

Submission in Support of the Proposed Thunderbolt Wind Farm with Recommendations

The Honourable Commissioners:

Professor Neal Menzies

Dr Bronwyn Evans AM

Suellen Fitzgerald

Planning Officer:

Callum Firth

Background

My family and I have recently made our home in the township of Kentucky and work and shop in nearby Uralla. Although we've only been residents of Kentucky for short time, we've been part of the New England community for many decades and love living in this beautiful part of the world.

Change is always a challenge, and the proposed project is poised to bring about significant alterations to our area, in particular to the people of Kentucky of which it will have the greatest impact. The initial announcement of the project raised concerns for many, myself included. This was clearly reflected in the sentiments expressed at the public meeting held at the Kentucky Community Hall on March 14th, where numerous community members voiced their feelings of powerlessness, exclusion, and their concerns being ignored in the face of these developments.

I recognise the transition to renewable energy is not only inevitable but also essential in our efforts to achieve net zero emissions by 2050. I therefore support the proposed wind farm project, however highlight the implementation of specific measures to ensure that the project aligns with the interests and values of our community, including our First Nations peoples.

1. Enhanced Community Consultation

First and foremost, I strongly advocate for improved community consultation. The current approach tends to foster anger, misinformation, and a sense of disempowerment among community members. Consultation should extend beyond mere information sharing and actively involve community members in the decision-making processes. This will not only enhance transparency but also ensure that the voices and concerns of the community are genuinely heard and addressed.

2. Community-Benefit Fund NOT a VPA arrangement

Secondly, I strongly endorse the establishment of a Community Benefit Fund. This fund should be controlled directly by the community, rather than the Uralla Shire Council. By doing so, we can ensure that the allocation of funds is transparent, democratic, and directly responsive to the needs and priorities of the community and landholders directly affected instead of being

absorbed into costs, fees and wages. This approach will go some way to foster a sense of ownership and engagement among residents.

3. Tower Decommissioning Trust

Thirdly, it is imperative to establish a decommissioning trust from the outset. This trust should be adequately funded to cover the costs of dismantling and safely removing the wind turbines and restoring the site at the end of the project's lifespan. By securing these funds in advance, we can protect our community from potential future liabilities and ensure that the environmental integrity of our region is preserved for future generations.

4. Thorough Ecological Impact Assessment

Fourthly, I recommend that a comprehensive ecological impact assessment be conducted before the project proceeds. This assessment should thoroughly evaluate the potential impacts of the wind farm on local wildlife and natural habitats, with a particular focus on our beautiful and endangered Bell's Turtle. It is essential that we understand and mitigate any adverse effects on this species and other ecological aspects of our region.

The results of this assessment should be made publicly available and should inform the planning and implementation of the project to ensure minimal harm to our natural environment. Furthermore, I suggest that ongoing monitoring and adaptive management strategies be put in place to address any unforeseen environmental impacts that may arise during the operation of the wind farm.

5. Engagement with First Nations Communities

Lastly, I strongly advocate for more consultation and dedicated funding initiatives that support the Anaiwan and Gamilaroi/Kamilaroi peoples. This could include educational scholarships, cultural preservation projects, employment opportunities, and other First Nations led initiatives. Recognising and respecting the rights and contributions of the traditional custodians of the land is not only a moral obligation but also a crucial step towards fostering a harmonious and inclusive community.

Conclusion

The decisions made by the Independent Planning Commission (IPC) regarding the Thunderbolt Wind Farm project, will set a precedent for each subsequent proposal within the New England area. The outcomes and recommendations made by the IPC will either lead to increased anger and unrest within the community or pave the way for more harmonious and constructive engagements in the future.

While I support the development of the Thunderbolt Wind Farm, I believe it is essential the Commission ensures that the project benefits all members of our community and respects our environment and cultural heritage. I urge the IPC to consider these recommendations seriously and to engage in meaningful consultation with the community to address any concerns and aspirations community members may have.

Thank you for your time

Sincerely
Timothy J Clifford

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