



New South Wales Government
Independent Planning Commission

TRANSCRIPT OF MEETING

RE: THUNDERBOLT WIND FARM (SSD-10807896)

URALLA SHIRE COUNCIL MEETING

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

OFFICE OF THE IPC: CALLUM FIRTH
KYLIE DORSETT
STUART MORGAN

URALLA SHIRE COUNCIL: CR ROBERT BELL (MAYOR)
CR BRUCE MCMULLEN
CR ROBERT CROUCH
CR SARAH BURROWS
CR LEANNE DORAN
CR LONE PETROV
CR TARA TOOMEY
CR TOM O’CONNOR
TONI AVERAY
MICHAEL RABY
SIMON VIVERS

LOCATION: URALLA SHIRE COUNCIL CHAMBERS,
32 SALISBURY ST, URALLA NSW 2358

DATE: 4:00PM – 5:00PM
MONDAY, 11TH MARCH 2024

<THE MEETING COMMENCED

PROF NEAL MENZIES: I'm the person who's going to kick off, Robert. Thanks for welcoming us. I have a formal statement that I need to read to start off and then
5 from that point on, we will be very informal. So a discussion. So let me just start by my formal statement. Before we begin, I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet the Anēwan people and pay my respects to their Elders, past and present. Welcome to the meeting today to discuss the
10 Thunderbolt Wind Farm case, which is currently before the Commission for determination. The Applicant, Neoen Australia Proprietary Limited, proposes to develop 192 megawatt wind farm located in the New England Renewable Energy Zone near Kentucky.

The proposed project involves development of up to 32 wind turbines with a
15 maximum tip height of 260m and associated ancillary infrastructure, including a new substation and switching station required to connect to the Transgrid's existing 330 kilovolt transmission line traversing the project site. My name is Neal Menzies. I'm the chair of the Commission panel. I'm joined with my fellow Commissioners, Bronwyn Evans and Suellen Fitzgerald. We're also joined by Callum Firth, Kylie
20 Dorsett and Stuart Morgan 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
25 form one of several sources of information on which the Commission will base its determination. It's important for the Commissioners to ask questions of attendees and to clarify issues wherever it is 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
30 provide any additional information in writing which 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 they do not speak up over the top of each other to ensure accuracy of the transcript.

And Stuart has asked me to remind you to press the button in front of you before
35 speaking, which will mean that he gets an accurate record for the transcript. So from this point you know, open discussion. We are all new to wind farms, probably, as everyone in the room is. So we're here learning both about how the wind farm will function where it fits in your landscape. What you as a community, think about it.
40 Ultimately, we need to make a decision on whether the wind farm is allowed to proceed, but also if it is, what are the conditions under which it's allowed to proceed. So we're very keen to get input from the Councils who are affected. As we, you know, you bring a community voice in a far more perhaps deliberate way than what we'll hear from individuals at our public meeting. So please – yeah, give us your
45 clear viewpoints and don't be concerned if we're asking questions of you. We're probing to understand and to clarify our own thinking. We've done a lot of homework before we've arrived.

Both with reading the various pieces of documentation prepared by the company, the Department, lots of public submissions. So we have lots of stuff in our head. But there's still a lot of areas where we, you know, we need to understand more. Okay, so if I can hand back to you, Robert.

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CR ROBERT BELL: Thank you very much, Professor Menzies. I might start with Councillor Bob Crouch and then Councillor Sarah Burrows. They done a significant amount of work on that submission that you'll be given a copy of. So if you could - thank you, Councillor Crouch?

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CR ROBERT CROUCH: Councillor Dr Bob Crouch. We've been - we learnt a lot through the process we went through with New England Solar. It's made us much more wary as a Council. It's also taught us that we need to cross the T's and dot the I's as we go. We are dealing with businesses whose resources both Uralla Shire. Let alone any other businesses in Uralla Shire. And we need to keep that in mind. I guess Councillor Barrett and myself did a lot of work putting together the submission you've got in front of you. We started with the submission that the Council made on the environmental impact statement. We then look very closely at how Walt had addressed the issues that we'd raised in their response to the agency submissions.

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And work their way through those to see whether we agreed, whether their response satisfied what we needed to have an opinion. And we tried to base our will we have where we have opinions, we base them on the evidence we have we can have in front of us, or the evidence we could find through talking with people around the area, talking with people at the university and that sort of situation. So we realised that if we're going to argue against something or argue for something, we need to have evidence to do that. So even though we haven't referenced and haven't quoted a lot of stuff in here, we kind of didn't see it was the place for that. But we can provide additional information if you want. Yeah. Do you want me to go through this, Robert?

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CR BELL: Probably not at this stage Councillor Crouch. I just wanted to ask Councillor Burrows if she's got any additional comments she wants to make at this stage on the submission.

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CR SARAH BURROWS: Hello, I'm Councillor Sarah Burrows. And as Councillor Crouch has said, we did this together. I would like to strongly note the community, the cumulative impact that is going to be in our area and that is not noted often by any of the projects that have been coming through or, as we pointed out, has been slightly misrepresented. Neoen noted 6 nearby energy or storage projects. We know have a further 24 and another 4 already operating projects. And we see as a very small shire, that we're about to be overwhelmed by something that we have very little control over. And as this is the first one that we're addressing with you, we feel it's very important that we try to get across all the problems that we see happening with good reason, as opposed to just you know, we don't like it. We do understand it's coming. We just want it to be done really well.

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CR BELL: Thank you. Again, my name is Robert Bell. Maybe we need to give some context for where Uralla and Tamworth sit on this project. That it is on our boundary. Probably only 2 or 3 of the turbines will be in Uralla Shire. The rest are in Tamworth Regional Council area. However, it's fair to say that the main area of impact is Kentucky, which is in your Shire and Bilal, which again is in Uralla Shire. So there's been hence the negotiations you would have seen over the 60/40s and the 50/50 splits. It's been evident in the last couple of weeks that we weren't going to align with our Tamworth was dealing with the voluntary planning agreements. So we've actually set out having some discussions.

And when I complete this, I'll ask the general manager to just update us. The reality is that, as I say, most of that impact will be felt on our neighbouring shire. And you know, be fairly clear that, you know, Tamworth weren't aware of the project until I suggested to them there were signs going down the highway from the Friends of Kentucky Action Group. So it's been knocked them critical focus. They've obviously had the Hills of Gold, which has taken a lot of their time and energy. The issue for us and the well set out, as I say, by Councillor Crouch and Councillor Burrows where we've identified items that we think could be better managed. So I guess I'm taking Councillor Crouch's view, trying to make it easier for that. They needed to be inserted into current conditions from the Department of Planning.

That would be a you know, that would be a big win for us. We've obviously had the challenges around and we mentioned earlier about the issues around cumulative impact, particularly around accommodation. Remembering that the Neoen project wasn't in the race. So we've only since the renewable energy zone been declared. They were already in process. So some of the voluntary planning agreement arrangements clearly don't fit into the draft guidelines put out by the Department of Planning. That will not happen for any future projects. They'll all meet the requirements of the draft voluntary planning agreement from the Department of Planning. I think as an organisation, we struggle with how the end of life is treated for all of these projects, whether it be solar or whether it be wind.

And we've lost arguments with the Department of Planning. We believe they should look bonded in, even if it's in the last five years of production some way to because to put the emphasis back on landowners, it seems to us a huge impost and as Councillor Crouch mentioned, if Uralla Shire is overwhelmed by these significantly large companies, then the local landowners are going to be even more overwhelmed. So I guess that's a point we don't take waste from any of the renewable energy projects. We just don't have the capacity. We struggle to see how they're going to deal with water access. Obviously, they've indicated in their new adjusted plans about going to a using a dam south of the project area.

The Department of Planning advice to us was if they needed more water, they didn't need to go back to the Department, but they do need to identify where it comes from and it's clearly not coming out of your water supply. So they've got some challenges in that area. You'll hear probably on Thursday, lots of talk about biodiversity issues around particularly around flora and fauna raptors and the like.

So, they'll leave those discussions related. But what I might do now is I might ask the general manager just to update us. Update you on the voluntary planning agreement arrangements. And then I'll ask any other Councillors who wish to make comment if that's okay with you. Thank you. Thank you, Tony.

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CR TARA TOOMEY: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. And through you, Mr. Chair. We have been working with Neoen energy for pretty much 12 months negotiating a voluntary planning agreement. We feel that's still the best vehicle for ensuring community benefits going to the communities. And those negotiations have taken a few different turns. We've had we've been working on behalf of Tamworth Regional Council in most of those negotiations. But most recently we've agreed that it would be better for each Council to negotiate on its own individual standalone terms. The agreement was initially to be a 50:50 split between Tamworth and Uralla Councils for the community benefits. More recently, Tamworth was seeking more clarification as to the impacts of the proposal.

In order for the Council laws to. Be satisfied that the 50:50 was an equitable split. In the end, it's been agreed that it would be a 60:40 arrangement with 60% going to Tamworth and 40% going to Uralla Council. And we're satisfied with that proportion of the contributions, the agreement that we have agreed in principle with Neoen most recently last week in an extraordinary Council meeting. It's based on annual payments for the life of the or for the operations, which is stated to be 30 years. And that contribution would be based on a 40% of the proposed annual payments to come to Uralla Shire. And at the start, it was 160,000 a year and our 40% share based on 30 year payments. So the total investment value is \$5.6 million.

And so that's how we're getting our \$5.6 million multiplied by the 40%. And we've agreed that Council has resolved that it would be an appropriate arrangement for Uralla Shire to enter into would provide certainty for future investment options for Council in the context of overall community benefits to be coming from a range of other proposals as well. The status at this stage is that we've provided that advice to Neoen from the Council's resolution at the extraordinary meeting, and we've advised our solicitors to go ahead and draft the agreement. We refine the agreement that we had previously been working on and that will come to us in the next little while, hopefully this week. And then back to Neoen.

We found that they have been quite open to engage with us on these matters, and we feel that this is the best option because it enshrines a CPI payment so that the buying power remains current and that we will have certainty for our Council to plan for community benefits in consultation with its community. I think that we need to say thank you.

CR BELL: Thank you again, Robert Bell. I'm just going to go around the room. Councillors, are there any questions you wish to ask? Councillor O'Connor - and I didn't hit him on Friday night. It wasn't me.

CR TOM O'CONNOR: My wife did.

CR O'CONNOR: Councillor Tom O'Connor. I have had experience in travelling through Portugal and Wales seeing wind turbines in place and thought they were very attractive. I went but my family and friends live through Washington State, Idaho, Montana. And there's a creeping sort of the number of wind turbines going
5 across that countryside. Unlike here the wind turbines in eastern Washington State, Idaho and Montana. Generally on hillsides denuded of any vegetation. So they look similar to what? Idaho and sorry, Portugal and Wales, they look to be pretty artistic but I don't believe the same can be transferred from those environments to ours with the same result. I have a number of issues that I've that I have, I agree with what
10 Councillor Crouch and Burrows have indicated about the known.

So that recyclability of the blades and in the end of life. So I won't speak about that, but I support their view. One comment that's been made to me is the no fly zones in relation to the towers and they are going to be placed within forested areas. And they
15 are Rural Fire Service is going to have real issues with no fly zones in tackling fire bush fires at their earliest positions, remembering that when a bush fires been fought, the best place to fight it is on the crest of the of a slope, because a fire slows down as it gets to the top. And that's where the towers are going to be. And that's where, even with a protocol to say the towers will be closed down, there will in fact be danger in
20 relation to those. These towers are going to be 260.

And the towers are growing in this height to up to 300,000 - 300m tall which is at the level of where the water bombers like to operate. So we're going to have a situation necessary situation where the fires will be able to gain in momentum because they
25 won't be able to attack the most appropriate time. So I think when you're looking at you must, I think, take in view the uniqueness of the Australian bush and the Rural Fire Service's requirements. They are better to talk about it than me, I'm not a Rural Fire Service, I just listen to what they have to say. One other item the next item that I have is that as they grow taller, the mass that's required at the base to stabilise them
30 is getting larger. And that is in most cases, concreteness. Some of these tales will almost use up as much gravel as we produce in our shire.

It's got to come from somewhere, and I don't think anyone has really addressed that problem. And alongside the gravel. Oh blue metal is water. And the mayor has noted
35 on that. And I don't think, I think any proponent has to address those issues in very precise nature and not just leave it where it will be fixed. If it isn't, if they haven't got a solution, they shouldn't be getting it at this time.

CR BELL: Yeah. Thank you. So can I ask you the other Councillors -
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CR O'CONNOR: Yeah, sure -

CR BELL: Come back to you?

CR O'CONNOR: Yep.
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CR BELL: Council McMullen.

CR BRUCE MCMULLEN: Thank you, Mr Mayor. My name is Bruce McMullen, and I have Councillor Bruce McMullen. I have a number of concerns. First of all, if I can put it in context, this project was deemed to be a project of state significance, so it was imposed upon us. It's the second time that has happened. We had the solar farm, the New England solar farm imposed upon us. We have suffered significantly as a community as a consequence of the New England solar farm in that accommodation is non-existent and it has gone through the roof and it has forced less able to afford it out of their accommodation. It has significantly impacted on services and our ability to provide those services, among those being our roads network, our very clever local truck drivers were able to destroy roads to just the extent where they could get through and then move on to the next one, parallel to that one and bugger it as well.

We have other services being impacted significantly as well, like medical and water and garbage collection and so on and so forth. But significantly also our ability to project into the future has been hampered by the fact that whatever voluntary planning agreements are imposed upon us are beyond the current legislation of the renewable energy zone. In other words, they can negotiate their voluntary planning agreements without the 1.5% of CIV. I think perhaps slightly cynical. I'd like to know how they come up with the CIV and a \$5 million project they might build two towers with \$5 million. So somebody's fiddling the books to give us our 1.5% in order to provide the services that this town desperately needs.

So the imposition of the renewable energy zone had that significant impact, and now we're being asked to cop it again. Neo in her very cleverly used their legislative knowledge to come up with a figure. As general manager outlined that will be paid to us on a per capita basis once they start to generate - and it is not for the life of the project - it's for 30 years now. Okay, that may be the life of the project, but I bet your quid it's not, because - improvements in efficiency, improvements in carriage capacity, improvements in storage, improvements in this and that and the other thing, will have the project updated. So that agreement of 30 years is a falsehood. Similarly the capacity I - okay, the agreement says they're allowed to generate a certain number of kilowatt amps to go into the system.

As the transmission capacity increases, I am sure there is a way that companies such as this will apply to have that generation capacity increased. So the Neoen project and the ACM project are both providing us with a certain amount of money based upon the CIV. If that changes, the agreement doesn't. If the project falls over, so does the agreement. But my major concern, and it's been touched on already is the decommissioning aspect. Now, Professor Menzies, like you, I had an interest in rocks and soils and things like that. And as a previous geologist in a life mapping the coal reserves in the Hunter Valley and then trying to supervise their rehabilitation,

I'm totally appalled. And the companies have used the legislation to their benefit so that there is no impact on their profit, their bottom line. And you can be rest assured that these companies similarly have lawyers that are paid more than our total input from rates to get their maximised profits.

I would like you to consider, when you come to make your decision on asking Neoen to come back to us within the guidelines of the renewable energy zone and within the capacity of them paying us on the kilowatt amps generated, not a token gesture of the capital investment value.

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CR BELL: Okay, Councillor McMullen, thank you. Councillor Doran, do you have any questions? Councillor Toomey?

CR BELL: Yeah. Sorry. I'll go back.

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CR LEANNE DORAN: Yeah. My apologies Councillors and Commissioners, I just wanted to clarify probably used the wrong term? So the offer is a total contribution of 5.6 million 500,000 plus indexation to CPI over the 30 year life of the project, split between the two Councils. And that figure is based on 1.5% of capital investment value. So just to clarify, that's not the capital investment value, that's the amount of contribution that's being paid by way of community benefit. And they our contribution is 40% of that amount over that 30 year life. I just thought I'd clarify that. Thank you.

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20 **CR BELL:** Councillor Toomey?

CR TOOMEY: No. Thank you, Tara Toomey. I guess I just - I really want to endorse what Councillor Crouch and Councillor Burrows have put together because I really respect the work they put into that, and I know that they have come to grips with it. And I all of the things I've raised are what I would have raised if I had spent the time that they spent doing that paper. I did not I will completely acknowledge that I was the last time of Council, as you know, was five and a quarter years. We had the first New England solar farm Malarkey. Is that the right word? That was during that time of Council, and it was utterly exhausting for everyone. And I think that's probably one of the reasons I have been grateful not to have to be at the forefront of it this time quite as much. Every meeting was just horrendous.

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Every alleged consultation was nothing short of a farce. And I really mean most sincerely, I cannot tell you how awful it was for our community to be divided and conquered by people with 25 lawyers now with, I don't know how much money, and every individual was told to keep their secrets, not talk to their neighbours, not who were their brothers or their uncles or their fathers or their wives. You know, I mean, it was incredibly divisive and shrouded in an awful amount of legalese that was deeply intimidating and distressing to people. And it really divided families, not just communities, but also communities. And I think what the level of mistrust that is here now, I actually really think the community should be applauded for not locking their gates. And I really just hope we can have that perspective on how incredibly sensible people are actually being in the face of what they've been through, because every single person has been through that in one way or another.

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A lot of people who had difficult, you know, extraordinarily difficult times. I love the way some of them creatively got around that nonsense, but too many people weren't able to get around it. And for some people, they just had to leave town. They

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had to, you know, some good friends of mine moved to far North Queensland. They just could not do this. So I think the context and the cumulative effect is incredibly important, I think for the Commission to see this. And I think point two in the statement that's been put forward through Councillor Bowers and Councillor Crouch, is absolutely the perspective that has to be taken by the Planning Commission, if I can ask that of you. Because the cumulative impact is actually what we're dealing with. And I know there are one project, but it's actually the picture that we have to manage.

10 I just feel really strongly that people are being reasonable, but they're being painted as if they're anti-renewable, and that is simply not true. And that has to stop. That rhetoric has to stop. The media has to stop spinning it. And I think every opportunity that we in any level of government and representation have to get rid of that has to be taken because it's nonsense people, I think, are being very reasonable. I do think it is
15 - as Councillor Burrows said, it's about how it's done. We accept, we know, we're trying to work with, but it is being treated respectfully in the process. You can only imagine how many lawyers there are that people have tried to fund out of savings they simply don't have to try and respond to extraordinary contracts. I mean, I've seen ludicrous contracts that people in my network have been given for - some
20 \$5,000 that they - just have a simple partnership agreement.

I was stunned at what they were asked to hand over for that, and that was pre REZ. But that's the way that ACEN are treating some of our community at the moment. So we just need to be really clear that we've still got that going around. We've still got
25 heavily legalised realities that people are trying to deal with, to try and still get along and work with and participate with what we know is coming. We are trying to navigate it. We are not all lawyers, nor are we lawyered up, and we're sure as hell not deep pocketed. And that's the problems we've got trying to manage it. I do think that there should be more state government provided legal advice, personally. I really do
30 think we've been left - and the silo effect of all of that is really damaging for the community. And has left people at a ridiculous disadvantage considering how much taxpayer money goes into fundraising numbers both. But that's just my perspective. Thank you. Thanks.

35 **CR BELL:** Thank you. Councillor Petrov, did you wish to make any comment?

CR LONE PETROV: No, I just endorse what Councillor Burrows -

40 **CR BELL:** Sorry, we're just going to have to. Even for that you're going to have to -

CR PETROV: Councillor Petrov - just wish to endorse what Councillor Burrows and Councillor Crouch have put a lot of time in and in agreement with everything that they've done.

45 **CR BELL:** Councillor, Doran?

CR DORAN: Sorry, Thank you. I am Councillor Leanne Doran. I don't really have anything to add to what's been said here. I certainly endorse the view of the Councillors and the submission that's been put in. Thank you.

5 **CR BELL:** Thank you. I'll go back to Councillor O'Connor because I cut him off. And then we're back to Councillor Burrows. Councillor O'Connor - did you have any more you wish to add?

10 **CR O'CONNOR:** I was on my last point when you stopped me. My last point was migratory birds. Wind turbines need to address the pattern of migratory birds. They do take up a very large portion. They are designed to catch the wind. So unless the proponents clearly identify and clearly show that they're not going to be a danger, then they should be there to providing what they're going to do about it.

15 **CR BELL:** Thank you, Councillor Burrows?

CR BURROWS: Seeing as we asked to -

20 **CR BELL:** Use your name each time.

CR BURROWS: Each time? Somebody and I was going to say, seeing as we asked if we could use your first names, I think we could probably go to our first names as well. If this is going to be informal in any way. I'm not sure when you were given our submission or if you even have been given our submission, and if you have any questions you'd like to ask us?

25 **PROF MENZIES:** I'm quite sure we have lots of questions we're going to ask you. I would like to thank you for the submission. It's really helpful for us to to get it documented. And the suggestion of conditions is useful because we can clearly see what you're thinking there. So thank you very much for that and it was supplied to us before we came.

CR BELL: Colleagues - Bronwyn, do you want to start?

35 **DR BRONWYN EVANS:** Bronwyn Evans, Thank you very much for the submission. And when we got it, we could clearly see how comprehensive it was. I think the points that you've raised around the cumulative impact has really reinforced the concerns in the community about it's not just this project. So thank you very much. I think some of the areas in particular that I would like to ask about were some of the areas around roads just there in the section on page five around the local transport and the road upgrades. If there were particular areas that you as a Council feel we should be looking at. So we've we had the transport for New South Wales at one of our Commissioner meetings a few weeks ago talking about their responsibilities for roads and where any work was done.

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45 But I'd just be keen to understand, from your point of view, what are some of those things around the roads where you really feel we should be just making sure we're aware of those issues.

CR BELL: Yes. Thank you Dr Evans. So I might start and then I'll go to Councillor Crouch to follow on their proposal talks about 50km of internal road. So at the moment, the access on from the highway and highway into the site doesn't will be before your local boundary. So that part as you say, transport from New South Wales and involved to come up from Newcastle home. The issues for us are around the roads is mostly the 50km of internal roads. Now, given that it's Granite Country we assume they'll want some sort of more significant gravel material where the best source of rich gravel. We have a number of sites, one that's being upgraded recently under a joint regional planning panel agreement, another one that's been approved by Council, but only for two hectare site.

So the issue for us is that none of that's identified in the EIS. We are extremely wary of any internal accesses they might use or any of our roads they might use. None of those roads are suitable for carting 50 you know, sort of a truck and dogs or truck and pigs or whatever they want to call them a day over. And as I say, quick maths on 50km of road, like six metres wide by maybe a couple of hundred millimetres deep gravel, significant amount of gravel that has to come out of our shire. We have been working on the 7-Eleven charges to try and ensure that road haulage charge costs are picked up. That's an area where we probably saw issues with the previous development that was referred to where that wasn't as strong as solid as the Council would have liked.

And we ran into some problems over road upgrades and what that should look like. But I think the fact that it's almost done, the eyes of solar and where they're going to get their gravel from, they talk about doing some testing where they're going to put each of the turbine bases in, but they might strike granite rock, they might strike granite sands, they might strike anything. We don't have any information on that. Now, I appreciate that. The developer will say to us, that's fine. That's something that we'll tell you in due course. Due course is not going to do our Council much good and definitely doesn't do our ratepayers much good where they find us personally responsible for the road, so on that basis. But Councillor Crouch, I will - thank you.

CR CROUCH: I've got to introduce myself as Bob this time. With the roads and look at what's here. The conditions of consent go into a lot of detail in what they require for the major transport route from Newcastle to the site. They talk about the roads around Muswellbrook. They'll be taken with blades and the turbine towers and all that over. Nowhere in the conditions of consent that they consider the impact on local roads. Now local roads will carry not just the highway, but roads to the highway - will carry people getting to the site. I don't know how many people are going to be there every 300, 400. It will carry the - as Robert said - the water, the sand, the gravel, the concrete. It won't be limited to just coming up the highway and turning in. The material has to get locally to the highway or come in the back way to them to the wind farm. We would - I've - we - because this has been sort of half approved by Council - we would appreciate the local roads that are going to be used to be considered in the same detail as the major roads.

MR MICHAEL RABY: So Mick Raby, Director, Infrastructure Developer Council. Thanks, Mr. Chair. If I could just swing in on the back of that. This is my first stint in a regional Council. I've come from Sydney and Coffs Harbour type things where
5 we have magnificent roads and lots of money to build them. In this shire, we live with a slightly different principle. We have a hierarchy of roads. Best roads we have is the highway through the main street, and it goes all the way down about five steps to very local roads, but service only a few properties, and they are built to a standard that can withstand 20 vehicles a day and survive for 10 years quite happily.

10 But what Council is pointing out is many of the roads that the construction traffic is going to have to drive up are built to that standard, and in their current state they won't last a week and they won't last the first week of construction. So it's a significant problem, and we have no insight into which those roads are as a part of
15 the planning process. So it'll all come very quickly, very late in the piece. And That's roads to appropriately carry traffic, allow the people that live off those roads, to keep using them during construction is going to take a significant amount of work, a significant amount of materials that may not exist in this shire in the quantities that are required. And it's not really addressed in the early planning stages, which is the
20 issue.

CR MCMULLEN: I mean, Councillor Burrows?

25 **CR BURROWS:** To be specific on that. What Mick was just saying about those roads on the Balala side of this project, there's a very low level of of people, and it's a dirt road all the way back. And it would be the fastest route to the two major gravel pits in the area. So that road will be destroyed. I personally live on that road and I would not like it. I live right at the front of it. It's the people down the road that are going to be upset. And I also think that nobody wants that road to be a 2 - a 4-lane
30 tarred road anyway. So we're going to have to work out ways to ensure that these trucks actually travel on the roads that the Shire can afford to keep up. And that they have to maintain them to the manner that is required to keep them usable by the rest of the population.

35 **CR BELL:** Councillor O'Connor?

CR O'CONNOR: Can I just add to that? Remember, what we're talking about is that currently raw road, right? And if you take Councillor Burrows point about trucks going down right from the gravel pits to the sites, we're talking about trucks going
40 and local people riding and driving on those. So there's going to be a need for those roads to be safe for other users other than the trucks. And that's requires a higher grading of roads that are currently provided. We don't have to provide on a small branch rural road, a standard of that would be safe with two trucks passing with traffic on them because it's talking about 20 cars, 20 vehicles a day.
45 We're going to be talking about 20 vehicles an hour. So that vehicle, that local road will have to be similar to the highway. And at the moment, it seems to be our responsibility to bring it to that.

CR BURROWS: Or keep them off our local roads and say that they have to travel specific routes so that we can actually try and keep our shire in the sort of state that we like it as opposed - we didn't - none of us lived here because we prefer to be in Sydney. So I think that the best way is going to be to limit the trucks, limit the roads that they can use.

CR BELL: Look, I think thank you for all the Councillors and the staff for their input. Look, we're honoured to have the Independent Planning Commission make time to come and see us today. Obviously, we'll I'll be making a presentation on Thursday. And I think Councillor Crouch is also indicated listed to make it a presentation that will be slightly shorter and a bit more succinct than what you've been handed in the submission today. But look, wonderful to see you in your Uralla. And as I say, with a clear understanding of where we see the concerns now, we avoided talking the biodiversity issues that we know that the Friends of Kentucky Action Group will raise, and those where they're much more familiar with those terms.

Just a couple of things on the current arrangement around the 30 years and the capital investment funds, the coalition of Regional Energy mayors are going to head towards the same as the voluntary planning agreements from the Department of the draft, where we talk about megawatts produced per annum. And we also talk about whatever the life of it is. So whether it's 30 years or 50 years, rather than having to, Councils have to go back and try and negotiate again with companies that I think probably ACEN is a classic. I think they're up to the third iteration of the ownership. We think that these companies will buy and sell and so we're very keen and obviously part of the agreements that we're talking about for with our lawyers is to ensure that this flows through from whoever runs the project.

We really don't care what names on it as long as they're committed to the same outcomes. But I guess the easiest part, to put it in perspective the annual payments of approximately \$74,000 that won't fix the kilometre road. So I guess that just puts it in perspective for everybody else. And I think going back to Councillor Toomey's comment, the accommodation we got from I think we're probably at 3%, although the local agents tell me there aren't any houses available, we got down to nought. He couldn't find a house, so anybody wanting to do a tree change come be relevant because we're cheap wasn't available. We're talking about houses that went up something like 150,000.

Now, we'd have said five years ago that we're well below the market. We clearly went very quickly to above the market. So that accommodation and how future development, including energy co in their new transmission lines, whether they have to go to work accommodation or how that process again, we were having energy Co will be leading that but they've become very silent to my view. And that's you know, I would have normally had regular contact. We'll have contact again next week. So I'll thank - on behalf of all of us - thank you very much for coming today and taking your time. So I appreciate it enormously. Thank you.

CR BURROWS: I was my question was actually going to be on the accommodation issue, and I was interested to know whether around the table Council has ideas about
5 how they might solve it or how you think the proponent might solve it. What ideas have you got to address it?

CR BELL: Let's go to the fundamental issue that Council thought yes, we wonderful. If we could to have a housing strategy. So we said to the Department of
10 Planning, we'd love to have a housing strategy. And they said, well, we can't fund you one because you're basically your population growth is flatline. And you go, well, what about the 6000 people that are coming to the region for renewable energy projects? And they go. So that would be our first step. The second step is not until we start to see some direction. I know Councillor McMullen's been doing some
15 work. We've been talking to House North, is it? We're talking to a number of agencies. And as I say, we're going to be learning this process.

But we don't have anything on the ground. We've identified land that's available. We're happy to talk to developers. But at the moment, if somebody came to us and
20 looked for a house tomorrow, there isn't the horrible, you know, three bedroom unit or a two bedroom unit, we don't have it. So look, it's a frustration. And I think that reflects back in our attitude to how one section of the Department of Planning works with another one. To be fair, it was only in the last 12 months that the Department of Planning thought that there was a cumulative impact, and they should be assessed as
25 part of the conditions of contact. Councillor McMullen?

CR MCMULLEN: If I can add one point to that. Thank you, Mr. Mayor. In terms of us having a housing strategy, it is a requisite before you can apply to have any land rezoned. We have land available for rezoning. We are not allowed to rezone it
30 because we don't have a housing strategy. They wouldn't let us have a housing strategy because they didn't think we needed to rezone the land.

CR DORAN: Okay. Thank you. I'll just give you an update on that. So yeah we were anticipating approval for the phase two or stage two, round two of the regional
35 housing grant program. Unfortunately there were only 16 Councils approved for funds out of the 64, I believe, that have applied across New South Wales. And we weren't one of the successful applicants being very grant dependent. We don't have the resources to be able to progress this work independently without the funding. So currently I'm working on another option which will be subject to energy code. We do
40 have some funding that we can draw on from energy code, and we'll be putting a proposal to them to be to enable us to do this, some of this groundwork that could provide us with the data to really form a strategic position on what's the best approach to the worker accommodation demand that is coming our way inevitably. We're seeing a lot of it already on the table with the projects that are on the books,
45 and it's the cumulative impact that is of greatest concern against a background of existing housing affordability and a housing shortage, which applies to regional New South Wales equally as it does to metropolitan Sydney. So we would like to work

through that in partnership with adjoining Councils, because the workers for each project don't just live in Uralla, because the projects in Uralla or live in Tamworth, because of projects in Tamworth, they're going to live wherever they want to live. And it is actually quite a deficiency in the current planning frameworks and
5 guidelines that have been reduced by the produced by the Department for Renewable Energy.

And we have noted that in our submission and the advice has been, as Mr Mayor said, that it's a bit of work that was to be headed up by energy. Unfortunately, it's,
10 you know, it's a bit late because we're already seeing these projects. So we feel that we have no option but to try to develop our own strategic response to that and put something on the table as the Councillors have said already. But it is, you know, it is something that we would have liked to have had in front of us in some local government areas across central West Arana, for example, there's been a preference
15 for worker accommodation to be located on site in the Donga type villages. The alternative is to have, you know, free market accommodation, find your rentals.

It has the effect that's already been mentioned today on available rental accommodation. It also would take up existing tourist accommodation, which we
20 wouldn't really want, and it would make it unaffordable for others in the community. And it also is a lost opportunity for some economic opportunities for local businesses. So we're really working out what we can do and trying to identify if there's areas where we can, you know, encourage developers potentially to look at some purpose built accommodation that might be able to be repurposed at a later
25 date. But for a Council of this, you know, this size, it's a, you know, it's a big ask. But we're going to try and take on that challenge. In the absence of any stronger leadership at the state level.

CR BURROWS: I'd also like to point out that we're quite a low socioeconomic
30 shire, and that with we've only had one project happening so far right in town, and that has already had a terrible impact on our community. We've had families have to move out because their rentals kept being raised to the point where they could no longer afford to live here. And because of that, they took their whole families with them which means that then we have fewer children in our schools. So it's a nasty
35 cycle from a low economic base. And it affects people that are never going to get any of the benefits from the renewable energy zone. So that's another fairly awful problem we have.

CR TOOMEY: Tara Toomey. The one thing that I just wanted to throw in to the
40 points Sarah's making are some that I've made repeatedly because I've seen the families leave and I've seen the schools dwindle and the high school impact here is horrendous. The central school here, sorry. But one thing I would just say is I've always been trying to work out a way to see if
45 developers who have this problem so that the renewable energy developers who bring this problem with them could do something like a legacy project. And that those legacy projects could not be turned into affordable housing, maybe social housing, but not affordable housing, which maintains that high rent and the taxpayers

pay the gap. But rent to buy housing, which is a federally endorsed approach to this problem. And that's something that I'd love to see. Those legacy projects help us bridge that gap, because we need to pull that rent down. We need to pull those numbers down of what the sale price of a house is.

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We have to actually do something to manage that by getting affordable housing stock on the market. And I can't see any other way in my current thinking. That's where I'm leaning at the moment, but that's what I'd really like. You know, I am having some conversations with people in the finance world about how they would see that working, but to me, it's the developers got to be the one that drives that. In a way. I'd love to see that then bound by that kind of commitment to come and create some accommodation, some maybe not all, you know, but some accommodation and to have it then bound into a rent to buy affordable housing, not affordable housing, a rent to buy scheme as opposed to affordable housing, which doesn't solve the problems.

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And I would just really like to see that part of what we can put forward for any of these projects, because it is it is definitely a huge problem, and it's having a huge impact on commercial real estate as well, which has had, you know, because people say, oh, the developers can pay the 7 or \$800 a week for a property that was \$350 a week before everyone's rent in that main street is going up. And I have one of those shops in the main street, and I've had a I think it's almost 20% increase in eight months. My sales have not gone up by 20%. They've gone down. This is really hard times for everybody was one of the darkest retail months I've had.

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And I've been in online and in the main street for only a couple of years, but online for a few years now. And it was tough. I don't think it's going to get any better that soon. So we've, you know, we've it's flowing on into everything that we try and rent. Yeah. So I think that's where I was hoping that we could translate some of that opportunity into something that would help our community. Long Term.

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CR BELL: Given that I sent all those people home and they've still got questions, I'm going to go back to Neal and his Independent Planning Commission and ask if they've got any more questions before we launch in again. Sorry about that, I really apologise.

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PROF MENZIES: I think we're all good. But if you've got more things that you would like to tell us, we would certainly welcome that. It's been a really useful session thus far. So don't feel constrained by time. Please keep going until you've told us everything that you think it would be valuable.

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CR BELL: Councillor McMullen. You had your button on before I said you could talk (indistinct) about that.

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CR MCMULLEN: It's called a pre-emptive attack, Mr. Mayor. One final point on housing, if I may refer you to the ACEN Housing Strategy. They are about to

commence their Stage 2 Project. They anticipate 400 workers. And their bottom line is they plan to use existing housing stock.

5 **CR TOOMEY:** Sorry, excuse me - Tara again. I just want to say, tagging on to Councillor McMullen's comment about tourism, which I think came up before. I also run an event here in town that we work really hard on for 11 years now to pull outsiders in because we need outside dollars in our economy. And tourism dollars are critical. And every year, you know, we flog ourselves to try and make sure we get the word out there. We do get a great audience from across Australia that come to
10 this town for one day a year. Hopefully 2 or 3 nights, like we really work hard on that. But what I have found is about a month ago, all the accommodation options were taken up and I started thinking, oh, that's amazing because I also, I also have a B&B, like most people can't do one thing, so I've got to do a couple.

15 So my B&B booked ages ago, but usually is. I've been around a lot longer than most, so, you know, I'm usually in one of the search engine responses early in the piece, but what I looked around and found was that while there were a lot of people who had who were genuinely booked, I do think we're looking like having a good weekend on the back of that. At the same time, there were people who said, oh no, I
20 just I've got, you know, six workers in. It's twice as much money as I could make on tourism. So that I do think it can't be understated, but it's going to be hard to really be clear about when that's actually happening and where that's actually happening, because it takes - I felt really frustrated when B&Bs were deregulated and you didn't have to get approval anymore and you didn't know where there was a bed and
25 breakfast or when it was still actually an available rental property.

And so now that we don't know that, but now we're also dealing with the worker overlay in that space too. It really does keep people in our community. I mean, we made a conscious choice not to move into the worker space. We could, but we
30 wanted to stay in tourism because we know how much that is important for our town's economy. It is so important for our town's economy. So we stayed in that space with our small cottage. But, you know, that's obviously not everyone's going to see that and understand the impact and make everyone can make their choices. But it's extremely worrying that we don't have anywhere to stay. And people, you know,
35 a month ago couldn't find a bed. They're staying in Armidale.

We're probably not going to come here for the dinner's on a Friday night on a Saturday night. And that's the impact that the benefit that we're all trying to drive for the community, for our whole share of that economic opportunity.

40 So I really am concerned about the tourism impact and how we, I mean, I think it's just the comment about as a left hand, right hand is doing sometimes in the planning space, not being rude, but just making sure we're all coordinating that because you take away the rules that you have to apply for permission to run a B&B, and then you
45 load 600 people in every couple of I mean, this is all going to get out of hand very quickly, and we've already got the housing problems. So that really and suggesting

that the next iteration of solar work is going to use current housing stock is just there isn't any it's just not appropriate.

CR BELL: Councillor Doran?

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CR DORAN: Hello. Thank you. Leanne. So two things I guess I'd like to add to the conversation is that I regularly work in Armidale. And so as I come home in the afternoon, the flood of traffic from the ACEN solar, the New England Solar Farm, heading back into Armidale, you can't miss them. They're minibuses. They got a flag like it's pretty obvious which ones are the solar farm workers. So there's a lot of people that are yet travelling outside of our shire and working here. And the other thing I think I'd like to just say is that we've only got a really limited number of restaurants.

15 And so when the workers have been really working really on when stage one occurred for the New England Solar Farm, the weight at the top pub was more than two hours for a meal like you just can't. Like there's just not enough food outlets to provide and and help because those people, they're working, they're not going to go and do a grocery shop and cook at home, like, or in their motel, like, you know, they have to purchase at our restaurants. And yeah, it makes it really hard for the rest of the community to then have a birthday dinner out, like, you know, just live our lives. It's a big impact on us.

25 **CR BELL:** I'm going to go to Councillor Crouch and then Counsellor Burrows (indistinct) three in front.

CR CROUCH: I just like to go back to our submission for a moment and point out some of the reasoning we've used in putting to you what we have. And that in a lot of cases they're in the conditions of consent. There are terms like the Applicant shall take all reasonable steps. The Applicant shall minimise impact, they'll minimise waste. Those are not quantifiable nor countable figures. At this level. They might be fine when you're dealing with a house site, but I don't believe they're fine at this level. If you looked at a mine site, the mines will keep dust below a certain level. They will keep sediment below a certain defined level. And that's what needs to go in here. And in that sense that the conditions of consent are just not good enough for a development of this nature, that we'll have the impact on the community that it will have. The other part, I'd say it's not all doom and gloom. I'm a director of the bowling club and the club's been benefiting a lot. And passing back to the community from New England Solar Farm. And our resources coming into the community. But it does have a big impact on the community.

45 **CR BURROWS:** The Mayor probably should have warned you it's hard to shut me up. As Bob said, the audits that - the independent environmental audits - that they haven't, even in their statement, brought it up to the regular level of audit, which is on - this is - where am I up to? I'm on Page 7 C14. We think that all we're very cognisant that the fact that the usual way that audits are done is they're done at the beginning and then they're done all the way through so that you can see if they're

actually sticking to what they should be doing. And in this document at the moment, it doesn't have any of the check-ups afterwards. It's only got the initial ones, which is why we've proposed that they go in.

5 We add, as would be normal in an audit independent audit, that at intervals no greater than three years from the initial operational audit and that we want everything to be published so that the public can see that they have to stick to what they're doing because the public don't trust them. Whether that's fair or not is not for me. But we've been fully treated, as you can hear in the past, so everyone is quite nervous about
10 what's coming at us. And again, because this is the first one that we get to have a chance to speak to you. We feel that this is very important for everyone that comes after. The other thing that I was worried about was I don't know if you know, but 40% of concrete is water. We have very little water up here with the top of the hill.

15 We don't collect water. It runs off us. So for them to have such high demand for water like this, one project will use more water than we can supply in a year. And they're saying that they can use it from this dam down the road. That is an unquantifiable size because it's quite a shallow dam, depending on how much rainfall we get as to whether there's much water in it or not. It's all very wishy washy, and I
20 would very much like this whole thing to be just tightened up a little bit so that the community have some feeling that it's actually going to hold them to limits. So exactly what Bob was saying about not just make it good in whatever you think good is, it needs to state what is reasonable and be audited on that, on all these points that we've put. That's all I can think about right now. Happy for more questions.

25 **CR BURROWS:** They love me on Council day. As Tom was saying, we have a lot of birds here. We have a lot of endangered birds. We have a lot of birds that are protected, like wedgetail eagles, because we have iron, we have a lot of trees. Wedgetail eagles nest on these hills. So that's why we added that hopefully
30 something like the Tasmanian Wind Farm could have I project that gets up and turns off the blades with approaching birds and that it could be set to birds that are protected such as the wedgetail eagle, or in times of migratory flight, it could be set for those birds as well. Now the university, our local university, has a lot of people that specialise in this area, and I'm sure they would be very happy to help you with
35 any information you wanted about local birds and times of year and all that sort of thing. But I know that the penalties are \$5,000 for the first wedgie you whack. But as it's known that on average, one turbine kills 200 birds a year, and these are set at about the height of wedgetail eagles. We're not going to have any left - 200 more of them are left. So that's another reason we put that in and we're very you will be
40 hearing a lot about that on Thursday, I'm sure.

CR BELL: I should have told you, Neal. You actually have a second button on that will cut anybody else off.

45 **PROF MENZIES:** I wouldn't do such a thing.

CR BELL: I did think about them.

PROF MENZIES: So thank you very much. That's been an extraordinary session for us. Lots of really good information. And I think that my fellow Commissioners, we found it really useful. I did have some questions, but they were obviously ones
5 that you are very exercised about because you've more than answered them for me. So thank you very much. So, Councillor Burrows, when your next good idea comes to you, don't think you've missed the opportunity. You can still make written submissions to us and please do so. So this is one opportunity to talk to us, but you can keep doing so as other things come to mind. I'm just going to check - Suellen,
10 you're good? Bronwyn, you're good? Okay, so it just leaves for me to say thank you very much. Should I gavel you Councillor Burrows?

CR BURROWS: Do more submissions, help your cause, or - like I've said and written, what I want to say - so I'm not speaking on Thursday because I thought that
15 if I just hit you with the same thing again, you're going to stop listening.

PROF MENZIES: Yeah. No, it doesn't help. I mean, any new idea is, of course, useful to us, but having 1 or 13 people give us the same good piece of information.

20 **UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:** Yeah.

PROF MENZIES: Mary O'Kane, who is the chair of the Commission, says it's not a vote. Meaning, it's really about the intellectual content of the material that you give
25 us. And so one submission is sufficient. Okay. So thank you very much Council.

>THE MEETING CONCLUDED