



**TRANSCRIPT OF MEETING**

RE: THUNDERBOLT WIND FARM (SSD-10807896)

**APPLICANT MEETING**

PANEL: PROF NEAL MENZIES AM (CHAIR)  
DR BRONWYN EVANS AM  
MS SUELLEN FITZGERALD

OFFICE OF THE IPC: STEVE BARRY  
CALLUM FIRTH  
KYLIE DORSETT

APPLICANT REPRESENTATIVES: EMILY WALKER  
AARON GUTTERIDGE  
PENELOPE WILLIAMS  
LISA STIEBEL  
BILL WALLACH

LOCATION: ZOOM VIDEO CONFERENCE

DATE: 4:00PM – 5:00PM  
MONDAY, 4<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2024

## THE MEETING COMMENCED

**PROF MENZIES:** All right, so before we begin, I'd like to acknowledge that I'm speaking from the land of the Turrbal and Yuggera people here in the Brisbane River Valley. I acknowledge the traditional owners of all the country from which we are virtually meeting today, and pay my respects to their Elders, past and present. Welcome to the meeting today to discuss Thunderbolt Windfarm. The case is currently before the Commission for determination. The applicant, Neoen, so you guys - proposes to develop 192 megawatt wind farm located in New England Renewable Energy Zone near Kentucky.

The proposed project involves development of up to 32 wind turbines with a maximum tip height of 260m, and associated ancillary infrastructure, including a new substation and switching station required to connect to Transgrid's existing 330 kilovolt transmission line traversing the project site. My name is Neal Menzies. I'm the chair of this Commission panel, and I'm joined by my fellow Commissioners, Bronwyn Evans and Suellen Fitzgerald. We're also joined by Steve Barry, Callum Firth and Kylie Dorsett from the Office of the Independent Planning Commission. In the interest of openness and transparency, and to ensure the full capture of information, today's meeting is being recorded and a complete transcript will be produced and made available on the Commission's website.

This meeting is one part of the Commission's consideration of this matter and will form one of several sources of information upon which the Commission will base its determination. It's important for the commissioners to ask questions of attendees and to clarify issues whenever it's considered appropriate. If you are asked a question and are not in a position to answer, please feel free to take the question on notice and provide additional information in writing, which you will then put up on our website. I request that all members here today introduce themselves before speaking for the first time, and for all members to ensure that they do not speak over the top of each other to ensure accuracy of the transcript. Okay, so we can now begin.

**MS WALKER:** Great. Thank you. Can you hear me? Okay.

**PROF MENZIES:** Perfectly. Thanks.

**MS WALKER:** So we've prepared a short presentation for the group today. We'll run through some introductions, a brief overview of the agenda, and then we'll take you through the presentation. Please feel free to interrupt at any point if you have any questions. Otherwise, we can obviously discuss all of the above at the end. Yep. I met Aaron. Go first. Yeah.

**MR AARON GUTTERIDGE:** I'll just share my screen. Six.

**MS WALKER:** I'll start with the introduction. So Emily Walker, I'm Neoen's State Leader for New South Wales, which means I oversee our development team for which is concentrated on projects in New South Wales such as Thunderbolt. Aaron is

one of a team of five soon to be six based between our Sydney and Canberra offices. Aaron and I are both based in Sydney. Aaron?

5 **MR GUTTERIDGE:** Hi everyone. My name is Aaron Gutteridge. I am the Project Manager for Thunderbolt Windfarm and will be running the presentation.

**MS WALKER:** Perhaps we'll go over to Lisa.

10 **MS LISA STIEBEL:** Hi everyone. My name is Lisa Stiebel. I'm Head of Communications and Engagement at Neoen. I've been with the company for five years, which means that I've tracked and seen and been part of the Thunderbolt engagement across that period.

15 **MS WALKER:** We also have a couple of consultants supporting us today. We have Penelope Williams, who's our Planning Lead on this project from Umwelt. And Bill Wallach, who's a Senior Biodiversity Consultant at Umwelt as well. And they'll be able to answer any of the more specific questions you might have in relation to landscape and visual biodiversity and things like that. Right. Shall we?

20 **MR GUTTERIDGE:** Firstly, I would like to acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, the traditional custodians of this land, and we pay our respects to their Elders, both past and present. We're going to go for a brief agenda. An overview of Australia. The project itself, how it's evolved over time, and the community engagement that we've conducted through the project. We'll go through some key  
25 topics identified as biodiversity, landscape and visual and traffic and electromagnetic interference. We'll then briefly touch base on the development conditions and a brief conclusion. Emily?

30 **MS WALKER:** So yes, Neoen and Australia, we're Australia's leading renewable energy company. We operate assets across most of Australia wind, solar and storage with a focus on wind and storage. We have seven offices these days in South Australia in Adelaide, Brisbane, Canberra, Hobart, Melbourne, Perth and Sydney. Although our main offices are here in Sydney and in Canberra, where we have our operations control centre, we have just under 100 employees in Australia now and  
35 we have around 1.7GW of renewable energy currently under construction, and another to just over two gigawatts now in operation in Australia. We have targets to get this number under construction and in operation up to five gigawatts by the end of 2025 and ten gigawatts in 2030. So a brief context setting. I'm sure this is not news to anyone on this call, but Australia needs renewable  
40 electricity and particularly New South Wales. We have four ageing coal fired power stations, all of which are due to close over the next 13 or so years, the next one of which will be a roaring, which is nearly three. I think that should be gigawatt, I dunno. Yeah. Gigawatts which is going to close towards the end of 2025. So to plug this gap, we really need more renewables coming online sooner rather than later.  
45 AEMO in their draft integrated system plan, which is out at the moment has made it very clear that they see the future of the Australian energy market centred around renewable electricity firms with storage and for the time being, backed up by gas.

We've got strong federal and state targets, both mandating achieving net zero by 2050 and at the federal level of 43% reduction in 2005 level emissions by 2030, and 82% of our electricity in the NEM supplied from renewables.

5 **MS WALKER:** So we thought we'd start with just a bit of context on why this site  
in particular was chosen. The site is, as we'll hear, a bit more later, largely cleared  
already. It's in a landscape that's been used for grazing and logging for a long time.  
It's also got a great wind resource. You can see that on the map there on the right-  
10 the higher wind speeds. So the site has an average wind speed of around 7.6m/s, and  
also quite a high capacity factor, which is something that we look for at each of our  
turbine locations.

We anticipate that the project will generate enough power for around 100,000 homes  
15 each year and will offset around 500,000 tonnes of CO2 every year. The other key  
feature of Thunderbolt when looking across the New England REZ is that  
Thunderbolt is, as you've already mentioned, Neal, connecting into an existing  
transmission line, which differentiates it from many of the other projects in the  
20 region. Because the new transmission infrastructure in New England isn't going to be  
completed until late 2028, Thunderbolt is in a very good position to start construction  
and connect and be operating a lot earlier than other projects, and our timeline  
reflects that. We're hoping to get this project into construction next year should it  
receive approval.

25 **MR GUTTERIDGE:** Thanks, Emily. In terms of the project site itself, it's  
approximately located in between Tamworth and Armidale, with the local Kentucky  
community nearby. The project site itself is just off the New England Highway. It's  
planned for 32 wind turbines. 29 are in Tamworth Regional Council and three in  
Uralla Shire Council. The connection, like Emily mentioned before, is on line 86,  
30 which is the existing 330 kV overhead line. We have two host landowners and three  
associated landowners, and it is generally used for livestock predominantly sheep  
and cattle. The infrastructure needed for this project comprises of internal access  
roads, O&M facilities, concrete batch plants, laydown areas and a temporary water  
pipeline included in the amendment report.

35 What we see here is the strategy of mitigating these impacts that we have on the  
project. Predominantly, when you have very good wind resources, it's always  
generally on ridge line.

40 These ridge lines for the most part aren't used for agricultural purposes, so there is  
less disturbed vegetation. But knowing that we've worked incredibly hard in the past  
few years based on the community feedback, to minimise that as much as practical  
that's prioritising exotic vegetation or low-quality native vegetation. It's working on  
ridge lines that we know, due to the surrounding project area, has a good natural  
screening to reduce visual impacts, and it's always a delicate balance of minimising  
45 biodiversity impacts and visual impacts, but also capitalising on why this is a good  
site and it's the and it's the wind speeds.

So each turbine location has prioritised wind speed and biodiversity and visual impacts. And these are the final 32 locations for the project site. It's a fantastic site. All the turbine locations have very high wind speeds and good annual or good capacity factors. And it's indicated there on the turbine yield, estimated turbine yield.  
5 I'm going to hand it over to Lisa for a discussion on community engagement.

**MS STIEBEL:** Thanks Aaron. The community engagement for Thunderbolt started back in the early days of the project with the host landowner group and a series of neighbour workshops across the early period. We then went on to employ based.  
10 And really, that set the tone and the approach for our engagement was sort of through those in early-stage discussions. I won't go into all the details here, but just, I suppose an overarching comment that this is an ongoing, extensive engagement. We had had a local community liaison officer on the ground since 2020, who has  
15 been really invaluable in just reaching out and making sure that everyone in the community was aware and had the opportunity to, you know, provide their feedback across what was a fairly difficult period of 1 to 2 years when in the midst of COVID we adjusted and adapted to that scenario quite well, I think. We had virtual online sessions and meetings that we held online during that period. And then there's been a  
20 wider engagement through the region with the Councils as well as other community organisations regular newsletters a series of three community information sessions and the Community Consultative Committee, which has been meeting since mid-2021 and has had seven meetings to date.

In response to this engagement, there have been some fairly major changes. The first,  
25 and I guess the most significant to that is in the project sizing and staging. The original scoping report back in November 2020 envisaged a much bigger project. Both wind solar and battery and as a result of the feedback that we received in that early-stage engagement for the scoping report relating to property value, to concerns  
30 around visual amenity, noise and disruption during construction, which mainly came from the southern side of the project in the sort of Kentucky region. We decided to change the staging and to split the project in two to proceed with stage one, which is the one, the stage which is currently under consideration within this application. And to look at a look at the second stage as being a potential future stage, just really  
35 depending on how things proceeded. And also, you know, under the desire to establish social license within the first stage of the project before proceeding to stage two.

Other elements of our response to engagement have related to neighbour benefit sharing in those very early host landowner discussions, which I mentioned, it was  
40 clear that everyone across this is when we were looking at stage one and two. It was really clear that not everyone within the host landowner group was going to be getting a turbine, and the group as a whole were very keen that all the neighbours and everyone participating would see direct benefits from the project. And so we established a neighbour benefit sharing scheme, which has been offered to all  
45 neighbours within 3.5km of a turbine.

**MS STIEBEL:** And you can see the graph down below on the bottom right, which shows how that is calculated. It was and is an industry leading approach to neighbour benefit sharing. It's transparent. After sharing it with all of the neighbours, we also shared it with the broader community at one of the open days. And the neighbour agreements or the deeds that go alongside the neighbour payments are simple, easy to understand documents with a clear no gag clause meaning that accepting the offer of the payment you're completely happy, you know, completely within your rights to oppose or complain about the project, that that's not what this is about. It's about sharing benefits with neighbours.

The community benefit sharing is also a generous one. We are proposing over \$5 million across the project life cycle through planning agreements with both of the two regional shires. Our original community benefit fund proposed was for 100,000 a year. In response to Council requests and feedback, this has been increased to \$160,000 a year. So both of those sort of two combined the neighbour benefit sharing and the community benefit sharing sits this project really very much at the the the very top end of industry practice in terms of in terms of amounts of benefit sharing. We have also worked with the community and with our partners in response to some of the concerns and in some of some of the requests to tailor project information in a way that would be helpful.

Just a few examples here. We developed an ecology video with our biodiversity partners, Umwelt, just showing the extent and nature of the survey work that was undertaken in the early stage of Thunderbolt. And were able then to show that back to the community at the subsequent community information Day. We also I mean, photo montages are something that we would offer anyway, but we went the extra step and partly this was due to Covid as well, but doing videos and photo montages that were then set up online so that people could click through and see the visual impact online from different vantage points.

As I mentioned we adapted to COVID. We developed a page on our Thunderbolt project website, which provided like a virtual town hall experience. We set it up, actually, for the for the community information session that was happening in the midst of Covid, but then we left it there online for, for a period of about, I think, 18 months, so that people could experience that virtual town hall at a time of their choosing. And we also have responded to interest from local farmers in the region. With a tailored biodiversity credit workshop so that people could understand what that process would look like if they wanted to be participating in it. So, yes I think a really comprehensive and reactive and responsive approach to community engagement on this project.

**MR GUTTERIDGE:** Thank you. Lisa. Just moving on to a topic identified in the agenda shared biodiversity. The project itself is located on a site that has largely been cleared for agricultural purposes, as mentioned previously. It's strands of remnant vegetation and a mosaic of native and exotic grazing land parcels. And a good figure illustrated on the slides now displays that a mix of exotic non-woody native and woody native vegetation. The remnant vegetation is generally restricted to the higher

elevation areas. Where significant areas of rocky outcrops and lower fertility soil occurs. And the final layout or layout provided in in the application prioritises locating infrastructure within exotic and or low-quality native grasslands.

5 We found an extensive amount of biodiversity research and surveys on the project area for the EIS and RTS. We have several mitigation measures. Proposed includes a very comprehensive environmental management strategy, a bird and bat adaptive management plan clearances from the canopy of existing native vegetation from the tip of the turbine blades. And we've also proposed several monitoring activities to  
10 take place prior during prior construction, during construction and through operation of the assets. We have also implemented a \$100,000 investment into bird and bat strike research program. This has been supported by DPHI, and it allows Neoen to provide the funds to help support bird and bat strikes. In, in the wind industry, which is still a bit of an unknown area.

15 **MR GUTTERIDGE:** In terms of landscape and visual. Generally, the area is your typical New England Tableland region agricultural land used for grazing remnant vegetation. Good indicator is the top figure on the slides. Your rolling hills pastureland, hills and pockets of native vegetation. In terms of nearby receivers for  
20 the project, we have 37 dwellings identified within 5.1km of the nearest associated turbines, 23 are within 3.4km, and 14 are between the 3.4 and 5.1km range. We did a very comprehensive landscape visual impact assessment, and we identified seven non-associated dwellings with a moderate impact and the proposed mitigation measures for that would be screen planting. And it's in- from that spring cleaning.  
25 We believe that it's going to have a negatively to low impact post screening.

The assessment provided from DPHI indicates that we have met the visual performance objectives. But we do believe that it's slightly overstates the impact the project has- based on requiring vegetation screening for all receivers within the  
30 5.1km But Emily will touch base on that briefly later on the draft conditions. Other topics of interest flagged were trafficked traffic and also electromagnetic interference. The TIA, or traffic import impact assessment carried out was between the Port of Newcastle and the site entrance. This includes both local government and straight state controlled roads. We will and have in previous projects, seek the  
35 relevant permits for any of these road upgrades with Council and Transport for New South Wales.

**MR GUTTERIDGE:** If there's any roadworks required. On the basis of the TIA, we there were several proposed mitigation measures to help reduce the impact of traffic  
40 on the on the local area. These include a site entrance which would be upgraded in accordance with road standards. The additional signage along the New England Highway to indicate that trucks are turning to alert motorists of the project site itself. And as well as a traffic management plan, which will be developed prior to construction, commencing with the goal of minimising the impact of traffic on the  
45 local roads and as well on the roads, internal roads on the project itself. Another item is electromagnetic interference in the EIS.

We conducted an assessment with the DMV. There was a small number of stakeholders that responded and included that the project may interfere with point to area communication services. During the during the RTS phase of the project, we managed to consult with all service providers, and they indicated that they don't expect the wind farm to cause material impact to their services. Nevertheless, we won't know until the projects are up and running and operating. But there is a condition in the consent which allows for Neoen to mitigate any of those impacted services. As a result of the project. I'm going to lead on to Emily to discuss a few items on the draft conditions of consent.

**MS WALKER:** So, yeah, we just got three conditions where we have a few comments. The first one relates to draft condition B1, which is around visual impact mitigation. The first part of this condition, as it's currently drafted requires the applicant to implement visual mitigation measures on request for any non-associated residences within that buffer of 5.1km of a turbine. We don't feel that that's reasonable. We suggest that any non-associated residences within that boundary of 5.1km where the visual impact assessment was assessed at the impact as low or negligible should not be able to request such mitigation, i.e. you can see on the right there we've proposed some amended wording. That essentially concentrates our efforts on non-associated residences where the LDVIA has assessed the impact as moderate or high with wording to make it clear that our aim is to reduce the visibility of turbines from the residence and its curtilage to low or negligible. This is in line with what was recommended in our landscape and visual impact assessment.

The next one related to condition B23, which is on biodiversity offset. So appendix five of the draft DA, which is referenced in condition B23, currently sets out the exact number and class of the biodiversity credits that have to be retired for the project before we start construction. The issue with including the exact credit liability means that there's no longer any flexibility for applicants to revise the conceptual layout, which is what our EIS is based on and which is often slightly conservative, even quite conservative, and reconfirm the final infrastructure footprint at a later date.

**MS WALKER:** Once we've done detailed design without modifying our DA, even if it's to reduce our credit liability. So essentially, by hardwiring the credit liability into the DA, the applicant is no longer incentivised to reduce its footprint of impact, which seems like a missed opportunity to us to get a better biodiversity outcome. We're not aware of any legislative restriction that would prevent DP from allowing us to review to update the biodiversity assessment report. But following detailed design, in order to recalculate the offsets and then retire the commensurate amount of credits based on the detailed design.

But essentially if you look at older development approvals, they do contain a condition similar to the one that you can see there on the top right, which comes from the younger wind farm DA, which basically allowed you to recalculate your offset credit liabilities through an updated beta based on the pre-construction design information that you had available, so that essentially not only are you reducing your



footprint of impact, but the project economics will also be better because you're reducing the liability that you have to pay, which in the case of a lot of projects in the New England REZ, is also significant. So that was a suggestion that we had and the final one just related to transport. And this is a fairly nuanced wording, but it does  
5 have significant implications.

**MS WALKER:** So if you look at part B of condition 31, so condition 31 says that the road upgrades identified in table 7.1 and 7.2 of an appendix must be implemented. But they're worded slightly differently. Our concern with part B is that  
10 as you read it here, the road upgrades identified in table 7.2 of appendix seven must be implemented by the applicant, and that table lists out the upgrades required from Denman from the intersection of the highway and Denman up into the New England REZ. That route is shared by a number of other projects and applicants, and there is a scenario in which another project might go first, start construction first, and therefore  
15 complete the upgrades themselves, and Neoen comes along a year later we don't need to do the upgrades because they've already been done and we can just roll on through, but as this condition is currently worded, it says that we must implement those upgrades. So it doesn't seem like a big one, but we may not be able to comply with that condition if those upgrades have already been done. So we've just proposed  
20 some minor changes there to include the words by the applicant or otherwise in accordance with the relevant requirements. And I think that was it. We were just going to conclude by saying that we have worked really hard to choose the sites and locate turbines in a manner that minimises impacts to the fullest extent possible, while maintaining a good wind resource for each of those turbines.

**MS WALKER:** As Lisa has talked us through, we've undertaken extensive community engagement, and the project's evolved significantly during this the last five years as on the basis, sorry, based on from the conversations of feedback that we've got and we continue that engagement today because when constructed  
30 Thunderbolt will remain in Neoen's projects for its lifetime. We don't tend to look to sell our projects. We want them to be operated around the clock from our Canberra office, and so we do regard ourselves as our relationships with the key local stakeholders as long time ones. Just a reminder of the benefits that Thunderbolt will bring. Obviously, it's clean  
35 electricity to a large number of homes and offsetting a huge amount of carbon. We have state and federal electricity targets, which are ambitious, and currently we are falling behind on looking like we can meet them. And we have a project here that could potentially be built earlier than a lot of other projects in this region. The project will also deliver more than \$5 million in financial benefits to the councils and also to  
40 near neighbours over its lifetime. And in case it wasn't clear, we agree in principle with the majority of the referral report provided by the department, we just had some minor suggestions for those three conditions. And that was all we had for you.

**PROF MENZIES:** Okay. Thank you very much, Emily and team. We do always  
45 end up talking about the things that are wrong with projects rather than the good things and I hadn't thought about it from your perspective that, yeah, there's a lot of

what's asked of you that you're happy with, but you're clearly be flagging the ones that you're unhappy with.

5 **PROF MENZIES:** The site selection really does seem a key part to the- you know to the community's acceptance and to the ease with which you should be able to meet obligations here. So well done identifying such a good site. We have a number of questions that we'd like to ask you and really, you may find this veering beyond your individual project, because we're also trying to think about the broader set of projects that are being developed across the- the landscape that the commission's thinking  
10 about and working on. So, so don't be concerned if we're asking you, you know broader conceptual questions rather than, you know, things that are specifically about your project and, and in, in saying that I'm sort of prejudging where, where the discussion might go. Bronwyn, are you happy for me to hand over to you for the first questions?

15 **DR BRONWYN EVANS:** Yes. Thank you. And I had two areas of questions. And thank you for your presentation. There was quite a bit in that that touched on the two areas I was interested in. And I think it was Lisa who took us through the community engagement. I read through, for the most part, the Umwelt submission report of  
20 August of last year. And I noticed in that submission report that there's a comment that you'll continue community consultation throughout 2023. And I just wondered, is that still ongoing? What form did that take and how many additional community members that you've been speaking with as a result of that extra consultation?

25 **MS WALKER:** Lisa.

**MS STIEBEL:** Yeah. I'm not sure who best to answer that one. But yes we certainly have continued our community consultation across 2023. We still have a community liaison officer who is based in Kentucky who has worked who works sort of 1 to 2  
30 days a week. So there is that local engagement at that level. And sort of her brief really is to continue to have neighbour and sort of local within discussions within that local area, face to face discussions. I'm not sure, Aaron, whether you've got numbers on that. So maybe that's something to look at while I'm talking. Or we'll take it on notice and get back to you with the exact numbers. We have also had the  
35 Community Consultative Committee has been meeting across that period and our local engagement from, in terms of kind of response to very particular questions, the biodiversity credit discussion I think is one of the ones that has happened across that period of time. So that was a group of both neighbours and host landowners in the area who were interested in participating in the project's biodiversity credit scheme  
40 and didn't really understand what it, what it entailed.

And, so actually that was something that Bill, Bill Wallach, who is here on the call myself and the project manager went up and met in Uralla with a group of  
45 neighbours and landowners and spent sort of a 4 or 5 hours really going into the depths of what that looks like and how to do it and how it might be possible, and trying to work through examples and scenarios where they could participate and we could facilitate their participation. So, yeah, that was one of the kind of more in-

depth parts of the consultation kind of in recent times. There would also have been newsletters going out across that period. Yeah. And I should say we kind of continue to do that sort of as soon as the IPC dates came out and newsletter went out to the community to let them know of the timing and to encourage everyone to participate.

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**DR EVANS:** I'm just curious too, because as I read through the submissions, I'm just wondering, wonder how you reconcile with your perspective that you feel. There was very extensive consultation and comments like Neoen hasn't properly consulted-consulted with the local community. Really unhappy with lack of consultation, extremely poor consultation. I know how frustrating it can be for communication but I'm just wondering how you think about the some of the comments that you got and what that might mean in terms of maybe pockets being missed or how you've been looking at what might extra need to be done.

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**MS STIEBEL:** Yeah. I mean, I think that Yeah, my understanding is that the most of those comments have come from people who are, who are, who are very opposed to the project. So I would yeah, I think and I mean, I think in terms of that sort of our consultation with people who are, you know, who do not want the project to proceed. I suppose maybe that's a good point to sort of dwell on, just briefly in the very early days of those host landowner discussions, sort of before the project was well known by the broader community, and before we'd had our first community information day we did have a town hall meeting with the near neighbour group, the people who were kind of just sitting outside of that host landowner group including a number of properties that it's kind of hard to see without seeing the topography.

25

But if you know that area at all when you're on the New England Highway, the project is sort of sitting up to the north. But if you have property that's on the other side of the highway, that's looking out to the east, all of those properties have an incredible view of the kind of landscape below them and out towards that way. And when we were in those sort of early stage discussions, a lot of those property owners were part of the host land landowner group. But it became quite clear that many of them would not have a large enough plot to have a turbine on it which was very much the origin of the of the discussions around making sure that everybody benefited because it was clear that not everybody would have, you know, turbine infrastructure. And so very in those very early days, we decided on a mechanism where everyone would get at least if they wanted to be part of the project, they would get at least a minimum of a ten, \$10,000 a year payment just so that nobody would be missing out. And although the project has sort of evolved from there, that was the origin of that neighbour benefit sharing kind of concept. But yes, some of those properties that look out over that, over that area would have been and would be visually impacted by the potential stage two. And so a lot of our strongest opposition has come from those smaller properties along the highway.

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And so it really was very much part of our thinking around the staging of the project was to establish, you know, that we were good, good corporate citizens and that we were going to do a really good project, and we were going to really involve the community and I and I'm not and we, we haven't brought those sort of those few

neighbours from that, from that thing along with us. And, and I guess it is it's something for us to reflect on. Could we have done it differently in those early days, like, could we have set something up in a way that was you know, more inclusive? But yeah, I think we as time went on that that opposition became more entrenched.  
5 And so I think that that's been a legacy of those early discussions where everybody was not able to be, you know, part of part of the project.

**DR EVANS:** Okay. And I think it's probably that's a really comprehensive answer. Thank you and now and back to Neal for questions in other areas. But thank you for  
10 that, Lisa.

**PROF MENZIES:** Thanks Bronwyn, Suellen?

**MS SUELLEN FITZGERALD:** Thanks, Neal. And this, I think maybe goes to  
15 your earlier comment, Neal, about some broader issues. I notice that the conditions as they stand at the moment require a accommodation and employment strategy for the local area. I'm wondering if you've turned your mind to what might be included in that strategy, or if you have thought about what the issues are that you'd like to address in that strategy.  
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**MS WALKER:** So we have just started turning our minds to it. We have just engaged Arcadis to start preparing some of these management plans that are required under the DA. So while we haven't got specifics that we can talk to now, we can say that we have been talking with Uralla and Tamworth Councils in particular around  
25 accommodation and employment water road usage and construction materials and things like that. So it will be something which evolves closely with the input of the councils. We are aware of issues around accommodation shortages in this area.

But equally, you know, with the construction timeline that we're targeting for  
30 Thunderbolt, we will be constructing significantly earlier than the majority of other projects in the REZ. So we hope that that will go a significant way to alleviating the cumulative problems that we might otherwise have seen when multiple projects are constructing at the same time.

**MS FITZGERALD:** Thanks, Emily. My other question is around the question of  
35 timelines, actually. I see the project has got a two year construction period, which is a long construction period, but possibly not for a wind farm. What do you see as being the length of the most intensive parts of that project, both in terms of traffic movements to the site and also noise from blasting and construction and so on. Is  
40 there periods where it'll be most intensive?

**MS WALKER:** Yeah, that's probably something we can the detail of which we can take on notice, because I'm sure we have more details from projects that we've  
45 actually constructed which can provide some of that information, but certainly from a vehicle movement perspective. In terms of the volume, I'd expect that the early stages, the first kind of 6 to 9 months of construction, will see the most traffic just in

terms of light, light vehicles and also, you know, b-doubles bringing construction materials, you know, quarry lorries, bringing quarry materials in.

5 We've obviously got, as you say large excavators clearing, taking material out of the ground. There will likely be a bit of blasting as well because of the large amount of rock on the site and concrete pouring as well. So we'll probably do batching on the site to reduce the number of vehicles coming in and out with, with concrete. And then when it comes to so that's all the kind of groundworks preparing the excavations in order to put the foundations in. And then we'll have the oversized over mass load  
10 transports, which come a bit later, perhaps even a year into the start of construction. And those will happen. I probably late at night or very early in the mornings to avoid you know, school bus times heavy movement of, you know, workforce traffic and stuff. Those, those often come in when it's when it's dark and so they go largely unnoticed by local residents. But yeah, we can perhaps provide something a bit more  
15 detailed on that, if you would like.

**MS FITZGERALD:** Thanks, Emily. That'd be great. Neal that's all my questions.

20 **PROF MENZIES:** Emily, I want to sort of ask an even more vague question. The issue of upgrades to roads is, is come up in, in various ways for us including your comment about the expectations of you upgrading bits of roadway that might be upgraded by somebody else. And this relates to your use of split blades. I take it that's not the preferred approach, that if the roads were up to bringing 90 metre  
25 blades onto site, that's what you'd do. Is that in scope a possibility or is it just not going to happen fast enough that the roads will be up to scratch for you to use long blades?

30 **MS WALKER:** This is a very topical question. So we have just. Yes, the current is based on a split blade, which is a GE machine where the blade is delivered in two parts and then put together, assembled on the site. So it's enabled us to yeah. Get, have, have a route with minimal upgrades. You know we our procurement department has actually, at the end of last year, kicked off the tender process to secure a turbine supplier for this project. So we've currently got around six turbine  
35 models that have been proposed by five different original equipment manufacturers for the project. We're in the process of going through those and looking at the energy yield results for each of them and what their credentials are in terms of ability to connect to the grid. Before we move forward with a short list of turbines, it is a possibility that the GE split blade will not be the most optimal turbine for the site, but if that were the case, then we would have to go through a DA modification  
40 because undoubtedly more significant road upgrades would be required.

45 **PROF MENZIES:** Yeah, it's a timing question in a way, isn't it, because you're not the only proponent who's wanting to put in big turbines. One of the other things that was raised by council was they noted that from the New England Highway and this is Tamworth. We haven't spoken to you yet. They noted from the New England Highway the long setback distances and that, you know, appreciative of, of that. But they also noted that there's a couple of turbines that are very close to one of the

smaller roads, and I think it's Green Valley Road that a couple of them are very close to. And, and they had concerns about that. So we just wondered what your view on that as an issue is. Is there scope to move those turbines further away? They were worried about safety issues of blade throat was the, the issue that came up for them?

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**MS WALKER:** So just to make sure I'm across this Green Valley Road is the is the small road that we used for access for the met mast as far as -

**MR GUTTERIDGE:** It's the western side.

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**MS WALKER:** Yeah. Okay. So, yeah, this is something I mean, whenever we site a turbine, we always take into consideration blade through risk assessment and maintain a certain buffer from public infrastructure, or be it overhead lines or public roads. That road is a very scarcely used unsealed road. It obviously will not be used for our site entrance. All the site traffic will come straight off the highway through that that single main site entrance. We don't think this is a significant issue, but equally, if it emerges that it's a bigger issue than we anticipated or assessed, then it's something that could be addressed through micro siting, potentially once we we're into the detailed design phase of the project. But at the moment, it's not something that we feel or that our designers have identified as a, as a health and safety risk or a traffic risk.

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**PROF MENZIES:** Okay. I think we're approaching the end point of our questions. Let me just check with my fellow commissioners. Bronwyn, anything from you?

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**DR EVANS:** I just had one further question. And, Aaron, you mentioned the bird and bat strike and the monitoring pre, during and post. I'm wondering from the two gigawatts that you've already got in operation, and I appreciate it's across both wind and solar. If you've been able to build up a level of understanding of in an Australian context, what might happen with birds and bats and, and how your monitoring activities have been able to get an understanding of what happens.

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**MR GUTTERIDGE:** We have several assets in operation in South Australia and Victoria that do carcass search programs. I can't say that the vegetations in those areas are applicable to Thunderbolt Wind Farm, but it's definitely something that we would utilise internally because we have that history of operating in the asset. We can definitely enforce our decisions if there's any evidence or data that would support our bird and bat adaptive management plan or how we manage, you know, on site. On site works like bird carcass programs. So on the top of my head, I don't think there would be information that would support project, but we can definitely utilise the historic information that we have on the project for Thunderbolt.

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**MS WALKER:** It's probably obvious, but I'm sure Bill is probably sitting there thinking the same. But every project is different. I mean, there are obviously obvious similarities between projects in the New England which have similar vegetation types. In those key areas, particularly on higher ground. You know, we I think it's reasonably safe to say that most wind farms would operate fairly similar mitigation

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strategies for the impacts that one might expect from one wind farm to the next may vary significantly simply because not just because you have different species there, but also because they're in that habitat for different reasons. You know, it may be a site which is used for foraging but not for nesting.

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**DR EVANS:** Sure. I was just thinking, have you established a workflow for the monitoring processes and has that sort of workflow been. But we can we'll be on site next week so we can actually, as we're walking around, get an understanding of how you've done that at other sites.

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**MS WALKER:** We can ask we can certainly ask our asset management team, though I'm not I'm not sure of what we do specifically on those other operating assets. So we'll ask.

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**DR EVANS:** Thank you.

**PROF MENZIES:** Suellen. Anything from you?

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**MS FITZGERALD:** I'm good. Thanks, Neal.

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**PROF MENZIES:** And I'm also good. So I simply need to thank you all for the presentations you made. They were very useful to us. We, in a short period of time, thinking through a very complex problem and trying to tease out the various bits that we don't understand sufficiently to be comfortable with the decisions that we need to make. So it's been really very useful talking to you. Emily, I'm assuming that those alterations that you're suggesting, you'll send them all to us.

**MS WALKER:** Yeah. Yeah, absolutely.

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**PROF MENZIES:** Nodding heads is good enough. So, so thank you very much for your time this afternoon. We we're really looking forward to our site visit.

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Material on paper is a good starting point, but actually turning up and physically getting, you know, the sense of the site and the impacts there's nothing like walking around the paddock to achieve that. So we're really looking forward to that. And for that matter, to the, the community meeting to get a sense of how people are thinking about and, and looking at your project. So thank you very much for the time you've spent with us today.

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**MR GUTTERIDGE:** Thank you very much.

**MS WALKER:** Thank you,

**MS STIEBEL:** Thank you.

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**MS WALKER:** See you next week.

**MR GUTTERIDGE:** See you next week, everyone.

**<THE MEETING CONCLUDED**