

I wish to contribute to the discussion relating to the Hills of Gold Wind Farm.

I moved to Nundle, from the Macedon Ranges in Victoria, at the end of April 2023. Prior to moving, I had no idea there was a wind farm proposed close to the village, or that the small community was significantly ruptured as a result of the division on the contentious issue. Whilst my primary motivation for moving to Nundle was personal, the beauty of the region, its seclusion, and its tranquillity were all factors in my decision.

Within a few months I secured weekend work at the Nundle Woollen Mill, the prime tourist attraction in the village. Being the only person on hand on the weekends provides me with the opportunity to talk to visitors about their reasons for visiting, and I invariably assist them by pointing out the other attractions to which they might visit. I am constantly amazed at how many Tamworth locals come to Nundle. They see it as a picturesque, quaint village not too far from home. Some come on a semi regular basis, bringing their friends to enjoy what Nundle has to offer. I also hear from visitors who have travelled much further to visit – the so-called grey nomads who travel away from the colder parts of the East Coast during the winter months. Some come here specifically, having heard of the town's natural beauty from internet advertising, NSW tourism activities, magazine articles or fellow travellers; others trip over Nundle by accident, and cannot believe their luck when they get here.

The businesses in Nundle are, with the exception of the post office, almost entirely dependent on tourism. If we upset the tourists by making our village hard to access due to roadworks and slow-moving traffic, or we destroy the natural amenity through heavy vehicle traffic on our narrow streets and destruction of the picturesque outlook, some of the existing businesses will fail. Two years of reduced income will make some of the existing businesses unviable, and unable to be revived. Should that happen, and jobs leave the town, I fear they will not return once the construction phase is complete. With access to social media, the reach of bad news is fast and wide. Eradicating bad news is difficult, so even after the construction phase is over, many potential tourists will still be viewing chaos on the roads stories, unless significant sums of money are spent to counteract the narrative. But businesses doing poorly will have little to spend. I have a significant amount of money to invest in a tourism-oriented business, but I am not prepared to move ahead unless there is no threat to the flow of tourists. Being uncommitted, I can, and will, leave if the wind farm goes ahead, and go back to Victoria. I will not be alone, (although most will not go as far away).

Beyond the threat to tourism, there are a number of other aspects about this proposal which cause concern. Having been evacuated as a child in the Ash Wednesday Bushfires, I am acutely apprehensive about the reduction in fire-fighting capacity which will result from the imposition on the ridgeline of wind turbines that will curtail the use of air support should a bushfire break out, due to the difficulty of navigating around the transmission lines that will have to be erected to deliver the power back into the grid. If the only means of fighting a bushfire is the use of vehicles, then all human livelihoods and life will be at risk, should the range go up in flames. According to the *Planning for Bush Fire Protection 2019* document, to which the *Recommended Conditions of Consent* (RCoC) make reference on numerous occasions,

‘The aim of PBP is to provide for the protection of human life and minimise impacts on property from the threat of bush fire, while having due regard to development potential, site characteristics and protection of the environment.’ p. 10

Furthermore, the protection principles note that a combination of strategies is required to ensure the aim is achieved, including ‘enable[ing] appropriate access and egress for the public and

firefighters; and provid[ing] adequate water supplies for bush fire suppression operations.’ I am not satisfied that the applicant has adequately addressed this increased risk of bush fire to our community and others. The Independent Planning Commission has insisted on the development of a Fire Safety Study (RCoC p 18) but only prior to the construction of the battery storage facility. This ignores the severity of the problems associated with the erection of the turbines, which will have occurred beforehand. In addition, a water storage facility of 20,000 litres is required ‘adjacent to an internal access road’ and fitted with the requisite connections for RFA access. The Nundle Woollen Mill had the same sized water catchment requirement, and it is certainly not in as high a bush fire risk zone as the proposed HOGWF! This does not fill me with confidence that the increased risks will be mitigated.

The Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council (AFAC) prepared a booklet addressing the issues surrounding wind farms and bushfire hazards in 2018. The authors stated that,

‘Wind farms are an infrastructure development that should be considered by fire and land management agencies through the preparation of incident action plans for the suppression of bushfires in their vicinity’. p.7

*Wind Farms and Bushfire Operations, 2018, Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council (AFAC)*

The community of Nundle has seen no such preparation. Nor should it have to wait until the wind farm is under construction before this issue is addressed. The case study cited by AFAC operated in a very different topographical and ecological environment to that which is proposed for the HOGWF, and therefore some of the conclusions will not pertain to this project. In that instance, the wind farm, whilst located on a ridge, was primarily surrounded by grasslands. HOGWF will be surrounded by bush, making it infinitely more difficult to extinguish any fires that might intrude into the surrounding region. If the IPC allows the project to proceed, at the very least it should insist on better bush fire mitigation plans.

The HOGWF site has already suffered from significant land clearing, not all of it authorised and legal, in order to make the site appear viable. This has reduced the biodiversity and habitat for a number of iconic flora and fauna, already, including the koala, endangered in NSW. Much more land clearing is required if the project goes ahead. Each mature tree cut down will require 40 to 50 years to be replaced, and the biodiversity will never be replicated. No amount of rehabilitation will ever restore the bush to what it was. Given the importance of bush land to the mitigation of climate change, it is farcical that we are even discussing the removal of native forest in order to impose another, less permanent form of climate change mitigation in its place. Surely there are better sites for a wind farm than here!

At the end of the project’s life, however long that may be, the current RCoC demand only partial rehabilitation of the site. The concrete will stay forever, because the applicant does not wish to pay the significant costs of removal. This is not good enough. We should not insist that native flora and fauna fit around the debris of human habitation. If the project does go ahead, the IPC should insist on full site rehabilitation, and demand the payment of a substantial bond to ensure future compliance.

It is my sincere belief that the HOGWF is poorly positioned, and ought not go ahead. I thank you for your consideration of my concerns.