

From: [Chris Eagles](#)
To: [Do-Not-Reply IPCN Submissions Mailbox](#)
Cc: [Maureen Eagles](#)
Subject: Hills of Gold Second Round IPC submission - CJE personal dated 12th July 2024
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CJ Eagles Personal Submission dated 12th July 2024

I refer to my previous submission to the IPC dated 7th of February 2024 in response to the DPHI Assessment dated December 2023 and now this submission in response to the DPHI response to the IPC, dated 24th June 2024 and Engie public submissions dated 12th February 2024.

I continue to **Object** to the Hills of Gold WindFarm Development Assessment by the DPHI. Indeed the most recent response from the DPHI rather than addressing concerns previously raised about this proposal, has actually increased those issues and concerns.

I also raise concerns about specific statements made by Engie in their public submissions to the IPC dated 12th February 2024.

Summarising the issues raised to the IPC in my submission dated 7th February 2024 to the IPC

- Inaccurate Assessment of the Soil Types on the Great Dividing range. Failure to account for these fragile soils, as mapped by the NSW Government, mean that any development in the area poses a significant unmitigated risk (Silt and Algal blooms) to the Isis River and Hunter Rivers and its sources.
- Inaccurate assessment of the Biodiversity impacts with incomplete information gathering during the assessment period. As evidence, I refer to the NHVSS submission and presentation to the IPC, which raises concerns that the information on the Cave and Bat population in the Isis Valley and Surrounds is based on infraction from 1986. As a result the number of caves in the area is in the order of 170, whereas the assessment is based on information, that only identified a fraction of this number .
- The use of a 4.5km Assessment boundary for visuals, of 230M towers (twice the size of Sydney Harbour Bridge) on a 1200M Mountain Range, is simply ludicrous. The Upper Hunter Development Control Plan applies a 10Km assessment area, and the draft NSW Wind Energy guidelines apply a 7.5km boundary. Our homestead will look at ~30 Turbines and we are a stones throw from the 4.5km assessment boundary. But Farmers don't live in their Kitchens. These Turbines will be visible across our Farming properties, in areas inside and outside, the 4.5km boundary, all day, every day
- Failure of Engie to engage with the community prior to the release of the original EIS. Breaching the NSW WindFarm Guidelines 2016 - Which DPHI now acknowledge. Engie should not be rewarded for not complying with the Guidelines.

No on the ground Noise or Vibration Testing undertaken South of the Range.
No baseline.

- Inadequate Water or Soil impact assessments for the Isis and Hunter River systems.
- Destruction of a Wildlife corridor linking the Wingen Maid to the Barrington's (identified in the establishment of the Crawney Nation Park in 2019). Replacing a wildlife corridor with biodiversity offset islands, will hasten the decline of threatened and endangered species in the area
- No analysis of the Traffic impacts to the Upper Hunter Roads South of the Range No analysis of the Traffic impacts to the Villages, without bypasses, along the New England Highways.
- Requested Conditions of Consent:

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)

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.

None of these previous issues have been addressed

Additional issues that now arise as a result of the DHPI response dated 24th June 2024.

Water

- Recommending approval of 62 turbines results in increased clearing of vegetation on the range and reduces the infiltration of rainwater into the soil

for release via springs into creeks and rivers. Concerns remain that the Applicant and DPHI do not understand the importance of the range as a water holding sponge.

- Reinstating Turbines 9 - 11 will magnify the impacts to the fragile Range. These are not even high generating Turbines
- Soil scientist Greg Chapman has warned that there has not been adequate detailed design to understand the extent of mitigation to avoid erosion, sedimentation and mass movement that could result in higher environmental and financial costs.
- The disturbance of phosphorous carrying soils without appropriate erosion mitigation, has the potential to cause Toxic Algal Blooms in the Peel, Isis and Hunter River systems and the downstream Glenbawn and Chaffey Dam water catchments.

Visuals

- The DPHI has stated in an online meeting, which I attended, and in its own Assessment Report, that Hills of Gold Wind Farm will be assessed using the 2016 Guidelines. Yet, It has used the 2023 Draft Guidelines where it chooses, and supposedly as an “exercise”, which is then used to reinstate turbines. They then ignore the new guidelines where it would require removal of turbines or further detailed assessment. This is completely Inconsistent.
- Non-Compliant Turbines 9 -11 were removed under the applicable 2016 Visual Guidelines, to benefit Crawney and Timor Landholders amongst others. Now they are returned in a mishmash of applicable guidelines and non-applicable guidelines. The non-applicable 2023 Guidelines are only at draft stage and may be altered as a result of community feedback.
- So we have the completely ludicrous situation that non-compliant Turbines per the actually applicable 2016 guidelines, are being justified and recommended for reinstatement using the incomplete, inapplicable draft 2023 guidelines.
- Consistency with the 2023 Draft Guidelines would dictate the removal of a number of Turbines and that all residences within 6.5km should now be reassessed including all of the homesteads and Vacation accomodation on our properties Glen Dhu, and Alston. None of which has been done.

Precedent

- DPHI states that it does not want this case to be a precedent, but if Hills of Gold Wind Farm is approved by the IPC, it will be. The concern for NSW landowners is that 2016 wind visual and noise guidelines are not being upheld;
- the DPHI alternates between the 2016 and 2023 draft guidelines to reinstate turbines, but doesn't remove turbines;
- dwelling entitlements and approved development applications are not respected;
- Voluntary Land Acquisition is being imposed on a non-associated neighbour and screening is the only mitigation for other non-associated neighbours, without their agreement or consideration of bushfire risk;

- Some biodiversity costs have been avoided because part of the wind farm infrastructure is proposed on unauthorised cleared land.

Biodiversity

- Protecting biodiversity is important for Australia and the world. Recommending approval of 62 turbines prioritises private profit for a multinational company instead of biodiversity of Australian native flora and fauna.
- Many submissions asked for removal of turbines next to Ben Halls Gap Nature Reserve, yet eight wind turbines and other infrastructure like a concrete batching plant, internal road, turbine foundations, hardstands, and cabling remain. Earthmoving and clearing is proposed within 135 metres of Critically Endangered Ben Halls Gap Sphagnum Moss Cool Temperate Rainforest that only occurs in this location.
- In a 62-turbine marginal to unviable scenario nineteen (19) Moderate risk turbines remain, including reinstatement of five Moderate risk turbines (WTG 9, 28, 58, 59, and 61) that were previously removed in the 47-turbine recommendation.
- The Community requests removal of all turbines next to the Ben Halls Gap Nature Reserve, having no confidence in the Applicant's capacity for self-monitoring of bird and bat carcasses by sniffer dogs and ecologists to inform potential curtailment of turbines, or the risk of scavenging by foxes, cats, dogs, pigs, and raptors.

Unviability

- The Independent Expert Advisory Panel for Energy Transition (IEAPET) modeling suggests that a 62 turbine layout of the project is the only viable scenario. Using IEAPET's alternative modeling all potential turbine layouts would be unviable.
- The project is so marginal that turbines previously recommended for removal for compliance with 2016 noise and visual guidelines, and biodiversity conservation have been reinstated. For example, Turbine 28, which requires clearing 1.5 ha of good condition endangered ecological community Ribbon Gum Mountain Gum Snow Gum, threatened species habitat for the Koala, Barking Owl and Large eared Pied Bat has been reinstated to achieve the 62-turbine viable layout.
- The IEAPET advice states that the applicant would need to spend \$7 million on further detailed assessments to reach readiness for consideration of an investment commitment (pg 12). The IEAPET assumptions do not include factors that would contribute to the unviability of Hills of Gold Wind Farm:
 - Significant increases in build costs.
 - Site complexity - steep terrain, narrow ridgeline, erosion, sedimentation and mass movement risk.
 - Potential construction delays increasing costs.

Public Benefit

It is not a public benefit to approve:

- a marginal to unviable wind farm;
- a State Significant Development on unlawfully cleared land;

- Imposing Voluntary Land Acquisition on a non-associated neighbour and setting a precedent for other State Significant Developments statewide;
- A wind farm between two national parks, Crawney Pass National Park and Ben Halls Gap Nature Reserve (including Critically Endangered Ben Halls Gap Sphagnum Moss Cool Temperate Rainforest);
- A wind farm without detailed design of internal roads on steep gradient land, with high erosion, sedimentation, and mass movement risk requiring mitigation with potentially understated environmental impacts and financial liability.

Engie Submissions dated 12th February 2024

Engie claim in their Written Submissions dated 12th February 2024, that they offered a Neighbour Benefit sharing arrangement to my wife and I, CJ and MC Eagles, at NAD 70. This is not the case. This is further evidenced by the simple fact as to why would Engie be offering us a Neighbour Benefit Sharing arrangement when we were outside the ~4km that they defined as being impacted.??

We certainly are in the impacted area per the 2023 draft guidelines, and should have been assessed had those guidelines applied to this Project, but they don't apparently, or at least they don't in our case, apparently.??

There are numerous similar misleading statements in the Engie documents dated 12th of February 2024, which I have collated, and I will be happy to provide details of these should the IPC be interested. I will also outline further misleading statements in their submission, in the Timor community response (if time allows).

In closing:

Building WindFarm infrastructure in non-REZi areas, with none of the associated supporting infrastructure, just magnifies the impacts on local communities and individuals. In addition to the WindFarm development itself, communities are also impacted by bespoke, and often inadequate supporting infrastructure developments such as roads, powerlines etc; Non-REZI areas should be excluded from this type of development.

The response to IPC by DPHI dated 24th June 2024, has actually increased the grounds for my objections, rather than addressing any of the previously raised issues. The reinstatement of Turbines, under pressure from Engie, impacting our properties, justified using incomplete and inapplicable guidelines will most likely provide very strong grounds for appeal.

This is an:

Unsuitable Development, in an under serviced area, posing unacceptable risks, and should be Rejected. Nothing in the latest DPHI response to IPC dated 24th June 2024 has addressed these risks, instead it has simply magnified them.

Thank you

Chris Eagles
"Alston"

Timor NSW 2338

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