and environment, and your future sustainability.

Commissioners, this is not the answer for a sustainable and thriving Nundle.
Thank you. (Applause)
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MS SYKES: Thank you very much, Sally. I now call Emma Bowman.

MS BOWMAN: Good morning, Chair, Commissioners, ladies and gentlemen. Firstly, thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak at this meeting. I am a fifth generation Dunedoo farmer, which is in the Central-West of New South Wales. And I am deeply concerned for the agricultural industry and rural and regional New South Wales, and Australia, with regard to the rapid transition to renewable energy.

My community is at the centre of the current proposals for the Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone. Hence, the urge I have to express my opinions about the Hills of Gold Wind Project. I have many concerns about large-scale renewable energy infrastructure projects: bushfire risks and firefighting limitations, loads and transport, water use, land use conflict, visual amenity and noise, just to name a few.

Although the biggest question I have at the moment after reading the DPHI recommendations on this project and others, is how do rural and regional Australians adequately inform the rest of the population, including the experts assessing such proposals, to understand the enormous impacts these projects will have on our businesses, lives, landscape and environment.

The people most affected by the rapid transition to renewables are those who have fed and clothed the population for hundreds of years. Their connection to the livestock they run and the country they care for is very special. That is why turning rural landscapes into an industrial setting is unfathomable for so many. Why does rural and regional Australia have to bear the brunt of the impacts to the clean energy transition?

If everyone was prepared to do their part, maybe we wouldn't endanger our food and fibre production. Personally, we installed an off-grid solar system to power our entire property in May 2023. Why are there not more incentives for solar panels on every roof and batteries in every garage? That would go a long way to minimising the impacts of large-scale projects on valuable agricultural land.

The bond with Australian scenery is not limited to farmers. It is a major contributing factor to a lot of people choosing to live rurally for their entire lives or opt for a tree change at some point in time. This is often due to a yearning for peace and tranquility, a slower pace, simpler life and community values. All of these things will be changed, possibly irreparably, considering the sheer volume of proposed large-scale renewable energy infrastructure projects for New South Wales and Australia.

To hear proponents and DPHI project assessors deem the impacts to surrounding landowners and communities as minor or negligible is an insult to our way of life and the things we value most. Not only will our landscapes be forever altered, the vast majority of these projects also pose an enormous threat to our personal safety and that of our livestock and wildlife.

On 11 February 2017, the Sir Ivan Bushfires started approximately 15Ks east of Dunedoo. Due to intense heat and wind, the fire had burnt over 50,000 hectares of mostly open farmland, approximately 50 Ks in length in three days. Whilst I won't go into my thoughts about the inner workings of the New South Wales Rural Fire Service, what I will tell you about is how the vast majority of our district came together during that time in an attempt to assist fellow farmers and community members in the fight of their lives. The aftermath of the Sir Ivan fire was one of the most traumatic times of my life.

10 **MS SYKES:** Take your time, Emma.

MS BOWMAN: I will never forget the days following the immediate threat of the fire. But the point I most want to make is who was available to help those who had lost so much clean up the mess. The men and women I was shooting and burying sheep, transporting live sheep to other properties, treating burnt cattle and fixing fences alongside, were other farmers and local community members. They were not DPHI, RFS, IPC, or DQ staff.

20 How is it that these public authorities are given the power to make such huge decisions regarding our future without enough consideration and emphasis placed on our opinions, knowledge and experience?

25 The DPHI Assessment Report states that, on balance, the Department considers that the benefits of the Hills of Gold Wind Farm outweigh its costs. I would like the panel to contemplate for whom. Is it energy, host landowners, and/or small towns like Nundle and Hanging Rock and the three affected LGAs who receive short-term investment of funds?

30 I do not live in this community, and the division this project has already caused is palpable, and this is before the project is approved and construction has even begun. Why is so much weight given to policy that our government, the people that are meant to represent us, have signed like the Paris Agreement and those who have to pay the ultimate price, just have to grin and bear it?

35 Dwight D Eisenhower said, "Farming looks mighty easy when your plough is a pencil and you're 1,000 miles away from the corn field." Please consider walking a mile or two in farmers' boots and do not approve the Hills of Gold Wind Project. Thank you. (Applause)

40 **MS SYKES:** Thank you very much for your submission, Emma. Our next speaker is Tommy Taylor.

45 **MR TAYLOR:** Good morning, everyone. First of all, I'd just like to thank my Elders of the Gomeroi tribe, the past, present and those yet to emerge, for me, in sending me here to speak today.

Welcome the Commissioners and everybody here. So in the language, we say "Yaama yaama. (Speaks in Gomeroi language). Tommy Taylor. (Speaks in Gomeroi language). That's "I'm Tommy Taylor, I'm a Gomeroi person of the Wallaby Tribe and I live at (indistinct) a place called Hanging Rock in the High Country.

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Recently I was called to a meeting at Corindi a fortnight ago to discuss some issues with the Elders over there, the Lands Council. I met with 13 of them and they informed me that they wished to support the Hills of Gold Wind Farm. They said that the communities that it may cover, and a lot of isolated areas and a lot of things like that around the place, that wind farming and solar energy may be a good thing and a lot cheaper to ease the problems of the consumers out there. So they wholly support it, and reckon it is a good thing to go ahead with because we have clean energy and we have reasonably a good rate.

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For 23 years I was a coal miner. 3 year ago I had a - unfortunate to have a accident at work, and even though retirement wasn't on my agenda, I had to accept it. Coal mining gave me a good living. I was able to purchase three houses. I have a comfortable retirement plan, and coal mining has been good to me. But, in saying that, my health. I'll take your shirt off now after being finished for two years, it'll be covered in black. I get sinus, we bring out black gunk. We get a cold, we cough up black lumps. You get under the shower of a morning, even now after two years, if the water's a little bit too hot, all you can smell is sulfur coal. You have some - a good time with your partner, all you can smell is sulfur coal.

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I spent some time from August last year visiting around Wodonga and all those places down there that have wind farms and solar farms. I've had consultation with a few farmers that have gantries on their places. They've informed me, they said, "██████, it was a real hassle." People here are saying different things and stuff, but he said, "I've got a gantry on me place now Tommy, and it gives me \$22,000 a year and I don't have to worry about raising heifers or keeping fat lambs and stuff like that." So that was it.

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I've had - since 2009, I've had seven of my mates die because we were in underground and then open-cut mining for - we call it dirty lung, it's a lung disease. So they had lung cancer and passed away.

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Surely if we can create something that gives us a good clean energy and gives a reasonable price to the consumer, well and good. And we should endeavour to improve a lot of things here. We talk about one - one discussion came about the fans on the gantries and stuff like that, and what are we going to do with them after 25 years? 19 - what was it? 1994 I was summoned to a meeting in Sydney and I talked to the great ██████████. He told me, he said, "If you can't get anything done, Tommy," he said, "Don't go through the back door, (indistinct) the truth and push the front door down."

And that's what our opinion is here. We'd like to see the wind farm go ahead, and we feel sorry for the graziers and what have you. But - and what are people saying? "Yeah, they've taking land off us" or "We can't see, my sight is being obstructed" and everything, and we don't want it to go ahead."

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But, in closing, let me tell you, 230 year ago, Pommies come out here in big boats and they took the country off us. Thank you so much. (Applause)

MS SYKES: Thank you very much, Mr Taylor. Our next speaker is Chris Eagles, who is speaking for the Timor, Crawney and Isis Valley communities, and himself.

MR EAGLES: Good morning, everybody. I thank the Commission for the opportunity to present on behalf of the Timor and Isis Valley communities, Crawney. It's a community that's largely been overlooked in this process, and I intend to present some evidence of that as I go through.

Who am I? I'm Chris Eagles. Obviously, I'm very concerned about the Eagles and the impact to the Eagles of this project. I'm concerned about the wedgetail eagles, and I'm also concerned about the Eagles in our business. I operate with my wife, farms at Timor and Crawney, they adjoin each other. Alston is just outside the 4.5 kilometre assessment for this particular project. We will have visibility of 30 turbines, and at Glen Dhu which is next door is at Crawney, it's 5 kilometres from this development.

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My wife and I are thinking if this goes ahead we might change the name of our properties to NAD70 and NAD99. But, seriously, I'm here to speak on behalf of the Isis River communities. They constitute the communities of Timor, Crawney and Waverley. I represent 80 per cent of those residents, and we've confirmed within the last fortnight that they are supportive of me presenting on their behalf.

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What is the Isis Valley? It runs from the project area, pretty much from the Great Dividing Range down to Gundy. It's an 80 kilometre stretch of land. And the Isis Valley is particularly farming communities, and also particularly unique because it's a karst environment, and a karst environment is grass trees and caves. And yet the Isis Valley has largely been - and river - has been overlooked in this process.

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If you go through the EIS, the amended DA, the Soils and Water Report, the Amended Soils and Water Report, the DPE Assessment, the Conditions of Consent, and even the Constructability and Soils and Water Report by PSM, you won't find the Isis River mentioned. How is this possible? How is it possible that one of the three main rivers coming out of that location is not even mentioned in those reports?

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The Isis Valley communities only became aware of this particular development, the majority of the communities, in December 2020. That was after the EIS was released. So we had no input to the EIS. That's a clear breach of the New South

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Wales Guidelines 2016. We had no input to the landscape value determined by the applicants, and that's a breach of the Bulletin as well. There has been ongoing lack of consultation with these communities and it is revealed in the outcomes that we're having today in terms of this assessment.

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We did make representations to the Upper Council, Upper Hunter Council, and if I could go to slide 3, please, next one. They made three - sent three letters on behalf of the communities. I'll go to slide 4. Of most concern to us was that the Upper Hunter Council had a Development Control Plan. It had been promulgated in 2015 and has now been reissued in 2023. The Upper Hunter Development Control Plan has very clear guidelines on wind farm developments.

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This is a Development Control Plan that's been embraced by a number of councils around New South Wales, and yet this development breaches numerous components of this particular Development Control Plan. That should be very concerning to the Commissioners.

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There's been no - so the visual assessment of less than 4.5 as a boundary is somewhat ridiculous for 230 metre towers on the top of a 1,200 metre mountain range. How can 4.5 metres be - kilometres be a reasonable assessment boundary for visuals? The DCP talks about 10 kilometres, and the New South Wales Wind Energy Draft Guidelines talk about 7-and-a-half kilometres. But we, the communities, were assessed on 4-and-a-half kilometres.

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There's been no noise and vibration assessment on the ground south of the range. I'll repeat that. There's been no noise and vibration assessments done on the ground south of the range. So there is no baseline.

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Next slide please. Let's talk about traffic. We raised this with the Upper Hunter Council. The reality is that if you look at the Google Maps, the quickest path to this particular development site is going to be up the Upper Hunter Council local roads. It's - it's a 60 minute round trip shorter distance. Now, the Commissioners actually visited NAD69 so I'm hoping that you went across that range because you've been on those local roads, and they are perilous. Yes? Agree?

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So we - the Upper Hunter Council asked for this to be excluded as a condition of consent, the use of the local roads, but that hasn't happened. I'd also raise the Commission's attention to the fact that the communities of Murrurundi, and Aberdeen and Willow Tree are completely unaware of this particular development.

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There will be 6 oversize limit. So let me get this in perspective. The main street of Gungahlin is about, is perhaps wider than the main street of Murrurundi, all right? These oversize movements are going to cause major disruption to the community of Murrurundi and their businesses, and yet those communities are completely unaware of this particular project.

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5 The other thing that's going to happen is when these oversized movements, 6 per day for 9 months start travelling through that, closing the main streets of those towns, the traffic will be forced onto the rural roads. So people will be looking for other paths, and they are going to travel up the Upper Hunter Road, basically, over the Crawney Pass.

10 The last slide - the next slide, sorry, this is about the Voluntary Partnership Agreement. You've heard about this. Essentially, what's happened is over the course of this particular project, the Voluntary Partnership Agreement and funding, which was to go to local communities is basically moved to the councils themselves. So now one-third of the funding is going to the locals who are most impacted, and two-thirds is going into the councils themselves. That seems to me somewhat unfair.

15 There are other outstanding issues for the Timor community and we will be - and Crawney communities, and we'll be submitting them as part of our submission, yep.

20 If we could go to the next slide, please. The next slide. So let's just talk about the location of this wind farm. It's actually sitting on the top of the Great Dividing Range between the Crawney National Park and the Ben Halls Gap National Park. That's a 1,200 metre mountain range as you can see in the photo on the right. They're not hills, that's a mountain range. And they're not slopes, they're cliffs. So let's be clear. The turbines are going on the top of that range, and that is the source of the Isis River which is the lifeblood of our community.

30 Let's go to the next slide please. So when Crawney National Park was established, the importance of that area was recognised. In as recently as 2019, DPE came out with a management plan for that particular area and it recognises that that park protects the headwaters of the Isis and Peel Rivers, and it provides habitat connectivity along the top of the range as part of the Greater Eastern Ranges Initiative. That connectivity extends all the way to the Barringtons and goes through to Wallabadah and across to the Winjen Mountain. And further it's actually an interconnector between the inland and the coast, and this project is right in the middle of that interconnector.

40 So I don't know what's changed in five years but then it was to be conserved. Now, apparently, it can be given up for a wind farm development, apparently. How are these animals going to escape the ravages of climate change, I do not know.

45 I'll touch a little bit, just on the next slide please, one more. I'd just like to talk about the clearing that was undertaken in the area of the wind farm development. These are photos of that clearing. I'll go to the next one, please. This occurred under an LLS Approval Permit, in the area of wind turbines 21 and 22. I escalated this matter to the Minister for Energy and Environment and he said to me, "There is no evidence that either allegation is related to the wind farm proposal."

Offsets don't replace interconnectivity and removing the vegetation on the top of that range is going to dry out the sponges that serves our communities in the Isis Valley.

5 The next slide please. Sorry, just back to that previous slide, my apologies. Next done, yeah. This sets a dangerous precedent for future assessments, is all I'll say. Allowing clearing to occur during the assessment process, and then allowing the proponents to include it in their offsets after - as part of the assessment, this will give a green light to every developer around the country, in New South Wales particularly, to undertake clearing before they actually have to get the assessment
10 undertaken; right. I warned the Commissioners about this. Okay.

Let's go to the soils and water, please. Sorry, next slide, my apologies. Next slide. As I mentioned, that's the Great Dividing Range and that's where these turbines
15 are going. They are not hills, they're cliffs. Let's move to the next one.

Okay, we'll go to this one, yes. As you can see from this topographical map this is extremely steep country. Those gradient lines indicate the steepness of the country, and to the left-hand side is the Isis River. As you go up towards the top of
20 the range, those gradient lines become increasingly close. That means that country is getting extremely steep in the lead-up to the top of that range.

Now, all of those turbines are basically sitting on the precipice of that range, of that ridge line, and yet there's been so little assessment on this ridge line, it scares
25 me and it should scare the Commission.

So you can see here these are the 50 degree slopes underneath those locations on the top of that ridge line. I'll touch a little bit on the environment that's in the main valley below this area. So could we go to the next slide please, and the next one.
30 This is a karst environment. So limestone country. There are caves throughout the area. As mentioned by the Newcastle and Hunter Valley Speleologist Society, there has been a massive underestimation of the number of caves in the area because it's all been based on documents that were produced in 1986.

35 There are up to 100 caves in the area south and west of this particular development, and caves as close as, for instance, the Glen Dhu Cave is 2.2 kilometres from the actual location. The Eyrie Cave, which was only discovered in 2021, is considered to be one of the most decorated caves in the whole Timor network, is 3 kilometres from the development project area. A new species of
40 crustacean has been just identified in the Lake Cave and is the subject of ongoing international research.

Next slide please. Bushfires. The community that look after this particular area - this is a shot looking up Perrys Creek towards the top of the range. The dark
45 area you can see here, along here, is the ridge line. We've had fires in 2010 and 2020. They start with lightning strikes near the Timor Caves and they run along that escarpment, and basically run for weeks and weeks and weeks. The local

brigade, Timor, are the ones that tend to be the people first brought in to look after these fires. They rely on aerial support because you cannot look after fires in that area and fight them without aerial support.

5 Yet, amazingly, the Timor Fire Brigade was not consulted in this process at all. The Commission need to consider what the impact of fires running up those 50 degree slopes will be. I mean, the example from Sydney in 1996 was in Heathcote. The fires ran up escarpments like that and they destroyed houses three streets back from the escarpment. What's going to happen here if the winds blow - these winds
10 were blowing from the south. If they start blowing from the west, turbines many, many hundreds of metres back will be destroyed.

15 Next slide please. Our big concern as a community is that the assessment has been based on incomplete information. The rainfall data is not accurate, and the snow has not been considered.

I'm about to show you a video and basically what you'll see in this video, it's a shot of the escarpment. It's an area that you would have seen when you went to NAD69 yesterday, or the day before. And in this video, you are seeing a very small section
20 of that long escarpment that was in my previous photos. It's the area underneath the escarpment from Crawney National Park through to Ben Halls Gap. What you will see is landslides in that country. What you will see is highly erodible valleys leading up to the ridge line, and you will see silt from some of the work that's already been undertaken in the project area, that's coming from that area. If I could
25 ask for the video to be shown, I'd appreciate it. Thank you very much.

<VIDEO SHOWN

30 **MR EAGLES:** This is the Perrys Creek which originates from the area I showed you earlier that was cleared under the LLS permit. This is the Isis River north, and then we have the Isis River running south.

<VIDEO CONCLUDED

35 **MR EAGLES:** Thank you. I know Greg Chapman will be speaking next about the soils, soil aspects of this particular project area. All I will say to the Commissioners is there is extreme risk in undertaking development on soils that are that fragile on a ridge line that narrow. You cannot build erosion control on 50 degree slopes. It's not possible to engineer that sort of erosion control. Allowing
40 this to go ahead and building turbines on the top of that range is basically condemning the Isis River to becoming a silt trap.

45 I will just summarise the issues for the community in closing. The PL and Isis sources will no longer be protected if this proceeds. The wildlife corridor is being replaced by biodiversity offsets which are islands. The interconnector between the inland and the coast is basically no longer going to be available for wildlife. They

will no longer be able to escape the ravages of climate change, and increasingly severe El Niño and La Niña events.

5 The voluntary partnership - not that I care about money - is no longer actually for impacted communities. There's no baseline of noise and vibration assessments actually been undertaken south of the range. The community was not engaged as part of the visual assessment which is in clear breach of the Bulletin. The visual
10 assessment of properties in the Isis Valley under less than 4.5 kilometres - in other words properties like mine at Alston, which is at 5 kilometres - not being impacted yet seeing potentially 60 or 65 - sorry, 30 or 35 turbines for the rest of our lives is ludicrous. This is a mountain range.

15 There's been no restraint on the use of the Upper Hunter local roads. Murrurundi is completely unaware of this development and should have been. There seems to be yet to be access for this. In the end - I will close. This is an unsuitable location and it poses unsuitable - unacceptable risks, I should say. Thank you. (Applause)

MS SYKES: Thank you very much, Chris.

20 **MR EAGLES:** Thanks.

MS SYKES: I just had one question. It's just clarification, really. Thank you very much for the video. And in terms of the landslides that were indicated on the
25 video -

MR EAGLES: Yep.

MS SYKES: - and then there was the footage of silt, evidence of silt throughout the river. Could you give some context around, you know, when - like, if landslips
30 occur in that region, whether it be through the hydrological conditions or the fragility of the soil, et cetera, but when would you typically see that flow-through to silt in the river?

MR EAGLES: Okay.

35 **MS SYKES:** Can we have a context around the timing of when the video was taken?

40 **MR EAGLES:** Sure. So that video was only taken a year ago. It's essentially just a small section of this area, right. It's focusing in on that, this particular area, I think it is. But the same applies to all of this escarpment. Essentially, all of this escarpment is similar soil type, right? We know because I farm here. This is my farm, looking at that every day. We have the same problem on our farm. We get scars and washer bays that occur because of the soil types that are (indistinct);
45 okay? The video that I showed you of the Isis River and the silting that was occurring there was actually as a result - look, I can't say because I haven't investigated it thoroughly, but it coincided with the clearing that was done at the

head of Perrys Creek which is where I showed you wind turbines 21 and 22 are going to go, and that's where the LLS clearing is.

MS SYKES: Right.

5

MR EAGLES: I can't categorically say that. All I can say is all of the adjoining streams were running clean at the time. The only stream that was full of silt was Perrys Creek running out of that area, yeah.

10 **MS SYKES:** Okay. Thank you.

MR EAGLES: That's all right.

MR EAGLES: Thank you.

15

MS SYKES: Did you have any questions? (Applause) So our next speaker is Greg Chapman who is speaking on behalf of Hills of Gold Preservation Inc. He's also speaking on behalf of Dr Rob Banks of Hills of Gold Preservation Inc. Greg, it would be helpful if you could delineate at which point you're speaking on behalf of Dr Rob Banks and then on behalf of the Hills of Gold Preservation Inc.

20

MR CHAPMAN: Sure. Well, it's actually two presentations.

MS SYKES: Yes.

25

MR CHAPMAN: And I'm pleased to be here to represent the soil and land. There was - this is actually started on the wrong slide show. This is me speaking as me. But anyway, this is in response to the response of the response. So there was the EIS. Then there was reviews by Dr Banks, Professor Thoms and myself, and that went to Planning, and they asked PSM Geotechnical Engineering to review that, and this is what I'm responding to.

30

So if we can go to the next slide please. They made three points in summary and I'll discuss each one of these. There's a lot of ground to cover, a lot of material. So I'll just basically say that the first one was the interaction of the proposed development with the terrain, which is quite difficult, and they said this, "Details indicating use of standard engineering practices for controlling soil erosion are proposed."

35

What a great set of weasel words. There's a second issue, was the insufficient and incorrect characterisation of the soil types and the land capability and they concluded, "It doesn't really matter, it's moderate to high erodibility, depends on the slope." They don't think it's consequential.

40

The third one was: what happens in the future? What are the climate change impacts and what about the decommissioning after the life of this project? They concluded, "It's second order effect and it's unlikely to result in any significant

45

changes to the impact assessment." I'm saying that if this proposal was on undulating sandstone soils, I would agree with all those points. Unfortunately, it's not.

5 Next slide please. The footprint still remains unknown. We have wind turbine blades which are at least double the length of this hall trying to come up several hundred metres through what's slip-prone and very steep erosion-prone land. I'll get on to this in a minute, but they were saying that the erosion control processes, you can just use the standard stuff, grassed waterways, level sills and so forth,
10 without looking at how difficult some of these things will be. The difficulties technically are huge and they say, "Oh yeah, we'll just address this in the construction phase." But by then it will be too late. Their optimistic suggestions of achieving soil stability on very steep batters, 2 to 1 batters for self-mulching soils over 30 years, good luck with that.

15 I have here some of that soil. It's soft and squidgy. It doesn't hold up well. It's wet quite often. When it gets really wet, it just turns to mush. It liquefies. It gets very heavy. It swells. It's hard to deal with.

20 The other thing is that they ignore mass movement. The interaction of mass movement and soil erosion is enormous, because when you have disturbed soils, they are prone to erosion. Mass movement disturbs the soil. You get a rainfall event over the top of that and it washes, it goes straight down into the creek.

25 The proposed road, this is a PSM map where they tried to straighten out where these turbines will go and the transverse track - actually we might go to the next slide, thanks. These red bits are where the road is 30 per cent slope. The steepest road in New South Wales, Ahearn Avenue in Coogee, which is tarmac, it's sealed, is 30-and-a-half per cent; half a per cent difference. How are you possibly going to
30 get those really heavy pieces of equipment up something that's so steep and slippery and soft? How's that going to happen?

Next please. Sorry, just before we go. These slopes here are mapped as greater than 30 per cent. So it's actually way steeper than what that looks. I've also
35 mapped out the mass movement prone areas just really quickly, and you can see from the shape of the terrain that this is full of historic and often very large slips. For instance, here, you can see that the flow around the side of the rock, those slips that we saw on Chris's video, are miniscule compared to what can happen.

40 The next please. The insufficient incorrect characterisation of soil types and soil capability: Rob Banks reviewed the EIS in '21 and said, "Hey, there's no soil information here. There's no mapping in detail that you would expect to see for a development of this sort of intensity on land of this sort of nature." Not there. No geotech information. Where's that? Why isn't it there? But we do have some New
45 South Wales Government information. So it seems to have been ignored and discounted.

Can we just have a look at the next slide, please. This is a map which is on eSPADE. Anyone can have a look at it, it's on the web. That's looking at land and soil capability for water for erosion. Class 8. That's the extreme category between Point Pass, Ben Halls Gap. There's a lot of class 8 land there, and it's not sustainable for land use. Humans keep away.

Next. This is the same story for mass movement. Class 8 extreme. Available information. How come this hasn't been properly taken into account?

Next please. It's inconsequential. They're saying moderate to high erodibility depending on slope is considered to be inconsequential. But erosion depends on rainfall erosivity, soil erodibility, slope, slope length, ground cover, management factors. And we've heard speakers ad infinitum talk about how the rainfall on the top of the mountain is way, way bigger than it is for around here, way bigger, probably double. Nobody knows. Nobody's measured it. Had six years of this process going on. Nobody's even started to actually measure what's happening.

If you look at the revised universal soil loss equation, in the EIS, they've come up with a number of 471 tonnes per hectare per year. 471 tonnes per hectare per year is pretty well off the scale. 60 tonnes per hectare per year for a construction site is considered extreme. More than 2 tonnes per hectare per year can impact water quality.

Now this is all very well, but the soils, they're from basalt. They're the only soils in Australia which have high levels of phosphorous. The phosphorous is bound very tightly onto iron oxides which are part of the play.

Can we go on to the next one, please. What happens is that the phosphorous only moves when there's erosion. So here we go down the hill. Exhibit B. This stuff will stay cloudy for a very long, very long time. It's very easily moved once it's in train for erosion. So, it goes off in the river, keeps on going until it gets out to sea. Low oxygen environments on the way where the water's still, where the water's stopped running. It runs out of oxygen. The chemistry flips over and the iron releases the phosphorous.

The phosphorous is food for blue-green algae. This is one of the reasons why Chaffey Dam is one of the biggest blue-green algae bloom areas in Australia. That stuff, 471 tonnes per hectare, we're talking about for 471 tonnes, between 9 and 20-odd tonnes of phosphorous if the whole lot came down into Chaffey Dam and then made its way down into the Murray-Darling Basin. We've already got a problem there. How much worse is that going to be?

Next, please. So, how do you prevent those inconsequential consequences? Erosion control is not necessarily going to work when areas are disturbed. So the next thing is sediment control, and that basically means big - building big basins which are designed for the 90th percentile rainfall over 5 days. So you think maximum rainfall for 5 days, that's how big those things need to be. You can't put

them on a steep slope. They just won't carry the amount of water that's required. It has to go somewhere flat. If it's somewhere flat, how far away is that going to be from the development footprint? How do you get water safely, dirty water safely, into these things?

5

And what about if they're built on a shelf, then is that shelf going to slip as well because it's got extra loading of water coming into it all the time, extra weight of the sediment, extra weight on the soil.

10 Next, please. So, there's land instability consequences as well. The extra loading of these 200 tonne -plus turbines on the top and edges of cliffs of basalt which are basically lava flows, the lava cools, it cracks and makes columns. Water goes down through those columns. A natural process. It gets down to where there's a layer of ash or a smaller basalt flow or something like that. It wets it, causes
15 spring to come out the side. It gradually, through being wet, it weathers, it gets soft, it loses its cohesion, it becomes slippery, and over we go. So, who carries the cost of failure of these sorts of things? Is that going to be the company or the community?

20 Next. So there's other things going on with landslip. It's not just to do with teetering basalt columns. It's also got to do with the soil itself because it gets heavy. It's got no strength, fills up with water and it can move. So, here's a red soil, and they say, okay, this has got a mass movement problem. But as humans, we cannot see what's happening in the ground below us. You can take a few
25 samples here and there. There's always going to be a residual risk. You just can't sample it enough. So the wall has been built but, whoops, there was something that wasn't accounted for in there. Every time you dig out something from the bottom of that, there's going to be more stuff coming in.

30 So, the geotechnical way of dealing with landslip is to put in rock bolts, rock anchors, dentition dowels, all sorts of stuff. Very expensive. There's 5 kilometres of this stuff. The other thing that happens is that you get a bit of run-off, extra run-off. It comes across over here and there's a landslip.

35 The next slide please. So, we know that from the mass movement that creates disturbance. That material there is very, very prone to erosion. It causes blue-green algal blooms. It can smother aquatic habitats. And it's very expensive to repair. The landslip on the Merriwa-Willow Tree Road has just had \$38 million-odd to reopen. Now, this is a road that's been built by the government. It's a road built to
40 a recipe and not a price.

In the development that's proposed, they're looking at roads going over 30 per cent slope country for 5 kilometres. As far as they're concerned, that has to last 30 years. It probably has to last a lot longer than that. Who's going to foot the bill
45 when the damages exceed the financial viability of this development?

Next, please. This slide is a little bit out of order but the coarse sediment impacts - basically you get lots of rocks. The soil's washed away. Heaps and heaps of rocks choking the streams. The pools that were there are gone. Those casuarinas have probably got a couple of foot of rocky sediment built up against them. It's quite a different thing. This is in the Warrumbungles. Debris flows started here and this is the last point of where it can be seen. Every single pool in that creek has been obliterated and smothered. That goes on for 2 kilometres, and it's just a small debris flow.

10 Next, please. So, the decommissioning is a second order effect. We pretty well touched on this, but to keep this without landslip or erosion for 30 years, who's going to do the maintenance? Where's the budget for that? And that has to - 30 years, you can expect quite a few snow storms. When it snows, that blocks drains and culverts, and creates other erosion problems because those standardised designed erosion control works just won't be happening. So, you know, you can think of not as a second order effect but a repeat of the first order.

20 Next, please. So, in conclusion, basically we don't know what the area extent of disturbance is, but with landslip and need for sediment detention basins, it's going to be way, way bigger than what was in the initial EIS. The size of the equipment going up these slopes is enormous. The turning circles are huge. The amount of disturbance is going to be a lot more than what they reckon.

25 The erosion and sediment control is definitely of consequence. Repairing the landslips is likely to be problematically expensive. It causes big long delays, and may end up being a societal cost when it exceeds the cost of what the developers have got in their financial tin.

30 So we really don't know what the extent of these risks are, and the costs haven't been calculated. So it's a matter of environmental and economic viability. So this is obviously a risky and difficult location. State map in the background. I'm noting that not all of New South Wales is red. There's plenty of other places to go. Why not invest in a safer alternative than this, taking on this unknown but palpably large risk which hasn't been assessed because there's no data?

35 And, finally, it should never have got to this point. The process of environmental impact assessment hasn't had the environmental impact assessed. It's not a statement. That's a supposition or a snow job. Thank you. (Applause)

40 **MS SYKES:** Thank you very much.

MR CHAPMAN: We've got Rob's slide show, Rob Banks. This is likely to be a repeat of the same. Rob's wife is very sick - anyway.

45 Next slide, please. These are soil landscape descriptions of what's happening on the Liverpool Range further to the west. Two soil landscapes. Nobody's going to

be able to read that from there but basically they're driven by landslip. The reason why they're there is landslip. This, that bit there, is a deposit from a landslip.

5 Next, please. The EIS basically didn't really use any understanding of what's going on with the soils. They haven't looked at what that list of hazards are for those two soil landscapes. The information is available. It's obviously very steep basalt country, dominated by mass movement processes. And although Rob complained about this, and they were asked to redo the EIS, and they came back with a better slope map, still no soil information.

10 Next, please. This might answer your question, Commissioner, about what happens when there's mass movement. Here's one in, I think that's in New Zealand. It's come down and you can see where that material's just going to wash into the nearest waterway. There's another one that's a bit closer in the Isis.

15 Next, thanks. We do have debris flows. They happen all over the place. They often block roads. These ones are on the Walcha Road. That's not as much of a hazard as what you'd expect say up around somewhere like Crawney Pass or Ben Halls Gap.

20 Next. The landslips, as I said, they're not just little things. Have a look at the scale of that and how the land has dropped down. It's made a step. Every time you see a step in this sort of landscape it means that there's been a big slip years and years ago. So there's various other things - slumping. You can see very lumpy terrain. That lumpiness will gradually smooth over but it can be there for thousands of
25 years. And we can see those things using Lidar and so forth. And so that, basically, is something that can be mapped out.

Okay. Next, thanks. Columnar basalt. So here it is near Warrick in Queensland and the material has been dug out on a steep slope and it's covered with those
30 wires and net, but it doesn't necessarily stop things from happening. Very difficult for people to assess what's going on.

Next. And it's not just slips from above blocking things, these ones are even more problematic to deal with because you have to go and rebuild the road over
35 something that's unstable for many metres below.

Next. That sort of landslip can lead to all sorts of problems; so we're talking about safety for humans and infrastructure below as well.

40 Next. So Rob's saying this is the same landscape as Nowlands Pass on the New England Highway which had to be rebuilt at a cost of tens of millions of dollars to be made more stable. He's saying the same thing with the Merriwa Road - there's a typo in there, it's 38, not 80 million. It takes years to repair. The mass movement issues haven't been addressed by being gainsayed. Saying, "Oh, yes, it's
45 inconsequential." The erosion from it's inconsequential. And even if there's flatter areas in the landscape, they can still have fall from above, and they can also cause mass movement below. And there's a high risk of sediment delivery into the Peel

and Isis Valleys. And there's no real mitigation effects of that. Okay, I think that's it. Yep. (Applause)

MR CHAPMAN: Thank you.

5

MS SYKES: Thank you very much, Greg, for your very informative submission. Did you have any questions at all? We're okay for questions at this point.

MR CHAPMAN: Okay. Do you want these? (Laughs) Thank you.

10

MS SYKES: Our next speaker is Brian Tomalin.

MR TOMALIN: Okay. Thanks for the opportunity to present. As you say, I'm Brian Tomalin. I was a grazier east of Hanging Rock for 36 years, and I still have a connection with the district through there - so I'm still Deputy Captain Hanging Rock Bushfire Brigade. And just incidentally, our property is now part of Ben Halls Gap Nature Reserve. You've asked us to cover what's in the submissions. I'm going to talk mainly about what's not covered.

15

20 Next slide. The project's located on the edge of a very steep escarpment. The contour lines in that previous map are 10 metres apart, so you can see how steep it is. None of the public's documentation gives any indication of the contours or extreme nature of the terrain. The EIS amendments and subsequent assessments and reviews do not cover many of the issues that are vital to enable a risk assessment of the impacts of the development. The rainfall on the tops has been underestimated. There is no detailed analysis of the rainfall or run-off or the changes that will result from climate change.

25

The rainfall actually ranges from a 35-year average on Morrisons Gap Road of 1,266 millimetres a year, to approximately 1,500 millimetres a year out at Mt Wombramurra. The importance of the underground flows that keep the rivers and creeks flowing hasn't been considered. The hydrological changes as a result of the development have not been considered. The structure of the mountain which is vital to understanding the hydrology has not been addressed. Detailed site specific engineering requirements required for a unique location have not been developed. And without such information, the risk practicality and constructability of the project cannot be assessed. The illustrations and diagrams in the documentation are not applicable to the site of the development.

30

35

40 New slide. As we said, the project sits on a very steep basalt escarpment prone to mass movement. There are 24 turbines sited within 10 to 30 metres of the edge of the escarpment, without room for the 100 metres of micro siting due to the project boundary in Morrisons Gap Road Reserve. Site specific engineering details are required to assess the risk of the stability of these turbines.

45

New slide. High rainfall and steep terrain generates large volumes of high velocity flows even in first order streams. Most of the first order streams are on the edge of

the escarpment and drop very sharply. The initial drop of the first order stream south of turbine 2 falls 60 metres in 35 metres. The first order stream west of turbine 42 falls 490 metres in 1,400 metres.

5 Turbine 6 sits on a 10 to 15 metre wide ridge and drops 90 metres in 150 metres. The embankment of the transfer track on the north arm at Talbots Creek is on a first order stream which falls 245 metres in 470 metres. And in a rainfall event of 50 millimetres in an hour, which is not unusual on the tops, that culvert for that embankment will have to deal with approximately 5 megalitres of water in an
10 hour.

Site specific designs are required to enable the risk assessment of the erosion and sediment control measures. Concept designs are not sufficient to enable the risk assessment of this unique location.

15 Next slide. The EIS and subsequent assessments deal inadequately with overland flows and at no stage are underground flows considered. The unique climate on the tops has not been considered, and the contribution of high rainfall, long periods of low cloud and mist, and winter snow on the hydrology of the area has
20 not been considered. The risk to the hydrological regime, freshwater ecosystems and downstream flow has not been addressed.

New slide. All this contributes to the ability of the mountain to absorb the moisture, and the big sponge effect on downstream flows has not been considered.
25 The headwater streams, wetlands, swamps and bogs that exist along the top, along the watershed maintain, the flow - downstream flows when the rain stops. The example, the spring which feeds the big dam on Nycooma, which the spring is 50 metres below the summit of Mt Wombramurra, did not dry up in the 1980s drought. That just gives you some idea of the water-holding ability of the
30 mountain.

The headwater regions of the Murray-Darling Basin typically generate up to 80 per cent of the run-off to downstream areas. The vegetation removal, both authorised and unauthorised, in the project footprint has already changed the flow
35 and absorption patterns of the mountain, and further clearing concrete surfaces, hard stands, and roads will further negatively impact the absorption and flow regimes, and has not been addressed.

Next slide. The importance of groundwater resources must be considered to
40 address the risk profile of the development. The reliability of flows to the Upper Hunter, Upper Peel River, Chaffey Dam, and Tamworth City water supply have not been considered, and the environmental changes in the headwaters of three major river systems to the wider region have not been considered. There is
45 insufficient geotechnical information to assess the impact of water flows or potential changes to the hydrological regime, freshwater ecosystems or downstream flows, and this must be known before the project is approved and the precautionary principle must be applied.

5 Next slide. The CSIRO research shows that climate change will result in rainfall events that change in intensity resulting in increased wet run-offs and soil erosion, and this has not been considered. The extreme slopes do not provide sufficient room for collective - effective collective systems and discharge point including grass swales and spreaders, as Greg has pointed out. The Appendix L, Constructability Advice, notes that the proposed erosion and sediment control measures require careful design. This must be done prior to approval. Concept designs are not appropriate for a project on this site.

10 Next slide. Other speakers have dealt with the mass movement risk of the basalt soils of Liverpool Range. The transverse track located on the shelves between the steep drops of the escarpment crosses deeply in size gullies, and a study of the land forms, it's obvious that these shelves were formed by landslips in the past.

15 Next slide. Erosion and mass movement potential is increased, with the disturbance required for infrastructure development including erosion and sediment control. The increased severity of rainfall events already contribute to an increase in the erosion and flood damage. And you can see what was ripped out of the ground and deposited in the creek from one rain event which was only 40 minutes of rain.

25 Something which has not been considered has been concrete cancer. The low pH of the river - ridge is not considered and it wouldn't be evident from the desktop analysis that the EIS and assessments are based on. Our experience shows that the ridge increases in acidity as it rises from the Hanging Rock end, and soil tests that we did on Nycooma in the 1980s, when the owner was trying to get some grass to grow, recorded pH levels as less than 4.

30 The bottom fence wires placed within 57 metres of the ground start to rot off in 5 to 10 years, and steel fence posts have a relatively short life and rot off at ground level. The risk of concrete cancer in these conditions poses significant risk to the stability of the turbines and the concrete structures.

35 Next slide. The information in the EIS and amendments and reviews of the project appear to be based predominantly on desktop studies. The information is not sufficiently robust to enable a risk assessment of the project. The lack of site specific information requires a strict application of the precautionary principle, and the location is not suitable for a development such as a wind farm.

40 The location is best suited for its potential contribution to the environment, and most attempts at grazing in the past, up until recently, have been unsuccessful. If you look at the maps and who owned what when, since 1900 the banks have owned that country for most of the time.

45

One thing that hasn't been mentioned is, and it's been mentioned that it's a very windy ridge - it is - but the turbulence hasn't been mentioned and you need to look at the impact of turbulence on the efficiency of turbines.

5 Now, the other thing which has come up a few times is bushfires. I've got a model of bushfire modelling which I've sent to the Commissioners which we won't have time to deal with today.

10 **MS SYKES:** Thank you very much. (Applause) Thank you very much, Brian, and yes, we look forward to seeing your information on the bushfire models as well that you've submitted. Thank you. We're just going to adjourn for a very quick break, just a 10-minute break, but we will be coming back with our next speaker Megan Trousdale.

15 **<THE MEETING ADJOURNED AT 11.35 AM**

<THE MEETING RESUMED AT 11.55 AM

20 **MS SYKES:** Thank you, and we'll recommence Day 2 of Hills of Gold Wind Farm Public Meeting. Our next speaker is Megan Trousdale who is representing Nundle Business Tourism and Marketing Group Inc.

25 **MS TROUSDALE:** Commissioners, this is not a decision between 64, 62, 47 turbines or some number in between. It is a choice between 47 turbines or none. I respect that there are a few members of Nundle Business Tourism and Marketing Group that have a pecuniary interest in the wind farm, and there are a few members that have previously written supporting submissions. A clear majority of members have previously written objecting submissions, signed petitions objecting to the proposal are members of the Hills of Gold Preservation Inc and
30 own non-associated dwellings.

35 Next slide, please. Nundle Business Tourism and Marketing Group has been established for more than a decade, and we celebrated our tenth anniversary by commissioning a vintage inspired tourism poster and postcard for Nundle in 2021.

Next slide, please. Our group funds and creates marketing communications, including an annual marketing plan, Nundle logo, brand, website, brochure, social media and print advertising.

40 Next slide. We receive annual funding from Destination Tamworth in addition to member contributions, and we work with Destination Tamworth to cross-promote in marketing communications for the greater benefit of regional tourism.

45 Next slide, please. In 2012 our members and Destination Tamworth contributed 25,000 to receive a dollar-for-dollar \$25,000 grant from Inland Tourism New South Wales to fund a \$50,000 12-month marketing campaign.

Next slide, please. Our most successful marketing activity is our Nundle Destination video. If we have time at the end, I will play it but it is visible on Nundle.com.au.

- 5 Next slide, please. It communicates what makes Nundle and Hanging Rock distinctive and why people choose to live and visit here. What the video captures is an explanation of the Nundle brand, the peace, the nature, heritage, food and wine, and events.
- 10 Next slide, please. In the past 12 months, Nundle has hosted at least one workshop a month on homesteading skills like sour dough making, fermenting, wellbeing retreats on mindful movement and breath work, and creative skills like songwriting, eco plant dyeing and hat making.
- 15 Next slide, please. Next slide. Next slide, thank you. Our reputation for pooling marketing funds for the benefit of all has seen us share our expertise on panels for the University of New England, the Plains, Country Outback New South Wales and Liverpool Plains and Glen Innes Chambers of Commerce. Other communities ask how we achieve what we do. It comes down to trust, goodwill, and motivation
- 20 to volunteer. The Hills of Gold Wind Farm has damaged all of this.

February 7th is the 6-year anniversary of being invited to a meeting of community members to be told Wind Energy Partners was investigating a wind energy project here. One of the first things the developers' representatives said was, "If the community doesn't want it, it won't happen." I've attended multiple information

25 sessions hosted by EnergyCo, New South Wales Farmers' Association, and the Department that discuss the importance of social licence. And yet the Department's recommendation for approval flies in the face of repeated evidence of lack of social licence for Hills of Gold Wind Farm. The Assessment Report and

30 Conditions underestimate the transport biodiversity and visual impacts of Hills of Gold Wind Farm, impacting residents, pre-existing tourism businesses, and visitors.

Our visitor experience encompasses the landscape surrounding Nundle and

35 Hanging Rock. Whether you live here or visit, the experience of arriving home, or visitor is about the range. The Wind Farm would be visible on all approaches. It would be visible from the village, Hanging Rock Lookout, and the Dag Sheep Station, a wedding venue. The range is the altar for our sacred ceremonies. The entrance to Nundle Village would be industrialised, and valued mature tree

40 removed.

Next slide, please. Construction traffic on Barry Road threatens to disturb the Crown land recreation area, Sheba Dams, that is popular with tourists and locals for its peaceful ambience and ease of being. CASA advises that turbines with 200

45 candelas, at least 900 metres apart are not significant beyond 3 kilometres. Yet our community has no idea what the real impact will be on residents and visitors. Our family, and other members of the community, have travelled to Sapphire Wind

Farm between Glen Innes and Inverell to see what 200 candela hazard lighting looks like, and it is not what we want to live with or impose on our tourists.

5 The Visual Independent Expert Review confirms what the majority of our members have been saying for 6 years. The change of character, to a combination of natural appearing and wind energy character, is significant. The proposed change will be critical to the ongoing community perception of the value of the surrounding landscape.

10 We know that the SEP recognises that wind energy developments have potential for negative impacts on regional cities like Tamworth and limit developments to outside 10 kilometres of the CBD, yet this proposal is 8 kilometres from Nundle and 3 kilometres from Hanging Rock. Our communities contribute to the liveability of Tamworth and the visitor economy.

15 In December last year, we saw New South Wales Land and Environment Court refusal of consent of a 10 megawatt Burrundulla solar farm 2.4 kilometres east of Mudgee. Midwestern Regional Council considered it an alien feature in the existing landscape which could be irreversibly changed by the development.

20 Senior Commissioner Susan Dixon ruled the development not suitable for the site because the development, whilst permissible, is uncharacteristic and will intrude into the landscape. Commissioner Dixon says:

25 "Failure to consider community views or values as part of landscape character was a significant flaw, and sense of place has not been sufficiently factored into the assessment."

30 The same has happened here. The Department has recommended approval of this project partly because of its capacity to connect to the grid fast. With no access agreement with Nungaroo Aboriginal Land Council, non-associated dwellings in key access locations, construction not resolved for multiple roads and Tamworth Regional Council opposed to the project, construction starting in 2025 may be good public relations. But it is not realistic.

35 Six years into this process I do not believe developer timelines. The visual impact on the approach and surrounding Nundle Hanging Rock, Crawney and Timor is dismissed because of low population. It doesn't take into account the 100,000 annual tourists to Nundle and Hanging Rock.

40 The impact of two years of construction traffic and road works on tourism is dismissed. It has already had a material impact on the tourism economy. Community division associated with Hills of Gold Wind Farm has meant community members cannot work together on committees, and has contributed to
45 the Go for Gold Festival being disbanded.

5 This is a slide of that event. This \$40,000 event - that's how much it cost to put on - generated more than \$350,000 in turnover for Nundle businesses and stall holders. Now, that's an old figure. That's pre-2019 when the last event was held. Our community has achieved much in the past by applying for Federal, State and Local Government grants, without the environmental, social and economic impacts of a Wind Farm.

10 The architect designed \$110,000 playground across the road installed in 2010 is an example of that. We've just installed a new community garden mural at the Nundle Library. That's another example of how we do things. Events now tend to be organised by community members either supporting the Wind farm or opposing the wind farm. This does not bode well for administration of a community benefit fund. I just have a couple more paragraphs.

15 Next slide, please. Any suggestion that Hills of Gold Wind Farm could be a tourism attraction or hold tourism events is mythical and not based on lived tourism experience of addressing public liability risk, finding staff, accommodating staff, and living the marketing of a business 24/7.

20 The success of any tourism business is people buy-in. If the local majority do not support it, no amount of PR spin will make it work. An agri-tourism leader gave me the following advice: Wind farms are not a major tourism attraction for visitors. They don't appear in any tourism stats at all. Nature and agriculture attract visitation, not wind farms.

25 I ask you, Commissioners, to protect our pre-existing tourism industry for the benefit of Nundle, Hanging Rock and neighbouring regions and reject Hills of Gold Wind Farm. (Applause)

30 **MS SYKES:** Megan, sorry, before you sit down - you don't have to go back up - but you are very welcome to submit the video that we were unable to show today as part of your submission. Thank you very much.

35 Our next speaker is Mark Fogarty from ReD4NE, online.

40 **MR FOGARTY:** Good morning, Commissioners. Good morning to the audience there. Thank you very much for taking the opportunity to come up and hear from the community. I hope we can add some value to what I think has been very inspiring and compelling testimony. I listened to a fair bit of it yesterday.

45 Just by way of background, ReD4 is an incorporated community group in the New England. It stands for Responsible Energy Development for New England, consisting of coordinating about 11-odd groups across the New England's geography.

ReD4 is very familiar with planning law and practice. We're very familiar with impact assessment, particularly in the New England and we've got good insight

into energy economics. We are familiar with the Hills of Gold. They're in a good position, I think, to offer a perspective which I hope is useful to your deliberations.

5 Our position on behalf of the members is objection to the whole project. We don't think it's suitable. I think yesterday reaffirmed, just dealing with the debates across the whole of the New England process, is only just part of the story. I think what's unravelled yesterday is a much bigger picture of fundamental flaws that need to be exposed and understood.

10 Today I just wanted to concentrate of three things. The strength of the LGA conclusion: this is a level of government closest to community and they say reject and object. The ignorance of the developer in trying to undermine the integrity of the Planning Guidelines, ReD4 doesn't see where DPE applied a forward approach to visual impact assessment.

15 And we want to comment on the last desperado grab through voluntary acquisition. And also I think we just want to conclude I think with just a little bit of the unmentionables; that is the project economics. We want to question and put on the table, I think the fact that there needs to be an inquiry into this. We have
20 right the way through the project a capex. When you distil that down it suggests somewhere around 2.14 million per megawatt installed. But as we've heard time and time again, that doesn't seem to take account of all the additional costs and things on a very expensive installation.

25 So how is there compelling public benefit, is the question. I guess [REDACTED] will summarise that from his perspective at the end of this morning or this afternoon. Why are we asking the community to throw their property values under the bus? Why shouldn't we be asking the developer to lift their skirt, so to speak, on the economic justification? And the Planning Act, of course in its objectives, is about
30 the promotion of social and economic wellbeing. It's about facilitating the ecological sustainment and development by considering economic as well as environmental and social factors.

35 So, you know, there's a dearth of compelling public interest, I believe, coming forward from the project. I should move just to slide 2, if possible. ReD4 constantly deals with State Governments (indistinct) to advise on, and to advocate planning, governments new and old. To be fair, on new policy, they are always - they always ask, they always listen. So, for example, [REDACTED], if
40 she's still in the audience, she spent, I think pretty much two weeks from the arduous process of communicating new guidelines on the road, explaining and steering input and from - I guess, from the community's perspective that was appreciated.

45 **MS SYKES:** Mark, I'm not sure if you can hear me?

MR FOGARTY: Yeah.

MS SYKES: I just need to interrupt at this point. If you could please refrain from making - naming individuals as part of the assessment process, that would be much appreciated.

5 **MR FOGARTY:** Okay. It's patently aware that an agency like DPA are trying to assure the (indistinct) to reflect modernity and realities of the energy transition. Social licence is critical to that. As we've seen with HumeLink, VNI (indistinct) and the offshore wind farm processes. The Planning Guidelines are planning principles. They remain very much work-in-progress. They're living documents.
10 Impact assessments have been a critical centrepiece to these guidelines since 2002, Draft Guidelines 2011, renewable action plans Wind Guidelines.

So the question of visual impact assessment has been prior to these guidelines have been hit and miss. The developer seems to rely on Taralga Landscape
15 Guardians v Minister for planning. I don't know whether they intend to address that. Maybe that's in part of the concluding - their concluding submissions. But if you look back at that judgment it is set against 8 megawatts installed. It's set against an inspection of Crookwell less than 7 megawatts. And, of course, as we've seen in the Department's reference there's some 20,000 megawatts to maintain
20 capacity, and their conclusion removing 11 turbines would not jeopardise that. So the position event by the developer is of no - taking away the Impact Guidelines is of no value. Can I just quickly go to slide 4 and then I'll conclude quickly?

25 **MS SYKES:** No, thank you. We've actually reached the end of our time. If you could sort of move through quickly and conclude, that would be appreciated.

MR FOGARTY: Conclusion. So, look, just - clearly this is a project which doesn't fit. You've heard that. It was wrongly placed. It's basically what we would call originators who follow the eye along, drop down with their finger, hold it in
30 the air, and ask the question: if there's wind here, there's wire here, then you've got a project. As we've seen, most of the other fatal flaws haven't been addressed.

And under the blanket of bankability we question the cost. We know the cost of the turbines has gone up, yet we don't see what this cost is. We know where the
35 energy prices have been pushed down. We question how this particular project is going to contribute to that. So look, at the end of the day, I think it's energy cause for their consideration, but in my observation having looked at these projects over 20 years, they've bought a lemon. Fools with gold. It's in the wrong place, poor place and so, therefore, non-determination from the IPC is warranted. That's it.
40 And we'll have a strong submission, Commissioners, that we'll put in. I thank you for your time and we hand it back to you unless there's a question.

MS SYKES: Thank you very much, Mark. (Applause)
45 Yeah, and we certainly look forward to reading your written submission post today's presentation.

MR FOGARTY: Thank you.

MS SYKES: Thank you.

MR FOGARTY: Okay, thank you.

5

MS SYKES: Our next speaker is Russell Sydenham who is speaking on behalf of Friends of the Wind Farm.

10 **MR SYDENHAM:** Commissioners, ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon. My name is Russell Sydenham, and I'm talking on behalf of the members of Friends of the Wind Farm. This group was formed a few years ago and was set up to provide accurate information about the process of building a wind farm and, as a group, to show support for the project. The group is informal but has had up to 120 attendees at organised information sessions over the past 5 years.

15

The key messages we would like to present to the Commission are: A large number of the community in support of the Hills of Gold Wind Farm remain silent for fear of causing conflict, of being intimidated, or having their businesses boycotted by those with an opposing agenda. Members of the Friends of the Wind Farm comprise local people. Some have lived in Nundle for generations. Others have moved into the district because of the beautiful location and were attracted to the friendly, inviting town and community.

20

25 Many have volunteered for multiple organisations in the town over the years. They love Nundle and strongly believe that a renewable energy project can coexist and enhance the community. Many of the members of this group are young family units with small children who are typically unable to attend information sessions or voice their support when the opportunities arise such as this one.

30

Over the past 6 years, there was a great deal of discussion and consultation with the proponents on several occasions and they made presentations to the community in information and question and answer forums, both in Nundle and in Hanging Rock. The proponent has also set up an information hub in the main street of Nundle which is manned by a local.

35

The group was given a brief opportunity to present a case for support for the project to Tamworth Regional Council in February 2022. I will submit a copy of the letter to council to request a hearing with councillors afterwards. The Friends of the Wind Farm note that the proponents have amended the scope of the project to satisfy concerns raised by this group, the community, and local government.

40

45 We feel that the changes are an improvement to the impacts on transport, biodiversity and constructability of the project. The group also considers that there are many benefits that this project will bring to this locality, the LGAs in the New England region, and the State. The economic benefits clearly include very real help with cost-of-living relief by discounts on power bills for the local community; significant direct grant funding for local organisations and special interest groups.

The flow of cash into the local economy: it has been estimated that similar projects that a construction worker will spend about \$22,000 locally on food, accommodation, fuel, et cetera, per year.

5 There is also the Community Enhancement Fund for which the Friends of the
Wind Farm have concerns if the funds are not administered by a locally elected
group of people. Creation of employment by the multiplier effect will also
increase economic activity in the region. More children in the local school, during
and post construction; improvements to roads and road safety, particularly
10 Morrisons Gap Road and Barry Road; benefits of renewable energy by replacing
environmentally damaging fossil fuel dependence; opportunities for investment in
different tourism ventures to enhance the current tourism offering of Nundle,
Hanging Rock, Crawney and the Tamworth Liverpool Plains in Upper Hunter
LGAs.

15
In conclusion, the Friends of the Wind Farm supports the approval of the New
South Wales Department of Planning and Environment recommendation to
proceed with the development and any conditions that the IPC conclude should be
imposed or removed. Thank you. (Applause)

20 **MS SYKES:** Thank you very much, Russell, and our next speaker is Susan
Robinson.

25 **MS ROBINSON:** Hello. My name is Susan Robinson. I'm speaking on behalf of
my husband, Jim Robinson, and myself. We are the main landholders to host the
turbines for the farm, the wind farm. We have a very windy ridge and we're
willing to share our land. I just want to say thank you to every landowner in this
country willing to share their land as hosts or neighbours, willing to be part of this
transition to renewable energy. These are not easy shoes to walk in. Whether it is
30 our land or someone else's, our country needs farmers to share their land.

We all care about Nundle. We all love Nundle and we all just have different views
and opinions on how we see that going into the future. So many people have
already moved out of this village in the last five years, others have moved in; so
35 I'm not really sure how you can say majority or minority of numbers any more.
There's just too many people that have moved out.

My history and why I support the project. When I moved to Nundle when I was
18 - sorry, I moved to Nundle when I was 18 and I have lived here for over 37
40 years. I've been a member of the P&C Committee and held the Treasurer position.
I'm a volunteer and committee member of the Nundle Sport and Recreation Club,
and we've been involved and sponsor many community events. I also taught group
fitness classes for kids and adults in Nundle for 6 years before building a
community gym at the bowling club by enclosing a verandah at my expense. So,
45 services and supports around here, they're so important to me to get those services
here. That's why I support the project.

I have three grown daughters that have all moved to Tamworth for work, and a 13-year-old son. When he was little, I had to drive to Tamworth to just attend a playgroup. We believe we can bring many people here for tourism, with mountain biking, daily wind farm and cattle farm tours. We also have an idea for hosting an annual community fun run that would take advantage of the scenic beauty and accessibility of the 35 kilometre ridge line. And this is done in other wind farms.

A speaker spoke yesterday about neighbours needing to sit down, just have a cup of tea and talk about fencing issues. Maybe you can understand how we felt when one of our neighbours who worked for us for 16 years doing contract mustering, who knew the farm was being monitored for a wind farm, put a DA for a small cabin over our fence after this went public. She never said a word to us. The facts are that we never had a boundary issue with this neighbour prior to the wind farm going public back in March 2018. This neighbour has a house with power, yards, water and sheds, more than 2 kilometres from the ridge. None of these are on top of the ridge.

We need to talk about this DA as it's very important for every project being submitted for approval in the future. I started to notice members of the HOGPI group travelling along this isolated dead-end road into a farm and I knew something was up. It was then I found a DA had been lodged for a small cabin over our fence and in our paddock. This was in August 2018 and nobody notified us. So you can imagine that we couldn't understand what was going. And we also found members of the HOGPI over our fence and when asked what they were doing there, she replied she was marking out for a cabin.

Still confused, as this had been our boundary fence and access road for all the years that we've owned the farm and probably 100 years before that, we then paid a surveyor at our expense to survey the whole boundary between us, and what that showed is that we had 1 acre of her land and she had around 13 acres of ours. This is still classed as a give-and-take fence. I would say every farm around these villages would have give-and-take fences because the old timers fenced where it made sense to fence.

Now, this DA was rejected by council back in September 2019 and one of those reasons for rejection was the potential social and economic impacts this development may have on the local community and the economy as raised in the submissions, and the site was not considered suitable given the matters of the public interest raised in the submissions. There were 50 local public submissions against this DA.

And in November 2020 the DA got approved by a private certifier, back over a fence but about 300 metres in from the ridge. We, the community, should have been notified because if it takes out the income of those 11 turbines, that lowers the community fund and it does impact the community. The DA has always been a deliberate attempt to cut the wind farm in half. So please tell us how a plan for

a small cabin in an area that has no power to connect to, still has not been built be more important than powering 165,000 homes, more important than delivering cheaper electricity to locals, and more important than a large community enhancement fund for the life of the wind farm, and, more important, the repairing and maintaining of our community buildings.

We have a swimming pool for the summer and a park for small children. Nothing for the teenagers. How can it be more important than creating a better life here for generations of children to come? Our neighbour passed away and the new owner of this DA lives in Canberra. I've listened for the past two days from five Tamworth councillors that say it's not a good site for a wind farm, but they've never been to the site, only Steve, only one of them.

I wanted to say thank you to the speaker yesterday for being the local fire captain, and when you talk about difficulty of fighting fires on the ridge you also need to talk to us because none of them were there in 2019. They were all fighting fires elsewhere. The fire that was in Ben Halls National Park stopped at our fenceline and we monitored it. Where it did jump over into our farm from a neighbouring property, we put it out ourselves without any help from RFS. So if we can put fires that come from the national park or State forests out ourselves, which we have proven with the 2019 fires, and if the wind farm employees are trained in firefighting, for us as landholders, we are very satisfied. We have our own bulldozers, water carts, and other machinery on the farm.

The National Parks and Wildlife and RFS all have access to the ridge because we maintain the roads. There is good access on the ridge. And there's just so many different groups in Nundle. Over the years when I ask, you know, people they said they support the wind farm. I say, "Well, why?" and some of them said they're proud to host renewable energy, or they want to see more things for their children in the village. Our school is now down to a 2-classroom school. Many years ago, if you talked to the generational farmers, and there was 150 kids attending school when they attended it.

So, you know, you can understand that the support for the wind farm comes from people wanting better services and wanting a better life for their children here. So there's a lot of people that love Nundle. Thank you. (Applause)

MS SYKES: Thank you very much, Susan. So our next speaker is Kenneth Sylvester speaking on behalf of Sylvester Pastoral.

MR SYLVESTER: G'day, everyone. It's the Hills Wind Farm talk. Good afternoon. Ken Sylvester from Crawney Station, 1969 Crawney Road, Crawney. Thank you to the members of the Commission for their time and due diligence to this project; taking the time to attend my property at 7.15 pm and not leaving until after dark on Wednesday was much appreciated.

I hope I have not - I note I have not had any time to prepare effectively for this talk, having only been emailed late on the details and IPC inquiry on my property on 25 January last week, nearly Australia Day. I've lived in the Hunter Valley for 60 years and grown up in steep hilly country. We have a reputation for farming this land sustainably. I am specifically aware of the fragile nature of hilly country, and always, no matter how much monetary impact, ensure that our land has significant ground cover and protection. However, no matter how much we protect the soils, landslips find their way in.

10 When we purchased Crawney, I was aware of how soft the soil is in this valley and hills, which is why the vegetation must, and needs to be protected. I can show you landslips that have happened in the last six months and that is with good ground cover and tree support. If the amount of excavation proposed for the Hills of Gold Wind Farm is approved, the landslips will be dramatic, and it does not matter how much computer modelling or machinery you have, they cannot be reversed. I find it hard to believe that the proposed industrial mega city of steel and cement is going to be located on an area of land that I could barely ride a horse, and at times would have to lead my horse, and I have been riding steep hills for a particularly long time.

20 I understand the wind resource is free and agree it should be utilised for electricity, but not in steep, remote country. I would like to note that the first notification received about this project from SONEVA was on 25 January. In fact, it was the IPC that sent me the links to the reports and mapping.

25 Our property is 3.3 kilometres from the turbines. We would be able to see 16 to 18 from our houses, which is located in the pristine famous Crawney Valley. We request the removal of turbines 2 to 15, and I thank you for taking the time to hear my appeal with such short notice. Thank you. (Applause)

30 **MS SYKES:** Thank you very much, Kenneth, and also thank you very much for having us visit your property the other day. Our next speaker is Peter White representing Applicant for the Gomeroi Native Title claim, NSD37-2019. Online. Thank you. Thank you, Peter.

35 **MR WHITE:** Okay, thank you, and I'd just like to thank the Commission for the opportunity for Gomeroi people to have their say at this meeting. As has been mentioned, my name is Peter White. I'm a Kamilaroi Murri and descendant of the Gomeroi (indistinct) Elizabeth or Betty White (indistinct) who was born in 1843 at Colley Creek. Unfortunately, I'm not able to be at home on country, but I acknowledge I'm here in Sydney on Gadigal Country and pay my respects to not only their ancestors but Gomeroi ancestors who have gone before us, and still guide us today.

45 Just in background about the Gomeroi Native Title claim, the Gomeroi people, a Native Title Claim Group, covers the traditional lands and waters of over 110,000 square kilometres in North-Western New South Wales. The application

area that is subject to the Gomeroi claim is bounded by the New South
Wales/Queensland State border in the north, the western slopes of the New
England Tableland in the east, the Hunter and Goulburn Rivers in the south and
the Castlereagh River in the west. The Nundle area comprises of the south-eastern
5 area of our nation.

The Gomeroi Nation is represented by the Gomeroi Applicant on Native Title
matters. The Applicant is comprised of 19 members representing the various
regions of our nation and, as I said, I am the local representative around the
10 Tamworth region.

The Native Title application was filed to seek the formal legal recognition of
Gomeroi people's inherent rights. The Native Title rights claimed include
exclusive rights and non-exclusive rights, including the right to access, camp,
15 hunt, fish, use water, gather and exchange natural resources, hold meetings,
perform ceremony and cultural activities, and protect cultural sites, which is what
we've been doing for multiple generations for time immemorial.

Native Title affords governments, NGOs, private enterprise in the broader
community interest the opportunity to deal with the traditional owners and
custodians who have a recognised continuous connection to both country, cultural
practices and law and intricate kinship systems linked to our country. The value of
Native Title groups, such as the Gomeroi Claim Group, are that they are the only
20 cultural authority with both cultural agency and cultural integrity to speak on
behalf of country.
25

The Gomeroi people are currently in negotiation with ENGIE on the Hills of Gold
Wind Farm and those negotiations are ongoing. The future acts necessary for the
project need to be validated under the Native Title Act through an Indigenous land
30 use agreement. These negotiations are open and transparent, but for any agreement
to be reached, Gomeroi people, as a whole - and I'm talking about the whole
nation - would need to provide their consent to an Indigenous land use agreement,
and that step has not yet occurred.

One of our biggest concerns for Gomeroi people is the impact that major
infrastructure projects such as energy and resource projects have on the unique and
important cultural heritage of Gomeroi people. To adequately protect and preserve
our critical cultural birthrights and the immensely valuable cultural assets for not
only the State of New South Wales but more broadly Australia, Gomeroi people,
40 through Native Title work, must navigate inadequate government legislative and
regulatory frameworks, some of which are decades old.

This system, governed by the National Parks and Wildlife Act of 1974, espouses
the intent of protection and preservation of Aboriginal objects and places within
45 New South Wales. The reality for Gomeroi people, as well as many Aboriginal
people in New South Wales, is that this system advocates for the
government-endorsed destruction and desecration of Aboriginal cultural heritage

through the Aboriginal Heritage Impact Permit System in relation to allowing development.

5 The Parliamentary Inquiry into Juukan Gorge highlighted the inadequacy of the New South Wales legislation and the urgent need for legislative reform. In terms of infrastructure projects, greater work is required by both government planning regimes and private development interests to ensure that the irrevocable damage to Australia's cultural asset ceases. On Gomerai country, the Gomerai Native Title Claim Group await real leadership in this space to work side by side with us on
10 this matter.

Gomerai people have always been responsible for the sound and sustainable management of the country since the beginning. It is essential for all major infrastructure and development projects in Gomerai country to be undertaken with
15 the consent of Gomerai people, where workable solutions which protect culture, country and our people have been incorporated not just as an afterthought but from the very inception of the project. Thank you. (Applause)

20 **MS SYKES:** Peter, we just had one - before you leave, we just had one question from Commissioner Grant.

25 **MS GRANT:** Thank you. Thanks, Peter. Just could you clarify which part of the project site is subject to the Native Title claim? I think it's the Crawney Road, the entrance site, but I don't know whether you have a map or you can describe ...

MR WHITE: No, I don't have a map but it is around - it's basically where the Crown land parcels where Native Title exists.

30 **MS GRANT:** Yep.

MR WHITE: Of course, Native Title, you know, doesn't exist on freehold lands.

MS GRANT: Okay. Thank you.

35 **MS SYKES:** Thank you very much, Peter, for your submission. We will now move to Fabian Norrie representing Friends of the Wind Farm.

40 **MR NORRIE:** Thank you for letting me have a go. I'm Fabian Norrie. I'm a big wind farm supporter; I get around by the wind farms and see what they do on the lands. Now, they do a minimum footprint but they've done what they had to do. Now, I'm not good at this sort of stuff but I'll give it a go.

45 If we go back to Delaney Wind Farm. Delaney Wind Farm was built back in the year 2000. It's now a concrete dam and it has not affected the water at all, and also the camping, fishing, swimming in that direction there. So they just give you number 1 to look at on the concrete and water side.

I've been around a lot of open days like Fire Creek Wind Farm, Sapphire Wind Farm, Delaney, and other ones around down the BHP where they've got the big wind turbine components which I got to see them up close and take photos and show the majority of people in the area what the turbines look like up close, in front, where no one got to see. I've also put videos together on YouTube so that people can get to see wind farms being built from start, middle and finish. That way they can get to see what it all turns out to be at the end result.

Now, coming down to snow, I do a lot of updates at Hanging Rock up here when we do snow reports all the time. The last couple of years it has been shocking for snow, which hasn't been coming down the way it should be coming down. The last good snowfall was probably back when we had COVID, and that's when I got a chance to get it, and so on.

Now, going on gold mines and the fire issue, there's a lot of logging trucks getting around. People don't sit there mentioning logging trucks all the time, which they're used to - every day you'll see how many come and go up that mountainside. They're going over a gold mine up that way. They're in the forestry there. How many gold mines have been destroyed under heritage? So I'll give you a rough idea for the gold mine area on top of the hill up there on the ridge. Now, that was going to be a gold mine at one stage but it had something else that come there along, not because we're getting a wind farm put on the ridge line, which is doing minimum footprint.

We get a lot of rainfall here, which that's where a lot of landslides come in. It's got nothing to do with the wind farm going ahead. If you go back out look at Willow Tree - between Willow Tree and Murrurundi - actually Merriwa, that got repaired before. They had a big massive rainfall there and they had a landslide go through and the road got destroyed. Another 4 years later they're still trying to get that road repaired again. That's due to heavy rain. It's got nothing to do with a bad commitment what went on.

I'll probably - now, also, I got involved by Tom, we got a phone call to go up Hanging Rock there one time where the wind farm was going. I put a video together for them to help them out, to support the wind farm. So that's on YouTube if you want to see it, where the wind farm was getting proposed at the time. That's all I've got to say because I'll go out of the way - sorry about that. (Applause)

MS SYKES: Thank you very much, Fabian, and I just wanted to note that if you wanted to submit your notes as part of a written submission, you are very welcome to do so on the Commission's website, as well as reference to the video that you just referenced there as well. Thank you.

So our next speaker is Nicole Brewer, from the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure. Nicole.

MS BREWER: Thanks, Commissioners. I didn't have anything additional to present other than what I presented yesterday but I'm happy to take questions that you might have.

5 **MS SYKES:** Yes. No, thank you very much Nicole, and for your presentation
yesterday. We have, just over the last two days, as well as our site visits and
locality tours over the week, have, you know, a number of questions that we'll be
working through of course as we make our deliberations on the Hills of Gold
Wind Farm SSD-9679. But I wanted to probably kick off just on, just a little bit
10 more detail from you, if possible, around transport.

One question that we had was actually just in relation to outside of the project, the
transport studies that are taking place that we spoke about in our meeting with you
a couple of weeks ago. Could we just get some relative timing in terms of the
15 broader transport studies that are taking place across to support the REZ, and what
that means in relation to this project, particularly as it comes up north from the
Port of Newcastle all the way through to the project, and if you could just shed
some insights in terms of that broader transport of material and equipment?

20 **MS BREWER:** Thanks, Commissioner. The New South Wales Government has
made a commitment to support the Renewable Energy Zones and part of that
includes coordinating the road upgrades that are required for both of the REZs.
Now, the Central West REZ is the first REZ and is the pilot REZ. So a number of
studies have taken place by EnergyCo and are underway at the moment in order to
25 define what kind of road upgrades are needed in order to get to the Central West.

The point where the road upgrades diverge is around Muswellbrook, and so there
are also studies that I'm aware that EnergyCo is undertaking at the moment for the
road upgrades that would be needed to get blades from the port up to that REZ as
30 well. So there are different timings between the two, the delivery to support both
of those REZs. I don't have the dates off the top of my head but the - and we're
happy to provide some additional information - but the road upgrades are proposed
to be supported by the New South Wales Government. And I think it's around, for
delivery for the Central West, around 2025 and New England will be delivered
35 later.

MS SYKES: Thank you. Thank you, Nicole. Commissioner Grant.

40 **MS GRANT:** Nicole, my question is around visual impact, and I think you've
been here and had the benefit of hearing over the last day-and-a-half a number of
the community members who've expressed concern around the lack of visual
assessment at some of the nearby properties, and both either a lack of assessment
at all from their property or a lack of assessment from secondary dwelling
locations or future potential dwelling locations. Could you explain if there is an
45 opportunity or a process to complete further visual impact assessment for those
properties that haven't been assessed at this point, so we can make sure that the
assessment is as comprehensive as is possible?

MS BREWER: Thanks for the question. Look, the Department's assessment of the visual impacts was undertaken in accordance with the Visual Performance Objectives that are described in the 2016 Visual Assessment Bulletin; and the distance between a receiver and the location of infrastructure is a key factor in considering the magnitude of that impact. That's one of the elements that needs consideration under the Bulletin.

So we've recommended deletion of certain turbines based on our assessment against those performance objectives, and in doing so, that has some - those recommended deletions for certain receivers would also have a benefit to other receivers that may be further from the site and may not have been considered in and of themselves to have a magnitude impact, for example. But the proposed deletions would have a benefit to the landscape and to those receivers that are further away.

So I think we, in terms of - you know, we described in our assessment the process that we went through against the performance objectives for the - against the visual Bulletin and we've considered the receivers that are - the existing receivers, but we have also considered, as you can see in the assessment, where there's development approvals or, you know, in the instance of one, where there's the complying development certificate. Dwelling entitlements have been considered but they are offered a different weighting.

If - I guess in terms of, we'd be happy to respond to any specific requests if there's additional assessment but I think - I guess my main comment would be that some of those are potentially at a distance that are further away from turbines and less likely to have a significant impact that would warrant additional mitigation or might not meet the performance objectives. But we'd be happy to provide clarification if there are certain locations that the Commission is particularly interested in.

MS GRANT: Thank you. And what about for the transverse track, was there visual assessment undertaken of that?

MS BREWER: Sorry?

MS GRANT: Sorry, I'll just repeat that.

MS BREWER: Thank you.

MS GRANT: So was there an assessment of the transverse track and the impact of that, or was the assessment really focused on the turbines themselves?

MS BREWER: No, I think that our assessment did include the transverse track. That kind of key future disruption is a performance objective that we need to assess against - under the Bulletin and includes for wind turbines or ancillary

facilities. So, you know, we've recognised that, you know, there are other factors other than just the location of the turbines that impact visual assessment that might also, you know, disrupt the continuity of the vegetation.

5 I think in relation particularly to that transverse track, that distance, you know, as I was mentioning earlier, is a key factor in our assessment. And the nearest non-associated receiver from the transverse track I understand is more than 9 kilometres from that site. So we have included, you know, all of those factors in our assessment but, in particular to your query about the transverse track, it's the distance to receivers that was an element here.

MS GRANT: Thank you.

15 **MS SYKES:** So, Nicole, over the last couple of days we have heard some concerns around the currency of data that was used or baseline assessment data that was used, for example, in biodiversity studies, but also today in some studies related to, say, soil characterisation, hydrological studies, et cetera. I just wondered if you had any comment on this in terms of those assessments?

20 **MS BREWER:** So I think in relation perhaps to the two issues separately. I mean, our assessment what about whole-of-government assessment and where there are experts within government we have relied on their advice. So, in the instance of biodiversity, we consulted, you know, in quite some detail, with the Biodiversity Conservation Division and they've reviewed all of the information that's contained within the Biodiversity Development Assessment Report and, you know, subsequent additional information that was provided.

30 So the surveys that were conducted for the threatened species, the Department, in consultation with BCD, considers that they are assessed appropriately under the BAM, the Biodiversity Assessment Methodology which sits under the Act. So we would be happy to seek further information from BCS, BCD, the Biodiversity Conservation Division, if there are particular things that you wanted clarified.

35 In regard to the soils data, I think, you know, it was an issue that we were concerned about, and I think that was the reason and the primary reason why we engaged the independent expert, PSM, to provide a review of that data. So they didn't raise issues with the data as provided. Certainly they requested some additional information and we requested that from the Applicant in order to have that assessment, you know, cover all the information that was needed to cover the constructability issues and address the soil issues and the landslip and erosion potential that the community had expressed significant concerns about. So we did request additional information, and, you know, the end point was that the independent advisor was satisfied that there was sufficient information.

45 **MS SYKES:** Thank you. Commissioner Marshall, did you have any questions?

MR MARSHALL: Just one question from me, and that's we heard, I think it was yesterday, about emergency access to one route, one track, is proposed as part of the overall project and that's at the head of Peel Road. And there were questions around, well, what did "emergency access" actually mean. I just wonder if you
5 could comment on what you think "emergency access" means in this case? You know, how and when might that apply?

MS BREWER: So the head of Peel Road wouldn't be used by regular construction or operational traffic. So the intent is that that emergency access
10 relates to emergency services; so ambulances, police, RFS, and that's - or in the event that the site needs to be evacuated. So it's not for regular traffic, and that's something that the Applicant committed to addressing in its Emergency Plan.

MR MARSHALL: So the wording of the current draft recommendation, I think is
15 broad in terms of emergency access. I mean, do you think there's scope there to sort of tighten up what that wording might actually mean?

MS BREWER: We'd be happy to look at that.

MS SYKES: Nicole, I just had one question. You know, it's a fairly broad
20 question, I guess, in relation to around the decommissioning process. At the moment, obviously decommissioning is a key requirement of the project with timeframes set around when that occurs from the conclusion of the project life. But when is the - like, the Commissioning Plan, when does the Commissioning
25 Plan commence in terms of the planning process for the end-of-life decommissioning?

MS BREWER: So our recommended Conditions of Consent include detailed
30 objective-based conditions for what the Department expects as the outcome at the end; and they require the Applicant to rehabilitate the site in accordance with those objectives which, you know, include the safe, stable and including the removal of infrastructure. The Department feels that with the implementation of that end point condition that a plan is not required as part of the consent. So the Applicant, you
35 know, may do that planning as part of the points that are triggered in the consent.

So the consent provides a number of trigger points in terms of turbines not
operating for a certain period, and then a time period within which they would
need to be decommissioned. The Department feels that those end point
40 conditions - and our sets of conditions, you know, really include, you know, a range of requirements and our feeling is that not everything requires a management plan. And so in this instance we've recommended just the end point, and it's the compliance against that end point. It's for the Applicant to get there, but how - and, you know, they may well prepare a plan but we don't feel that
45 it needs to be a requirement of the conditions of consent.

MS SYKES: Okay. Thank you for that. Commissioner Grant, do you have any more questions?

5 **MS GRANT:** Yes, sorry, one last question, thanks Nicole. We've heard a lot of concerns about how the funding that may be provided could be applied locally; you know, the community benefit locally versus regionally. Does the Department have a way of managing that? I understand there has to be - funds have to be allocated to the responsible authority in the first instance, but there is a way that there could be guidance if the proposal was to be supported, guidance as to how that was actually spent and distributed to directly benefit the local community?

10 **MS BREWER:** So the voluntary planning agreements are - the process is perhaps somewhat a little bit complicated and it relies on the Applicant making an offer and Council accepting that offer. So in this instance, the Applicant has made an offer that - with a certain split between local projects and regional projects. And, as I understand it, that part has been accepted by the Council.

15 Now, depending on the mechanism that is used for these kind of community benefit schemes, if it is a voluntary planning agreement, in general they are set up and we've seen on other wind farms, they are set up under the Local Government Act and administered through a committee, and that that committee would have representatives of the community and it would have representatives of Council and representatives the Applicant. And it's a very specific Local Government Act committee under section 355 of the Local Government Act.

20 That process also has - requires terms of reference, and so the terms of reference then can also further support the offer that's made. And our recommended conditions also include that, you know, the VPA is in accordance with that offer which has already defined local and regional spending or the split. And so that's been discussed with each of the councils. But there are terms of reference that, you know, would also apply through those committees that, you know, the community and Council can influence as well at that point when they're actually going through the process of allocating funds and administering those funds.

25 **MS GRANT:** Thank you.

30 **MS SYKES:** Do you have any more questions? So we didn't have any more questions, but we may do so, of course.

MS BREWER: Of course.

35 **MS SYKES:** As we continue our review and - of all of the submissions that have come both as part of the Public Meeting and the written submissions. I just wanted to invite - did you have any final comments, Nicole?

40 **MS BREWER:** No final comments. Thank you very much for the opportunity to present yesterday and to answer questions today and we'd be happy to further any further clarifications as required.

MS SYKES: Yes, thank you very much, Nicole.

MS BREWER: Thank you. (Applause)

5 **MS SYKES:** So our final speaker is Scott De Keizer for ENGIE Australia and New Zealand.

MR DE KEIZER: Okay. So, firstly, on behalf of the project team, I'd like to thank the Commission for your diligence and thoroughness through this process.
10 I know that's not just from us as the Applicant but across the associated dwellings and non-associated dwellings, I think they've all experienced the same level of detail from you guys, so much appreciated;
Your endurance and stamina over the two days of public meeting and for your determination and commitment to understand this project deeply and completely.

15 I'd also like to acknowledge all the speakers we've heard from. We've heard different perspectives, different viewpoints, difference experiences and, speaking personally, I appreciate it can be difficult to stand up in this spot. However, we have heard some claims that we're not entirely comfortable with, particularly
20 related to our conduct and our dealings with community. I can assure the Commission that our Community Engagement Program will stand up to close scrutiny and we'll address each of these claims in our written submissions and the records that support it.

25 Where there are areas in fact, we will also detail our position in written materials with objectivity and evidence as our guiding principles. I'd like to take a brief moment to reiterate four key points. First, our commitment to delivering this project. I say it again: It's a great project. It's constructible and it's perfectly sited. The fact that it sits between two REZs and not within one, is a benefit delivering
30 value to future energy projects and to the region overall. Any suggestion that projects cannot be developed outside a REZ is simply not correct.

Second, our commitment to community. We've been working with landowners, neighbours, First Nations people and community members for years, and will
35 continue to stay open, transparent and available to anyone who chooses to engage with us. We're easy to find. The hub is just over on the corner of the street. And if we feel safe, we'll come to you as well.

40 Third, our commitment to remaining flexible and cooperative. We've heard some speakers suggest that our many changes and adjustments show that the project is flawed. I disagree strongly there. Our many adjustments to turbine locations, turbine numbers, transport routes, including the removal of Devils Elbow Bypass have been to refine and continue to optimise the project.

45 The Hills of Gold Wind Farm is a better project than it's ever been because of these refinements, not despite them. And, lastly, I'd like to reaffirm our commitment to advancing the green energy transition with this important project.

Over the last six years there's been an extraordinary volume of industry expertise to help get us to this point. And now we need to turn our minds to the urgency for transforming our energy system to avoid the worst impacts of climate change and to keep the lights on as we do it.

5

Hills of Gold has not been conceived overnight. It's a fully worked optimised and well-balanced State significant project which will be a privilege for us to deliver. My colleagues and I are available for any questions the Commission may have in this moment, and I'll - in response to questions, if I can't answer them myself, I'll call up necessary people so we can answer as much as we can here, and where we can't we'll reserve the right to put it into our submission if we can't do it accurately.

10

MS SYKES: Yes, absolutely, and we appreciate that.

15

MR DE KEIZER: Sure.

MS SYKES: And we appreciate some of the detail that might be required -

20

MR DE KEIZER: No worries.

MS SYKES: - to be delivered in a written submission. Thank you very much, Scott, for that, your opening, opening words there. I guess I had - my first question was related to transport. You know, we've heard, you know, many concerns as part of some of the submissions over the last couple of days related to transport. And, in particular, I just wanted to focus a little bit on Morrisons Gap Road and the access to the site there. Could you please clarify - there are oversize and overmass vehicles proposed to use Morrison Gap Road, and do we have a feel for the likely frequency during the construction phase in particular?

25

30

MR DE KEIZER: Sure. I will ask for some support from Tim on this.

MS SYKES: Yes.

35

MR DE KEIZER: But on the basis of the submissions we've put in, I think we've shared a table that identifies the different routes available to the different types of vehicles.

MS SYKES: Yes.

40

MR DE KEIZER: For which, on the Barry Road, Morrisons Gap Road, there is the oversize, overmass vehicles are for the hub, so the nose of the turbine. And then in the event that there is a split blade turbine blade used, which means the blade will be in two parts and it's transported in two parts, only the tip of that split blade is accessible through that, that route option. If there's anything else - in terms of frequency, I might turn to Tim.

45

MS SYKES: Yes

5 **MR MEAD:** Thanks Scott, and thanks Commissioners. So, yeah, as Scott said, in terms of oversize, overmass loads on the northern route up Barry Road and down Morrisons Gap Road, there's only intended to be hubs, and there's one hub per turbine. So depending if the project was approved up to 64 or less and that's over an estimated 9-month period.

10 **MS SYKES:** Okay.

15 **MR MEAD:** So, on average, we would estimate no more than two hub loads per week as a guide. And, as Scott said, if it was a split blade, which is perhaps less likely now, but - the technology seemed to be moving away from that - but there would be one part of the split blade as well that would go up in that direction and it's just because that load is a lot narrower - sorry, not as long as other loads. So this is basically - the constraint's basically the Barry Road hairpin, existing hairpin.

20 We've asked our contractors, Rex Andrews, who's one of the leading market contractors for delivery, what they think is a safe component to deliver up that hairpin and so that's what really drives what OSOM loads can go in that direction.

25 **MS SYKES:** Yes. Okay. Thank you. So just in relation to those oversize, overmass vehicles, as well as other heavy vehicle or other equipment that may be using that access route, what works would be required to ensure that Morrisons Gap Road can accommodate those vehicles and, in particular, we have heard some concerns around the widening of that road, the clearing of vegetation - or is clearing of vegetation all within the existing road reserves?

30 **MR MEAD:** Yep. Sure. No, I appreciate that and there's been a number of iterations over the last five or six years, so I can appreciate that there is some confusion. So I'll just maybe quickly some history that might be helpful. When the original road - route, sorry, was proposed with the Devils Elbow Bypass, all OSOM loads were proposed to go in that direction and therefore all OSOM loads would have to be assessed to go down Morrisons Gap Road. So, in an earlier version of this project, the widening required on Morrisons Gap Road was a lot more substantial than where we are now. It included things at one stage including proposing, at one tight bend, some retaining walls. And so since that, and in consultation with Tamworth Regional Council as we've heard over the last two days, when that route was changed and the bypass was removed, the need for that Morrisons Gap Road upgrade to that significant level was reduced significantly.

40 **MS SYKES:** Okay.

45 **MR MEAD:** So, where we are now, I might just touch on sealing of the road. So that was raised, I think yesterday. And so the history there is from our perspective on all of these projects large wind scale - large-scale wind projects around New South Wales and in Victoria, we - obviously, one of those parts of the process is to

sit with local councils, talk about local roads, and what they think is necessary in terms of upgrades to facilitate these loads.

5 So, over the course of those discussions over the last few years, the discussion was had about whether, in the first instance, Morrisons Gap Road should be sealed, and later whether the final part of Crawney Road should be sealed. From a project perspective, sealing that, those roads is not necessary for the delivery of our components. Those sections of roads are not steep which is, from our perspective, when we might seal sections of road.

10 But there are other benefits, one being a better trafficable surface that some community members prefer. Also, it helps keeping down dust. And so, for those reasons, it was raised in discussions with Tamworth Council.

15 We proposed, from our experience in other projects that, some councils prefer us to seal after construction and just manage dust through construction, because they get a road that is a perfect surface afterwards and it's not then - it's not trafficked by construction traffic if we seal it before. We were happy to offer that approach here and that's what we did. I wouldn't say we got clear feedback on this point, and
20 so it does exist in our proposal, but I'd say we're flexible to the order in which we seal. It's just from our other experience sometimes it's preferred to seal afterwards. So that's sealing.

25 In terms of widening, after we removed - this is the main OSOM route - we did an assessment and we surveyed that corridor. Certainly no works would be proposed outside the corridor, road corridor, as surveyed. We looked at whether our vehicles would need widening on that road and the answer is no with a single pass. If we want a double pass with, say, two heavy vehicles going both directions, we propose some minor widening in some of the tighter corners. The tightest corner I
30 think is near NAD12, and that widening of the road surface was somewhere between 1 to 3 metres in different areas. And so there would be some tree clearing or vegetation clearing in those locations. And also, where we can, we would just prune rather than clear. But that has been assessed in the BDAR.

35 **MS SYKES:** Okay.

MR MEAD: So we've taken a conservative approach to what might be done, noting that we would expect if the project is approved, we would be sitting down with Tamworth Council, as is the case for the section 138s, which is a secondary
40 consent process, about any impacts to roads and what the final design might look like.

MS SYKES: Okay. Thanks very much, Tim. And I guess following from that in terms of, you know, confirming that, depending on the road condition of course,
45 what would be typically a dust suppression technique during - if it is a dirt road. Could you just explain the water management on those roads through construction?

MR MEAD: Yeah, sure. So, in terms of a standard approach for all of our unsealed roads through the entire site, there will be water dust suppression. So that is standard operation with every large-scale project. There's a water cart at least, or many, depending on the size and the parameters of the project, that would be operating daily but certainly in hot, dry conditions and windy conditions. So that would be a standard.

We've also looked into - and we know other projects have used polymers, surface polymers, which is not sealing the road but is using a surface treatment to help keep the dust down. So we've also discussed those approaches with Tamworth and we're open to those as well.

MS SYKES: Okay. Thank you. Commissioner Marshall

MR MARSHALL: Yes, just following up on the OSOM information that you provided on Morrisons Gap Road, I mean, so just to double-check - so you're only anticipating the maximum 64 OSOM movements up Morrisons Gap Road as part of the project? There will still be other heavy vehicles but in terms of OSOM it's only those 64 movements maximum, depending on the number of turbines if approved?

MR MEAD: Yeah, yep, that's correct. And there's a table in the Revised Transport Impact Assessment which goes through every oversize load, how many loads, and the routes that would be appropriate for those loads, yep.

MS SYKES: While we're on the topic of water, there have also been concerns raised over the last couple of days as well in relation to the project's water use. Could you confirm where is the water proposed to be sourced from for both construction and ongoing operations?

MR DE KEIZER: Yeah, absolutely. So Aref, who's been managing all our biodiversity aspects as well as water, can answer. But it's on the basis of a licence that would be sought between the consent and construction.

MS SYKES: Yes, yes.

MR DE KEIZER: So -

MS SYKES: Thank you.

MR TALEB: Thanks, Scott, and thanks Commissioners. So, in our planning documents we did identify the water requirements to build the project, and that came out at 55 megalitres. We also have some information in there on operational water requirements which is minor use for buildings like the operations and maintenance buildings; so potable water for facilities there. At this stage of the project we have outlined the different sources that we could source water. So

including onsite, purchasing from landowners, arrangements with Council to cart water into the site. And during the secondary consents process, that's when you identify and secure your final water licences and your water approach, and that's through your Construction Environment Management Plan that will have to get signed off before we could enter construction of the site. So that's the response there.

MS SYKES: Okay. Thank you very much. And, you know, there have also been concerns raised related to the particular nature of the ridge area in particular, risks around landslips, erosion, and, you know, understanding those risks in terms of the soil characterisation studies, hydrological studies, geotechnical studies, et cetera. Could you just give some context around that and advancing knowledge in those areas to - in terms of the risk management, but also in terms of, you know, water quality monitoring. We've heard concerns about, you know, the potential for water quality impacts further downstream, et cetera. Is there the intent for water quality monitoring in the project area to be able to manage - both understand, but also manage those impacts?

MR DE KEIZER: Sure. Tim. Yep.

MR MEAD: Yeah, thanks. I think the first thing to say on the topic of soil and water is it's certainly, and erosion, is certainly very technical, and we've heard some presentations on that over the last two days. And so I think we would say that we're certainly not the experts on everything and certainly not the experts on that. But if I could just perhaps back over the process that I've been involved with on this project.

From an engineering perspective, there has been substantial level of engineering done on this project for this stage of project. It's not that long ago that projects - roads would be lines on a page, and it's a good thing that this industry has matured a lot since then. And in the case of this project we've had four civil - I think four civil engineers assist with their preliminary design of this project which considers the full batter extents of what could be proposed. Obviously, this is all subject to if the project was approved at all and what's the nature of the project. There's many uncertainties at this stage for us as well as the turbines that would be installed.

But we make some worst case assumptions. We provide that information to engineers. And, as I said, four civil engineers have provided various iterations of our layout over the course of the last 5 years as we've been going through the planning process. And, as you've heard, there's been many design layout changes, and so that's updated a lot over that time.

They've also - we've had two geotech engineers come out to site in two separate campaigns as well which has informed some of that work. And then we've had the soil and water assessments which has been substantial, and as someone earlier said, it's been multi-stages. There was an EIS submission. There was many good

community responses. There was our response to submissions, and there's been responses since then on the topic.

5 And so, from our perspective, there's been a substantial amount of work and documents produced on this topic. And then, of course, there's a constructability assessment which the Department has discussed. So it's been long and thorough, in our view. Some of the specific questions, such as where is the final erosion and sediment control measure going to be, there's going to be many, but exactly where they're going to be across - it can't be known until we have a detailed design of the
10 final site.

But what we've sought to demonstrate through the process is that those erosion sediment controls are standard across large-scale projects like this which are often developed in complex terrain, and that they can be implemented within the
15 footprint that we proposed. And so, in terms of the next stage, we will have erosion and sediment control plans. They'll form part of the Soil and Water Management Plan which will sit across all of this, and it will consider the erosion sediment control methods as well as things such as the water quality that you mentioned then.

20 And so I guess, to answer that part of your question, the Soil and Water Management Plan would consider the optimal locations for water quality monitoring. But I would also add that any large-scale wind farm in New South Wales needs to seek an Environmental Protection Licence from the EPA, and so
25 there's another layer of scrutiny, I suppose, under that EPL that would govern those things as well.

MS SYKES: Okay. Thank you. Commissioner, did you have any questions?

30 **MR MARSHALL:** Yes, I do. Can you just advise us whether landholder agreements are in place for all of the current proposed access route?

MR TALEB: So with the transport assessment, we've taken a conservative approach on the largest blade that we would look to utilise of 85 metres for the
35 length of the blade. And then, with that information, we would engage all the transport landowners from port to site that we would require to get tenure to the project. We're in discussions with all of those transport landowners. We have a number of executed agreements with landowners and we're in negotiation with the rest of them, which are currently on track to be signed at some date with no
40 major objections to sign up.

MR MARSHALL: Okay. All right. And I guess I wanted to focus a little bit on the Crawney Road and the access route to the project site. I just wondered if you
45 could speak briefly about where things are up to with the sort of transport study for that access route as a more recent component of the project?

MR TALEB: So, in terms of the technical assessments that went into planning, during our amendment report we did complete biodiversity studies along that route, and we also completed Aboriginal cultural heritage assessment. So we had registered Aboriginal parties from the Gomeroi Applicant - or previous Applicant
5 Group before it changed, as well as representatives from the Nungaru local Aboriginal Land Council. And further to that, we've done cultural heritage walkovers with people like that have presented today and other Elders in the community, and I'll pass to Tim to speak to some of the engineering design.

10 **MR MEAD:** Thank you. Just to clarify the question, are you - you're also asking about the technical aspects of the route as well?

MR MARSHALL: Yes.

15 **MR MEAD:** Yes. So before we proposed the substantial route changes which is in Amendment 2, I think, of the project, and we were contemplating an alternate route to Devils Elbow Bypass, we obviously had to do substantial work to have a look at this route at the western access at Crawney Rode because from our perspective there's no utility in proposing something that can't be built or utilised.

20 So part of that process, even before we lodged the second amendment, was to engage with firstly the transport route contractor, Rex Andrews, and so there's an updated revised route study which includes that whole route. But also we had to engage with them not only on the route study which typically focuses on the
25 public route - public roads, which is fairly non-contentious from our perspective at Crawney Road, we think it's a very suitable route for oversized deliveries. But we also had to engage with both engineers and the transport contractor about the suitability of the internal western access route up to the ridge line which we drove on the site visit on Monday, because, again, from our perspective, unless there's
30 a viable access, there's no point proposing it.

So we spent quite a lot of time with the civil engineers as well that I mentioned earlier in proposing a design that will work, and we discussed that in consultation with the transport contractor to ensure that they're happy that that route will work,
35 and from their perspective - so, there's obviously no getting around it: A lot of wind farms are up on ridge lines and there's steep terrain and there's steep terrain on this side as well.

40 But from the contractor's perspective it's not steeper than other projects that they've delivered up; and from the engineer's perspective it's not more complex than other roads that they've built. And so we fed all of that into a preliminary model and that's what the impact was assessed on, which went into our project amendment.

45 **MR MARSHALL:** And can you just remind me: Has geotechnical work been done for that, that access route?

MR MEAD: So we've done geotech work all across the site but I couldn't guarantee off the top of my head exactly where it's been. It's obviously a vast site. So, yes, they've been to site. They've had a look at it. I couldn't tell you - I can't recall where they've taken test bits or bore holes, but that's something that we could follow up with.

MR MARSHALL: Yes, please.

MR MEAD: Yes.

MR MARSHALL: Thank you. Scott, you responded or made comments about the community consultation comments that had been made during the last two days of the hearing, but I guess a kind of follow-up question to those comments is, because what I heard in your answer was kind of a passive, you know, "We're here if you want to come and talk to us" message. I just wonder whether there's any thought of a more proactive approach to address what seemed to be concerns that not all of the consultation has been achieved to the level of satisfaction of some, some members of the community or landowners.

MR DE KEIZER: Sure. Well, obviously between Aref - and Jacqui, our Head of Community might be best placed to speak pointedly to the actual consultations that has happened. So maybe starting with Jacqui as to the active approach.

MS NIEMAND: Thanks Commission, and thanks Scott. I think that's right. I'd like to say that, as Scott already said, for years there has been consultation happening with landowners, with neighbours, First Nations, with the wider community by both ENGIE and previous to us our partners at SONEVA, as well as the formal community consultative committee which ran for over 3 years and we thank all of those who were actively involved and took the time as part of that process. We've held a range of information sessions, not just here in Nundle, but we've been at Hanging Rock, we've held multiple sessions at Crawney and we've also held a session at Wallabidar. We've actively advertised those. We've encouraged people to come along and use multiple means of information to try and encourage people to come to those.

There has been calls on us and some debate around holding a public meeting, and there was reference yesterday that the last public meeting held in this hall about this project that we attended as project proponents, was back in 2018. I was quite clear when this last request came to us formally, that our team - I wasn't going to jeopardise the safety or the intimidation of our team to attend one of those events again, and hence why we have made very much a stand around having information sessions which had a more drop-in style approach to encourage open information.

There's also been multiple other opportunities that we've had. We've held - done a survey with local business owners along the transport route. And I guess most notably we set up the community information hub on the corner up here, to provide a space where people could come in; they could speak to somebody who

is a local resident about the project. There are multiple forms of information up there that would have answered many of the questions that actually arose yesterday. And I encourage people to go up to that community hub and see some of the visuals, some of the information that exists there if they haven't already.

5 And that hub will remain open.

I also think too where there has been, I guess, some conjecture over what levels of consultation have gone in and not just the sort of reactive but the proactive consultation over the years. We've got comprehensive records. We have
10 a comprehensive database of everything that we've done. We've provided those before in our reports but we're happy again to put that in our written submission. Then I think I'll hand over to Aref because he really has managed a lot of the one-on-one neighbour and landowner engagement, and I'll get him to speak to that.

15 **MR TALEB:** Yeah, thanks, Jacqui. So I, when I first joined, I used work for SONEVA and then I jumped across to ENGIE for some context. So I've been working on this project since 2020, and we were going through the EIS process then, and as a part of that, we started engaging quite closely with neighbours within 5 kilometres of the project, and that involved visual assessment visits. So
20 we visited a large number of residences and took the photos for the visual assessment which also involved consultation. That was over a 2 to 3-day period and we did travel to the Crawney/Timor side of the range and visited specific residences, as well as took a public viewpoint from that area which we displayed in the Murrurundi Library during public exhibition and it was there on display.

25 As a result of all that engagement, we were able to sign a specific number of neighbour agreements before EIS. I think it was eight; I can go back and double-check. Through the amendment process we kept engaging with neighbours on Morrisons Gap Road, on Nundle Creek Road in the Crawney/Timor side of the
30 range and were able to sign further neighbour agreements. So over the years we've had extensive consultation with neighbours and sent them information such as the visual assessments.

The noise assessment completed on dwellings is a desktop model that's completed
35 but we did complete background noise monitoring at select neighbour locations as a part of the assessment, and to make sure we adhered to the guidelines of monitoring background noise at a certain number of receptors. So that information was also sent to receptors as well. So over the years we continue to engage with neighbours, as well post-recommendation we attempted to reach out to neighbours
40 as well to speak about the project and update them on the project. So that's probably the update there on that side. Thank you.

45 **MS SYKES:** We've come up to our time. However, we will extend for a few more minutes just to continue with some of our questions. Commissioner Grant, did have you any questions that you would like to cover?

MS GRANT: Yeah, thank you. We've heard a lot of submissions asking for additional removal of turbines from the project. What would this mean for the project if we were to go down that pathway?

5 **MR DE KEIZER:** That's a good question. I guess, like farmers would know, is there's economies of scale and so it will put pressure on the project by removing more turbines. There's no getting around that. So, you know, at the current state with the recommended project, we've seen, you know, us not being able to provide
10 increase in, in the energy price on the basis of the recommendation. So you could probably extrapolate out of that is, is to how that might impact the project and what it would need to go ahead. So, yep, it would put pressure on the project for sure.

15 **MS GRANT:** But is it broader than just that energy price?

MR DE KEIZER: Is it broader in terms of?

20 **MS GRANT:** In terms of the impacts on delivery, on the community benefit?

MR DE KEIZER: Yeah, so obviously -

MS GRANT: On liability.

25 **MR DE KEIZER:** With the structures in place for the project, is it's associated to - to the capital investment value of the project and if we reduce that value, we reduce the contributions that the project can, can make. And that contribution is, is part of the enhancement fund, part of the VPA that has been structured. So there is a broad reduction in its impact; and impact, you know, how many houses we can
30 power through green electricity, impact to how many jobs we can create, impact to how much money we can pump into the economy through direct and indirect reasons. So it flows all the way through.

35 **MS GRANT:** Thank you.

MS SYKES: I just have a question on the biodiversity points that have been raised which Ms Brewer has, you know, outlined part of that question, of course. You know, I just wondered if you had any comment around the concerns that we've
40 heard about the currency of data used in the biodiversity studies or more broadly across some of the other studies? But I was probably keen to just explore a little bit more about the monitoring programs and the adaptive management or curtailment strategy programs that are proposed to be in place, like to address further bat strike, how, you know, how that would work in practice.

45 **MR DE KEIZER:** Yep.

MS SYKES: And how that relates to the baseline monitoring that we've heard over the last couple of days, there has been a few questions about.

MR DE KEIZER: Sure. Okay, there's probably a few things to unpack.

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MS SYKES: Yeah, there is.

MR DE KEIZER: And there are lots of people who will, who will answer that question, so -

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MS SYKES: And I did want to say that if you're unable to answer of course, you know, we can take that -

MR DE KEIZER: Let's -

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MS SYKES: - in written submissions.

MR DE KEIZER: Let's provide a general overview and then obviously the written submission will go into detail and I think maybe will include our strategy around offsets which is really important to the biodiversity picture that we've painted for this project and the positiveness of that strategy and then on the peer reviews on the curtailment strategy as well. I sort of spoke just quickly on that. I spoke in regards to the technical capacity to do it is there. You know, curtailment is used all around the world for different reasons and this would be setting just a threshold based on biodiversity and bird and bats to determine when a turbine will cut in and cut out and at what speeds and under what conditions.

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So that is a very applicable technology. As to the effectiveness, I think there was also a discussion of yesterday and probably additional to your question. Maybe Tim can just quickly cover that in terms of peer review.

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MR MEAD: Yeah, sure. Thanks. So on smart curtailment, again we are definitely not the experts and so we'll follow up with written information which will largely come out of the existing assessments, but also the Bird and Bat Adaptive Management Plan which is already in draft. But the history there, firstly, my understanding of its current use is I believe it is being used in Australia but I'm not aware of an outcome that we could be - that we could rely on. And so the reliance has been from a paper, I think is in 2019 in Europe and maybe North America. And so that has formed - and I think there's another study as well - and those two studies have formed the basis of the quite protracted conversations between the project and BCD. And I believe it could have even been BCD that asked us to consider it in the first place but we can confirm that.

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And so, broadly, what that has entailed is that we have gone out and we've installed a lot of bat meter and bird song meters and tried to assess - when I say "we", this is bios as the experts - have gone out and assessed bat activity at different heights and at different meteorological conditions, so different wind

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speeds, different temperatures, different humidities. And they've found a strong correlation, which was evident in the paper as well, for bat activity at certain heights at certain temperatures and wind speeds. So what they were able to determine is that at certain wind speeds you can curtail the turbines - this is the smart curtailment bit - to significantly avoid impacts and strikes to bats.

So that, I guess, is the crux of what the smart curtailment strategy attempts to do. And so since then, Biosis and BCD have produced a lot of information on how that would apply to Hills of Gold. And we can provide all that information and we can also provide the background studies that they base their assessment on.

MS SYKES: Thank you.

MR MEAD: Then maybe I'll just say in terms of more broadly around biodiversity and your question around currency of data and things that you asked earlier, from our perspective, Biosis is one of the leading biodiversity consultants in the market. And also other biodiversity consultants have worked on this project for about five years, and that's included, I think, over four years of seasonal data capture onsite.

So that has then formed the basis of a BDAR, a Biodiversity Assessment Report, which is now in probably its fifth or seventh iteration and has about 1,300 pages. So there's an extensive amount of information there, and so this has been a long process in not only assessing what's on site and what the risks and impacts could be, but also refining the layout to respond to those risks. And that's all in the BDAR as well.

MS SYKES: Yeah, thank you, thank you, Tim.

MR DE KEIZER: Did you want any more information on the biodiversity offsets or do you prefer to see that in the written submission?

MS SYKES: I think - well, I think I'd prefer to see that in the submission.

MR DE KEIZER: Yep.

MS SYKES: I think we can probably cover that off with the written submission.

MR DE KEIZER: No worries.

MS SYKES: Commissioner Marshall, did you have any questions?

MR MARSHALL: Well, I was just going to - I mean, you heard the question they asked the Department about the emergency access issue, and I just wanted to get your reaction to what you think emergency access to that road or track at the head of Peel Road might mean.

MR MEAD: Yeah. So just to clarify what has been proposed in the project and what's been assessed, we, as Nicole said earlier, we committed a long time ago now that we would not use head of the Peel Road for general project access. And we have just proposed that it is for emergency access. So that obviously includes
5 emergency services.

In terms of reaction to the question before, we're happy to look at the condition and see if we can limit it further if there's uncertainty. I guess I would just personally say we shouldn't be limiting it to the point where the general public
10 can't use it for emergency access or project staff in the case of an emergency. But to be very clear, we have no intention to use it for construction or operation related matters. And in terms of just the assessment, we propose a minor farm track upgrade, if necessary, for those service vehicles to get up on to the ridge line. That's all on the private property of our site within the project area and that's in the
15 BDAR and assessed as well.

MR MARSHALL: Thanks.

MS SYKES: Did you have any further questions?
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MR MARSHALL: No.

MS SYKES: I just have one final question from a perspective around the decommissioning plans and proposal. At what stage does a project proponent start
25 to go into detailed designs around that decommissioning process, and how do we ensure there are enough funds allocated for the decommissioning?

MR DE KEIZER: Well, I guess I can just provide some energy context around our track record with rehabilitation. It's quite widely known our commitment to
30 rehabilitation, noting the rehabilitation of Hazelwood down in Victoria which is the coal-fired power station which was shut down, and a contribution of \$660 million worth of rehabilitation costs which ENGIE is funding to rehabilitate that site. So, from a track record perspective, I think we sit well there.

In terms of the plan itself, we have a series, as the Department has issued in the consent, as to what is expected at the time of decommissioning and we would look
35 to build a plan at the appropriate time. I'll confirm with my colleagues as to when that appropriate time is in our submission, that will cover off that detail. But rest assured that it's not in our interests to walk away from the rehabilitation of a site.
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MS SYKES: Thank you. And Commissioner Grant, did you have any more questions?

MS GRANT: No thanks.
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MS SYKES: Yep, okay. I think they were all of the questions that we had. If you have any final comments, Scott, you're very welcome -

MR DE KEIZER: No, just again, thank you for the time and thanks for everyone in the hall's time. I appreciate it's been a long couple of days.

5 **MS SYKES:** Thank you.

MR DE KEIZER: Thank you.

10 **MS SYKES:** So thank you. That brings us to the end of this Public Meeting into the Hills of Gold Wind Farm SSD-9679. Thank you to everyone who has participated in this important process. Juliet, Duncan and I have very much appreciated your input. Just a reminder that it's not too late to have your say on this application. Simply click onto the Make a Submission portal on our website or send us a submission via email or post. The deadline for written comments is 5
15 pm, Monday 12 February.

In the interests of openness and transparency, we'll be making a full transcript of this Public Meeting available on our website in the coming week. At the time of determination, the Commission will publish its Statement of Reasons for Decision
20 which will outline how the panel took the community's views into consideration as part of its decision-making process. And, finally, a quick thank you to my fellow Commissioners, Juliet and Duncan. And thank you for watching. And from all of us here at the Commission, enjoy the rest of your day. Thank you.

25 **<THE PUBLIC MEETING CONCLUDED AT 1.46 PM**

