

My name is Natasha Soonchild I am a resident, artist and small business owner in Nundle and I am providing comment on the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure's response to Independent Planning Commission questions regarding Hills of Gold Wind Farm (SD-9679).

I must first say how disappointed and concerned I am that the IPC process seems to have been hijacked by the Developer in the most egregious manner. To submit new information after the public hearing seems a calculated step to obscure the IPC process (by the Developer). There is evidence to show that the proponent knew as early as August 2023 of the impending recommendation for 47 turbines, and as early as December 2021 of the unviability of the project with less than 62 turbines in it, yet they publicly accepted the recommendation when the DPHI handed down their determination. To hold off submitting new information to the IPC at the point when the IPC had completed their consultations and were entering their determination period can only seem (in my opinion) a deliberate act and one with a particular agenda.

I must also note, for the IPC to allow the Developer to formally respond to public comments made to the IPC at the public hearing (by HOGPI) is unfair and a miscarriage of the process. When does the IPC draw the line?

To think that the viability of a project hinges on the reinstatement 15 turbines (out of the 17 non-compliant turbines initially removed by the Department) is absurd in the extreme.

This project is financially borderline at best, why has the DPHI done a backflip?

Nothing has changed to make these turbines compliant to the 2016 visual and noise regulations and biodiversity conversation measures (of the Department!), nothing has changed to the non-associated dwellings who will be affected. The DPHI asserts reinstatement is in the public interest, and in-so-doing justifies their backflip, but by using this argument they are placing the importance on the wrong agenda: they are effectively trying to define the project as more important (and imperative) than it really is. The approval or rejection of this project will not affect the future of renewables in NSW OR the delivery of net zero by 2050. Hills of Gold Wind Farm represents just 1.92% of the NSW planning assessment pipeline. The approval of it, however, will set a precedent for all future State Significant developments...and this is particularly worrying when there is so much evidence of sub-standard community consultation by the Developer, sub-standard reports submitted, evidence of the project being partly situated on unlawfully cleared land (to name but a few examples)...if they are willing to accept this behaviour, poor management, and poor design (and approve it) the implications could be severe.

The DPHI is setting a dangerous precedent to bow to the threats of a multinational company by forcing a voluntary land acquisition on a non-associated dwelling that has consistently and openly opposed this project. In my opinion, this will not be "voluntary" – this will be a forced land acquisition backed by the NSW Government and it will be based on the distress, discomfort and dis-benefit that this project will impose on this NAD. Not to mention the other NADs who will be adversely affected by these (non-compliant) turbines being reinstated into the design.

There is no material difference to the project. The DPHI are not responsible for a badly designed and non-compliant project, Engie most certainly is, they are however, I feel, complicit in *accepting* and *approving* a badly designed, poorly sited, poorly consulted project. It is also concerning that the DPHI alternates between the 2016 guidelines and 2023 draft guidelines to reinstate turbines, but doesn't remove turbines. How can this be justified?

There have been ZERO changes to the project as last submitted to the DPHI, the only difference I can see, is the spectre of litigation by Engie. Whomever has the deepest pockets is proving to have the largest voice. The optics are clear. As a community, we have dealt with the Department with the greatest respect for the process (despite the personal toll of opposing this for 6.5 years), but it is plain to see the Department works to facilitate private companies at the cost of communities, environment and local government wishes.

For a private company to ("voluntarily") acquire private land for a private project that is regarded as in the "public interest" is a contradiction. This is all about prioritising private profit over community, private profit over conservation, private profit over Australia's rare and endangered biodiverse environments.

The threat to Ben Hall's Gap Nature reserve and Crawney National Park could not be clearer. How can this project be in the "public interest" when 8 turbines and other infrastructure (like a concrete batching plant, internal road, turbine foundations, hardstands, and cabling) remain located on the border of Ben Halls Gap Nature Reserve? Surely the importance of these rare, biodiverse environmental assets outweigh the flimsy "public interest" argument both Engie and DPHI assert? For example, Turbine 28, which requires clearing 1.5 ha of endangered habitat home to threatened species like the Koala, Barking Owl and Large eared Pied Bat had been reinstated to achieve the 62-turbine viable layout.

It is in the public interest, now more than ever, to PROTECT and CONSERVE these environments. They cannot be recreated. They cannot be rehabilitated. And they certainly cannot be offset.

They are forcing this project on a community who wishes to protect it's biodiverse assets, water security, social, environmental amenity and way of life. I cannot help but feel, after this last iteration, that this whole process is corrupt. I predict there will one day be a Royal Commission into the renewables industry in response to the irresponsible way these projects are weighted towards a corporate agenda and (ironically) against the environment - but it will be too late, we will have lost out habitats, we will have lost our endangered species and we will have lost the environment we are purportedly trying to save through the push for renewables.

Once again I state: I am a sister talking for this land, I am a voice for the voiceless. I am an artist who is witness. I remain in hope that I am heard, and I believe I stand on the right side of the equation when I request that the IPC unequivocally rejects the Hills of Gold Wind Farm.