



New South Wales Government
Independent Planning Commission

TRANSCRIPT OF MEETING

RE: VALLEY OF THE WINDS WIND FARM (SSD-10461)

COUNCIL MEETING

PANEL:	RICHARD PEARSON (CHAIR) SARAH DINNING SUELLEN FITZGERALD
OFFICE OF THE IPC:	KENDALL CLYSDALE CALLUM FIRTH BRAD JAMES
WARRUMBUNGLE SHIRE COUNCIL:	MAYOR KATHRYN RINDFLEISH LINDSAY MASON LEEANNE RYAN NICOLE BENSON ERIN PLAYER ADJUNCT PROF WARWICK GIBLIN BEVAN CROFTS NGAIRE STEVENS
LOCATION:	ZOOM VIDEOCONFERENCE
DATE:	12:00PM – 1:00PM WEDNESDAY, 2 nd APRIL 2025

<THE MEETING COMMENCED

MR RICHARD PEARSON: Hello, Warrumbungle Council.

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PROF WARWICK GIBLIN: Hello, Richard.

[All say “morning”].

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MR PEARSON: Good to see you. Madam Mayor and all the other attendees of Council, thank you for joining us. If you don’t mind, I’m just going to ... I’m Richard Pearson, but I’m going to just start with an introductory statement that we need to do for each of these meetings that we’re holding.

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So, before we begin, I would like to acknowledge that I am speaking to you from Yuin country and I acknowledge the traditional owners of all the lands from which we virtually meet today and pay my respects to Elders past and present.

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Welcome to this meeting today to discuss the Valley of the Winds Wind Farm (SSD-10461) currently before the Commission for determination. The Applicant, ACEN Australia, propose to develop a 943-megawatt wind farm in the Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone within the Warrumbungle Shire local government area.

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The project involves the development of up to 131 turbines, a 320-megawatt/640-megawatt hour battery energy storage facility, connection to the proposed Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone transmission line and other ancillary infrastructure.

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My name is Richard Pearson, and I am Chair of this Commission Panel and I am joined by fellow commissioners, Sarah Dinning and Suellen Fitzgerald. We’re also joined by Brad James, Kendall Clydsdale and Callum Firth from the Office of the Independent Planning Commission.

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In the interest of openness and transparency and to ensure 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.

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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 is important for the commissioners to ask questions of attendees and clarify issues whenever it is considered appropriate. If you’re asked a question and not in a position to answer, please feel free to take the question on notice and provide any additional information in writing which we will then put up

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I request all members today introduce themselves before speaking for the first time, and for all members to ensure they do not speak over the top of each other,

to ensure accuracy of the transcript.

5 And in beginning this meeting, may I just first ask each member joining from Council to please introduce yourself, and if necessary, provide any verbal declaration of any actual or potential conflicts of interest that you may have in the project. Thank you.

10 So, what I'll do now is hand over – I'm not sure if you have a formal presentation for us, Council, but I will hand over to you to do your introductions and then perhaps talk through the briefing note that you've provided to us and/or any presentation that you have.

15 **MR LINDSAY MASON:** Lindsay Mason, General Manager, Warrumbungle Shire. I have no interests in the project.

MR PEARSON: Hi Lindsay, thank you.

20 **MS LEEANNE RYAN:** Leeanne Ryan, Council's Director Environment and Development Services, and I have no interest in it either.

MR PEARSON: Thanks, Leeanne.

25 **PROF GIBLIN:** Hello Richard, my name is Adjunct Professor Warwick Giblin. I have been advising Warrumbungle Shire on all REZ matters since the commencement, and I have no interest -

MR PEARSON: Thanks, Warwick.

30 **PROF GIBLIN:** ... pecuniary interest in the project.

MR PEARSON: Yes, yes, understood.

35 **MS NICOLE BENSON:** My name's Nicole Benson and I'm the Director of Technical Services with Warrumbungle Shire Council. I have no interest in the project.

MR PEARSON: Mm-hm.

40 **MAYOR KATHRYN RINDFLEISH:** Mayor Kathryn Rindfleish. I have no interest in the project.

MR PEARSON: Thank you.

45 **MR BEVAN CROFTS:** Thank you, commissioners. Bevan Crofts, Director Engineering at Landex, assisting Council on roads matters, and no interests to declare.

MR PEARSON: Thank you.

MS NGAIRE STEVENS: I'm Ngaire Stevens. I'm the Acting Director Corporation and Community Services at Council, and I have no interest in the project.

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MR PEARSON: Thank you.

MS ERIN PLAYER: Hi, I'm Erin Player and I'm the REZ Coordinator at Council and I've got no interest in the project.

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MR PEARSON: Thank you. So, we did provide an agenda to Council which you would have received. We can work through that and/or if you wanted to talk to us about the – I think it was a briefing note that we received, that we've read, and we've also looked at your submissions to the EIS and the response to submissions. So, I think we're well across some of the issues that are in play for Warrumbungle Council, but did you want to begin talking through the issues that you still think are key for Council in the project as it is now framed?

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PROF GIBLIN: Lindsay, did you want – are you comfortable for me to make a few comments?

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MR MASON: Yes, that's fine, Warwick.

PROF GIBLIN: Thank you. Well, hello commissioners, and it's a pleasure to talk with you today. The REZ was declared back in November 2021 and since 2022, starting with the Birriwa Project, and Council has examined very carefully 10 generation projects since then that are proposed in the Shire, plus the major transmission line. And to keep that in context, that's 10 generation plus one major transmission, and then a [unintelligible] across the whole REZ, either inside it or just outside it, are in the order of 40 projects.

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Now, right from the very beginning, Council has expressed reservations about the inadequacy of the impact assessment, especially in relation to cumulative impacts. Now Richard, if I can address you directly as the Chair. Here we are three-and-a-half years in, and the State Government is yet to complete its much-promised cumulative impact assessment and to identify and implement tangible material substantial actions to mitigate predicted impacts.

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Now, that's the strategic REZ-wide matter, okay. It still has not been addressed. And I would ask of you what are Council, what's local government and the community to think and to feel about this, when this matter which is material and significant and the government has now foreshadowed, "Oh yes, we've made a slip-up here and we'll now do the cumulative impact assessment for the Southwest REZ and the New England REZ." Right, but that strategic study still hasn't been delivered, and we're none the wiser.

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Secondly, I would ask you to comment on the fact that the EP&A Act is primarily focused on looking at the project generated impacts and is somewhat limited and

inadequate in assessing the cumulative impacts arising from a number of projects that are nearby. Now, the Assessment Report prepared by the DPHI for this project has flagged, I think it's about five or six projects, they mention them by name in relation to cumulative impacts on roads, and they have made the judgement in there that there is, quote, "ample capacity", "ample capacity on the Golden Highway."

Now, that Golden Highway is also meant to haul equipment and infrastructure relating to not half a dozen projects but in fact in the order of 40, just to do with the REZ. Secondly, it has been brought to our attention in the last few months that the wind farms destined to be built in the Southwest REZ are in fact also going to use the Golden Highway to haul their infrastructure. Now, anyone that travels the Golden Highway would already know it's rather a – road safety is somewhat a challenge. There is very few overtaking places and very few slow vehicle lanes.

So, my question to you is, what is Council – how are we meant to feel when the fact is these cumulative impact issues have not been yet addressed?

MR PEARSON: Thanks, Warwick. Look, I mean, obviously our role at this point is to hear the concerns of Council and obviously we are well aware from reading your submissions that cumulative impact is well up the tree in terms of impacts that you're concerned about. We have had a discussion with the Department about the cumulative impact work that's being undertaken, and I think we do as commissioners need to find out some more about that through this process.

But we're at an early stage in our determination of this project. I don't have any magic answers for you, Warwick, on the cumulative impact work. It's a little bit of an exploratory process for us at this stage as well. Have you had any consultation, has Council had any consultation in relation to the cumulative impact work, or is that work that's being undertaken in-house, to your knowledge?

PROF GIBLIN: Leeanne, would you like to comment on that?

MS RYAN: Yes, thank you. Yes, we have had some involvement in working groups with the State Government, particularly the Department of Planning, and yes, the EPA have been involved as well, and DCCEEW for water and sewer. So, there has been involvement.

Those studies are still very much in draft format, and a lot of the information in them is, yes, a lot of assumptions, because some of the details in the EIS's and the information provided by developers, yes, didn't quite stack up. So, they've looked at that a bit closer, and some of the information was not forthcoming as well, developers didn't want to offer it up. But yes, we have had some input into that, yes, at this point in time we still continue to do so.

MR PEARSON: Okay, thank you. Look, at this stage I do want to hear, and I think the other commissioners want to hear the range of issues that Council has in relation to this project. So, very clearly on our radar is the cumulative impact

piece. Can we perhaps talk through some of the other issues that you have with the project? We have our agenda before us, so, you know, traffic and transport, you've spoken, Warwick, about the Golden Highway. Can we talk more about that?

5 **PROF GIBLIN:** Sorry, just to – yes, if I may, if I can talk about social impacts, Richard. Because this is a pivotal part in relation to the cumulative impact matter. Okay. Now, for Warrumbungle Shire, we could see approximately a doubling of the population in this shire over the next 6–8 years. The population is about 9,200, foreshadowing there could be another 10,000 people come in on a short-term basis
10 for the construction phase.

Now, that's going to be profound in terms of social impacts, you know, we're already fairly stretched in terms of policing. We're very stretched on policing. What about ambulances, paramedics, firefighting equipment and services, doctors,
15 hospital beds, mental health services? The government touts this as it's going to be a bonanza and a great deal of benefits for the local communities. Now, the community wants to see some of these benefits, particularly in the topics that we've just raised.

20 Now, if there's going to be these construction workers and they've started coming now, that's going to be put additional pressure on those social constructs, those social services that I've just mentioned. Again, that is a pivotal issue. When are we going to see more police, more ambulances, more paramedics, more hospital beds, more doctors?
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MR PEARSON: Yes, no, understood. I think you've made the point well on cumulative impacts. And as I've mentioned, we are certainly aiming to find out more about that work through this process. I don't have answers for you on those questions, but at this point very keen to take on board what the key issues are for
30 Council. So, social impact.

How does Council feel about the accommodation camp concept that's being proposed for this development? Is Council supportive of that or neutral on that?

35 **PROF GIBLIN:** Leeanne, would you like to comment on that

MS RYAN: Pretty neutral on that. I mean, our preference always was for camps to be close to our communities on the edge of town, so that there would be some benefit for our local communities. But this one sits between, and you probably
40 know, Coolah and Leadville. I'm guessing it's about 10 k's from town, I might be corrected on that. But yes, fairly all standalone from what I understand, so we're fairly neutral on that.

MR PEARSON: I guess it has some benefit in terms of not putting pressure on your tourist accommodation and I guess the scarce rental accommodation in the
45 area.

MS RYAN: Yes, correct. Yes. There's still the outstanding issue of water and

disposal of wastewater, what they're going to do with that. So, I don't know where they're going to gain their potable water for camp from, yes, that's still a moving target under the cumulative impact study stuff that's going on.

5 **MR PEARSON:** And what's your feeling, Leeanne, in terms of how far they are off with the studies, the cumulative impact studies? Do you think it's some way down the line, do you?

10 **MS RYAN:** Yes, yes, definitely.

MR PEARSON: Okay. Thank you.

15 **PROF GIBLIN:** Commissioners, I might ask Bevan Crofts, who's been assisting us on the roading matters, to just summarise where you think we're at, Bevan, in our positioning on that.

20 **MR CROFTS:** Thanks, Warwick. Commissioners, Council's done its best to reach agreement with the developer on a number of specific identifiable and reasonable and feasible road upgrades that address the direct impacts of known traffic between the site and the accommodation, and the site and various supply centres such as Dubbo and the like.

25 And the quantity of truck movements shouldn't be underestimated as it's in the order, in our opinion, of 200 or so thousand movements to deliver millions of tonnes of gravel to this project. And we appreciate the developer has met us on those requirements largely.

30 I guess the broader issues which Warwick spoke to are about the residual impacts, which we can't, under the New South Wales Planning Framework, attribute direct and quantifiable and specific nexus to this developer. And necessarily, where those residual impacts basically fall to the Council. And to talk to one, the number of oversize-over-mass movements that this project alone requires is around 12 movements per turbine. So, we're talking about 1,500 movements.

35 And if you do the sums, assume that they move maybe three oversize-over-mass loads up from the Port of Newcastle every day, it'll take a minimum of two years all going well with no delays to basically get just this project's load up the Golden Highway. So, at the moment we can't concur with the New South Wales
40 Government's assessment that there is ample capacity within the state road, because as you know there's at least 10 concurrent projects waiting in the wings, including others in other REZ's that need to use this as the sole feasible route to get from the Port of Newcastle to their site.

45 So, from our view, and we know that Transport for New South Wales and EnergyCo are looking at this with quite a few people, professionals, to make these judgements about how to manage this. But from our view, basically the bandwidth of the road network could be up the Golden Highway here hauling 10 or 20 oversize movements per day and still be locked up for the next 20 years essentially

at the current rate. And each one of those loads moves quite slowly, like, potentially 30 to 50 k's per hour up the couple hundred kilometres from the port.

5 So, it's a significant issue which we can't quantify internally with the resources we have, which basically Council will be left to manage with over the coming years.

Warwick, would you like to speak to my comments more – sorry.

10 **MR PEARSON:** Sorry, Bevan. When you say, "Council will be left to manage." So, the Golden Highway, that's a State Government responsibility in terms of road upgrades etc., maintenance etc., is that correct? Or does Council share some responsibility?

15 **MR CROFTS:** Well, Transport for New South Wales has operational care and control of the state road carriageway, but Council remains the roads authority. So, basically all residual risks in regard to any impacts off the carriageway itself within, say, rest areas or on the local roads attending to between the state road and the site, and the communities more broadly around it and all of those services that are provided to those movements basically become a matter for Council. And
20 especially when the State Government isn't stepping in to try and calculate and then predict and manage these risks.

MR PEARSON: Any questions, Suellen or Sarah, on the traffic issues?

25 **MS SUELLEN FITZGERALD:** Richard, I'm aware that Council has a Contributions Plan and that they've been in negotiations with the Proponent here around the VPA matters. Is it correct that Contributions Plan will be applied here, and is the community aware of the elements of that Contributions Plan?

30 **PROF GIBLIN:** Maybe I can answer that, Suellen.

MS FITZGERALD: Okay, thanks Warwick.

35 **PROF GIBLIN:** Yes. I mean, the Warrumbungle Shire Council has invested a lot of time and effort in identifying an approach and a methodology for looking at the development contributions that are paid under planning agreements.

40 We have been focused on transparency and accountability. And Council has designed a process where there will be a Planning Agreement Management Committee, which will be an advisory committee which will advise the full council in relation to how the dollars are to be allocated. Those dollars are to be allocated, you know, on a project on a developer/developer basis, to public purpose projects, as defined in the EP&A Act.

45 And they are to be chaired by the Mayor. There are two elected officials on that committee, and significantly, four representatives from affected communities. Now, those affected communities are those which are going to be impacted by these projects, including Coolah, Dunedoo etc., and in and around where the

Valley of the Winds will be.

5 And the developers will also have an input into their hopes and expectations about how the dollars that are to be paid might be allocated to projects. And so, you know, that'll be in the – part of the – the functioning of the Council and the decisions will be by the full council, so they'll be open and transparent, they will be reported in meetings. So, we are very confident that we've come up with a system here that is fair to all parties: the communities, the developers, and to Council and to the developers.

10 Does that answer your question?

15 **MS FITZGERALD:** Yes, thanks, Warwick. I suppose I'm just looking for opportunities, you know, for that VPA to be able to be put to some of these local issues that you've raised.

20 **PROF GIBLIN:** Yes, well, the purpose of the money is of course to be allocated to projects in the zone of influence in relation to the development. And absolutely and unequivocally, that's where it, that will go. I mean, what we've tried to do here because there are 10 projects, we didn't want to have, you know, different committees or different methodologies for assessing each and every one. So, this one committee will function universally and apply some consistency across all the projects. But very happy to take more detail questions on that, if you wish.

25 **MS FITZGERALD:** No, that's good, thanks Warwick. Thanks, Richard.

30 **MR PEARSON:** Thanks, Suellen. Yes, just, look, and I suppose the other point is that in terms of the road upgrades that I think are now proposed as a schedule or an appendix in the Development Approval.

PROF GIBLIN: Yes.

MR PEARSON: They will be separately funded and undertaken by ACEN ...

35 **PROF GIBLIN:** Correct.

MR PEARSON: ... separately to that VPA fund.

40 **PROF GIBLIN:** Correct, absolutely.

MR PEARSON: And Bevan, from what you were saying, you were largely comfortable with where that's landed in terms of those local road upgrades that are proposed?

45 **MR CROFTS:** Commissioner, without a knowledge of the New South Wales planning system, we're comfortable that we have got the best deal in terms of dealing with the nexus of those impacts. I'm not sure we can specify anything more. But there are residual impacts that -

MR PEARSON: Yes, no, I understand that point, yes. Thank you. Okay. So, I'm just referring back to our agenda here.

5 **PROF GIBLIN:** Commissioner, if I may, can we just do a little bit more on the roads here for a moment?

MR PEARSON: Sure.

10 **PROF GIBLIN:** As per our briefing note, there, as Suellen well knows in previous matters before the Commission, we have highlighted here the matters around ensuring that project related traffic actually sticks to the prescribed roads for access ...

15 **MR PEARSON:** Yes.

PROF GIBLIN: ... and doesn't go on other roads. Now, we are concerned that there's nothing really in effect, there's no adverse consequences for the developer if in fact workers go on roads which are not prescribed. Now, I'm not sure how the Commission proposes to address that, but it is a serious risk for Council. Because if people find these rat-runs and thrash them to death as they are likely to do, then that is a cost that will be borne by the residents and the ratepayers, and that's not fair. That's taking money from ratepayers when a private entity has generated the costs.

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MR PEARSON: Are you referring to heavy vehicle movements there or worker movements or all of them?

PROF GIBLIN: Any.

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MR PEARSON: Sorry?

PROF GIBLIN: Any.

35 **MR PEARSON:** Any and all. Yes, okay.

PROF GIBLIN: Go on, sorry.

40 **MR PEARSON:** No, no. I'm happy for you to clarify. I mean, look, we have looked at things like GPS tracking on other projects ...

PROF GIBLIN: Yes.

45 **MR PEARSON:** ... to ensure adherence to transport routes. And that's something we can look at in relation to this project. Because it is important that if we're doing these road upgrades and prescribing routes, that they are adopted. I think we're on the same page there. We will certainly have a look at that.

5 **PROF GIBLIN:** Excellent. Thank you. And just one further matter on roads. You may have seen this. But back in November last year, the CEO of the Port of Newcastle, Mr Craig Carmody, is reported in the *Financial Review* as saying that, “The port needs to bring in about 9,500 wind turbines and 30,500 components for the CWO REZ in the next 7 years.” But he says, “You can only move 6 trucks a night.” He went on to say, “If you extrapolate that out, it will take us 11 years to move the wind turbines that we’re supposed to do in 7 years. That’s even before we start talking about roundabouts, roads and bridges.” End of quote.

10 Now, we’re talking about – yes, you know, that highlights and emphasises, hopefully, in terms of what we’re saying about the condition of the Golden Highway and the attendant cumulative risks.

15 **MR PEARSON:** Thank you. Yes, we’re very clear on that point, so it’s something that we’ll look into further, the cumulative impacts, but also the Golden Highway impacts. So, I think that’s something we probably need to get some follow up from the Department on, Brad, just to get some further intelligence on that.

20 Okay. So, we’ve covered traffic and transport. We’ve covered cumulative –

PROF GIBLIN: Sorry, Richard. On that, I guess Transport for New South Wales would be the place to go to, to try and ...

25 **MR PEARSON:** Sure. We generally tend to funnel our enquiries through the Department, and they can liaise with other agencies as necessary. But I just want to make sure that we cover all the items on our agenda so that, you know, by the time we finish you don’t feel like there’s things we haven’t covered.

30 In terms of the VPA, you’re generally comfortable with the amount of money that’s now being proposed? That you’re ... sorry. But you have some questions around the governance of that, is that ...?

35 **PROF GIBLIN:** No. We have invested, again, invested a lot of time and effort in negotiating these planning agreements. It was some months ago that we agreed on the key financial terms with ACEN on this project, and they are articulated accurately in Appendix 4 of the draft Conditions of Consent. So, we’re very comfortable about that.

40 The challenge for us now is, that’s about a quarter of a page, the issue is the planning agreement document is about 20-odd pages long. And so you can understand that there are always little bits and pieces that might be subject to conjecture. And so the challenge for us is to get the full document agreed in principle to allow us to place it on exhibition. Now, that won’t happen until after consent.

45 **MR PEARSON:** Okay. Thank you for that. Any other issues, commissioners, that we want to – you think are particularly important to raise with Council? We’ve spoken traffic and transport. We’ve spoken cumulative. We talked about worker

accommodation. Yes, what else, Suellen?

5 **MS FITZGERALD:** Richard, I'm interested in Council's view about opportunities. Are they comfortable with the project in relation to local jobs and training, including working with your local indigenous communities? How's that working for Council at the moment?

PROF GIBLIN: Leeanne, do you want to make a comment on that?

10 **MS RYAN:** I can't really say too much in relation to that. I guess, they're still working through it. They have the statements that they say how many people they're going to employ that are local and how much benefits are going to go locally. But, yes, how long is a piece of string and is that really going to occur? So, yes, sitting out on it at the moment, probably a bit neutral.

15 **MS FITZGERALD:** Okay. So, Leeanne, there hasn't been new initiatives raised by the Proponent with Council, that's not producing new proposals from them?

20 **MS RYAN:** Not that I'm aware of, not that comes to mind at the moment.

MS FITZGERALD: Ah-ha. Thanks, Richard.

25 **MR PEARSON:** I think they have a target of 70% local employment, from what I recall, in the Response to Submissions document. Your unemployment rate is at about 6%, did I read somewhere, so it's not high particularly. Do you think there is available local resources to work on this project?

PROF GIBLIN: You have a go, Leeanne.

30 **MS RYAN:** Yes, I think that probably anyone that's sort of looking for work probably already has a job. Unless Lindsay, you've got something you want to add there.

35 **MR MASON:** I think it'd ambitious, 70%, because we're talking about reasonably small communities. So, yes, I think it's highly ambitious. And as Leeanne said, most people have a job around the place. We're probably – the impact on, say, Council in particular might be, you know, the grass is always greener over the fence, or other employers as well. So, that could be an issue.

40 **MR PEARSON:** Yes, okay. So, it's potentially a two-edged sword.

MR MASON: Yes.

45 **MR PEARSON:** Okay. Interesting. Okay. What else would you like to discuss?

PROF GIBLIN: Well, just while we're on that, Richard.

MR PEARSON: Yes.

5 **PROF GIBLIN:** Yes, at 70%, they're dreaming, with respect. What will happen is the developers will bring in, and the contractors will bring in their own teams, unequivocally, you know, 90% of it will be brought in, each and every contractor will have their own team, they will already be trained, they'll be the ones that are brought in, because it's cheaper for the contractors to do it that way.

10 If they're going to employ, supervise and train locals who perhaps aren't skilled in those areas, that's an additional burden for the contractors. And history and experience shows that that's highly unlikely to occur.

15 **MR PEARSON:** Yes. They do have to employ – prepare an accommodation and employment strategy as part of the proposed Conditions of Consent for this development. They do need to consult Council in doing that work. So, I think there is an opportunity, should the project be approved by the Commission, for Council to exert some influence over that employment strategy. But I appreciate, with 10 other projects in your local government area, and a relatively low rate of unemployment, that it's probably not – there's probably not a huge number of people just hanging around waiting to work on this wind farm.

20 But look, it takes me back to one of the points, I guess, that was made in what I read from Council around social cohesion and trying to get some benefits for the community out of this project. What do you – what does Council tangibly think that they would like to see from this project? You've got the, you know, you want more police, you want more doctors, you want more nurses and firefighters, that's kind of through the cumulative impact work, but that may happen.

25 But what from this project would you like to see happen locally in terms of the integration of this project into your local community, should it proceed? Do you have thoughts on that?

30 **PROF GIBLIN:** Well, you know, certainly via the development contributions under the planning agreement, Richard, clearly the community will be having quite a considerable say about the projects that they wish to – which are public deemed to be public purpose projects which they think warrant expenditure of these funds. So, that's their primary focus and that's our primary focus in relation to these projects here.

35 On the broader issue of infrastructure and there's been a phrase tossed around about legacy enhancing infrastructure. With respect, we would see that as primarily the province of the State Government. That is their domain. They declared this REZ and all these REZ's with little or no input fundamentally from the local communities or local government. And the primary responsibility for infrastructure needs that are arising as a result of 40-odd generation projects in this area, clearly in our view, is in the responsibility of State Government.

40 **MR PEARSON:** Mm-hm. Are you talking there about hard infrastructure or social infrastructure or all of the above?

PROF GIBLIN: All of the above.

MR PEARSON: Okay.

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MR MASON: And Richard, sorry, can I just add in. We talked about police shortages. We have an acute nursing shortage as well. And the two hospitals in, say, Coolah and Dunedoo, are only MPS, they're multi-purpose centres or, you know, there's only a couple of acute beds in each. So, if there's any incidents, obviously they'll be shipped off to a major base hospital. But we need to point that out, that these hospitals we have now don't have many acute beds and often don't have doctors available. A lot of them are, you know, telehealth conferences with base hospitals if something goes wrong. That is a – along with police, they're two key issues.

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And also we talked about firefighting. The Rural Fire Services, their numbers are diminishing and so are the New South Wales retained fighters in the towns. So, they are key.

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And when we're talking about social cohesion issues. As Warwick said, the state needs to take a bigger stake in that. And we can't influence those. That's up to the State Government.

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MR PEARSON: Yes, well, hopefully you can influence that through the committee process that maybe Leanne's involved in. But, sure, ultimately the buck stops with the State Government, I guess, on that kind of infrastructure.

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Yes, further questions from commissioners for Council or staff of the Commission? I think we've got some follow ups that we need to, you know, we definitely need to look further at the cumulative impact work. We're signed up to having a closer look at that, and appreciate –

MS SARAH DINNING: Richard, if I may.

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MR PEARSON: Yes, sure.

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MS DINNING: And I don't know if you have addressed it or if it's relevant, but would this project have an impact on the Council's rate revenue? Does it change – it's sort of mixed use, isn't there? There's grazing and turbines, so there's no change to the income from rates?

PROF GIBLIN: No. My understanding is at this point, no.

45

MR MASON: Very little.

MR PEARSON: Yes, I wouldn't have thought so. Yes.

MS DINNING: No, I just ...

5 **MR PEARSON:** No, it's a good thought, because sometimes with these projects you can have – not wind farms, but other projects can result in quite different revenue streams. I think it's the Voluntary Planning Agreement is the big one for Council. It sounds like you're getting your act together in terms of how you're going to administer that project, that process.

10 Has Council had a chance to look through the draft Conditions of Consent for this project, Leeanne, or others, and will you be perhaps making comments on those to the Commission?

MS RYAN: We have had a look, and I know Warwick and Bevan have flagged a few things there. So, yes, I guess we're pretty okay though.

15 **MR PEARSON:** Yes, I think if you have specific comments, we're keen to hear them through, I guess, by making a – you could make a submission through to the Commission on that.

20 I'm just going to go back to our agenda and make sure that we've covered off on the items that on there. So, traffic and transport we've spoken about. Workers accommodation we have. Construction impacts, probably haven't really talked about that, other than the transporting of turbines. But do you see other construction impacts as being critical in relation to dust or noise or other issues? Leeanne, is there anything that you wanted to raise with us on that?

25 **MS RYAN:** No, nothing from me unless Warwick, you have anything?

30 **PROF GIBLIN:** Thanks, Leeanne. Yes, a couple of comments there, Richard. Perhaps it's illustrative that the first sods have been turned on the Merotherie – is it Merotherie, yes, Merotherie – construction of the accommodation camp at Merotherie for the transmission line. And within a week there were non-compliance complaints being made. The project, it would appear, was not complying with the provisions of air quality in terms of dust management. So, not a good start, with respect, for the first sods to be turned on the REZ.

35 So, that is an issue. Clearly, clearly, I think if I may say, a question perhaps you may pose to DPHI is, so what additional post-compliance management resources will be applied to the REZ, not just this REZ but Southwest and New England, to ensure and to enable the community to have some faith that the conditions of consent will be complied with?

40 This is a major, major disruption and disturbance. If this is a once-in-a-century change to a longstanding rural landscape and rural community. It's nearly 200 years since European settlement; this is a huge change potentially occurring here.

45 And truly, Richard, we need an elevation of the commitment and the resources from the State Government to ensure that the rank and file, the residents and

ratepayers in this shire and Dubbo and Mid-Western and Upper Hunter that the much-promised land of milk and honey that will be delivered because, well, the challenge is there.

5 **MR PEARSON:** Yes.

10 **PROF GIBLIN:** You know, councils, I think not just Warrumbungle but Midwestern as well in particular, I mean, you've been getting clear messages out of them about what they think about things. It's not like we haven't raised these matters. We would like to see some definitive action aside from words.

15 **MR PEARSON:** Yes. Hearing you loud and clear, Warwick. All our conversations seem to be coming back to the cumulative impact issue, I think, for Council. And I do appreciate that the LGA is going through a transformative period. So, we've got that well and truly on our radar.

20 I'm thinking in terms of our agenda, the only thing we probably haven't spoken about is decommissioning, which is a 30-year hence activity. The condition that you see, Leeanne, in relation to that in the draft consent is probably not, should the Commission be minded to approve this project, we probably tend to have a more, I think, a stronger condition that we impose in relation to decommissioning compared to what the Department recommends. So, don't necessarily take that as likely to be the final condition.

25 But in talking to the Applicant, they have a view that this project may go potentially beyond 30 years. They would need a subsequent approval if that were to be the case. But do you have any comments for us in relation to decommissioning that you would like us to take on board?

30 **MS RYAN:** Nothing that springs to mind, you know, aside from waste management. Where are they going to take these things when they're done, and I guess that's been raised on a number of occasions.

35 **MR PEARSON:** Yes.

MS RYAN: The life of them, yes, interesting that they may go longer than what they're saying now, and along with that of course goes the upgrades that need to be done.

40 **MR PEARSON:** Correct.

MS RYAN: Yes, we'd have to have a look at our VPA and check that it's covered with that length of time, Warwick, as well.

45 **MR PEARSON:** Leeanne, if they were to go beyond the 30 years, they would need a subsequent approval, so there would be a need to refresh VPAs and other things ...

MS RYAN: Yes.

MR PEARSON: ... at that time. And look, I'm only mentioning that because it was mentioned to us by the Applicant. At this stage, we're looking at this as a 30-year project and that there will be decommissioning required at that stage. I'm just flagging that it may – you know, if we need a future renewable energy world, and we can get away without throwing these into the recycling mill, then maybe that's a good thing. But that's very much down the line.

MS RYAN: Yes. Yes.

PROF GIBLIN: Richard, just to add to that. Correct me if I'm wrong here, commissioners, but as I recall, many of these or most of these REZ projects don't have a finite end date.

MR PEARSON: It's a good question you ask, Warwick. I'm not sure, Brad and/or Kendall, that I saw that in the draft consent?

MR BRAD JAMES: Yes, there's no condition placing a limit on timeframes in the consent, as recommended.

MR PEARSON: Yes, I don't recall seeing one.

PROF GIBLIN: Yes, yes. So, I haven't seen any, right. So, therefore these projects are open ended and could go on ad infinitum. That's why, as part from decommissioning, the other big issue for us is what we call repowering or refurbishment, because that I think, it's the construction impacts are only but part of the significant impacts. The other one unequivocally probably a minimum every 20 years, you're going to have repowering and refurbishment of all this infrastructure.

MR PEARSON: There is a condition that requires approval for replacement of turbines etc.

MR BRAD JAMES: I think it's condition A12, Richard.

MR PEARSON: It's what, sorry, Brad?

MR JAMES: Condition A12, it says, "Prior to carrying out any upgrades, the Applicant must provide revised layout plans and project details of the development to the Secretary incorporating proposed upgrades." So, there is a purpose there.

MR PEARSON: Yes, so that's where that would get picked up, Warwick, any – and they have to be within the existing footprint.

PROF GIBLIN: Sure, sure. But we've learnt from bitter experience with the Liverpool Range Project, arguably there was profoundly significant variations on

the original approval, but the Department pushed it through as a modification after taking out the quarry and, anyway, the accommodation camp went in as well, arguably though, are significant material changes to the project. But it still went through as a mod.

5

So, by all means, all these projects could go through as a mod. But the point is, a lot of it will go through – it gets less scrutiny as a mod of course, as you know. So, we are concerned – simply we would urge that the Conditions of Consent are robust about safeguards pursuant to repowering and refurbishment aspects.

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MR PEARSON: Yes, well, if you have any comments about that draft proposed condition, that's something you should let us know through the submissions process.

15

Okay. I'm mindful that we're getting close to the end of our time. Is there any further questions from commissioners for Council or any further, well, let me ask that question first. Suellen or Sarah?

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MS DINNING: No, thank you.

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MR PEARSON: Is there anything further that Council would like to offer, bearing in mind that we'll be in town next week for ... And I think we've extended an invitation to Council to join us on the site inspection on the Wednesday, I'm not sure who from Council is coming, Leanne or Warwick, I'm not sure who got the lucky dip.

30

MS RYAN: Yes, no, we're sending Erin along, our REZ Coordinator. She's going to go and have a look and, yes, open her eyes. Yes.

35

MR PEARSON: Yes, good. Good, look forward to meeting you then. We'll be having the public meeting on Thursday. I'm not sure if Council is proposing to attend that or not.

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PROF GIBLIN: Yes, we will.

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MR PEARSON: You're more than welcome to. You will directly?

PROF GIBLIN: I believe the Deputy Mayor will be making a speech.

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MR PEARSON: Oh, okay, okay. Sure. Important to register for that, so yes, please do that. Is there anything else further at this point in time that you would like to raise with the Commission?

55

PROF GIBLIN: Yes, Richard, if I may. Could you just articulate for us please, under what so scenarios would the IPC refuse the project?

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MR PEARSON: I'm not going to be drawn on that, Warwick. Our role is to assess the impacts of the project. We have the Department's Assessment Report,

we have all of your submissions, we'll hear from the public meeting next week. We're bound by the relevant provisions of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act in making our determination, and we will absolutely do that. But we want to hear from the community and Council, their views on the project and in particular things that you don't think are addressed by the Department in the recommended Conditions of Consent.

We have to focus in on our legal responsibility here. We don't have a policy setting role. So, our role is to implement the State Government policy in terms of renewable energy and to look at renewable energy projects on their merit. And that's what we do.

Anything else? All done? I want to thank you very much, Council, for your time and for turning out in such numbers. We're very mindful that this is a big issue for your council area. We look forward to being in Coolah next week and look forward to meeting some of you in person as well and trying to work through some of these thorny issues that you're dealing with. We're definitely – we'll attempt to assist as much as we can within our legal responsibilities.

So, thank you all and appreciate your attendance, and goodbye.

[All say goodbye/thank you]

>THE MEETING CONCLUDED