

I support and endorse this project.

I am a resident of Hanging Rock. I love this ridgeline- I have lived, worked, walked and hunted here for about 2 decades. I manage Arc-en-Ciel Trout Farm (AD05) and am a landowner on Morrisons Gap Rd (AD15). I am an experienced firefighter, having fought fires on this ridgeline and throughout the Hanging Rock area and beyond, both as an RFS member (previous Permit Officer and Deputy Captain for a number of years) and as a citizen/neighbour/farmer when RFS resources have been overstretched or plainly unavailable.

My daughter is 8 years old. In her short life, she has directly witnessed the worst drought we have seen on record, as well as bushfires on an unprecedented scale. These things are scary to see and hear about in the media- they are even more confronting to live through, when your entire livelihood is intrinsically linked to the health of the land and waterways. For this reason, I am a firm and passionate believer in a practical transition away from fossil fuel domination in our energy mix and a decisive acceleration towards meeting (and hopefully surpassing) “net zero” targets. The Hills of Gold Wind Farm offers a significant opportunity to positively contribute to and benefit from this transition, as individuals and as a community. I (as do many community members) consider it a legacy worth supporting and acting towards. While I understand the visual/aesthetic concerns, I don't believe that such subjective arguments should be weighted very heavily, given the grander context. Just as many people love the look and symbolism as those that are confronted by it (for whatever personal/ideological reason). School age kids are learning about renewables in their curriculum and, in my experience, are very receptive to the change that older generations may be hesitant to accept. This is for their benefit- economically, health wise and environmentally. Media presents imagery of renewables on the landscape consistently and, if one travels enough with their family, they too will notice that they are on the rise.

As mentioned, I have a lot of experience in bushfire activity in the area. The vast majority of fires (particularly larger, longer burning events) are a result of lightning strike in inaccessible terrain (ie- the fire has to run its course until it is accessible and controllable). Wind turbines have been globally proven to significantly reduce (and in some instances negate) the threat of lightning ignition. Furthermore, the development and maintenance of the “Transverse Road/Track” and associated access tracks as a part of infrastructure provide far better emergency access/evacuation than what already exists. Engie's commitment to have all staff trained to a volunteer firefighting level significantly increases the area's ability to monitor and fight fires when both Nundle and Hanging Rock RFS Brigades are undermanned and under resourced, given the area.

I cannot comment on aspects of aerial firefighting, except to anecdotally mention that I have only experienced aerial bombing happen in the project area perhaps 5 times in the last 2 decades- again, due to lack of access tracks and on-ground capability.

Much talk is given to the 109.54ha of land clearing involved for construction. It is important to note that neighbours surrounding the project area have committed to biodiversity stewardship agreements, ensuring that around 800ha of land are protected in perpetuity. Independent biodiversity surveyors (Biosis) have diligently assessed both the project site and neighbouring land, documenting vulnerable and threatened species and ecological communities, across all seasons and over a significant timeframe. As such, some proposed turbines and infrastructure have been shifted or eliminated- this clearly demonstrates environmental consideration and sensitivity. The biodiversity offset agreements and locations are strategically developed to protect and maximise ecological benefit and connectivity. These areas connect and preserve previously fragmented conservation areas from beyond Ben Halls Gap National Park and the larger Nature Reserve through to Crawney Pass National Park and Wallabadah Nature Reserve. With these areas included, that potentially constitutes 5778ha of environmental protection.

Stewardship agreements are administered via the biodiversity credit model and are collectively worth several million dollars. This model offers a very real solution towards financing regeneration/rehabilitation and conservation of our natural environment. While detractors may suggest that it is profiteering, it is, in fact, quite the opposite. These administered funds serve a dual purpose of environmental preservation and contribution to the local/regional economy via weed and feral pest eradication and habitat restoration/rehabilitation. This opens a funded pathway for current and future land management and conservation industries in the area, far beyond the obvious ongoing tasks of weed control and fencing- real opportunities for real income for locals.

While the area isn't considered of high value, in terms of koala habitat, many concerns have been raised around potential impact to koala habitat (personally, I have only seen one koala in the area and it was around the Devil's Elbow- I believe the higher altitude terrain to be marginal habitat, although it could potentially be improved for future conservation efforts- clearly the opportunity to rehabilitate and connect existing reserve areas can only be beneficial). I'll reference the current (2021-2026) NSW Koala Strategy (as presented by the NSW Dept of Planning and Environment) as just one potential area/opportunity that can be supported by the environmental stewardship funding. The goal is to double the koala population by 2050. The strategy is summarised by way of "4 Pillars"-

Pillar 1- Koala Habitat conservation. “Habitat loss and climate change are the most serious threats to koalas. *Significant increases in koala habitat area and condition are needed to double koala numbers.*” (\$107.1 million worth of state funding- imagine what we could achieve with private investment added?)

Pillar 2- Supporting Local Communities. “Under the NSW Koala Strategy, \$19.6 million is being invested over 5 years to support local communities to conserve koalas and fund partnerships. *Recognising the importance of local and cultural knowledge, the strategy will leverage and build strong partnerships with local councils, community groups, local Aboriginal groups and conservation organisations.* These partnerships will help deliver coordinated and strategic on-ground conservation actions and prioritise investment.” (Consider the potential for coupling Hills of Gold biodiversity funding with Koala strategy funding)

Pillar 3- Improving Safety and Health. “Under the NSW Koala Strategy, \$23.2 million is being invested over 5 years to *remove threats, improve koala health and rehabilitation, and establish a translocation program.* Koalas face various threats, including habitat loss and fragmentation, vehicle strikes, disease, dog attacks, fire, drought and heatwaves. Improvements to the health and safety of koalas are required to better protect them from the impact of these threats.” (The establishment of a significant wildlife corridor, joining existing parks and reserves along the range, protected in perpetuity, provides a very real opportunity to actively support the states larger koala population through habitat improvement, predator control and as an accessible midway point for relocation/translocation efforts between several notable, geographically and subsequently genetically isolated populations.)

Pillar 4- Building our Knowledge. “Establishing a statewide baseline of population, disease, and genetic information for koala populations is critical to achieving the longterm goal of doubling the NSW koala population by 2050...” (This offers opportunities for environmentally minded locals to gain environmental/scientific education and credentials and apply them directly to their locality, rather than going to university and then moving away to wherever employment/further opportunities lie- a very real issue in rural and regional Australia)

I present that as just one example of many easily achievable conservation opportunities, offering an array of employment and environmental benefits. With capital injection from the private sector, this means that government investment can be reduced to achieve these outcomes in the area.

Environment aside, Hanging Rock and Nundle stand to realise a level of economic sufficiency and improvement that we haven't had in a very long time. I am hesitant to present figures, as they obviously relate directly to the final scope of the project. Needless to say, many (if not all) community groups and organisations are running on an extremely tight budget (to the point where a number of them are non-functioning but not yet disbanded). The Community Enhancement Fund creates/revitalises a level of hope and opportunity for community restoration and development to what was once a prosperous and busy area. In terms of intergenerational equity in the village, funding could be directed all the way from the preschool through to the retirement village, while also encompassing health access and (existing) special interests as diverse as the swimming club, bowling club, fishing club and pony club, to name a few (all which are positive assets and reinvestors in the community when functioning healthily)- with scope for improvement and emergent alternatives (I'd suggest that this is the largest regular, ongoing contribution the communities have ever had on offer- subsequently, the possibilities are somewhat unfathomable.) Facilities to attract and occupy teenagers are sadly missing from the local community- across Australia, this is frequently noted as a significant contributor to gradual demise and/or collapse of regional townships and could be quickly mitigated with investment.

The project itself offers employment opportunities that have been lacking in the community. There are several private operators/small business owners directly involved in the construction/earthworks sectors that stand to gain contracts in their immediate locality, rather than having to seek out and travel for work. There are opportunities for younger generations (or others seeking to reskill) to focus their businesses locally rather than regionally as well as to complete qualifications and find work here in existing and emergent industries. There is a flow-on factor for the majority of local businesses to recruit more staff to meet demand during construction. I assume, looking forward, that the end-of-life upgrades or decommissioning will provide a similar level of activity 3 decades down the line. As one simple, personal anecdote, years ago I had one staff member leave to go work in Glen Innes, concreting for White Rock Windfarm. He was able to set himself up as a business and secure a home and raise a family from the income. This is a very rare opportunity for someone that is born and bred (and chooses to stay) in Nundle, currently. We need these opportunities back.

Improvements to roads (particularly Morrisons Gap Rd) are much needed and I invite them. Due to my location and the nature of my work, I travel the road multiple times a day, 365 days a year, regardless of condition. Landholders frequently "pick up the slack" and repair (with their own resources at their own cost) what I assume council consider "an outlying, peripheral road". This road is used by locals as well as a moderate level of tourist traffic (particularly over long weekends, school holidays and any time there might be the chance of snow). This furthers my aforementioned support for the Transverse Rd as an evacuation/emergency option for Shearers and Morrisons

Gap Rds. It needs improvement to a level Council don't appear willing or able to commit to.

Tamworth was the first city in Australia with electric street lights. Nundle swimming pool was the first public pool with solar heating. To me, this invites school excursions and special interest tours. We are not just a simple country town. With a bit of innovation, positivity and investment we can make the whole region and project a positive, flagship example of regional NSW/Australia embracing and harmoniously combining past, present and future. Environment and industry. That said, we need to manage and administer the community enhancement funds locally, between directly impacted localities to make best use of them. I don't believe they should go into the wider coffers of the region for administration.

I'll close by reiterating the conclusion presented to the IPC by the Friends of the Windfarm representative:

I support the approval of the NSW Dept of planning and Environment's recommendations to proceed with the development and any conditions that the IPC conclude should be imposed or removed.

Regards,

Roger Sydenham

