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Resident of Nundle and Hanging Rock

Owner of [REDACTED] on Morrisons Gap Road, Hanging Rock.

Objection to the Hills of Gold wind farm project located near Nundle/Hanging Rock

I provide my comments and disagreement with the new material presented by DPHI and the Proponent in June 2024

Public interest

“When all else fails in a logical argument, invoke the “public interest” defence would have to be my favourite quote from a submission to the failed Jupiter wind farm

Every project comes with public interest. Every wind farm, every road, bridge, dam or mine. If large scale projects could simply be approved “due to the public interest”, why do we need an assessment process at all? Why not rubber stamp them the minute they hit the DPHI desk?

Jupiter wind farm (240MW), Chalumbin Wind farm (294MW) and Kumbarilla Renewable Energy Park (100 MW) were also supposed to deliver “public benefit” and the power to the electricity network. Yet they did not proceed. Poor site selection was their ultimate downfall.

In the Hills of Gold Wind Farm case, poor site selection has been flagged by DPHI multiple times.

The imposition of the *Voluntary Land Acquisition* of the adjoining neighbour is akin to a forced acquisition. The owner of DAD 1 has a right to sell his property to anyone, the Proponent or any other buyer of his choosing, if he wants to. When buyer competition is present, an above market price can be achieved. If the turbines next door are constructed and impose *significant* and *dangerous* impacts upon his property, his choice of buyers clearly becomes limited. He can only sell his land to the developer and only at market value. I am aware that the land holder in question has no interest in selling at all, but such limitation of his rights does not sit well with me

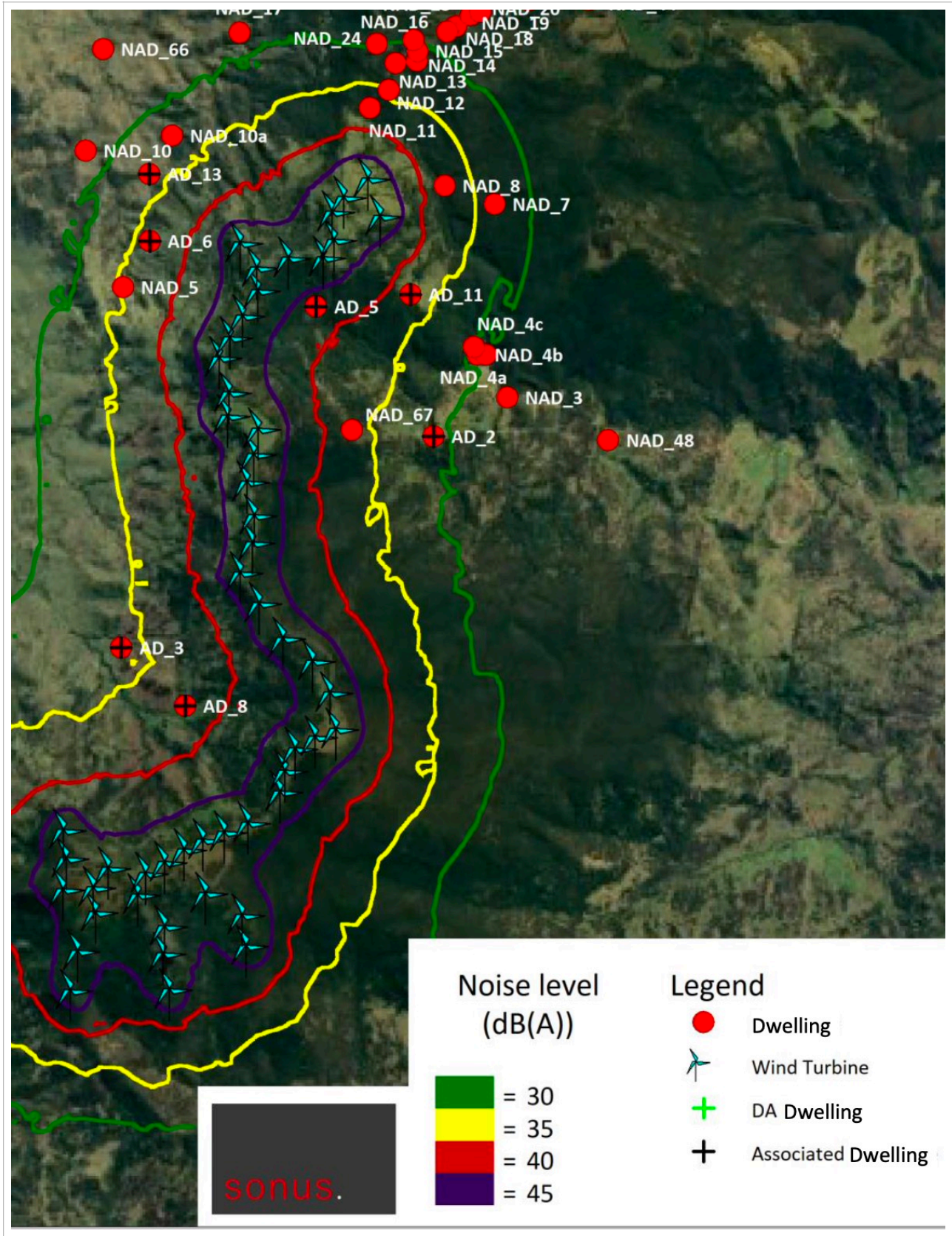
If such a principle was applied to the general public by removing retail competition and forcing everyone to shop in one shop only, Woolworths for example, there would be a public outcry and a Royal Commission to follow.

There is a danger of setting the precedent with the developers becoming aware that the consultation process with affected neighbours is a “ticking box exercise only”, if the acquisition order slapped on the land can solve all issues which otherwise cannot be mitigated.

Local impacts

In total, the noise compliance can not be achieved at five properties: DAD1, NAD67, NAD5, NAD11 and NAD_8.

NAD12 is marginal.



Given the lived experience at other wind farms, noise limits are likely to be exceeded and NAD_7 may potentially become impacted.

Of the six closest properties, three (DAD1, NAD67, NAD5) have received visual assessments such as photomontage or wireframe, indicating visual impact, unacceptable to the owners. The other three (NAD11, NAD8, NAD7) have received computer simulations, with artificial trees of unrealistic widths filling the field of view between the dwellings and turbines. These simulations were made available to the Department at the 11th hour, just three months prior to the Project's recommendation, and were not made available to the owners of the three properties until AFTER the recommendation. Therefore they were not able to review and comment on the visual assessment material.

In the case of NAD11, the images for photomontage were taken, but not used. The property has filtered views to the project site, the artificial simulation presented a solid wall of trees filling the view with turbine 69 towering above.

In the case of NAD7, the aerial image used as the basis of the assessment indicates trees located in close proximity to the dwelling which no longer exist. The trees were removed 3 years ago to improve defensible space around the dwelling in the case of bush fire.

It is well established and accepted that the bush fire threat will continue to rise in the warming climate. The imposition of the vegetation screening to alleviate visual impacts is not acceptable without property owner agreement and consultation with a bush fire specialist, as required by the 2016 Wind Energy Framework.

The spanner in the works - 2023 guidelines

Can this new improved Framework be applied to HOG Wind Farm?

Department said it can't, and then went right ahead and applied it. They used it to revise the visual assessments at three non associated properties which ultimately allowed them to revise their recommendation.

The 2023 guideline brings new obligatory compliance checks and balances the old guideline lacked. For example it introduces the obligation to consult, and document any feedback received, with the affected land owners where vegetation screening is proposed. To achieve compliance with the visual impacts at multiple receivers, under the 2016 guideline, Department specified tree planting. It didn't matter if the trees could not be planted within a power line corridor (NAD69, Lot13/DP249183), or would block out the only view (NAD18, NAD67, NAD69, NAD72, NAD98), or would block sunshine (NAD5, NAD69, NAS1 NAD72, NAD98), or would be planted into the septic tank (NAD5).

Where existing vegetation was used for compliance, the plans of the owner of the vegetation were not clarified. Especially if the vegetation is located on some one else's land.

Any consideration of the bush fire threat in the warming climate and the interference with the Asset Protection Zone of the dwelling should be considered very seriously.

The missing biodiversity

The success of Morrison Gap Road lifestyle subdivision has been an example of a Nature Positive development. Once a farmland, the area was subdivided onto lifestyle blocks of mostly 100 and 50 acres. The owners have created small clearings for domestic infrastructure and gardens, the rest remain untouched, unfenced and unspoiled.

The farming land next door, now a site to a wind farm, has undergone a different transformation, with extensive clearing especially in the recent years. Level or steep ground - doesn't matter. Trees predating European settlement - doesn't matter. His land or his neighbours' - doesn't matter.

To approve the wind farm in this location would now be the ultimate reward to the "proactive" host and to the Renewable Industry at large.

Land use, current and future

As Gina Vereka said at the public meeting on 1 February 2024: "what is Planning?"

The reinstatement of the turbine 53 to 63 brings back and magnifies the impacts to the surrounding properties and community at large.

If we put aside for a minute the "public interest" this wind farm is supposed to deliver, and look at impacts it will bring, turbines 53 to 63 must be removed, and so are turbines 64 to 70, to alleviate broad noise and visual impacts, and in some cases shadow flicker, ice and blade throw (DAD1 and road users). Turbine 47 needs to be taken out of the State Forest and turbines 43 to 45 and 38 to 40 need to be removed to protect the Ben Halls Gap Nature Reserve. To make good for the multiple affected dwellings on Timor side, the entire string of turbines along the southern crest of the ridge need to be removed. Plucking out a few turbines makes little difference.

This of course means that there is no wind farm left.

So when judgement of the balance of "public benefit" is made, it's not a matter of 11 turbines vs DAD1, but the TOTALITY of the project against the broad impacts to the surrounding community and biodiversity.

This simply demonstrates the unsuitability of the site, and the project can only be carried out in this location at a great expense to the public and the natural environment.

From a community impact perspective, my concerns revolve around the Morrisons Gap Road and the properties surrounding the northern arm of the wind farm, from turbine 53 to 70. I predict this will be the hot spot of future conflicts, complaints and possibly court cases, as visually dominant, noise and light emitting industrial development will interact with current and future land use of the area.

Surrounded by lifestyle properties, the wind farm takes the "style" out of the life around it.

The land use is changing. The Agri-tourism is already in and there are flagged introductions of Eco-tourism, secondary dwellings, Environmental living zoning, possible reduction in minimum lot sizes back to 500 acres and classification of the ridge as a scenic landscape.

When planning authorities consider existing and draft policies, the Tamworth's upcoming LEP should also be considered. The presence of wind farm will stifle the future development in the area.

As I am finishing my submission this morning, snow is forecast at Hanging Rock for tomorrow and Wednesday. I see on the social media that all accommodation in Nundle is already booked out, the little town will be packed. I remind myself how lucky I am to have bought land on Morrisons Gap Road. Our future house site is being prepared, first camping site cleaned up, orchard started and by this summer we will be open for visitors.

There are only two places in NSW where fertile basalt soil, high rainfall and snow meet. Here at Hanging Rock and on Barrington Tops.

Hanging Rock is the only place where people can live, work and play, Barrington Tops are covered by National Park and reserved for animals to live and play.

In the changing climate, what "weighting" should be given to this unique location?

In closure, I would like to retaliate that our land on Morrisons Gap Road is an element of the access route to the project site and the absence of the Transport agreement, which is not forthcoming, should be considered carefully by the Commission Panel.