

Objection

Hills of Gold Windfarm (HOGWF)

SSD-9679

1. Conflict of interest: Clare Sykes as Founder and Managing Director of LarkinSykes

My first concern is regarding the appointment of Clare Sykes as the Chairperson for the Independent Planning Commission regarding HOGWF. Her LinkedIn profile describes her as

“Founder and Managing Director of LarkinSykes Advisory. A resources, energy and supply chain industry professional, experienced in operations, corporate, and strategy development. A strong industry collaborator, who enjoys identifying, matching, and applying innovation and insights to the resources and new energy sectors, and developing and executing multi-stakeholder initiatives and projects.

Clare specialises in bringing knowledge of the working environment between industry, government, and research and partners with clients who prioritise a clean and sustainable future for the world.

Skilled in strategy development, management, leadership, planning, and industry and international market development. Professional Mining Engineer (UNSW), GAICD and Churchill Fellow, with applied finance and leadership qualifications.” [\(27\) Clare Sykes | LinkedIn](#)

Her company's website describes their activities as follows.

“We work with clients to identify opportunities and develop strategies to grow, accelerate delivery, and generate tangible impact for future resources and energy value chains.

We specialise in deep insightful analysis that will uncover the drivers shaping your target industry segment and the challenges that need to be articulated and solved.

We develop strategic and tactical advice ranging from the firm to the broader industry level, to enable sustainable business models and pathway strategies to achieve success.”

[Capabilities | Larkinsykes](#)

In her (self) descriptions, comments and activities on her professional social media, Ms Sykes has stood firmly on the side of the renewable industries and their partners, with little to no reference to the concerns or needs of the impacted communities.

By failing to notify the commission of what is **actual, potential, or perceived conflict** between her professional life and her position as Chairperson is both disingenuous and deceptive. She should have declared her conflict of interest and had it investigated and assessed, such as was done with Mr Duncan Marshall AM’s appointment. Her appointment then could have been legitimised.

This breach of integrity gives me little confidence in the impartiality of the Commission’s final decision on the HOGWF.

2. Renewables

I wear my Greenie badge with pride. Contrary to the accusations of many who support HOGWF, I am not against the renewable energy sector. I am not against windfarms. I want to see an end of fossil fuel-based energy sources. I have even admired windturbine structures, their blades slowly rotating, gracing cleared, rolling plains. However, that is not the scene that HOGWF projects. The construction and maintenance of the proposed site is totally unsuitable. Yes, it may get good wind flow, but the destruction of the environment and loss of biodiversity will be insurmountable and unrepairable. Those of us who care deeply on a holistic level for the environment are concerned about the destruction of old growth forest, alpine rainforest, koala habitat, bird and bat strikes and loss of habitat and migratory paths, sphagnum moss ecologies, the disruption/destruction of vital underground and overground water sources. Add to the list the light pollution on our pristine night skies. There are many objections from many specialists in each of these areas who have voiced their much more learned concerns, which should be listened to, acknowledged and acted upon. Yet Engie has failed to address these with any meaningful way. In fact, quite to the contrary. These concerns have been ignored, or underestimated as of no real concern. The main land owner (proponent) has himself been charged with illegal land clearing (prior to the projects approval), this land now included in the windfarm's footprint. Approval of this project, gives tacit approval to his actions. This sets a dire and dangerous precedent for future development proposals, where the dollar signs at the end of the road are of utmost importance to the landowner and are worth the fiscal risks of environmental vandalism.

3. Why Nundle?

I am a long-time Nundle visitor and a new resident. I am of Gomerai/Gamilaraay /Kamilaroi heritage through my father. My father and two brothers moved to Nundle in 1980. The boys attended Nundle primary school, went to school in Tamworth and went on to bring up their own children up in the village, also attending Nundle Primary School. The youngest of my four nephews and nieces graduated from Quirindi High School in 2023. All have gone on to attend university, and return home to Nundle at every opportunity. Interestingly, all four youngsters found part-time work in the village, and return to these jobs when they are back in Nundle during uni breaks. My brother Ian is an active member of the Nungaroo Local Lands Council. I've been visiting Nundle since 1980. It was always a dream to eventually make it my home. Particularly so when I got to know many of the locals. The creative and entrepreneurial activities of the women in particular, and the heartwarming calendar of community activities and festivals, (unexpected for such a small town) made me feel that, as a creative artist, I could in fact make a living, whilst residing in a small rural town.

That dream was to become a reality when in 2022 my partner and I were fortunate enough to purchase a 2.4 ha block of land on Old Hanging Rock Road, between Oakenville Creek Road and Happy Valley Road. There are many things that drew me to Nundle. First family, being back on Gamilaraay Country and then the community

that I grew to love. I didn't expect my partner Peter to fall in love with Nundle as deeply as he did (he'd been a surfer, living on the Tweed Coast all his adult life). We are often asked why we would move from Brisbane/Gold/ Tweed Coast to Nundle.

Easy... because of Nundle's natural beauty; the views of the great Diving Range, the pristine forests and waterways, the peace and tranquility and the majestic night skies.

We are currently awaiting DA approval (**DA2024-0156**) for the construction of our new house, and will have our permanent home there by the end of 2024. I will be including a studio space where I can continue to create. I completed my Doctoral studies in 2023 in Visual Art, and the work I have created (award winning) was created on Gamilaraay country, particularly using the waterways around Nundle and Hanging Rock. The work investigated my family's relationship to our coloniser and Aboriginal past. During this investigation I discovered that my Great x 3 grandmother, an Aboriginal woman by the name of Harriet, was born on the banks of the Peel River. It is as if our family has been called home to our ancestral roots. I have been an educator at a tertiary level (TAFE and University) since 2010 and have facilitated many art workshops over the years. I plan to run ceramic workshops with the Nundle community and at the local primary school, attracting participants from Sydney, Newcastle and the Upper Hunter for weekend getaways... enjoy the scenery, the peace and tranquility away from city hustle and bustle, enjoy some paddock to plate lamb, and learn new skills while utilising Nundle clay. THIS is the sort of thing that will bring tourists..... not the windfarm, or the construction traffic and the industrialisation of the village.

4. Traffic routes

This brings me to the next point of the traffic routes. Our property is situated at 101 Old Hanging Rock Road, with road frontages on Old Hanging Rock Road (main entrance), Happy Valley Road and Frederick St. Our block is situated above the cutout on Old Hanging Rock Road. The road was restricted for many months while land slippage of the road (possibly exacerbated by logging trucks) was repaired and yet this is now a recommended route for (b) for vehicles with loads exceeding 5.2 m in height and (c) for vehicles with loads up to 5.2 m in height, according to **B30 Heavy Vehicles Requiring Escort and Heavy Vehicles Routes**. DPE recommended Conditions. These vehicles will travel within 20 meters of our home and workshop space. At no time has ENGIE or the proponents approached us to provide any information of potential impacts or for any sort of agreement. We will NOT be giving any approval for use of any of our land for road widening for this project. It appears the impacts on Old Hanging Rock Road is nothing more than a by-line.

The fact that there has been no definitive transport route yet determined indicates a lack of due diligence, preparation and planning on the part of ENGIE and proponent. To approve a proposal that plans to "wing it" when it comes to one of the most hotly debated and impactful elements of the HOGWF proposal, and saying there will be a

transport plan created after approval is inadequate and irresponsible. Added to that is the impact on industrial traffic, parking, diversions etc in the village of Nundle itself. For a village that relies on tourism, the flood of construction traffic and the eyesore of parking lots (wherever the developer chooses to put them because none of that information is clear) will cause irreparable harm to the picturesque charm of the village. Especially the approach, driving down Nundle Road and crossing the Peel River, the historic bridge a hint of the past's legacy. The Hills of Gold- scarred.

5. Employment and Population

I lived, and invested in, a community that relied on a particular industry. Sure the town saw a boon for a short period of time, during which many Mum and Dad investors started businesses and created accommodation for the industry's workers. Those workers were mostly fly in/ fly out workers. They did not uproot their families while they worked for a limited time on a project. Similarly, they will not bring their children with them to attend Nundle School. And are they likely to become permanent residents? Maybe some, but many will go back to their homes in the metropolitan regions once their work is done in Nundle. Any ongoing work in the windfarm will require high levels of technical skills, and are ENGIE going to train local residents to perform this work or bring in a few specialists? The only businesses that will likely see any boon for a short time would be the Pub, takeaway and perhaps accommodation providers. Those Nundle businesses relying on tourism will be heavily impacted. In the community previously mentioned, when the industry suddenly changed their strategic plan, reduced their use of community resources (such as housing the workers in camps rather than in the community), and eventually ceased operations, many of those Mum and Dads lost all they had worked for; their property investments become worthless, and their town full of insolvent businesses and closed shopfronts. I would hate to see the same thing happen to Nundle.

5. Cultural Heritage

Heritage Management Plan B29. As a Gamilaraay woman who did her Doctoral research on the colonial frontier and the impact on First Nation people (focussing on female relationships) I am disappointed with the inadequacy of the Heritage Management Assessment. The route between the Upper Hunter Valley and the Nundle region, and the plains beyond, was important and well-used. As such, I feel extensive investigation should be done before any development of the Nundle, Crawney and Timor areas take place. Local Nungaroo Council must be consulted. Who will train all Engie employees in observing for and protecting archaeological locations and artifacts? Engie? Will the Nungaroo Lands Council be consulted, because throughout this whole project, they are yet to be consulted. Additionally, the colonial heritage of Nundle, particularly gold mining, Chinese settlement, and colonial- Federation architecture demands to be protected, and highlighted as a tourism drawcard. Nundle buildings such as Ogders and McClland, and the Court House and churches, old bridges and historic locations, such as Teamsters Rest need to be protected, not destroyed by ENGIE's proposal.

6. Untrustworthiness of Engie and principal proponents

I hate to have to say this, but leaving so many of the condition details to be determined after approval has been given is dangerous and reckless. Engie has been dishonest and underhanded in its dealings with the community. Community meeting were where we expected to get answers from Engie. I attended a number of meetings where questions posed to Engie's representatives were met with "good question, we'll get back to you on that." So much so that the response was often met with laughter from the community because we had heard the phrase so often, with never a follow up. Over a year ago, their newsletters claimed that they already had approval and they told the media as such, causing untold distress to the community. They claim in their submission that they have approval from Nungaroo Lands Council, but I know they have never been consulted and have NOT entered into an agreement. This is fraudulent in their submission. There is also no agreement with the Gomeroi claimant group, despite Engie's claims. Leaving important factors such as transport routes, protection of cultural heritage, maintaining roads, and reducing visual impacts, protection and surveillance of flora and fauna impacts, decommissioning and rehabilitation up to the discretion of ENGIE (or which ever company they sell on to) and to be determined or detailed AFTER the project gets approved is ludicrous, especially when the company has proved it does not have the residents of Nundle's best interests at heart.

Please don't let a big multinational company destroy Nundle, a uniquely Australian village. Reject the Hills of Gold Wind Farm.