

My name is Cindy Hill, I am a landowner, tourism business operator, artist gallery/studio operator, teacher, and farmer on the foreshores of the Peel River, Chaffey Dam and Cann's Creek at Bowling Alley Point where my family have farmed since 1925. My parents also owned a farm on the Morrisons Gap range during my childhood and from my understanding some of this land is now the subject of discussion regarding the Hills of Gold Windfarm project. Reference is made to my family's close involvement with the land where the proposed road development will occur to highlight that our lived experience has resulted in an accumulated wealth of knowledge about terrain and biodiversity, as well as the difficulties in terms of access, runoff flows, water concentration, and instability during and following rainfall events.

I'd like to begin by thanking the commissioners for their diligence and stamina in hearing this case, I recognise that it is complex and there is much merit in seeking alternative energy and supporting the livelihoods and opportunities for people in regional areas and villages such as Nundle & Hanging Rock. Please be clear that I am not in any way against wind farming, but I wholly reject its suitability for the proposed site for the following reasons:

It is unacceptable to allow a proposal that will endanger school children, heritage buildings, wildlife, locals, and visitors, and require the mass removal and pruning of established trees both native and exotic.

Construction of enormous infrastructure on highly erodible Class 8 soils in areas where slopes are reported to reach a 50% gradient poses obvious problems. My partner, who holds as one of his qualifications a plant science degree, and previously operated his own earth-moving business on steep sub-alpine slopes in Tasmania, also questions the wisdom of developers willing to risk the lives of drivers/operators and endangered species to create unnecessary structures on such unsuitable and difficult to access terrain. Having walked in that area it appears ludicrous that Engie's consultants claim it's traversable by large vehicles and stable enough to hold enormous, heavy structures, including roads and turbines required to withstand elemental forces. This is against the advice and experience of many others more familiar with the terrain. The advice of government land and water agencies and the local knowledge of our community has been disregarded. The sentiment that Engie 'bought a lemon' rings true. If we the majority are proven correct it will be at a huge cost to all involved and a tragedy for our environment, our community, and endangered species.

Flow of water from the project's hard surfaces will intensify flood events on the Peel River which already rises with incredible speed and force. Recently two separate floods swept large bridges at Bowling Alley Point into Chaffey Dam. As a founding member of Chaffey Dam Catchment Landcare Group, it is concerning that our efforts and those of other agencies to stabilise the many waterways, including the Peel River, Head of the Peel and Wombramurra Creek, against multiple and regular flood events will be washed away.

Several related issues are:

- Earthworks result in loss of groundcover and inevitably increase erosion.
- Creation of hard surfaces dramatically increases runoff and subsequently impacts land instability. This poses a devastating risk to Chaffey Dam which is home to numerous birds and aquatic life and supplies water to irrigators, stock, and homes along the Peel River to Tamworth, as well as feeding into the Murray Darling Basin.
- The flow of water from the project's hard surfaces will be concentrated into the Peel River causing damage to property owned by myself and others, including fences and established trees.

Constructing a wind farm in a high lightning strike area creates unnecessary danger. As a former member of the Bowling Alley Point Volunteer Fire Brigade and daughter of its former Captain of over 30 years, I can attest that the ridgelines above Nundle and Bowling Alley Point are extremely high lightning strike areas. The lightning often starts fires in areas only accessible by air or foot. This makes fighting them impossible without air support. Terrifyingly the turbines and overhead high voltage power lines will no longer allow water to be flown in to fight such bushfires.

Turbines will both encourage lightning strike fires and hinder their control. Consider what will happen when a turbine is struck by lightning. Reports state that 1 in 2000 turbines are likely to catch fire, and this is most often from lightning strikes. According to the Australian Parliament website site at <https://www//:aph.gov.au>

*'Susceptibility to lightning damage is heavily dependent on a wind turbine's location – and its size.'* (3)

We must question the ethics and economics of the project when considering:

- alternative energy technology is changing rapidly, and these turbines only offer a short life span of approximately 30 years,
- the project will be unnecessarily hazardous and costly to decommission in such a steep and remote location,
- the cost is enormous to the immediate ecology, including rare sub-alpine flora,
- mined resources to build and transport the components to such a remote location,
- soil mass movement hazards in the area,
- increased turbidity of water in the Peel, Isis, and Barnyard catchments,
- silting of waterways, particularly Chaffey Dam the principal water supply to the regional centre of Tamworth and its surrounds,
- removal of established flora, including magnificent trees that are the lungs of the planet and habitat for diverse species, particularly in a period of rapid climate change,
- lack of protection of Aboriginal, environmental, and local heritage,

- risk to local endangered species, including but not limited to: Ribbon Gum, Koalas, Booroolong Frogs, Spotted Quolls, Bats, Wedge-tailed Eagles, and Grass Trees,
- danger posed to residents and visitors by transport, ice throws, limited access, psychological stressors, bushfires, and incidents of limited access in emergencies.
- cost of roads and their maintenance up to and past decommissioning
- the cost of installing a project on land over a 20% gradient and up to at least 50% in places,
- remote and difficult to access for servicing, repairs and maintenance post-construction.

Furthermore, Engie's processes and understanding of the site appear to be completely inadequate with decisions on slope and filtration measures for the water runoff as well as end-of-life phase decisions to be made during the construction and decommissioning phase - as confirmed by Engie representatives Scott De Keizer and Tim Mead (4). Considering the lack of proximity to appropriate and cost-effective recycling services at the end-of-life phase the removal and recycling of components would surely outweigh its economic feasibility and therefore, the components are highly at risk of going to landfill or remaining on site. This is an unacceptable risk for our community and our environment and it completely ignores advice from experts. A 2022 study led by [Professor Peter Majewski](#), found that,

*"...drawing on the experience of similar programs for other products, either the manufacturer must take responsibility for what needs to be done with the blades at the end of their useful life, or the wind farm operators must provide end-of-life solutions as part of the planning approval process for their business operations."*

Professor Majewski went on to warn us that, *"Without such solutions, energy options like wind and solar may prove to be no more sustainable than the old technologies they are aiming to replace."* (2)

Surely no one would argue that the economic viability of a small village or the race to save the planet with renewables should be at the cost of the planet! We must accept that this renewable project is just not suited to this site and does not make sense, in terms of either the Nundle area's viability as a charming destination and pleasant home or as an industrialised energy hub. As a former student of Nundle School, I remember it being a small friendly community of around 50 students in the 1970's with a bakery, bank, tennis club, golf club and a butchers in addition to the hotel and post office; it's been very sad to see these places and people pass but I can attest that Nundle has grown enormously as a cultural centre through tourism and has a reputation for beauty, nature and a friendly community. We have gained: a world famous homewares store, a popular coffee business, a motel, a café that serves as a museum and accommodation, a woollen mill, a number of artisan businesses, and furniture makers, a world class gem display, an information centre and a Pilates studio, a well-resourced library, craft shop, charity boutique, second hand emporium, and a walking club, a

bushwalking club, a large number of accommodation businesses, a studio gallery, The Great Nundle Dog Race, The Go for Gold Festival, a songwriters festival, a satellite country music festival, several Landcare organisations, a homemade produce store, a skincare business, a community garden, a food bank, a reputation as a wedding destination, and much more.

Construction workers are often well paid but so are many tourists and although workers have come for brief stints on the forestry or during the construction of Chaffey Dam few if any have remained long term. It is not plausible to claim that construction workers will choose to stay in Nundle, history has spoken otherwise and the best way to secure Nundle's future is through preserving its community, environment, and charm.

Whilst all avenues for energy production are yet to be fully investigated, including the attainability of solar for homes and vehicles, and the potential benefits of nuclear power, we should not rush toward renewables at the irreversible cost of our environment. Presently building and decommissioning renewables is cost-prohibitive, and the economic viability of the project for our community and Engie is at best questionable. With the greatest respect for the arguments of clean energy, renewable resources, reducing carbon emissions, and security for future generations the wind farm is a highly unsuitable option for this ecologically fragile site and community.