



**New South Wales Government**  
Independent Planning Commission

## **TRANSCRIPT OF MEETING**

**RE: SPICERS CREEK WIND FARM (SSD-41134610)**

### **DUBBO REGIONAL COUNCIL MEETING**

**PANEL:** PROF NEAL MENZIES AM (CHAIR)  
MR MICHAEL WRIGHT  
MS SUELLEN FITZGERALD

**OFFICE OF THE IPC:** KENDALL CLYDSDALE  
TAHLIA HUTCHINSON

**DUBBO REGIONAL COUNCIL:** MURRAY WOOD  
DARRYLL QUIGLEY  
STEVEN JENNINGS  
TIM HOWLETT  
MARK JOHNSTON  
PETER JAMES

**LOCATION:** ZOOM VIDEOCONFERENCE

**DATE:** 9:30AM – 10:30AM  
FRIDAY, 16<sup>TH</sup> AUGUST 2024

## <THE MEETING COMMENCED

**PROF MENZIES:** Well, guys, I have to start the meeting with a formal statement that I read. So we can plough through that and then if the councillors are joining, that's great. I'm an experienced academic, so people walking in and out of my lecture halfway through, perfectly normal. All right, so let me kick off with the formal statement. After the formal statement, we'll keep it as a really informal meeting so that we can discussing things backwards and forwards.

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10 So before we begin, I'd like to acknowledge that I'm speaking to you from the land of the Turrbal and Jagera people here in the Brisbane River Valley and I acknowledge the traditional owners of all the country from which we're virtually meeting today and pay my respects to their elders past and present.

15 Welcome to the meeting today to discuss the Spicers Creek Wind Farm, SSD-41134610, currently before the Commission for determination. Spicers Creek Wind Farm Pty Ltd is a project entity owned by the Squadron Energy Group of companies, proposes to develop a 700 megawatt wind farm located approximately 25 km northwest of Gulgong within the Dubbo Regional and Warrumbungle Shire local government areas.

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25 The project site is in the Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone. The proposed project involves the development of up to 117 turbines with a tip height of 256 metres, a 400 megawatt battery energy storage system, connection to the proposed Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone transmission line and other ancillary infrastructure.

30 My name is Neal Menzies. I'm the chair of the Commission panel and I'm joined by my fellow commissioners, Michael Wright and Suellen Fitzgerald. We are also joined by Kendall Clydsdale and Tahlia Hutchinson from the Office of the Independent Planning Commission.

35 In the interests 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 several sources of information on which the Commission will base its determination.

40 It's important for the commissioners to ask questions of attendees and to clarify issues whenever it is considered appropriate. If you are asked a question and are 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.

45 I request that all members here today introduce themselves before speaking for the first time and for all members to ensure that they do not speak over the top of each other to ensure accuracy of the transcript. We may now begin and if I could, I'd

ask each member joining from the Council to introduce yourselves and provide a verbal declaration of any actual or potential personal interest that you may have in the project. Okay, so over to the Council.

5 **MR WOOD:** I might kick off, team. Murray Wood, chief executive officer, Dubbo Regional Council.

**MR JENNINGS:** Steve Jennings, manager growth planning at Dubbo Regional Council.

10 **MR PETER JAMES:** Peter James, senior transport asset specialist, roads person at Dubbo Regional Council. I have no special interest.

15 **MR MARK JOHNSTON:** Mark Johnston, manager of infrastructure strategy and design in the engineering section at Dubbo Regional Council.

**MR DARRYLL QUIGLEY:** Darryll Quigley, manager building and development services, Dubbo Council and I have no perceived or imagined conflicts in this matter.

20 **MR TIM HOWLETT:** Tim Howlett, I'm the team leader, growth planning projects at Dubbo Regional Council. I have no conflict in the matter but I have a question potentially for Kendall. Did we used to work together at Gosford Council? So I don't know if that's a conflict or not.

25 **MR KENDALL CLYDSDALE:** Tim, yes, we did. We did sit near each other at Gosford City Council and no, look, I'm going to make a note right now just to say that we were prior colleagues but I don't have any dramas with that.

30 **MR HOWLETT:** Cool.

**PROF MENZIES:** Thanks, Tim. Yes, it's funny how we encounter people and yes, it's worth declaring it but it won't represent a conflict for us, at least for the context of the discussion we're about to have today. Okay, so thanks for the introductions. I think that you guys are going to make a presentation to us. Just a heads up, we are very likely to interrupt you during the course of the presentation to ask questions. We find that sort of informal approach works well for us, so don't be put off if we a third of the way through say, "Hey, can you tell us about that aspect?"

40 **MR WOOD:** Steve, Council team, are we doing a slide presentation or are we just talking through our matters? I'll just throw to my manager, growth planning, initially, thanks, Commissioner. Steve J?

45 **MR JENNINGS:** Yes, I think what we could probably do and Darryll, I'll take your advice as well on this one, as the man that handles the assessment angle of things, we can just go through that list that was in the meeting invite, Neal, if you

think that's a good way of perhaps having a chat around the issues.

5 **PROF MENZIERS:** It's just so that we have some level of structure, Steve, and we don't miss something that is really important or realise later, "Oh, we didn't talk about such and such." So the agenda items, if we just pick through those, you give us the Council's viewpoint and, as I say, we'll pursue issues that we find an interest or there's something that we haven't understood that you've said, we'll pursue it.

10 **MR JENNINGS:** Awesome. I'm happy to tee off with workforce accommodation. That's probably more in my side of things. So we've been working with Squadron Energy on a workforce accommodation solution here in Dubbo. Council resolved at the May 2024 council meeting to enter into a lease with Squadron Energy for 10 hectares of land at the Keswick Estate, which is in  
15 southeast Dubbo, for the purposes of undertaking a temporary workforce accommodation project.

This is a project that we have been working on for probably two years or so now and Murray, jump in at any time, of course. But yes, it's a project we've been  
20 working on for probably two years at the moment as well and also yes, more recently in the last probably 12 months with Squadron Energy on the project. So one of the other steps, the land is also subject to a planning proposal, which Council did consider last night as well and its meeting, where they endorsed the planning proposal to go forward for the purposes of a gateway determination from  
25 the Department of Planning as well.

So that planning proposal does allow the land to be – will work towards the land being zoned R1 general residential, which would allow a temporary workforce accommodation project, whilst also allowing us – or as Council, as a landowner,  
30 and we probably should obviously declare that as well in this accommodation discussion. It would allow us to develop the land for further residential purposes when that TWA project is no longer required as well from there.

So at this stage, the project would have or would allow for 259 beds for exclusive  
35 use of Squadron Energy. The lease terms are five plus five in terms of longevity and then we do meet every two or three weeks with Squadron Energy to work through various elements of the project as well in terms of legacy infrastructure that that's going to provide for us and also working through what some of the general operational characteristics and obviously the look and feel of what this  
40 TWA project is for us as well, from that point of view.

Council, with TWA, has a very strong policy position that we would like to have our TWA projects in our urban areas. We don't have a position of having TWA on site. We see there is a great deal of benefit that can be gained for our community  
45 from having TWA within our urban environments and then also it's that legacy piece as well, where we can get some long term benefit for the community after that five year construction pulse has left as well.

So yes, our electorate body adopted the planning proposal unanimously last night as well and then also, yes, they've been very favourable in working through the lease side of things with Squadron Energy as well, so from there. But yes –

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**PROF MENZIES:** That's great, Steve. As you note, that's quite separate from what we're looking at but it's such an issue for councils, the impact on accommodation, that it certainly is of interest to us and it's nice to hear that it got through Council last night. Suellen, did you have something?

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**MS SUELLEN FITZGERALD:** I did. Yes, thanks, Neal. Steve, you mentioned 259 beds, which is well short of their proposed workforce, which I think is over 500 – sorry, 500.

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**MR JENNINGS:** I was going to say, 500,000, don't say that.

**MS FITZGERALD:** Yes. Quite an impact. So are you satisfied that there won't be a residual impact on other accommodation in the area, in the Dubbo LGA? Are you happy that this is going to address the issues?

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**MR JENNINGS:** Yes, so Murray, obviously jump in as well but yes, we are – obviously this will be the main solution for them but also we do have many discussions with them around lots of other solutions in Wellington and then also how we could bring other providers into the mix as well. They do have their Uungula Wind Farm project, which is currently under construction. They do have an accommodation solution at the Bellhaven Nursing Home, which is an old nursing home, which has been repurposed as well.

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So yes, that will cycle through in terms of – yes, from what I'm led to believe, that will cycle through in terms of use over that time as well, when Uungula gears down and then Spicers can gear up and pick up some of that as well. But yes, obviously it's one part of the solution, a main part but there's also we have to keep working at these things and there is options there but yes, as I said in that earlier spiel, that yes, our strong policy position is we don't want a TWA on site but we want our community to benefit across the whole range of that accommodation industry.

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**MS FITZGERALD:** Thanks, Steve. That's helpful.

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**MR WOOD:** I might, if I could, Commissioner. Sorry, if I could, I'll jump in further. So our – actually I guess we've been very proactive in marketing the opportunity to others. So Squadron, of all the proponents in our region, has actually taken control of their destiny more so by working through with us and I'd reinforce that point that in Dubbo we see the opportunity as our urban release areas for workers accommodation that we can then flip to affordable and more easily developed for ongoing residential.

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In Wellington, it's more urban renewal where there's lots of opportunities in that way too I guess reinvigorate the CBD and the urban areas. And so there's another proponent, for example, very specialist, that's entering the market that is also interested in another 7 hectares, so we've created enough knowledge about the opportunity more broadly, not just about Squadron. So from a council perspective, we're quite satisfied that this is a key part of the Squadron solution and it's going to be at that real peak of around 587, I think I've seen the data.

There's those other options both in Wellington and other options in Dubbo as well that are targeted at renewables, not just [unintelligible 00:17:24] motels and what have you, there's others that are taking control of their own destiny. But in terms of this project, they've addressed what their impacts on accommodation has been. So we're very confident in that regard.

**MS FITZGERALD:** Thank you. Thanks, Murray.

**MR MICHAEL WRIGHT:** Sorry, Neal, could I just ask a question?

**PROF MENZIES:** Yes, by all means, Michael.

**MR WRIGHT:** Just in terms of location of TWA in an urban context, Steve and Murray, is it also the case that by having those workers close to your commercial centre, that the commercial centre benefits more than if they were off in a remote site location?

**MR WOOD:** Correct. There's a direct economic multiplier to our community as opposed to subbies that are – and we get workers campers and in some cases that will be the right solution, but where we can we want this happening where our whole community can benefit from that economic multiplier, as opposed to subbies. Some of our people will benefit from being subbies but this will be much better for us.

**MR WRIGHT:** Thank you.

**PROF MENZIES:** Okay, I'm going to move us on because, as I say, that's sort of out of scope. We're very interested but the next few items are ones that really do impact on what we've got to think about. So roads and transports.

**MR WOOD:** I might kick off first and then I'll throw to Peter if that's okay, Commissioner. Look, our workings with Squadron are very positive and proactive. I've found them good to deal with, they identify the routes, they understand that they're responsible for upgrading them to enable project delivery and they have to upgrade them to our standards.

So I guess we've got lived experience with Squadron on the Uungula Wind Farm and so we have confidence that we've got that working relationship right as well, that we're in control of the specs in the ultimate finished product and also the pre –

and to be honest, most of these roads will need the upgrading before they can construct anyway. So we're going to have a good legacy out of these road improvements.

5 There is, just before I throw to Peter, what we've found is with renewable projects and we do get funded directly, so it's cost recovery, because no rural road sticks to the old colonial surveys of the paper road, shall we say, we have to compulsorily acquire and that actually has taken staff resource. But we get paid for that, so it's actually – what we've realised is an impact we didn't know was coming at us with  
10 all these renewable projects, that we have to – and the farmers are okay. It's basically locking down what is reality, where the road actually travels.

15 So we've got to compulsorily acquire bits of farm land where the road is to formally make them the road corridor to allow contractors or subcontractors for Squadron to deliver the road projects. So that's what we found it's a new experience for us but it's being well-managed and funded by Squadron as the proponent. But Peter, I might throw to you for the more technical stuff, mate.

20 **MR JAMES:** Yes, thanks, Murray. Look, yes, agree with everything you said there. Squadron are very good to deal with at this moment. Their engineering team, icubed, they come from Brisbane, again also very good to deal with. We've been dealing with them at the Uungula Wind Farm as well. So basically we have one state road, the Golden Highway, which is going to provide the main access on to Sweeneys Lane.

25 Some land acquisitions are required there over some Crown land that joins between – or currently doesn't join between the Golden Highway and Sweeneys. That's underway. Two regional roads, we've got the Saxa Road and the Gollan Road, both of those, the intersections of Saxa and the Tallawonga Road, which is  
30 going to be one of their main accesses, is being upgraded. We're negotiating the final design on that at the moment. Mark's team is, Mark Johnston's team, sorry.

35 The Gollan Road and the Ben Hoden Road, also an intersection upgrade. Both of those are to allow for the longer, wider vehicles to be able to access safely. And as mentioned, we're going through the final designs on those. Local roads, there's four local roads are being upgraded, unsealed, and they're going to be gravel re-sheeted. Council's requirement is for a minimum depth of gravel, a minimum quality of gravel. Squadron Energy have indicated that they're going to actually  
40 probably double what we need as far as depth because their needs for their oversize, over mass vehicles is greater than our local need.

45 So we're going to end up with a pretty good legacy there. And we're also looking at stock grid improvements, drainage improvements. So basically, we've asked Squadron to talk to the local landowners. The stock grids are owned by the local landowners but they're on our roads, so we've asked them to review the condition and the function and the capacity of each of those and with a potential to replace or remove. Any removals will require Squadron to fence the adjoining paddocks

or replace the stock grids with new. But that's pretty much it, I suppose.

5 Sorry, one other item, which was a late item, was secondary access roads. Council wasn't aware of those early in the piece, we've now found that they're going to be crossing some local roads, particularly the Bald Hill Road. So they'll be internal tracks inside the wind farm that will then go external on to a public road and then grow back into private property and we've asked them to identify those and come back to us with how they're going to manage traffic and how they're going to upgrade those for public safety during the construction process. That's pretty much it.

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15 **MR WOOD:** I might just add one thing as well. What we're finding is we've got construction is our second biggest employer, we've got some very capable major players, Maas, for example, covering the whole eastern seaboard, and they've been very strategic in acquiring gravel pits in farms and what have you. So we think there's – well, that will be able to be servicing the roads. They've spoken to me already about some of the [unintelligible 00:23:33] where they've got the rights to establish formal quarry pits and potentially for us that's going to be another ongoing legacy in terms of logistics.

20 We will have access to gravel for our own re-sheeting. At the moment we have to do a lot of logistics and moving gravel around the LGA and so that is potentially – so they've already got a solution, the industry's already strategically getting ready for the opportunity and another legacy for us will be access to these other gravel pits around our distributed gravel road network.

25 **MR JAMES:** We're actually seeing that come through development DAs at the moment, Murray, yes, directly below the wind farm site. Yes.

30 **PROF MENZIERS:** Once again, that's a heap of useful information to us because it's something that we've touched up against in other similar wind farms and yes, you guys seem really well ahead of the game on that one. So thanks for that information. Let's move on. Subdivision and this one's one that Suellen in particular is interested in and this was about the – Suellen, correct me if I'm wrong, this was about the subdivisions to allow the construction of substations, et cetera.

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40 **MS FITZGERALD:** Thanks, Neal. Yes. Just the fact of issue of minimum sizes of subdivisions, I suppose. I know that under the zoning, the subdivisions proposed might be below the threshold. Any concerns from Council there?

45 **MR QUIGLEY:** Thank you, Commissioner. I'll answer those ones. The concern is a bit more – subdivisions get a bit left behind in these things because it's all about the wind farms and everything else and how you get there and how you have your workforce and everything else. Subdivisions get a bit forgotten really. The minimum lot size, well, I suppose the minister or maybe the panel have the powers to do whatever they like, so minimum lot size can get pushed side a little bit. Our



greater concern is more that we're seeing some of the subdivisions occur before even works start on the sites.

5 So you're getting these two, three, 10 hectare lots that are just paper lots with no access, no – and if the project didn't proceed, you're just ending up with a bit more fragmentation of the area, which is a bit of a concern. Council, normally when we do subdivisions, subdivision usually occurs at the end of the process. You've done your works, you've done this, you've ticked off, you've done the driveways, you've done all the infrastructure, subdivision registered, not a  
10 problem at all.

15 It gets a little skewed on these ones because they have financial commitments to their banks, to the developers and it seems to get pushed a little bit through. So Council's just raised it as an ongoing concern. It's gotten a little bit better over the years. We've done a lot of these. It was just ignored upfront going back a few years. It's gotten a little bit better but it is what it is, I suppose.

20 **MS FITZGERALD:** Thanks, Darryll. And Neal, I might just jump back to Peter on a transport question I had in my mind and that's about any concerns from Council about leakage of traffic from the nominated roads for the proposal. It seems like there is quite an extensive network of local roads, particularly that go southwest back to the Golden Highway and back to Dubbo, which will be the big pool, I assume. So have you had experience or have you got any concerns about traffic impacting on roads that are not nominated by the project?  
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30 **MR JAMES:** I do. Probably more the other direction. We're expecting, as Steve mentioned earlier, the combination of local, Dubbo, Wellington potentially, and contractors coming, Dubbo, Wellington, from that general west, southwest area. A little bit concerned about potential for contractors to come from Mudgee, which is from the opposite direction. Gollan Road in that case would be affected more than what we're considering at the moment.

35 So I think the Ben Hoden access would be about 9 kilometres along the Gollan Road and the Gollan Road in the Dubbo LGA is about 32 kilometres long. So there's potential for the remaining 21 kilometres of the Gollan Road to be impacted potentially by I'd say either contractors or resources being hauled to the site from that easterly direction. Now, what Murray mentioned about the quarries, that's another thing we haven't really thought about. Prior to these DAs popping up for local quarries to be established, the assumption was – my assumption was  
40 that a lot of the quarry products would come from the Dubbo direction, from the west.

45 That assumption's probably going to go out the window a little bit. We're probably going to see a lot of haulage coming from the south and possibly also from the east, which will affect roads that we haven't really considered at this stage. Probably won't be able to provide a much clearer answer than that of what roads will be affected until we see more of these DAs come and we just don't

know who's going to be employed by Squadron to do their subcontractor work. So Murray talked about Maas and Maas do have businesses out in Mudgee, they've got affiliates in Mudgee which may be providing resources. I just don't know at this stage.

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**MS FITZGERALD:** Thanks, Peter.

**PROF MENZIES:** Okay. I think we're ready to move on then to the community contributions and benefits item.

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**MR WOOD:** Thanks. Steve J, if you can kick that off, mate.

**MR JENNINGS:** Thanks, Murray. So Council has an executed voluntary planning agreement with Squadron Energy for the project. So the voluntary planning agreement, it's at the 1.5% of their capital investment value of the final project. We understand as well that Warrumbungle are going through a similar process with Squadron Energy but yes, two different agreements. So we haven't joint that agreement that we were fairly further progressed in our discussions with Squadron compared to where Warrumbungle were at at the time as well.

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What we've arrived at, we do have a solid policy position and a framework around how we negotiate our VPAs with renewable energy proponents. So our renewable energy benefits framework, it's obviously at that 1.5% of CIV at this stage. We do know that we'll probably have to revisit that at some stage in the future when the Department of Planning's policy position and their new guideline does come out and does come into force around the per megawatt rates as well from there.

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What we've done with Squadron and the Gollan community out in that general area is build up a planning agreement which is more locational based. So at the sort of extremity, the funds, which is about 900,000 per annum, can be spent in Wellington but they don't leak into Dubbo or any of those things. Our policy structure and agreement around VPAs is very much trying to look after the community of interest where the project does happen or where it is proposed to happen from there.

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One of the sort of first things that we did build up with Squadron after hearing from community over a long period of time and Murray can attest to this, the Forestvale causeway on Forestvale Road that goes into Gollan Hall there as well, it's a causeway that does cause us lots of community angst over time and it's also a project that we wouldn't have on our books and really wouldn't have the need to have on our books for 10 or 15 years in terms of road projects for Council. So we saw this as a great opportunity in the first five years of the Squadron project to have that causeway replaced with a bridge structure as well.

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I've actually seen – yes, I witnessed one councillor's Tesla get through that causeway and I was surprised that he actually took it through. So he did do well on one of our community meetings at the Gollan Hall. But yes, like we saw that and

the community have seen that as an important project where Squadron can obviously give us the financial structure to undertake that project quickly. It's not a project that would be required for the wind farm, so that's why it's in the VPA structure instead of Council asking or requesting it in the condition structure in the actual DA as well from there.

But also what we've tried to do with our VPA, we have the first five years set with that Forestvale bridge, that causeway replacement and then also after that, there is some other projects there or basically a structure where other projects can get chosen and then also we will road test those with community at the time as well. One of the key things to help us deliver a VPA like this and this is very much our first VPA that we're trying to lead with where we can show how this structure can work. We're building a community consultation committee structure as well at the moment, which we're going to road test with our new council post September 14 election.

As well, the role of this committee will be basically where just say, for instance, the Gollan community, they will have input into the project selection from the VPA funds and then also it's a very important consultation mechanism where we can continue to consult on various project elements as well. So it might be an update that Squadron Energy want to provide on the project at the time, it might be a project selection process for VPA funds from there.

But what also we're trying to do with that committee is come up with a sort of differential membership model which can bring in basically community members from the actual project area for individual project discussion. So there's no point having someone from Stuart Town coming to talk about Spicers Creek. They won't care. So it's making sure we have the right people in the room at the right time to discuss project selection and also how ultimately those VPA funds are expended as well.

**MR WOOD:** I could just add as well –

**MR JENNINGS:** And then, yeah, no.

**MR WOOD:** Yes, it is. Thank you. So the focus of that policy setting, which has actually been realised with the Squadron Energy Spicers Creek VPA, is that we don't want just the soccer shirts fund. If they want to do that, rock and roll, paint a community hall, that's up to you to build your relationships. That's not a strategic community investment. So that's why we've pitched it this way in listening to the community, I've listened to lots of conversations during La Niña about various roads and what have you and that causeway is either underwater, covered in silt, but from an asset renewal point of view, it doesn't need updating for that 10 to 15 years.

So what we can do just in terms of delivery against that, once the VPA kicks in, once they've got the financial close and what have you, I can actually borrow

against that known five years' worth of income and build the bridge straight away. So community will get the benefit much earlier because I can actually pay that back over that guaranteed annual income to deliver this bridge, it's around a three – Peter, I presume it's a bit like the Saxa Road bridge, \$3, 3.6 million bridge.

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**MR JAMES:** Very similar. Yes.

**MR WOOD:** So community's going to get that greater connectivity, the resilience to climate variabilities, like so through three years of La Niña it was often underwater. The RFS has to take their truck all the way the long round, so it's a way we can structure it and deliver it earlier so the community gets that tangible benefit upfront but it's a strategic benefit, not the sugar hit of the new soccer shirts, footy shirts or a painted hall, as important as they are, I hasten to add.

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**PROF MENZIES:** Yes, thanks, Murray. Michael?

**MR WRIGHT:** Yes, thanks, Neal. Can I just ask the question, in the mind of Dubbo Council, is there a clear delineation between the intersection road upgrades that Squadron need to put in place for the project and other roadworks that might flow out of the VPA? Or is that sort of a grey zone between the two?

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**MR WOOD:** No, we try and keep them very separate, I would suggest. So if you need your roads and intersections for your development, that is part of a DA, you'll be doing that on your Pat Malone. So VPA is I guess the community cream on top and that's where we can deliver I guess the other legacies and community can see an actual benefit outside of a development approval process. So it's very much in addition to.

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**MR WRIGHT:** Yes.

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**PROF MENZIES:** Suellen, anything to follow up on this one? Okay. Then let's move on to social impacts.

**MR WOOD:** Yes, look, I'll start and my other team, please kick in. I guess we see less than – as part of the renewable energy zone and talking to the other councils obviously quite tightly, Warrumbungles and Mid-Western, I guess we see less risks of that given where we're pitching our workers accommodation solution because it's an urban environment, so there's I guess less social impacts on the immediate community. Yes, traffic flow, to some of what Peter's point is. Once we get down to that traffic management, that's where the relationship with the constructors and the landholders in terms of the times to taking out heavy vehicles with stock and what have you and grain, that's going to have a bit of nuance with a traffic control plan.

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But in terms of the overall impact of increased population, of a workers accommodation, we see less risks here than say other smaller communities, I guess because Dubbo's got that capability of absorbing more in a positive sense as

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opposed to overwhelming local services. But Steve J, you've had those conversations and what have you? You've got some other perspectives?

5 **MR JENNINGS:** Yes. No, definitely, Murray. So yes, I would definitely see that as being the case for sure, like with Dubbo, it does have a fair bit there to absorb but obviously there we are still working on these things and it's all about making sure that we have the right connections in the right places. And also for us making sure that we can explain to our community how they will benefit from these things as well and that's very much how we've tried to do business, not just with this project but that's very much our focus on renewables as well with the REZ.

10 **MR WOOD:** And probably add, what Squadron has done, to their credit, is they've opened up permanent offices and employed locals in Wellington office as well and I'll give you an example of employing the right people locally as well. 15 They've employed Justin Toomey-White, really well regarded First Nations leader in Wellington, captain of the Wellington Cowboys rugby league team but genuine leader, genuine interest in delivering outcomes. They've rolled out some I guess early famil training, so how people can get to understand the early skills we need, they've actually funded some training, particularly with Aboriginal focus, First Nations focus as well. 20

So in our experience, in working in the last – we established, as a way of our consultation body, the Wellington Aboriginal Action Panel, they describe themselves as, and so we're very quick to point proponents to work with the leadership in the Aboriginal communities there and Squadron's got some living proof because they've employed the right people, they've delivered some programs already. And they've actually opened up an office with I think it might be 11 staff in Wellington, which is different to any proponent we've had thus far. So from that particular I guess social impact, they've actually followed through with, where some are more about the spoken word than the delivery, shall we say. 25 30

**MR JENNINGS:** Yes, I was there for a meeting on Tuesday at that office and there was eight in the office at that time, which is great for Wellington. Yes, really great. And that office opening has got some really good traction with the elected body as well and our deputy mayor's very thankful and I think it's something that he raised with them a couple of years ago, "Why haven't you got some sort of presence in Wellington?" And they're the first one to have it. 35

**PROF MENZIES:** Fellow Commissioners, any questions before we move on once again? The material you're giving us is really brilliant. We're not asking questions because you're covering off to a tee the sorts of things we need to know. Materials sourcing, now this was really about where the applicant's going to get water and gravel, et cetera. We've already learned about the proposed upgrade to the Dubbo water treatment plant – 40 45

**MR WOOD:** Good.

**PROF MENZIES:** – which we viewed as a really elegant solution to that particular problem and it leaves something for the council, so that’s the context for that question. So if you guys wanted to give us your sense of how this is going to land?

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**MR WOOD:** So in terms of the water project itself?

**PROF MENZIES:** And gravel, which we’ve already touched on. So in a lot of respects, we already know a lot about this that we didn’t know from the application but the discussions we’ve had have helped to build our knowledge. So Murray, the Council’s perspective on the water and gravel aspect would be good for us.

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**MR WOOD:** So water I’ll start with. Really good example of being ready for the opportunity. I think El Niño was about to kick in in November when they first started discussing water and we could have the “Hey, here’s our strategic focus and the gap in infrastructure. Let us help you.” And we’ve got that approved. I’m sorry, apologies if I’m already telling you what you know. So we got that approved through the Office of Local Government for a public-private partnership formally, so that was – some of you may know how difficult that can be, purposely, to control risk, so that’s a real positive. We’re actually working now through the specifications.

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We’ve got – Squadron’s in a tent of course because it’s in effect a donation to a capability. So they’re giving us the money, obviously they’ll have rights and I think it’s around 125 meg per wind project, so they’ve got their construction water sorted. And I hasten to add, it’s not just for suppressing dirt and watering gravel roads, it’s also enabled us to treat the water to a standard, it’s the Australian standards for concrete. So we’re removing all those salts and impurities, so they can use it for the foundation.

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So it’s very much the total construction water demand is what we’re aiming for. For us they’re actually – it was an interesting conversation with our partners in the regulatory agencies, they’re saying, “You’re overtreating the water,” but that is the legacy by which we will ultimately move through the different regulatory approvals, ultimately so the technology will be given to us through this agreement and it’s above – it’s not in a VPA. It’s an agreement by itself, so it’s above that capital investment value, so it’s separate and it’s very separate to a DA condition.

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So we’ve come to this deal that adds on to those things. But ultimately it will be a new raw water source for our drinking water. So I don’t say that in front of regulators too much because there’s a whole bunch of processes to go through but that is I guess the over delivery of treatment process that we are getting out of this project. It will help us meet the criteria for concrete construction, so there’s some value initially with that overtreatment of water, shall I say, for construction, but there is going to be this long lasting legacy.

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And from our perspective, why we were chasing this as an opportunity, the next drought will come like the last drought, where the dam is down to 1.5% and the river's going to get turned off, well town water is the highest security water and I think around 9 megalitres a day comes back to us at the sewage treatment plant, so it's a very secure water source. Now, whether we just use it for industry or what other things raw water can be used for or whether ultimately it can be used in the drinking water treatment plant because it will be cleaner than the river, it's just that legacy piece of technology that we're going to have out of this construction project.

**PROF MENZIES:** Yes, excellent. That's reverse osmosis technology?

**MR WOOD:** Yes, yes. We're working through those specs. We've got University of Newcastle as the science part again, just to create confidence in the regulators. We've got the regulators in the tent already, helping at the initial phases of the project, so that they're comfortable in where we're heading before you apply for your s 60 approvals and what have you, which, if you've ever been in that game, they can be challenging to get through in a timely manner. So yes, no, tracking extremely well and our community thus far, it's had a lot of profile and certainly the only feedback we've had thus far is positive. So that's – gravel –

**PROF MENZIES:** That's a great story.

**MR WOOD:** It is. No, and look, I've offered that lesson to all other local councils around us to share in getting it through a PPP is a very complex application process, to get [unintelligible 00:45:34]. We're willing to share that throughout the network of local governments faced with the same opportunity/challenge. Gravel, yes, I hope you heard I'm very comfortable that we've got major quarries in town anyway and Dubbo for road resourcing and what have you. We've got three and then also with these gravel for quarries for the unsealed road network, we're quite confident that we will have more assets to provide supply rather than overdemand on existing assets.

**PROF MENZIES:** That's excellent. Fellow Commissioners, I think we're at the end of our list of specified matters for discussion. Do we have other things that we'd like to raise with the Council? Well, I should ask the Council first, have we left anything off our agenda that you'd like to tell us about?

**MR WOOD:** Throw that to the team. I'll throw one in terms of community benefit. They have contributed – we've got four proponents contributing, Steve J, \$50,000 is my memory, to a study for a training/education centre for renewables and that's the reason we have that strategic focus is we want our community to be able to take advantage of this seven, 10 years' worth of construction and then the maintenance phase. How does a kid in Year 6 Wellington Public School look at a wind turbine and think, "I want to be a part of that?"

So they've part funded and they've given it again to us as a donation to do the

commercial feasibility of establishing a training and education centre and that's what we would ultimately tap EnergyCo and other government to help create in New South Wales. For example, a wind technician, if you want to climb the faux wind tower and get your cred, they send people down to Victoria. So how can we make that happen in our patch as well?

So Squadron, as part of I guess the community benefit for setting up in our region, has part funded this commercial feasibility for us as well. That's probably the only thing. Team, have we got anything else you want to talk about? My team.

**MR QUIGLEY:** Can I just – a little thing and it's a little thing just for down the track, we often have these and they focus on the turbines and everything else and tend to forget about the administration building, the ablution blocks and all these sort of things and when it comes down the track to do a construction certificate, we don't actually have plans because they've just given you something indicative, it becomes a little bit problematic.

So I've noticed in the draft consent, final layout plans shall be provided to the Secretary, it would be nice if they could just also be provided to us. It just makes going forward with construction certificates much easier down the track. And not for us, it might be a private certifier having the same issue. So again, something over the years which has gotten a little bit better, it's slowly getting a little bit better but yes, we just want to make it as smooth as possible down the track.

**PROF MENZIES:** Darryll, anything like this where the Council has a view on the wording of a condition, if you want to send that to us for our consideration, that would be helpful.

**MR QUIGLEY:** All right. Thank you.

**PROF MENZIES:** Okay. Let's go to the commissioners. Michael?

**MR WRIGHT:** Thanks, Neal. Just a question in terms of the experience that Dubbo Council has had with proponents for other renewable energy projects and community engagement and how that experience has compared to the way Squadron has gone about doing its business?

**MR WOOD:** I can say that we view Squadron as a partner that helps us set the benchmark by which we explain our expectations to other proponents. So very positive and like I genuinely say that enables us to go, "No, no, look what we agreed to here." Solar farms, for example, have been notoriously difficult to pin down on a VPA, make lots of noise about benefits and don't deliver much to be frank, the old approvals. We just had last night where Steve Jennings and the team have negotiated with another one, Lightsource bp, to get to that 1.5% of capital investment value, so that's our solar farm under our new policy setting. So helping set the benchmarks has been very valuable in working with Squadron compared to other proponents.



5 **MR JENNINGS:** Yes. And I think that you can definitely, from our experience, you can definitely see the companies that are probably more in the game of flipping projects verse companies that are there for the long haul as well. So and even talking to some of our counterparts in the REZ, like yes, they can see there is a lot of chatter about what project's getting sold, what project's going in this direction.

10 But yes, I definitely echo Murray's thoughts. They're probably tier one in terms of our dealings with them, of course, but even with the accommodation project, like they don't roll over easily but they're very happy to work through a process and can see the long-term benefits in what they're trying to leave for the community.

15 **PROF MENZIES:** Excellent. Any further, questions, Michael?

**MR WRIGHT:** No thanks, Neal.

**PROF MENZIES:** Okay, Suellen?

20 **MS FITZGERALD:** No, nothing from me, Neal. Council's obviously well advanced in all their processes, so I'm good.

25 **PROF MENZIES:** Excellent. Well, let me finish by thanking the Council. Murray, you and your team have really done a superb job of informing us. We are normally a lot more interactive but you've so well prepared what you needed to say to us to address the things we needed, that it has felt very one-sided, but it was actually a really very useful discussion. So thank you for your time.

30 Let me just restate the point that if you have got suggestions to changes to conditions, write them down for us. It doesn't necessarily mean that that's the way it'll end up but it makes sure we capture accurately the way that you see the condition being improved. All right. Thank you very much for your time.

35 **MR WOOD:** No, appreciate the opportunity.

**MR JENNINGS:** Thank you.

**UNKNOWN SPEAKER:** Thanks a lot.

40 **MR WOOD:** And Michael, from MEG days, wasn't it?

**MR WRIGHT:** Yes.

45 **MR WOOD:** Yes, briefly crossed paths. Yes, sorry, when you popped up on the screen, "Oh, hang on, I know Michael."

**MR WRIGHT:** That's right. Of course, of course.

**PROF MENZIES:** There's another conflict of interest.

5 **MR WOOD:** Yes, so sorry, I didn't pick that one up. So and Mike, good to see you.

**PROF MENZIES:** Yes, and Michael, once again, and Murray, not one that's going to influence us at all but –

10 **MR WRIGHT:** This isn't a coal seam gas project, so I think we're okay.

**MR WOOD:** Yes, that's right. That's right.

15 **PROF MENZIES:** All right, guys. Bye for now.

**MR WOOD:** See you. Bye.

**>THE MEETING CONCLUDED**