



## **TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS**

RE: HILLS OF GOLD WIND FARM (SSD-9679)

### **TAMWORTH REGIONAL COUNCIL MEETING**

PANEL: CLARE SYKES (CHAIR)  
JULIET GRANT  
DUNCAN MARSHALL AM

OFFICE OF THE IPC: STEVE BARRY (PLANNING DIRECTOR)  
GEOFF KWOK (A/PRINCIPAL CASE MANAGER)  
STUART MORGAN (MANAGER PUBLIC PARTICIPATION)

NAME ATTENDEE: PAUL BENNETT (GENERAL MANAGER)  
GINA VEREKER (DIRECTOR – LIVEABLE COMMUNITIES)  
PETER RESCH (DIRECTOR – REGIONAL SERVICES)  
BRUCE LOGAN (DIRECTOR – WATER AND WASTE)  
STEVE BRAKE (MANAGER – DEVELOPMENT  
ENGINEERING)  
ANDREW SPICER (MANAGER – FUTURE COMMUNITIES)  
SAM LOBSEY (MANAGER – DEVELOPMENT)  
MITCH GILLOGLY (TEAM LEADER – STRATEGIC  
PLANNING)  
MURRAY RUSSELL (MANAGER – OPERATIONS)  
CR RUSSELL WEBB (MAYOR)  
CR BROOKE SOUTHWELL (COUNCILLOR)  
CR MARK RODDA (COUNCILLOR)  
CR HELEN TICKLE (COUNCILLOR)  
CR JUDY COATES (COUNCILLOR)  
CR MARC SUTHERLAND (COUNCILLOR)  
CR PHIL BETTS (COUNCILLOR)  
LISA RENNIE (EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT)

LOCATION: NEMINGHA ROOM, LANDS BUILDING,  
25 FITZROY STREET, TAMWORTH

DATE: 3:30PM – 5:00PM  
TUESDAY 30<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2024

## <THE MEETING COMMENCED

**MS SYKES:** Well good afternoon and welcome. Before we begin, I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners on the land on which we meet. And I would like to welcome Councillor Sutherland to provide an acknowledgement of country.

**CR SUTHERLAND:** Thanks. My name is Marc Sutherland. I'm a proud Gomeroid man, born and raised here in Tamworth. I just want to acknowledge the country that we're on by saying Yaama (Gamilaraay language spoken). That's the language spoken by our families and our communities here in Tamworth and across the region, just making sure that we pay respects to elders who have cared and still care for this country, which is the land of the Gomeroid people. That connection has been maintained for thousands of years. And, as a council, I'm proud to be part of an organisation who honours and respects that level of connection to the level that is.

Thanks.

**MS SYKES:** Thank you very much, Councillor Sutherland. Welcome to the meeting today to discuss the Hills of Gold Wind Farm Case SSD-9679 currently before the Commission for determination. The applicant Hills of Gold Wind Farm Proprietary Limited, a project entity owned by ENGIE Australia and New Zealand, proposes to develop a 390 megawatt wind farm approximately 60km south east of Tamworth, near Nundle, Hanging Rock and Crawney, in the local government areas of Tamworth, Upper Hunter and Liverpool Plains. The proposed project involves the development of up to 64 turbines, up to 230m high, a 100 megawatt battery energy storage system, a 330 kilovolt transmission line connecting to Transgrid's existing transmission network at Wallabadah, and other associated ancillary infrastructure. My name is Clare Sykes. I'm the chair of this commission panel, and I'm joined by my fellow commissioners, Juliet Grant and Duncan Marshall. We are also joined by Steve Barry, Geoff Kwok and Stuart Morgan from the office of the Independent Planning Commission. In the interest of openness and transparency, and to ensure the full capture of information, today's meeting is being recorded and a complete transcript will be produced and made available on the Commission's website. This meeting is one part of the Commission's consideration of this matter and will form one of many sources of information from which the Commission will base its determination.

**MS SYKES:** I note that the panel met with council staff via video conference on the 15th of January 2024 to discuss the project. The transcript of this meeting is available on the Commission's website. To assist with the Commission's consideration of the application, we encourage councillors and council staff to avoid duplicating that discussion and focus their submission on any relevant additional matters they would like to cover. It is important for the commissioners to ask questions of attendees and to clarify issues whenever it is considered appropriate. If you're asked a question and not in a position to answer, please feel free to take the question on notice and provide any additional information in writing, which we will then put up on our website. I request that all members here today introduce

themselves before speaking for the first time, and for all members to ensure they do not speak over the top of each other, just to ensure the accuracy of the transcript. We will now begin, and may I first request each councillor member joining from the council to please introduce yourself and, if applicable, provide a verbal declaration of any actual or potential personal interests that you may have in the project. And then, if we could have all the council staff attending, if you could come forward because we just have one microphone here. And please introduce yourselves for the purpose of the transcripts. So, councillors.

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10 **CR BETTS:** Phil Betts, Councillor, Tamworth Regional Council and no, I have no interest in the project.

**CR TICKLE:** Helen Tickle, Councillor, Tamworth Regional councillor. I have no interest.

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**CR WEBB:** Russell Webb, I'm the Mayor of the Tamworth Regional Council and I have no declaration interest to declare.

**CR COATES:** Judy Coates, Deputy Mayor and I have no interests to declare.

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**CR SOUTHWELL:** Hi, Brooke Southwell, councillor, Tamworth Regional Council I'll just declare that prior to becoming a councillor I was working for C7EVEN, which was a marketing company, that was engaged by the proponent. And so I understand some of the community liaison, some of the issues from a marketing and stakeholder engagement perspective. They were a client of the company I work for, I guess, (indistinct). Yes.

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**CR RODDA:** Councillor Mark Rodda. I wish to declare a potential conflict, in that, I am employed by Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure, Crown Lands, and I realise that Crown Lands has been integral to some of the discussions with Planning New South Wales in relation to this project, but I have participated in none of those discussions or worked - My work is not involved with this project.

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35 **CR SUTHERLAND:** Councillor Marc Sutherland. I have no conflicts of interest to declare.

**MS SYKES:** Thank you. And if we could just please invite, council staff just to come up one by one or I would just come up as a group, actually, but just could speak clearly so that we can capture that on the panel.

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**MR BENNETT:** Good afternoon, Paul Bennett, General Manager, Tamworth Regional Council, I have no conflicts of interest.

**MS VEREKER:** Gina Vereker, I'm the Director at Liveable Communities with Council and I have no conflict of interest.

**MR RESCH:** Peter Resch, I'm the Director of Regional Services, and I have no conflict of interest in this project.

5 **MR LOGAN:** Bruce Logan. I'm the Director of Water and Waste and no conflict.

**MR LOBSEY:** I'm Sam Lobsey, the Manager of Development at council, and I have no interest to declare.

10 **MR SPICER:** My name's Andrew Spicer. I'm the Manager of Future Communities, and I don't have anything to declare.

**MR GILLOGLY:** Mitch Gillogly, Team Leader of Strategic Planning. Nothing to declare.

15 **MR BRAKE:** Steve Brake Manager of Development Engineering and I have no conflicts to declare.

**MR RUSSELL:** Murray Russell, Manager of Transport Operations, and I have no conflicts.

20 **MS RENNIE:** Lisa Rennie, executive assistant to our director of Liveable Communities and I've got no conflicts.

25 **MS SYKES:** Okay. Well, thanks very much, everyone. We have provided an agenda, in advance of the meeting and now wish to invite councillors to provide an overview of the submission. Any key matters that you wish to present. Thank you. Mayor, yes.

30 **CR WEBB:** Okay. I might follow some of my fellow councillors. I know that each one of them have got some issues that they would like to raise, and some will have registered to speak on Thursday. Two of the councillors have registered to speak on Thursday, and I will give them the first right to speak before the rest of us speak. And I'll ask our Deputy Mayor Judy, to make comment.

35 **CR COATES:** Thank you, Mr. Mayor. (Indistinct).

**MS SYKES:** No.

40 **CR COATES:** I guess for me, in terms of this particular project, there are still a lot of unanswered questions, and there's been copious amounts of work that's been done in terms of, investigations and reports and amendments to reports and things like that. And I actually have read through both the 100 odd page report as well as the transcript of the previous meeting. And I - even though I have some notes, what I'll do is just very briefly mention those. And I guess rather than talk here for, you know,  
45 15 minutes, I don't want to do that to everyone else. But I think that for me, basically, I'm not an engineer, I'm not a planner, I'm not a developer. I am an elected

representative of the Tamworth LGA, which encompasses the areas of Nundle and Hanging Rock. And as such, I'm not qualified to make technical comments, but I do believe that I'm well versed around the project and the concerns of the majority of the residents of those two communities, Nundle and Hanging Rock. And we're all aware that there's been quite a lot of division within that community, and we're all aware that there's been up to 300 people who have supported it. But we've also had quite a number, I think the number was about 30% or 40% who have objected. Starting from basically where the ridgeline is in terms of that particular part of the project actually is the feeder source for the water supply for three major tributaries or starts of river heads, and that being the Peel River, the Isis River, which flows into the Hunter River and the Barnard River. When you're starting at the top of the hill and you're looking at the possible impacts of putting, all those infrastructures, the pads support, the turbines on and the transmission lines and the underground transmission lines and that, I actually have questions around what that impact may be on.

**CR COATES:** Number one, that water supply, which at the moment is quite pristine. The whole area is basically natural. Sorry, National park or state forest. We don't have any impact on that head water supply for those rivers. I guess the other thing is that Nundle itself is quite a historic little village. You know, it goes right back to 18 - in the early 1850s when the gold rush started. And as such, there's a lot of historic buildings that are sitting in that quaint little village. And, from the perspective of the impact of those, I have concerns, I guess, number one, in terms of transporting of some of those larger pieces of equipment through there and whether or not there may be some impact on the buildings that exist that are in close proximity to that. But also when you start cutting massive roads and taking out swathes of land, and forest, that actual impact not just on the little village itself in terms of tourism, but in terms of when it goes out into those forest areas, what the impact that may have on that area as well.

**CR COATES:** The other thing that that really concerned me after reading a lot of those papers were - was around the roads and the access. And like I said, I'm not a technical person. I can only speak on what I've actually read and how those concerns come back to me. But, you know, areas such as Morrisons Gap Road, Devil's Elbow, Crawney Road. How much more land clearing and what is that going to look like. You know, we've all looked at these photographs in terms of what impact trying to get a lot of those large pieces of equipment can have. But when you're talking about forest area and vegetated area and you're talking about lots of twists and turns and narrow roads, I do have concerns about the impact of that on the environment, but I guess also, just going through Nundle itself that particular bypass that they're proposing across the floodplain, that's like putting - I think I read somewhere, it's like putting a freeway into somewhere else, you know, it's that the village is so unique and so sleepy, I guess, and so green and leafy. That to put a massive bypass like that through that area. It's got to have an impact on the amenity. And you know how it actually looks to not just residents but also to visitors. There's also been mentioned in some of the reports about the actual suitability of the terrain to be able to cope not

just with roads, but also with those concrete pads and other infrastructure. And I think that, you know, we've seen the pictures of the landslides and things like that. And to be able to deal with that in a way that decreases and minimises the risk is going to require massive engineering and massive intersection into that natural  
5 environment to be able to stabilise and to ensure the safety going forward. And that's without even speaking to the possible impact on things like, the Black Snake Gully Mine. There was also the mention of the other roads, the Crawney Road, Lindsays Gap Road, Sandy Crossing Road. I won't go over that because everyone's aware of what Steve Brake has actually raised from an engineering perspective in that area. I  
10 think if I can just make a comment and I'll finish now because I realise that I can't talk forever. The things that come out to me is that there's been the government mandate around renewable energy states that community consultation and least environmental impact is a really important part of any of these projects. And the  
15 community consultation has been extensive, but I'm not so sure about the least environmental impact from this particular project in this particular space. I think, you know, as a council, we support renewable energy, but it's got to be the right project in the right location. And for various reasons that I've mentioned and obviously other people have stated, I don't believe that that's the case.

20 **CR COATES:** I think the other thing that, I'd like to say is that there was mentioned by the state director for Energy Infrastructure and Zones, Chloe Hicks. She's actually been quoted as saying social license was central to the delivery of the REZs. And also the associated electricity infrastructure roadmap. And I'm not sure that social  
25 license has actually been fully addressed in this particular case. The project for me expounds itself as being economically beneficial at the expense of environmental and biodiversity destruction and community cohesion. And we all understand that we need to move to renewable energies. We all do understand that. But I think when you look at the number of other projects that are still out there that could be developed in  
30 more appropriate locations that are not going to cause the damage to such a pristine environment, I really have to question why we, you know, really pushing forward with this when we could have less impact somewhere else in terms of particularly environmental and biodiversity. And I guess one last thing is I ask, what would be the outcry and the outcome if somewhere like the Blue Mountains, where it's, you  
35 know, it's a similar type of environment, if someone proposed to put something like this down there. Now, I believe, the only difference is that there are more people down there who could make more noise about the impact on that environment than we will ever be able to get here. But that doesn't say that the environment and the  
40 associated things that are happening shouldn't be treated with the same respect and the same consideration, just because we don't have the numbers to be able to stand up and do that. So I think that, the project may well be in the public interest of the whole state, but I wonder about the public interest of the region. And yes. I think I can just leave it there.

45 **MS SYKES:** Okay. Thank you very much. Councillor Coates. And I had one clarification when you mentioned the concern with landslip was referring to the concrete pads or the transport infrastructure or both?

**CR COATES:** Both. Probably more like the transport infrastructure, but potentially the pads as well. Yes.

5 **CR WEBB:** Councillor Rodda.

**CR RODDA:** Thank you, Mr. Mayor. Look, I'll start by saying that I'm likely to repeat things that may have been said by, staff or community members, but, I'll thank you, the members of the IPC, for the opportunity to speak today about this very  
10 contentious project that will create such a blight on the environment and vista of Hanging Rock, Nundle and Timor that this region will likely never recover from even after the project end of life. This is a proposal that a majority of the community up there have fought for more than five years. They've been through more than five  
15 years of hell trying to get a positive outcome for their beloved communities, and it has been an extremely divisive proposal. They are not against renewable energy projects, far from it. And nor is my council. They are simply - they simply believe this proposal is in the wrong location. Although my council has an approved council recommendation to sign a proposed voluntary planning agreement with ENGIE, I believe no such agreement has yet been signed. But council continues to strongly  
20 object to the Hills of Gold Wind Farm and has done so on two occasions. My council has committed considerable resources in planning staff and councillors, time to understanding and assessing the potential impacts of this project, as have many concerned residents who we represent and many concerns have not been adequately addressed as the proponent hopes to address these after an approval is provided.  
25 Putting the cart before the horse, which I believe is absolutely wrong.

**CR RODDA:** It is significant that this project so far is the only renewable project that my council has objected to, and for good reason. Nundle and Hanging Rock are an environmental, economic and social asset for Tamworth. This region and the state  
30 of New South Wales. Environmentally it is a source of great biodiversity and natural heritage. With two national parks, Ben Halls Gap Nature Reserve and Crawney Pass National Park, extensive Crown Lands, recreation areas and state forest. The vista that residents and visitors currently enjoy will be irrevocably destroyed by this proposal. I know that the department is aware of both authorised and unauthorised  
35 clearing. This makes the remaining native vegetation on the range and slopes even more important. Economically, the Nundle and Hanging Rock communities are the go-to destination for visiting family and friends. Tamworth's largest tourism segment, it plays an important role in encouraging visitors to stay one more night and increase their spend. It does this year-round. Unlike other locations, businesses are  
40 open on weekends, and public holidays and school holidays and Nundle hosts a unique program of events, from singer songwriter retreats to the great Nundle Dog Race, Nundle CWA Art show, Nundle Country Picnic and more. Socially, Nundle contributes to the liveability of Tamworth with its subalpine climate. It's our Leura Katoomba. We love the indie shops, the pub, doughnuts, cabins, B&Bs, free camps,  
45 Chaffey Dam, Sheba Dam for swimming, fishing and kayaking and the snow.

**CR RODDA:** It is also a site and source of rich European and Chinese gold mining heritage. Council's blueprint 100 States Council's intent to protect the character of Nundle and Hanging Rock. This project will permanently industrialise the entrance to the village and the highly visible surrounding landscape day and night. The experience of the heritage buildings and street trees of Nundle are important to residents and visitors. This project permanently compromises the experience of the Heritage Village by industrialising a highly visible part of the range for 35 years. The applicant and department haven't assessed important access and biodiversity issues, which include the western side access from Crawney Road onto the project site via Access option B, then via Western connector track to the ridge towards turbine five. This access is proposed for 35% of light and heavy traffic, 100% of OSOM traffic and the only option for blade delivery. Governor's Shelf, which include concrete batching, BESS substation, operations and maintenance car park excluded from the visual montages, neighbouring non-associated dwellings and uses of Crawney Road and Teamsters Rest Campground are unable to comment on visual impact. The Wombramurra Creek Crossing access option B is not addressed with respect to waterway crossings, biodiversity, flash flooding and engineering risks of underestimated biodiversity impact, incomplete constructability advice and no visuals for infrastructure on the shelf, risk of underestimated environmental impacts and no visuals shown for construction of the transverse track, including substantial concrete or rock batters.

**CR RODDA:** Turbines next to the boundary of Ben Halls Gap Nature Reserve need to be removed to protect the world biodiversity legacy located in the park, particularly critically endangered Ben Halls Gap Sphagnum Moss Cool Temperate Rainforest. At 130 metre setback is not enough if we are serious about preventing extinctions and protecting world biodiversity. Turbines 32, 33, 38, 39, 40, 43, 44 and 45 should be removed. Turbine 47 appears to be located in the state forest. The Hills of Gold Preservation Group previously raised concerns about the location. And the applicant replied, Turbine 47 is not in the state forest, it is on lot 48. Now I'll have a look, lot 48 is in the state forest and it is included in the table of involved landholders. Who is the recipient of the income from this turbine, who would ultimately be responsible for the decommissioning of turbine number 47. Turbine 50 appears to be on the Crown Road. It is not transparent how the Crown Road will remain accessible to Crown Lands and National Parks staff or members of the public, or indeed the emergency services. But diameter of the turbine foundation is quoted as 26m. The Crown Road may be partially occupied by the turbine foundation and interrupted by associated hardstand. Turbine 49 appears to be only a few metres from the Crown Road. Turbine foundation may be partially on the road, and the road may be interrupted by associated earthworks. Turbine 64 to 70 need to be removed from the land adjoining Morrison's Gap Road, a public road used for access for tourists to a trout farm, snow seekers, residents and council, Crown Lands Forestry National Park and emergency services staff. The project treats the road reserve like private property, with proposed construction compounds immediately either side of the road, underground cabling and access tracks across the public road, and turbine foundations and lay downs, with no detail for significant earthworks. It is not known

whether Morrisons Gap Road will be fenced and blocked to residents or the public. The seven turbines are at risk to the driving public and a liability to council, particularly in a subalpine area with mist and snow, there is risk of ice throw. In the updated Mitigation Measures November 2022 page C18, the following is proposed, the proponent will provide UHF radios in brackets given mobile phone reception can be intermittent to residents along Morrison's Gap Road and Shearers Road to communicate any emergency or travel plans to site staff, along with a protocol for reaching the site manager. Residents shouldn't have to communicate by radio to enter or exit their properties on a public road.

**CR RODDA:** 100% of light, heavy and oversized over mass vehicles will travel through the village of Nundle on residential and village streets and rural roads. 65% of light and heavy vehicles will travel on Oakenville Street, Old Barry Road, Barry Road, which includes an unresolved sinkhole and Morrison's Gap Road. There is not enough detail and modifications to Morrison's Gap Road that could become a liability for TRC. Proposed widening to 5.5m in straight sections and wider on the corners. There has already been significant unauthorised clearing, as I previously mentioned, within the project site of irreplaceable vegetation by the proponents supporters. Approval will empower proponents with similar behaviour. The proposal does not adequately address the 13 kilometre long corridor of vegetation that will be destroyed to deliver the wind power to the grid. Worse, there is no suitable remediation plan at the project's end of life to clean up the concrete and steel pads, towers or blades. Despite money offered to landholders, 80% of dwellings within the 8.7km of the project remain non-associated, and that indicates how important the ridgeline and the environment is to the local community. The community has suffered socially, and the Community Enhancement Fund will only create a further wedge in an already divided community. The project is not in the public interest because it currently has no access, is incomplete, high risk and this is unprovable. And I would like to thank the council TRC staff for their excellent work on this matter so far. And thank you again for your time.

**MS SYKES:** Thank you very much.

**CR WEBB:** Thank you, Councillor Betts.

**CR BETTS:** Yes. Thank you. I won't go over any of the issues that, previous councillors have addressed. Having spent 30 years as a councillor in local government. I've seen a fair few things that have transpired in major developments, minor developments. And having spent my career in the road construction industry, working for the New South Wales government road construction agencies under different names in the geotechnical area. My issue that I see as one of the significant things for the Tamworth regional community for the longer terms is, road pavements are generally designed for 20 year design life. These heavy vehicles that are going to be using that broader infrastructure will reduce the lifespan of that infrastructure unless something is actually done to address that, because that then will become a liability for the Tamworth Regional Council in the future. And I see that as a

concern. Yes, some of the other construction issues with the slippage and that real issues. The longer term issue for Tamworth Regional Council for the damage to the infrastructure. But while you may not see it, you know, potholes that come up immediately, the damage that heavy vehicles do transversing any infrastructure does  
5 destroy the integrity of that bearing ratio.

**MS SYKES:** Councillor Betts, do you have any specific localities where you have more concern over others in terms of that (crosstalk).

10 **CR BETTS:** I read the report and I'll get back to you some exact details on that because, you know, I can just - (indistinct) there are in the broader infrastructure coming in off the New England Highway through in there, but even some of the minor roads as well.

15 **MS SYKES:** Yes.

**CR BETTS:** Yes.

20 **CR WEBB:** Councillor Sutherland.

**CR SUTHERLAND:** I don't have any concerns as of yet. That hasn't already been raised by Councillor Coates, Councillor Rodda and Councillor Betts.

25 **CR SOUTHWELL:** I've just got a couple of points. I'd also like to thank you for meeting with us in person. I appreciate that you guys have come a long way. And it is, a lot different when you can have a chat in person. I thank you for making the effort. I guess as a project, I was actually probably more on the supportive side of this project initially. And that's largely because, thinking about the project from a larger Australia wide perspective, the need for renewables. When I learned about the  
30 project, I was thinking, this is great. But I've since probably changed my position. And the reality is, from a broad perspective is it ticks a lot of boxes. It probably ticks about half the boxes. When you talk about renewables, like the whole of Australia, and the world is moving towards that. Climate change is real. We need to act, and this actual project is a lot further ahead than others. So I can see that that is another  
35 positive. There are a range of economic benefits as well that will come into play. There's a lot of things - it's a very windy area. This particular location, it's one of the windiest, you know, parts of New South Wales. So that's another very, very big box ticking there. But when you get down into the nitty gritty, there is probably half the boxes that are just completely not ticked. And when we look at renewables as a  
40 planning, directorate and our planners are amazing, they really try to tick all the boxes in terms of access and, all of these things here, biodiversity, heritage, all of those things, they want to see a project that really does tick about 90%.

45 **CR SOUTHWELL:** Let's talk about renewables. Yes, this isn't an issue of not in our backyard. We have another quite a lot of renewables that are going ahead and progressing. And we're supportive of those. And example is one, just off the

highway, where access isn't an issue. It's not on prime agricultural land. There isn't a lot of large 100-year-old trees or koalas living nearby. It's close to the grid, you know, and that is an example of a project that is largely in support from this council. But I think it is counterproductive to approve a project when you're talking about a lot of land clearing, because the idea of climate change is around renewables and diversifying our energy supply. But when you're having to clear all of that land and koala habitat and these 100-year-old trees, you kind of think, hang on a minute from a higher level, that doesn't seem really right, because, you know, all of those trees and that environment is adding, positive things to our environment long term and positive things to climate change. So I just think that that's not right. That's one issue.

**CR SOUTHWELL:** The next one is obviously access is a big problem. We've talked about landslides. What about the safety of those workers as well, that would be actually driving those, trucks and all of that sort of thing. And if there was a landslide, I know best endeavours are made to make sure that that won't happen, but that's a real risk. I think we need to be considering the safety of those, potential workers in the future. Community cohesion and social license hasn't been gained in that particular town, at all. It really has been divisive and that's already been spoken about. The impacts to infrastructure has been spoken about, I'll probably just will elaborate on what Phil has said, which is as a council - as local government, we're the poor cousins in government. So, cost shifting is very real from the state and federal government. This project, if it was to go ahead, yes, there will be some improvements to road infrastructure. Maybe there'd be some widening of roads, etc. Then where there's no funding provided to council to continuously upgrade and fix those potholes of the widened road, etc. We're left with a legacy of having to continuously, fix them. And with a budget that is, getting depleted every single year because of rising costs. And we're having to ask for the community for an increased rate variation, which you might have heard. That's because costs are going up and we can't pay for that at the moment as it is.

**CR SOUTHWELL:** You probably noticed that on the road out to Nundle, which is very, very bad. And it's probably one of the big concerns of residents as well. Having to upgrade those roads in the future, it will be a real issue to us and no one's paying for that. That's just going to be an expectation that council will have to again, come up with the money there. Once again, I'll just reiterate at the beginning - actually, Gina Vereker, when she was asked quite plainly - who's our planning director, what are your thoughts on this project. She said, it's a fantastic project, it really is, it's a great project, but it's just in the wrong spot. And that pretty much summarises our view. You know, there's a lot of issues here, it takes about half the boxes. And when you look at all the renewable energy projects coming into play, this one is further advanced, yes, but my understanding is that all the renewable energy projects that are coming on board, not all of them, will actually be able to go into the grid. There's going to have to be a few that get knocked on the head. If you're going to have to knock a couple on the head, this may be an example of one that that doesn't quite come up to scratch.

**CR SUTHERLAND:** Thanks, Brooke. Councillor Tickle.

5 **CR TICKLE:** Thank you. I actually don't have a lot extra to add to what's been said, but thank you very much for coming, because as you were aware, this has dragged  
10 on for five years, posing considerably amount of uncertainty on that community and in fact, to our whole area. The whole process has been very costly and as already stated, like local government are under significant cost pressures. This project for five years, we have spent so much time and effort on it and so have a lot of the small businesses in the Nundle area, and that money we can't recover. We've already heard,  
15 too, about the ongoing potential damage to roads and other infrastructure. And sure, the proponent might come back and say, we'll give you a bit more, but that's only short term, as experience has said. Like, you know, we plan for 20, 30 years out, not just the short time fixing up potholes. And that is on the destruction of old growth timber, we can't replace that. And there's already been considerable unauthorised  
20 land clearing up there. You probably have seen it. It's just shameful. And it's quite at odds with what the federal and state governments standing is. So in many cases just, counterproductive. And as I said, we've already seen sampling of that destruction up there and how it happened and how that person is still standing after, I don't know, it was considerable clearing and that's just a taste of what is to come. And so much of that is old growth timber, it's irreplaceable. We've got koalas, for example, up there. You know what's happening to all of them. So the effect on biodiversity is considerable. And the financial implications have already been enormous and continue to be that way. But I think the community just needs certainty. And we just need finalisation of this project, which has been dragging on for over five years. But  
25 I won't go on and I won't add anything more because I think it's been very well covered and I certainly support the council's submission.

**MS SYKES:** Thanks very much.

30 **CR WEBB:** Thanks Councillor Tickle. Well, in wrapping up, from where we sit as Councillors and we are the representatives of the wider community and Nundle as such. I too, along with Councillor Betts, have been around for some time.

35 **CR BETTS:** (Indistinct)

**CR WEBB:** We have seen Nundle as - and it's been put up in lights as an example of a community, that can work together collaboratively, a whole community, and they can make stuff happen. And that over the last five years has been completely  
40 shattered, to a point where family members aren't talking to each other. Nothing much happens up there anymore. The whole fabric of that community has been torn apart. Before I go on any further, I'd like to say I was very disappointed that all we were going to do was get a zoom conference. I found that quite confronting and I spoke to Steve and I thank you, Steve, for organising a face to face. I think this is the best outcome and I thank you for the time to do that. I do know that you'll be meeting  
45 with the staff, and also you're going to meet with the residents up there to hear from

them. From both sides of the argument on Thursday. That's good. But thank you again for taking the time to come and meet with us.

5 **CR WEBB:** In some sort of a wrap up, we've heard a lot of stuff here, a lot of our concerns raised today. There are so many issues that are unresolved. There are so many grey areas. There is such an impact on the environment up there that we've already seen. I was a member of the board of Local Land Services, some year or two ago where we saw a lot of land clearing up there. And much of that was  
10 unauthorised. That land clearing has created some scars on the landscape that will probably never be healed. If this project is to be approved, there will be further scarring of the landscape that can never, ever, be remediated. And I think one of the challenges that the government face, both state and federal, because there is a political imperative to get renewable energy up and running. But one of the  
15 challenges they face is, how do we do that without destroying the environment. What we're looking at here is a project, that if it is approved, is providing some opportunity for renewable energy, but at the same time is destroying the environment - is destroying the environment that it's going to be placed in.

20 **CR WEBB:** That's why there is so much opposition to what we're seeing here, along with, you know, a whole range of other issues. I think if we look at some of the challenges that are unresolved, I can't see how we can actually support anything to be approved and approval for any development without the issues all being resolved before we give that approval. And what I see, from where I sit, is some of these developments and this particular one where there are so many issues that are  
25 completely unresolved and we do not, as a council, know what the legacy is that is going to be left for us. There is going to be a legacy left for us, our council, not just that area, but our whole council, our whole budget is going to have to find some real - it's going to have some real impacts on it, because we're going to be up in that area in years to come. Fixing up, some of the problems that are going to be caused by  
30 some of the activities that are going to be occurring up there if this particular development is approved only (indistinct) infrastructure. I don't believe that with the voluntary planning agreement, there is enough, money in that to cover what that legacy is going to leave us as an organisation.

35 **CR WEBB:** What we'll find is that areas that aren't affected by the look of it, or in any other way, with their road networks that we are trying to maintain at the moment, we'll be dragging money out of that to try and fix roads up there that are going to be impacted on into the future. I think it's going to be so difficult into the future. I mean, the decommissioning of these things in years to come. And there will  
40 be a time when they have to be - there has to be decommissioning. That has not resolved and I don't think it will be resolved in the near future. I think there are so many - it's so problematic as to how do you apply a decommissioning strategy to a development that we can get guaranteed funding around in the next 20 or 30 years? I can't see that happening. And it's certainly not a part of this proposal. I think, that is  
45 something that that we could be left with, the landholders up there could be left with, the whole of the community could be left with in years to come. None of us sitting

around this table, will be here to argue either way on it or actually, probably - maybe some, maybe a couple, sorry. But I think that, the legacy that's going to be left there with decommissioning is, I mean, we've got no idea what that's going to look like, and it is so problematic.

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**CR SOUTHWELL:** They have put forward the decommissioning plan. It is - yes, it's got holes in it though, like all of them do because the government hasn't put time and effort into this. And I spoke to the minister about it and he said, oh, it's something we're working on. But it's not great.

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**CR WEBB:** Again, completely unresolved. There are so many grey areas, so many areas that are unresolved. And I do believe that - and I will state that our council has been and does support the renewable energy industry. We have many, many, proposals before us, and we're working with many of those proponents to try and get some great outcomes. In this particular case, I don't believe we can get great outcomes regardless of how well we can work with the proponent. It is clearly not a bad development. But as our director said and as Brooke highlighted, it's not a bad development, it's just in the wrong place. And the damage that's already been caused out there, when you multiply that by what further damage is going to be caused into the future, I think that's unacceptable. Unacceptable to the community as a whole.

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**CR WEBB:** I'll wrap up by saying I totally do not support this development because there are so many issues unresolved. I see that the council, in years to come, will be left with a legacy where they're going to have to find funding to repair a lot of the roadworks and other infrastructure that's going to be put in place that will become unaffordable for us as an organisation. And in some cases, I do believe that some of that infrastructure they're talking about is particularly unachievable. I think we've got to consider that there are so many grey areas, the issues that are not resolved and they are completely unresolved, and there's no hint of some of those issues being resolved in the short term. I just say I cannot imagine how any agency could look at this and say, oh, we'll give it a tick because they'll fix it up later. We don't do that with our own lives. We don't do that with other planning matters when we're dealing with them as a council. And anything comes before any other government agency in line with water or whatever it might be, unless the issues are resolved before, you know, with a funding agreement or a business case, a proper formulated business case, you won't get any money. Every issue has to be resolved in this case. There are so many unresolved issues. And I'll finish up by saying, I think it's a very - it'd be a very poor outcome to see it moving forward.

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**MS SYKES:** Thank you very much for all of your submissions and points that you wish to raise. I guess we'll just open up for some - if we've covered off - whether there's any other items on the agenda that you wish to raise as other matters. You've covered most of those. Did you want to raise any other points around the status of the VPA or the economic or other benefits?

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**CR RODDA:** But actually, just one-minute, sorry Madam Chair. The bushfire prone land, I don't know - we didn't obviously mention too much about that, but obviously you probably you know, you've been up there and it's -

5 **MS SYKES:** Yes.

**CR RODDA:** It is significant. And it's certainly something that - what would concern me if there was an approval is how much additional clearing would there be to protect that infrastructure.

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**MS SYKES:** Yeah.

**CR RODDA:** And already, you know, we've heard that there's already been significant unauthorised clearing. There'll be additional clearing required for the movement of infrastructure and transport vehicles and whatever and also the power lines. But added to that, obviously, you know, they'd be wanting barriers to protect their infrastructure from bushfire that I've seen stuff there that we are lucky - we did have a bushfire in 2019, 2020 and it was lucky it didn't get into the area across the road and the state forest, it was a significant bushfire. And if it had jumped to the other side, I'm surprised it didn't from ember attack or anything like that -

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**MS SYKES:** We were up there yesterday (crosstalk).

**CR RODDA:** But it's significant. It's a beautiful area and you can see why people are passionate about it. But what obviously, you know, from that perspective, it would be something that we need to sort of, I guess, reinforce our concerns. It certainly there is significant, obviously bushfire prone land there. And I guess we wouldn't want that impacted by a company wanting to protect their infrastructure, which obviously it would need that - some protection, you know, to ensure that it wasn't at risk during a bushfire.

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**CR COATES:** Through you Madam Chair. Can I just make a comment as well along those lines. In one of the reports I was reading, there's actually - I have concerns about the challenges that how they're sort of, proposing to meet the challenges and that they may actually be at odds with current legislation. And one of the things that was mentioned was that they're talking about vegetation screening to actually improve the amenity. And yet that's going to add to the bushfire risk. And I do recall reading in one of the reports that they were limiting the removal of canopy trees and retaining understory vegetation within overhead transmission lines. Now, for me, those two things don't go together, because when you talk about bushfire risk, they like, as Mark said, to have that clearance space around them because the closer the vegetation is, the higher the risk is in terms of starting bushfires. And yet in the report they're stating that, you know, that would be one of the ways they would have of addressing and minimising the vegetation clearing. I'm not quite sure which way they're feeling that they're needing to go with that.

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**MS SYKES:** Okay. We'll yes - certainly follow up. That would have been captured on the transcript.

5 **CR SOUTHWELL:** Just to add, I think the economic and other benefits, as many proponents or developers will do, they will, you know, elaborate on those. I think what it really comes down to wind farms are - yes, there is some economic benefits whilst they're getting developed, but a lot of those are specialised skills that need to come in from outside of the area. Obviously accommodation would be beneficial and food and beverage and things like that. But long term it's a couple of people, you  
10 know, 1 or 2 people. And again there's usually expertise that's required around electrical knowledge and so forth. I think yes, the economic benefit - obviously we haven't got a VPA happening yet. And the mayor may want to talk about that. We've probably been - it's probably been a bit of a difficult one for us as a council to agree on, because some of us - let's get one in case we miss the boat. Others no, because  
15 we don't want to - we're not approving it. And it might look like we're just trying to take the cash, you know. But we're worried we're going to miss - or the community will miss out if we don't get one sorted. But yes, that might be something you want to touch on.

20 **CR WEBB:** Yes. With the VPA we've spoken with now, obviously we're a member of a group called COREM Coalition of Renewable Energy Mayors, which would be well aware of. And we've taken a position on that, as COREM as a group of councils. And that is that, our voluntary planning agreement should look a certain way. And that's 1.5% of the total project cost, and we need 50% of that 1.5% up front before  
25 we start. We have not been able to come to an agreement with the company on that. We've had to wind that back a bit, which none of us are very happy about. That's one thing. And I think across the board, when you've got a group of councils across New South Wales that have agreed that that's what we need to try and manage ourselves into the future with the money that is going to come into these zones, into these,  
30 renewable energy developments. We worked it out pretty well. That that would probably be a reasonable figure.

**MS GRANT:** Did you say 1% with 50% up front?

35 **CR WEBB:** 1.5%.

**MS GRANT:** Of the CIB?

40 **CR WEBB:** Of the capital cost. Now there is a position the government has looked at, and that also is on a - I can't remember the actual figures, but it's, they've talked about us actually taking, so much money per unit of power that they can produce, not produce, but can produce and of course, it actually works out a very similar amount of money. One thing I would just like to - and I did miss it in my in my speech - that  
45 is, there is going to be so much product is going to have to be introduced into that zone where they're putting the towers in, in terms of concrete. You'll have to have your sand and your gravel. But the other one is, of course, 30% of - about 30% of a

cubic metre of concrete is water. And there's going to be hundreds of cubic metres of concrete in each one of those holes. If we ran into a dry time, water is very precious. It just wouldn't be the water available. It would not be available. If you look at one of the pier holes might have, say, five - 600m<sup>3</sup> of concrete, then it might have a little bit more and 30% of that is going to be water. It adds up to a lot of water. And you times that by the number of, I guess, turbines that are going in or proposed to go in. If we did step into a dry period, then it's not achievable.

10 **MS SYKES:** Yes. Okay. We can certainly look into that one. I was interested in Councillor Coates your comment on the impact of the community of Nundle, in particular the road access through the back of the - through the flood zone and the back of the (indistinct).

15 **CR WEBB:** Back of the hotel.

**MS SYKES:** Back of the hotel. Could you - you know, we did visit that site, yesterday and the one - our understanding is that that will be a temporary infrastructure build for two years or for the period of construction, to then be remediated. Did you have any comment on that impact, given what we understood to be a temporary nature and any of your concerns within that there?

25 **CR COATES:** I guess my concern is I wonder how temporary any of it is going to be, because it's unknown what we - what may need to be taken in to do repairs or replacements or maintenance and things like that. I think, you know - and yes, the decommissioning is a long way down the track, but are we going to have to go through that whole process again. And we all know that every time we put something on a landscape, move it. It's - the mark of it is always there. It doesn't matter how hard we try to plant around it and fill it in, the mark is always there. I think it was more - in answer to your question - it was more about how temporary is it going to actually be if they've got to, go and do any other maintenance or replacement or things like that?

35 **CR WEBB:** Can I just add to that and say that whatever infrastructure you put into create a construction like this, any infrastructure is pretty well going to have to stay in place for maintenance and repairs along the way if something happens with one of those, turbine. So, it's got to stay in place for that. But then it would always have to stay in place with - potentially in place for decommissioning in years to come.

40 **CR RODDA:** Just adding to the end of that, I'm not sure whether it's actually been raised as an issue, but I know that the Nundle Pub is quite iconic. It has a septic system that I believe is reliant on the land behind and potentially on the other side of that road for - to work successfully. I don't know what impact that development of that road would be on that septic system if the project proceeded, I know it's only a small issue, but it's certainly would be a big issue for that pub. And, you know, if 45 Nundle lost its pub, I think the people would be very happy.

**MR MARSHALL:** Isn't there a creek actually immediately behind the -.

**CR COATES:** Yes, there is.

5 **CR RODDA:** Yeah, a little bit (indistinct)

**MR MARSHALL:** (Crosstalk) It's just right over - on the other side of the river?

10 **CR RODDA:** No, it's - there's a - there's the pub, then it's in a little paddock behind. I don't think - I think there's a little gully behind there, but it's on the other side of the gully.

**MR MARSHALL:** Yes.

15 **MS SYKES:** (Indistinct) Juliet did you -

**MS GRANT:** Yes, I do. Quite a number of people have mentioned the impact on the infrastructure and I'm wondering what is the arrangement that council generally enters into with other projects. You know, you've said this is a project you're not  
20 supportive of, but you've supported other renewable projects. How do you handle that sort of ongoing infrastructure maintenance cost -

**CR WEBB:** We've never had a project with so much industry infrastructure that's going to be so costly to maintain in the future. Other projects have this infrastructure.  
25 And I might ask the engineer if he wants to make comment on that. But in this particular one, the infrastructure that we're looking at will be so costly. I - Pete do you want to make a comment or Steve?

**MR RESCH:** Mate, I might comment that this project development cost Council  
30 here in terms of staff and -

**MS SYKES:** Sorry, sorry to interrupt. Would you - would it be possible, Peter, if you could come up and (crosstalk) just the microphone is just here, if you wouldn't mind. Because apparently it's an AI system that's doing the transcript.  
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**MR RESCH:** I'm going to stand up. Yes, I guess that's the concern that how much time this has already cost Council, in terms of staff time and particularly concern of ours is that a lot of the unknowns and the DA conditions we understand are going to be written around, you know, with the approval of the local road authority or with  
40 the approval of the authority, which could end up being us. And how much more time is that going to take up when we are sitting here thinking that it's not in a snowflake's chance in hell of even looking like it's going to work. And how much more time are we going to invest in that. Are we then going to end up in the land and environment court and spend more time and potentially more money trying to justify  
45 our position. In normal developments, we would want a lot of surety before we would issue a DA. And we're concerned or I'm concerned that a DA could be issued

on the basis that I'm just going to work it out with the local authority, which is us, and we are really concerned about - well, I am anyway concerned about that.

**CR WEBB:** I think we all are Pete.

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**CR RODDA:** Steve, did you want to make a comment on (indistinct)?

**MR BRAKE:** We haven't had a renewable project move through the process. We've got 16 active projects on our book and a few others. I think Gina referred to about 20 projects in front of us in one form or another. At the moment, none of those have made it to, turning a shovel of dirt yet. We haven't got to that point where we're identifying any potential issues with the way we're conditioning them at the moment. We tend to be on a lot of these projects the last mile. The whole transport group runs from usually Newcastle Port, up through the valley, through all the other various shires, and then to us on a lot of that journey there on State Road network. So it doesn't really matter in terms of the local government and its - the impact on the local government.

**MR BRAKE:** For us, we're the last mile and almost all of these projects are remote in some extent or other from the state network. They're impacting on our roads. And they do tend to be on our lesser trafficked roads. So they're fairly low standard roads, some are narrow gravel roads. The typical conditions that have been imposed have been upgraded management of those low-end roads, we've got a couple of those involved in this project and, they are going to cop a hammering we've got Lindsey Gap Road, which is a link road, mostly in our jurisdiction, a little bit over in Liverpool Plains. That road is a - well, I guess you'd know better than me, Peter, but a deteriorating asset of ours, it gets hammered by the logging trucks. And it's a legacy road, it's grown from being an old gravel track to a sealed road to a sealed road that gets hammered by logging trucks. And now it's going to be, loaded with, I guess, what you'd call some extreme loads. OSOM traffic, there's all the routine traffic that's going to be, involved in the construction of this project, should it get a go ahead. But that particular concern would be with the OSOM traffic and the management of not so much gradual deterioration, which we can make arrangements with developers for that sort of deterioration. But the real concern around any, sort of instantaneous, dramatic, catastrophic failure that one of these really heavy loads might impart on the road, on perhaps a bridge structure or a culvert structure, the edge of a road, if it wanders too close to an edge and catastrophically deteriorates. We're the road authority and it's our responsibility to make sure that the travelling public are both provided with the level of service, but more importantly, a level of safety. If an element of critical road network like that, like Lindsays Gap Road suffered a catastrophic failure, then there's going to need to be a mechanism to determine how it's going to be quickly funded and fixed. The early representations from the proponent were, they pay us a little licensing fee because we're the experts in road management. It's not their business. And the offer was really, quite ludicrous. It was a \$300,000 or something. I mean, we could spend ten times that on one incident if a bridge or something was to fail. So we batted that back and said, and

we'll come back and let us know what you want to do. We're still working through the process. I don't know what the answer - where that would land. It would have to be sort of negotiated at a high level. One of the concerns we've got is that the way the draft conditions are worded is that if there was to be a difference of opinion, it'll be resolved by the planning secretary. And I'm not sure what expertise would then be brought in to the table to resolve that issue and where we'd be left. I think understandably nervous about that.

**MS SYKES:** Steve, just to clarify, your greater concern is any catastrophic failure or incidents that occur on the roads. As opposed to the long term. or I mean, it's both?

**MR RESCH:** The Mayor's already, alluded to those and I think others have - Phil - about those -

**MS SYKES:** Yes.

**MR RESCH:** Councillor Betts, sorry. About those sort of longer term buried.

**MS GRANT:** Wear and tear.

**MR RESCH:** Yes, wear and tear sort of costs. You can accumulate money for that, but in the longer term when we're talking about those biscuity thin roads. It's very hard to calculate, you know, whether you're going to get enough money to ultimately replace that asset with something that's going to withstand that punishment, and it will fail quite quickly once it does.

**MS SYKES:** Do you have many incidents of landslip and other catastrophic failures on the existing road networks as it stands?

**MR RESCH:** Well, in that locality, we've had that landslip we had to deviate around when we went on our site visit yesterday. And I'm not sure - what's the funding outcome to try and fix that problem. It's been quite a while, hasn't it? That landslip on top of -

**MR RUSSELL:** (Indistinct)

**MR RESCH:** (Indistinct)

**MR RUSSELL:** It's still in discussion with the State whether it's (indistinct)

**MR RESCH:** Yes, it certainly can happen. And structures certainly can fail and have and the storm events that generated that landslip generated a large number of issues that council had to resolve on our broader network, including in that locality. It's certainly not immune to those sorts of problems that are hidden away and then present themselves and quite catastrophic failures, not just (indistinct).

**MS SYKES:** Yes. Thank you. Did you have any?

**MR MARSHALL:** What I was wondering was with the long arc of this project, and I guess its evolving character. We're now at the, perhaps end point of that process, and at least the broad outline of the project is at a point where it's to be determined. I just wonder, given that you've seen the department's assessment report, the draft conditions, many of which touch upon the matters that have been, raised today and raised in the meeting with council officers earlier. I just wonder whether, there is some sense of, progress in addressing issues. And in some ways some issues have - are better resolved, better understood, responses are better formulated. I mean, I hear the concern about there are still in the conditions. You know, some I think, which reflect on future work to be done, future detailed work to be done. But I just wonder whether there is nonetheless, in the assessment report in this draft conditions, some sense of progress in the resolution of some of the issues that you're facing with us again today.

**CR WEBB:** If we can go back over the years - that's been going on for a few years. There have been so many iterations that have come before us and our staff to look at. And each time there's a change, there's - the issues change. And, sometimes the next iteration will be as a result of we can't resolve these issues so we'll try this. Now, that's happened many, many times. And we're still in that position where there's I believe the latest iteration. And what we're looking at today has still got many, many unresolved issues. And in my mind, there's no guarantees they're actually going to be able to resolve those issues, at this current point in time. So understand. We've gone through this so many times, and every time there's unresolved issues, there's a new iteration of what (indistinct) look like trying to solve some of those issues and that the new iteration might solve a couple, but it creates others. And we're still in that same situation. We've got unresolved issues and I'm very nervous about that.

**MR MARSHALL:** I mean, if I can just pull apart what is a complex puzzle of issues. I mean, for example, on the biodiversity side and, and clearly there are, recognised through the documentation, biodiversity impacts. But I mean, the proposed response to that is a series of offsets. I mean, what's your response to the solution being suggested there? That, habitat offset can, maintain the biodiversity values that would otherwise be impacted by the project.

**CR WEBB:** I guess apart from the social license, which we all have to talk about and sit around the table and talk with our communities, about which I don't believe we have one on this issue - on this particular project. All of the engineering staff, none of us are engineers, except for Phil's got a background in road construction. We rely on our engineers to give us advice on what those solutions might look like into the future, but they - the proponents, got to come forward and agree to those solutions, or at least find some solutions that they can - find the solutions, present them to us as an organisation. Let our engineers have a look at it and see if it's going to work, because up until this point in time a lot of the unresolved issues, they've come to us with some resolutions, but they're not achievable.

**MR MARSHALL:** I was trying to get you to focus on biodiversity, but if I can perhaps move to your topic of transport. I mean, I guess the latest, proposal, the proposal before us, and the draft conditions kind of focus in and provide, perhaps not  
5 in all cases, final design, resolution of transport options. And I know there's been a discussion about the bypass through the back of the hotel in Nundle, but I'm just wondering, whether again, there has been some resolution, some degree of resolution of some of those other transport issues, which is making progress in the right direction in terms of addressing, at least route options. I guess is the -

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**CR WEBB:** Our director or Steve, may be able answer that a bit better than I, but I think, unless you've got a definite - if I - (indistinct) came to me and said, will you build me home? I'll say, yes, I'll build your home, here's the plans. And then, you say to me, what's it going to cost? I say, oh, I'll tell you what it's going to cost when I  
15 finish it. What would you say to me?

**MR MARSHALL:** I come from an architecture background, so I know that problem.

20 **CR WEBB:** You'd say, no, I'm not going to let you build that house because you need to give me a definite price. We want a definite solution to all of our problems.

**CR RODDA:** If I could have a bit of a crack at the biodiversity bit. I think that - the problem is that we are destroying 200, 300, 400-year-old vegetation. We don't know  
25 how old some of that vegetation that will be removed is. Putting - having biodiversity offsets does not replace that. It's irreplaceable. We'll never (indistinct) there will be - there is no one here that will see how good that vegetation could be in hundreds of years if it survives. We cannot replace what we lose with biodiversity offsets. It just is environmental vandalism. And we will never get back what we lose  
30 if we - and to think that, oh well, we'll chop down 46 hectares of subalpine vegetation to put these in and we'll have these biodiversity offsets. That's just to make us all feel good. And it'll never replace or make good what we lose.

**CR SOUTHWELL:** Can I add to that?  
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**CR WEBB:** Just ask Gina to comment on that (indistinct) earlier question, please? Sorry.

**MS SYKES:** Yes.  
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**MS VEREKER:** I'd like to - if I can go back to your original question about biodiversity. One of the examples that I would give is the little (indistinct) bats. Now they don't live on the site, but they live adjoining, and they need caves to survive. Whilst their caves aren't being destroyed, if we lose that small population, I think  
45 there's only 25 of them -

**CR RODDA:** Critically endangered.

5 **MS VEREKER:** They're critically endangered and if we lose even a few of them, that can mean the whole population goes. And you can't just plant some trees on some other site because they won't survive there anyway without the caves. They're so specific and we haven't seen any information to date despite asking. That's not an irreversible impact on that population alone. That's just one population up there that we think that's really, really significant. And if you talk about the road infrastructure, we've gone around in circles. Some of the routes that were proposed in 10 the first place. And Steve and our experts said that's not going to work. And so it was off the table. And now we have in the very last version of information that came to us in the Constructability Report, we've gone right circle right back to that route that was already written off. There's no certainty in the information that's been provided. It hasn't answered those questions. And I think that goes to the conditions. That's 15 why the conditions are so - if I can put in layman's terms, wishy washy because there hasn't been adequate information provided. As part of the application to the department. For the department to be able to write final and certain conditions, and therefore council and our team are still struggling to make valid comments because none of the questions have actually been satisfactorily answered, which from a 20 planning point of view means, it's not ready to be approved. It just doesn't get to that point. So, if that helps.

**CR SOUTHWELL:** Just that -

25 **MR MARSHALL:** The Councillor was waiting patiently for -

**CR COATES:** (Crosstalk) Just in terms of the biodiversity offsets, again, I totally agree with Mark, and I think that comes down to the fact that when you look at those environments, the flora and the fauna and it's a symbiotic relationship, so actually 30 paying for an offset somewhere else is not going to actually replace what is really needed for those things. And I quote the example out of something I've read in 1904, there was a last sighting of a very rare species up in that space - *Euphrasia Arguta* I think it was called - and that was refound again in 2008. Now, that would never have occurred if someone had been in there and actually disrupted that environment. I 35 think we don't even know what we're impacting. By going in and destroying that environment. I think that the offsets are just really to appease and tick a box, but it does nothing about the actual trying to conserve, the flora and the fauna and those very rare species that we're wanting to make sure do survive.

40 **CR SOUTHWELL:** I would just add to that I'm saying pretty much the same thing. I think there's complex ecosystems that exist that are untouched, and we've got some pretty special, flora and fauna that exists there. Offsets are a good step and they're there for a reason because of, you know, companies that can come in and they can create renewable or whatever infrastructure, but create - planting some trees over 45 here, to replace a complex ecosystem here is not the same and never will be. It's a good step in the right direction. But again, going back to the high level, what are we

doing this for? We're doing it for climate change. We need more renewables, because we can't be, you know, utilising existing coal seam, you know, coal and whatnot. But, if you look at it from a high level, that's really counterproductive to go and clear how many hectares - I can't remember off the top of my head - I know they've  
5 reduced it and reduced it again, but there's still a lot of hectares that we all need to be cleared for this project to go ahead. I think if it's not a hell yes, it's a hell no. That's something I've learned in life in general, not only for projects but so many things. And this is - it's definitely not a hell yes. There's just as the mayor said, there's so many issues and you can try to mitigate them through, all of the conditions, but as  
10 we've seen for five years, there will be more. And it's unfortunate. And you have a very tough job, you know, and I'm sure a lot of the projects that come to you are all a bit grey. Because otherwise they would have been ticked and approved. And, yes, it's a difficult - I know you're in a difficult role, but it's hard for us to, to support this particular one.

15 **CR BETTS:** A way to reconcile the offsets is pretty difficult when it's going to take 300 years to even get vaguely - getting all the other issues that previous councillors have talked about. This project's going to, supply alternate energy for 25 years or 30 years or whatever it is we're talking (indistinct) biodiversity. Back to where it was  
20 300 years ago. It's hard -

**CR SUTHERLAND:** Just to the question that you did ask, you know, around has there been any significant progress towards some of the - towards the resolution for many of these issues. (Indistinct) considerable staff time and effort, it's clear that  
25 there hasn't been any progress towards a resolution for many of these outstanding issues that we're still asking for clarity.

**MS SYKES:** Yes.

30 **CR WEBB:** I guess still, after five years, we're still asking very similar questions and just no answers.

**MS SYKES:** (Indistinct) Juliet, do you have any - sorry (indistinct) do you have any more questions?  
35

**MS GRANT:** One very specific one. Councillor Coates, you mentioned the impact on Black Snake Mine, and we've heard that raised a couple of times. But could you clarify to us exactly what kind of impacts and I'm not familiar with the history of the mine. So just wanting to understand what we're sort of -  
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**CR COATES:** I'm obviously not technically minded, but from what I've actually read, there's an unknown amount of tunnelling that actually goes with that mine. And the actual impact when the - in terms of when they're starting to or road construction is unknown, when you don't know what's underneath them.  
45

**MS GRANT:** It's the road access element that is impacting this.

**CR COATES:** Yes.

5 **CR SOUTHWELL:** And potential for collapsing I believe as well due to the weight and the size of the vehicles, etc.

**CR COATES:** Unless, Steve wants to add something or Sam. Sorry.

10 **MR LOBSEY:** I can talk a little bit for that. One of the first - one of the original proposals was to run the road up the Devil's Elbow through the Black Snake Gold Mine. A number of questions were raised about that, about the actual information that they had, about what's underneath that mine. We know that there's - it's only one of - a couple in Australia of that particular type of gold mine, and that's why it was heritage listed. Council currently is in management of that particular piece of land.  
15 And it went off the table. Going to one of the questions around what was the resolution. At a point in time, that was off the table, but the actual application or the recommended conditions that we're looking at now it's still up in the air. There is still a potential that one day we might see a modification and see something go back up there. We've talked a little bit about the lack of detail from the other access routes so far, all the details have been provided on that route, going up through the Devil's Elbow. That's the concern that we have, is that we want to be certain and we're not certain at the moment that that particular route is off the table.

25 **MS GRANT:** That's not a direct impact at the moment. Now that Devil's Elbow Bypass has removed.

**MR LOBSEY:** Well, we don't believe it's 100% clearly off the table. There's some tables at the end of the draft conditions that sort of mention OSOM going up that hill. And it's just not clear to us at this stage because a Lot of the work hasn't been done  
30 on and the other transport routes hasn't been - it's not definitive to us how these things are going to get up there. I guess that's what Councillor Coates is referring to there. And, and just highlighting that is still potentially an issue for us. If not now, maybe later on.

35 **MS SYKES:** Without that clarity.

**MR LOBSEY:** Yes.

40 **CR RODDA:** To actually add to that, to actually put a road there - I'm not an engineer either, but it would be a thousand tonnes - I don't know, it would need that much fill to put it in. And it's again, an area that's rich in biodiversity and flora and fauna. And along with the heritage asset being the Black Snake Gold Mine. But, it just wouldn't - it would just ruin it. You'd never because they'd have to have that forever then. And for the life of the project, you could never remove that and  
45 remediate that back to what it currently is. And you can - it's sad that it wasn't actually mentioned, when you go up the Barry Road and you started going snaking

through that Devils Pinch. If you looked straight up at one point, it's the first - It was the first turn. That's where you'd be looking. The they would have proposed a road to go. And it's just a crazy thing to do, on such a delightful piece of vegetation and area. One other thing, actually, and going on from that, was when that Black Snake Gold Mine was in, I don't know whether you've had any conversations with (indistinct)Local Aboriginal Land Council, but, I asked when we previously met with ENGIE representatives, I've asked them had they been discussing an ILUA Indigenous Land Use Agreement and they said probably yes, they had seen. But the issue that I find is that the Gomerioi Native Title Claim, has not been resolved. And currently the process is actually happening at the moment where they're trying to determine who are the actual claimants to determine the claimants of the Gomerioi Native Title Claim. If they have done that work and they are negotiating an ILUA, who are they negotiating with? Because they can't necessarily be the actual Gomerioi Native Title Claimant. That would be a big question mark. And there is - I'm not sure what land is being granted to them or is - I know of plenty that it's potentially proposed to be granted to them, but that would be a big concern to that Land Council in the future. If someone is the negotiating with people that aren't the right people to be negotiating with and we've never really got a suitable answer back about that issue, but I think it's significant.

20 **MS SYKES:** Okay. Thanks very much.

**CR RODDA:** And sorry to interrupt Sam.

25 **MS GRANT:** Thank you. I've got one other question. We've talked a bit about that sort of, how you reconcile the sort of the big picture benefits, the environmental benefits versus the local impacts. One thing that we haven't really talked about today is the visual impact. And that is something that's been raised in a lot of - has come to us from some of the more, proximate landowners. Is that something that councils had - sent their mind to - has a view on.

35 **CR WEBB:** We have considered it and it certainly is a big impact but the big the bigger impacts that are going to cost our community money in the longer time are the ones we've probably spoken about today and the bigger issues that are going to cost the environment, which to us, is so important.

40 **CR SOUTHWELL:** But just to add to what you're saying, the visual impact is going to be there for those living around the Nundle area. There's also a - there is a sound impact to for those that will be living in close proximity. It's like a 'wo wo wo' the sound impacts to wind farms. There is research done on those which can have, mental health impacts around that continuous noise and whatnot as well. There's definitely - there's a range of concerns around the visual for people, and the community, especially given it's a heritage town, it's a tourist town. One of the biggest economic benefits or economic drivers for Nundle is the tourism. So, it will have an incredible impact on that with having the wind farm there. If it does go ahead.

**CR WEBB:** One of the arguments that was posed earlier in the piece was people want to come up there and look at the windmills. Well hang on, they can go anywhere near around the state of New South Wales and there'll be a big patch of windmills. They're not going to go up there looking at windmills. That argument is out the door. What we do have up there is a pristine landscape that actually people do like going up and spending time up there and enjoying.

**MR MARSHALL:** Although it is a modified landscape. I mean, it's an agricultural landscape. I mean, and you've got state forest with palm trees up there. I'm a bit careful about the word pristine in this environment.

**CR WEBB:** There is some pristine landscape up around those hills, because there's a lot of old growth stuff up in there.

**MR MARSHALL:** Yes.

**CR WEBB:** And some of that has been cleared, unfortunately.

**MS SYKES:** I think it might have been, Councillor (crosstalk)

**CR RODDA:** Only going to mention, talking about the vista is that I frequently go to Hanging Rock lookout, which is a bit of a tourist mecca for anyone that goes up to Nundle and Hanging Rock. They go to the lookout and, you know, that's the image that you'd be presented with if you go up there in one direction. And I think if you look south from where - that's looking sort of west, but if you look south, which you can, you would see turbines and I believe that some of that image might be impacted by it as well. But I know that that some of the wind farm proposals have been knocked on the head because of, visual amenity and the impact of the vista. I said that's what we are going to lose forever by approval of this project.

**MS SYKES:** Thanks. Yes.

**CR COATES:** I guess for me that, as the mayor said, you know, you've got a really dramatic natural landscape there. But I think the really important thing about visual amenity is it's not one dimensional. So you can say that you stand there and you can't see those wind turbines there, and you go somewhere else and you can't see that. But what you're doing is you're moving around those kind of environments, and you want to be able to see minimal impact wherever you go. And I think it's very easy to go that one dimensional flat, but we've got to be considering it from that multi-dimensional perspective. And, you know, right from when you first drive into Nundle and, you know, wherever you look there, what is going to be the impact. When you drive up Barry Road, if you actually go up to Hanging Rock, and there's probably many of us here that have been up there at different seasons and I think that it's important that it's, you know, visual amenity has to be all encompassing, not just

a particular landscape that looks like it's painted on a piece of board. You actually have to be able to move through it and still feel like it's not imposing on you.

5 **MS GRANT:** You did you comment on that over the last day and a half, as we've driven through that landscape, we did actually notice and comment to it amongst ourselves on that point.

10 **CR RODDA:** And I think Duncan is right. It certainly is impacted by farming and obviously forestry and stuff like that. I think you'll find that an overwhelming number of people that live there now live there because of the vegetation. And most of that, whether it be in a small village of, Hanging Rock or further up towards Sheba Dams, things like that. I think you'll find that most of the people would be there because of what is currently there. Not necessarily because of the farming communities or the - of all the forestry vegetation.

15 **CR BETTS:** I'm going to have to excuse myself because I've got to go and pick grandchildren up. (Crosstalk)

20 **MS SYKES:** I'm also conscious of time we have actually come up to, just a bit over 5:00pm, which is when we had scheduled to finish. But Steve?

**MR BRAKE:** Thanks for a little bit of extra opportunity. I just wanted to (indistinct) few of the dots between some of the concepts that have been discussed today. Constructability traffic and transport and visual impact. So Councillor Rodda talked  
25 about the photo montage that have been presented in terms of visual impact, but what it doesn't cover is the impact of the access tracks that are going up that, heavily in size, very difficult terrain that we drove a little bit of yesterday but didn't drive all of it. And the Constructability report talks about that in terms of the hard engineering. Can you build these tracks? And the answer pretty much for any engineering  
30 challenge is yes, you can. It's the consequence of doing so. The photo montage presents the turbines up on the ridge, but they're kind of the tip of the iceberg because the access track that's going to have to be carved through those and up those, various scarps and escarpments, and the heavily incised ones haven't been modelled at all. The Constructability report talks about it, it touches on it and says, well, it's  
35 been modelled, certainly hasn't been modelled for the east west track that we drove yesterday afternoon.

**MR BRAKE:** There was a question asked during that drive, and I've got to tell you, that was on the edge of my comfort zone. I'm driving up some of those, four wheel  
40 drive tracks to get to the top of the ridge. That's the route that the wind turbines are going to take. And I'm sure you'll recall, we were sort of up and down some fairly heavy drops and climbs in and out of some fairly pronounced incisions in the landscape to get to where we got to. The question was asked, is that the route you're going to take? And the answer was from the proponent fairly close. And there was a  
45 question about, well, how much are you going to have to upgrade that track? And the answer was, we'll probably push it out a couple of metres extra in width and maybe a

little bit more for some batters and some (indistinct) drains. That answer is correct when you're down on the on the valley floor and coming up the gentle hills. But once you get into that steep terrain, that's not the case at all. And the track is going to have to take virtually a same sort of alignment that a railway track would take, because  
5 those 90 metre long wind vanes have to track through there, they cannot go in and out and up and down like we managed to do. They're going to be out on a few. I don't know if you had the presence of mind to look over the right hand side as we were driving up there. But that track is going to be out there somewhere. Cut into that side, pushed out onto that side, and the earthworks in the embankments involved in doing  
10 that. But by necessity going to be very visible. And in the foreground of all of the turbines. The turbines, like I say, they're sort of typically iceberg. And that just hasn't been addressed at all on our jobs as engineers is to interpret what's going to happen so that the visual impact people and the environmental impact people that are looking at the footprint that that's going to occupy and the stormwater management  
15 people that are going to have to look at how, sediment and erosion control in that quite unstable ground is going to be managed. And then what additional impact will that have on visual impact as well, because the stilling basins that you're going to have to deploy at the bottom of each of those cuttings to slow the water down is another embankment in itself. It's going to take out vegetation, be quite obvious from  
20 the various vantage points around the place. And to me, if I'm looking at projects that I've managed in the past as a private practitioner. A proponent that I'm working for will always want to push some of these issues into the into the future and resolve them. And authorities always want to push back the other direction. And there's a balance point in the middle.

25  
**MR BRAKE:** In my opinion, we're nowhere near that balance point yet because these issues just haven't been fleshed out to the extent that they should be. All the little dots are missing, but one tiny example would be the battery storage. That battery storage, usually the fire suppression is water based, so there'll be a storage  
30 tank or a dam. But if you suppress a fire in battery storage with water, you mobilising heavy metals and all of the nasties that are in there, and that has to be managed somehow. We're up on a big steep escarpment. There are specialists looking at this element and that element, that element. But the council sort of sits here. We have to deal with this on a daily basis and all of those little elements. And it  
35 concerns me that the ministry has presented this back as an approvable project. I don't think they're at that point where we can and I don't know that they've got people joining the dots in an expert way from all of the obviously well credentialed experts in their own fields. And that's my concern. It basically goes to all of the issues that have been raised by the councillors today.

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**MS SYKES:** Thank you very much, Steve. We have actually come up to time now because checking (indistinct). If there was any other closing statement, Mayor Webb, if you would like to make that, and then I think we'll close the meeting. It's been  
45 wonderful to meet you.

**CR WEBB:** (Indistinct) We believe that there are so many, issues unresolved. And I'll say it again. That we just can't see how a project like this can be approved, when there's so many unknowns. In every in every facet of the development from the biodiversity from the (indistinct) fauna and the flora and from the infrastructure perspectives. There are so many unresolved issues.

**CR TICKLE:** And we want closure.

**CR WEBB:** Pardon?

**CR TICKLE:** We want the whole thing - we need closure. We can't just expect the community to go on and on and on like this. And you've seen the time today as our staff. We don't have the resources. The five years of going around in a complete circle, as was just stated.

**MS SYKES:** Right. Well, thank you so much for the meeting. It's been really great to meet in person as well.

**CR SOUTHWELL:** Good luck.

**MS SYKES:** Thank you.

**<THE MEETING CONCLUDED**