

As a concerned resident of NSW, I have a moral obligation to ensure that our current generation secures a sustainable, biodiverse environment for the future. This means that alternative energy projects still need to be assessed for capacity to meet this goal, and not just for profit. I object to the Hills of Gold Windfarm (SSD9679) as the application by Engie does not address a range of environmental issues, leading to a short-term alternative energy benefit, which does not come close to outweighing the long-term environmental costs.

I have a number of concerns, including impact on waterways, soil erosion, impact on cave ecosystems, impact on koala populations, impediment to aerial fire fighting activities, visual impact on surrounding native parks and properties, and non use UHSC roads. I will outline two of these issues in more depth below.

- The impact of the installation (construction, concrete piers, deforestation etc) on the three river system that has its origins in these mountains. These rivers that are already subject to stress from droughts (possibly increasing due to climate changes), need to be supported by a healthy soil and plant catchment if they are to remain healthy. Clearing for construction, access and pylons will increase the rate of erosion and run off, leading to increased sedimentation and possibility of changing the pH and chemical composition of the water. This, in turn, can affect flow rate and potential for algal blooms, thereby impacting on both the natural ecosystems reliant on these waterways, as well as the health and livelihood of those using this water for domestic and farming purposes. If this happens, it cannot wait 35 years for a token rehabilitation to bring it back. An offset, is elsewhere and therefore does not provide acceptable reparation. Short term benefit, long term loss. We need to consider that good flowing waterways are vitally important to a future, sustainable Australia. Is a windfarm in a forest really putting the environment first?

- The threat to the flora and fauna endemic to, or using as a corridor, this section of the Great Dividing Ranges. A topical point is the dwindling koala population, which is becoming an endangered species. Why then, would we destroy sections of sub-Alpine forests that provide a corridor for koalas, when there are other 'good wind points' that have already been cleared? Additionally, this is an area of many cave systems, more of which been found since the 1985 karst index used in the Hills of Gold submission. Cave ecosystems are fragile and the negative impact of digging in large concrete supports and destroying these caves is obvious. It does not make sense to ignore updated evidence of the incompleteness of the 1985 index and the proposed 'bird and bat adaptive management plan' being put in place to protect these species, just because they may not yet fit a 'format'. Again, the risk of endangering habitats, to go for a cost saving option is not what increasing alternative energy usage is about. To ignore these issues, is to make the same mistakes that have led to other environmental disasters.

A ridge does provide a good wind site for a turbine, but there are many ridges in NSW, which do not require the destruction/damage to forests, river catchments and cave systems. This proposal has too many negative impacts to the environment to approve it on the grounds of being good for the environment. I ask that you take these concerns into consideration and reject the Hills of Gold proposal.

In the event of these concerns not being enough to reject the proposal, then I request that the of 'Conditions of Assent' should be applied:

1) Condition of Consent B21 (b) (iv) needs to be amended and strengthened to include “avoidance of impacts on the quality of water flowing into the Chaffey and Glenbawn

Catchments AND the Isis River.”

2) Condition of Consent added to B21 (b) to include “avoidance of impacts on the quality of water flowing into Perry’s Creek, Pages Creek, Dead Eye Creek and Whites Creek” to protect the interests of the Isis river communities.

3) Condition of Consent for removal of 17 turbines, as indicated by DPE report, due to non-compliance with visual, noise and biodiversity guidelines be upheld. Remove WTGs 9, 10, 11, 24, 28, 42, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63

4) Condition of Consent that there be no use of Upper Hunter Shire Council (UHSC) local roads.

5) Condition of Consent for removal of 17 additional turbines due to serious concern about proximity of turbines to important habitat features (tree canopies, hollow bearing trees, and the BHGMR) and the resultant threats to bat and birds. Removal of WTGs 6, 9, 16, 18, 21, 22, 32, 33, 40, 42, 43, 49, 50, 51, 58, 59, 61. - as posed by BCS and NPWS in the DPE report point 206, page 63.

6) Condition of Consent should state that a suitable and meaningful decommissioning bond must be instituted which starts at the commencement of construction and continues throughout the operation of the project ; the “within 18 month timeframe” must stand firm as the beginning of decommissioning with a finished rehabilitation timeframe of no more than 3 years from the rehabilitation commencement date; all rehabilitation objectives should remain firm and not be able to be waived by the Planning Secretary; additionally all the underground concreting and other underground infrastructure must be removed to enable the restoration of the development site to its natural vegetation and landscape value.

In closing, I ask that the IPC rejects the Hills of Gold Wind Farm.