



TRANSCRIPT OF MEETING

RE: SPICERS CREEK WIND FARM (SSD-41134610)

PUBLIC MEETING

PANEL:

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

SPEAKERS:

TRISH MCDONALD
CR DALE HOGDEN
CHRISTINE O'LEARY
GRANT PIPER
RAFE CHAMPION
SALLY EDWARDS
RICK CAMPBELL
JOHN MCGRATH
DENNIS ARMSTRONG
RAE CRAFT
STAN MOORE
KATHRYN REYNOLDS
TRACIE DAVIES
MAYOR MATHEW DICKERSON
REBECCA GLENCROSS
LOUISE HENNESSY
NICOLE BREWER

LOCATION:

DUNEDOO JUBILEE MEMORIAL HALL

DATE:

10:00AM – 1:34PM
THURSDAY, 29TH AUGUST 2024

<THE MEETING COMMENCED

PROF NEAL MENZIES: Good morning and welcome to the Independent Planning Commission’s public meeting into the state significant development application for Spicers Creek Wind Farm (SSD-41134610). I am speaking to you today from – I knew I would screw this up, Suellen, and I am. Wiradjuri land. Thank you very much, guys. Actually, if we work it like this throughout the day, you guys help me out when I’m screwing up, that would be really good.

10 I’d like to start by acknowledging the traditional owners of all the countries on which we’re meeting from today and I pay my respects to their elders past and present and to elders from other communities who may be participating today. I’m Neal Menzies and I’m the chair of the panel. Joining me are my fellow commissioners, Suellen Fitzgerald and Michael Wright. No conflicts of interest
15 have been identified in relation to our determination of this development application.

We have a limited and specific role at the end of the planning process. We decide if an application should go ahead and if so, under what conditions. We consider
20 the Department’s assessment report, the application, your written and oral submissions and other materials that the planning law requires us to consider. All of these materials are either already publicly available or will be made available on our website.

25 In making a decision on this case, the Commission must obey all the relevant laws and consider all applicable policies and the public interest. We’re also obliged to consider public submissions and that is the purpose of today.

30 We want to hear what you think about the merits of the application. This is not a forum for submissions on whether you like or approve of the applicant, the laws we must obey or the policies we must consider. The application has already been assessed by the Department on our behalf. Many of you may have already participated in the Department’s processes and we thank you for your participation. There is no need to repeat your previous submissions. They are all
35 available to us for consideration.

The applicant and the Department have considered your submissions and taken them into account in the application and assessment and conditions we are considering today. Today we want to hear your response to the Department’s
40 assessment, recommendations and recommended conditions. Even if your submission today objects to the application being approved at all, we encourage you to tell us whether any of your concerns could be addressed, either wholly or in part, by the imposition of conditions. Your consideration of alternatives does not in any way compromise your submission and it enables the panel to consider all
45 options.

Firstly, today we’ll hear from the applicant. Then we’ll proceed to hear from our

5 registered speakers. Then at the conclusion of our public meeting, we'll hear from the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure and the applicant to answer questions or respond to any of the issues raised during the public meeting. While we endeavour to stick to our published schedule, this will be dependent on registered speakers being ready to present at their allocated time.

10 I will introduce each speaker when it's their turn to present to the panel. Everyone has been advised in advance of how long they have to speak. A bell will sound when a speaker has one minute remaining. A second bell will sound when the speaker's time has expired. Thank you. To ensure that everyone receives their fair share of time, I will enforce timekeeping rules.

15 If there's something that the panel wants to hear more of, then we'll grant an extension case by case and that extension will be on the basis of my decision as panel chair. However, in the interest of fairness to other registered speakers, there will not be many extensions. Okay. It would only be under exceptional circumstances.

20 If you have a copy of your speaking notes or any additional material to support your presentation, it would be appreciated if you would provide a copy to the Commission. Please note that any information given to the Commission may be made public. The Commission's privacy statement governs its approach to managing your information and is available on the Commission's website.

25 Finally, some housekeeping matters for the meeting. Exits from this venue in case of emergency are located on the left side of the hall and toilets are located at the front of the hall. Please be considerate of the Commission staff who are working here today. They're here to support the panel. Please look after them as you would members of your community. Throughout the day, if there's a need for me to do so, I'll call short breaks. So please don't be concerned if we need to take a break to talk about something that's occurred. Okay. Let's kick off with our first speaker. So Trish McDonald is speaking on behalf of Squadron Energy and is here in person. Trish, welcome.

35 **MS TRISH MCDONALD:** Good morning and thank you, Chair and Commissioners. My name is Trish McDonald. I'm acting head of project development at Squadron Energy and project manager for Spicers Creek Wind Farm. Next slide, please. Squadron Energy would like to acknowledge the Wiradjuri people, the traditional custodians of the land we are meeting on today. We recognise and respect their continued connection to land, waters and community. We would like to pay respects to the elders, both past and present, and extend that respect to others who are present here today. Next slide.

45 Spicers Creek Wind Farm Pty Ltd, the proponent for the state significant development application, is owned by Squadron Energy, which is part of the Tattarang group of companies. Tattarang is an Australian private investment group owned by Andrew and Nicola Forrest.

5 The Spicers Creek Wind Farm team has worked with Umwelt Environmental and Social Consultants as the lead consultant and a number of other technical specialists, noted on this slide, to prepare the state significant development application. Next slide.

10 Squadron is a 100% Australian owned renewable energy company that develops, operates and owns renewable energy assets in Australia. We have 1.1 gigawatts of renewable energy in operation and 900 megawatts under construction. In New South Wales, Squadron Energy has three operating wind farms, one wind farm under construction being the Uungula Wind Farm, east of Wellington, and a number of wind farm projects in development. Spicers Creek is our most advanced wind farm in development. Next slide.

15 The team has undertaken extensive engagement with the landowners, broader community and other stakeholders throughout the planning and assessment process. We have adopted an iterative approach to the design since the inception of the project in 2019. We have taken on board feedback from the community as well as the findings of the environmental and social impact assessment and
20 adapted the project design accordingly.

25 The project location was selected due to the reliable wind resource, low density of rural residential dwellings, proximity to major roads and proposed transmission infrastructure and the largely cleared landscape. We've adopted the avoid, minimise, mitigate offset design hierarchy.

30 I won't go through each of the items noted on the timeline but a few key points are in August 2019, we commenced engagement with potential host landowners. In May 2021, the project was publicly announced and broader engagement commenced. Exhibition of the final EIS and social impact assessment occurred during July to August 2023, along with community engagement on the assessment findings.

35 We have held seven community drop in sessions since the project was publicly announced. In December 2023, we lodged the submissions report to address community and government feedback on the EIS. On 30 July this year, the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure referred the project to the IPC for determination.

40 The project is located in the Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone, between Gulgong and Wellington. 106 wind turbines are located within the Dubbo Regional LGA and 11 wind turbines in the Warrumbungle Shire. The project involves around 2 billion in investment, has the capacity to supply sufficient clean energy to power around 397 homes per annum, which represents around 12% of
45 all New South Wales homes.

The project comprises up to 117 wind turbines, battery storage, local road

upgrades, internal access roads and tracks, operational buildings, temporary construction facilities and electrical infrastructure. This slide shows the project components and layout. The project is bound by the Golden Highway in the north, Saxa Road in the west and Gollan Road in the south.

5

Spicers Creek Wind Farm will contribute a net economic stimulus of around 410 million over the 30 year operating life. It will generate 840 full time equivalent construction jobs and 47 operational jobs, including both direct and indirect employment. The project will contribute to Energy Corporation's community benefit and employment program through the payment of fees to access the transmission infrastructure. I will briefly cover other local benefits on the following slides.

10

Recognising the importance of water security, we are working with Dubbo Regional Council through a public-private partnership to build a new advanced waste water treatment facility at Dubbo sewerage treatment plant. Squadron Energy will fund the facility to treat up to 700 megalitres of water per year. Up to 250 megalitres of water per year will be used for constructions purposes and will be suitable quality for both concrete batching and dust suppression. This is a great example of how renewable energy companies and local councils can work together to deliver long-term benefits for an entire community.

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Lack of adequate telecommunication infrastructure and service was a key theme we heard throughout our community engagement. At our Uungula Wind Farm near Wellington, we are currently rolling out a program we called Squadron Link, which is a point-to-point wireless network. This program will also be implemented at Spicers Creek Wind Farm.

25

Squadron Energy has a dedicated economic development facilitator based in Dubbo to assist with identifying and maximising the local economic benefits that come with our projects. We also have a dedicated First Nations engagement facilitator based in Wellington, to ensure early and respectful cultural heritage work as well as communication of renewable energy careers and pathways.

30

In addition to the 28 land agreements we have in place with our host landowners, we have 29 agreements in place with neighbouring landowners, covering 45 dwellings, which provide annual payments for the life of the project. We know that part of being a good neighbour is ensuring that we have a local presence where members of the community can connect directly with our team. We now have two local officers in Dubbo and Wellington.

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We are partnering with ARC Wind to support two local First Nations trainee wind turbine technician roles. We have also developed an Introduction to Wind Energy micro skills course with TAFE New South Wales.

45

To contribute to roads and other public infrastructure, the project has a fully executed planning agreement in place with Dubbo Council to contribute 1.5% of

the approved and committed capital investment value of the wind farm project. In February 2024, the same commercial terms were agreed with Warrumbungle Shire Council.

5 We've listened to the local community and acknowledge concerns expressed by Warrumbungle and Mid-Western Councils regarding accommodations in their local government areas. We are working with Dubbo Regional Council to locate a temporary worker accommodation site on a council owned land on the eastern outskirts of Dubbo. We are discussing enabling infrastructure with Dubbo that will help with future subdivisions and population growth and leave a lasting positive legacy.

10 The Spicers Creek Wind Farm community sponsorship program is ongoing. Since it commenced in May 2021, the program has supported 36 local initiatives, totalling \$114,000.

15 This slide is a quote from the Department's assessment report, recognising the work done to appropriately site and design the wind farm to minimise impacts, leading to a comparatively straightforward assessment process.

20 Since the submission of the EIS, there has been further refinements of the project to avoid biodiversity impacts. The development footprint of the project where the work will take place has been reduced by 49 hectares since EIS submission. A buffer area of around 100 metres has also been included around the development footprint to create the development corridor, to provide flexibility for locating wind turbines and site infrastructure during the detailed design and construction process. The development corridor has been reduced by about 714 hectares since EIS submission.

25 The Department has noted the reduced credit liability relative to other recent wind farms. Squadron has a number of biodiversity offset sites already secured and will finalise these prior to construction, as well as implementing biodiversity management and bird and bat adaptive management plans.

30 Visual impacts were a key issue for stakeholders. The visual impact assessment identified five non-associated dwellings with a moderate visual impact rating, two within zone one, which is within 3.4 km of the project, and three within zone two, between 3.4 and 5 km. Visual screening has been recommended for these dwellings and further consultation with the landowners will be carried out as part of project implementation.

35 In relation to construction traffic impacts, we are committed to implementing a traffic management plan in consultation with councils to manage vehicle movements and ensure road safety and road network operations are maintained. We will undertake intersection upgrades to Golden Highway, Sweeneys Lane, Saxa Road, Tallawonga Road, Gollan Road, Ben Hoden Road and road upgrades to Tallawonga Road, Ben Hoden Road and Sweeneys Lane. The community

identified the completion of road upgrades as a key benefit of the project.

5 The Department has also considered the technical assessment in relation to noise, vibration, soil and water impacts, heritage and bushfire. In the interests of time, I won't discuss these in detail, but they are noted on this slide.

10 The findings of the social impact assessment identified a range of impacts and benefits of the project, which contributed to the development of a detailed set of commitments and mitigation measures made within both the EIS and the submissions report. The economic impact assessment quantified the direct and indirect jobs and economic benefits, as depicted here.

15 The conclusion of the Department's assessment report for Spicers Creek Wind Farm was that the project would not result in any significant impacts on the local community or the environment, is located on a suitable site for a wind farm development and any residual impacts can be managed through the implementation of the recommended conditions. Thank you.

20 **PROF MENZIES:** Thank you. Fellow Commissioners, do we have any questions at this point?

MR MICHAEL WRIGHT: No.

25 **MS SUELLEN FITZGERALD:** No.

PROF MENZIES: No. Thank you, Trish. Our next speaker is Councillor Dale Hogden, who's representing the Warrumbungle Shire Council. Welcome, Dale.

30 **CR DALE HOGDEN:** Thank you. Good morning, Commissioners and welcome to wonderful Dunedoo. My name is Dale Hogden and it's my privilege to be here as a councillor for Warrumbungle Shire Council. Unfortunately, the mayor, Ambrose Doolan, has a prior commitment and sends his apologies.

35 Dunedoo was established by European settlers in 1841. The name Dunedoo is derived from the Wiradjuri word, "swans," which you may see in the lagoons around town. I hope you've laid eyes on the beautiful silo painting of jockey Hugh Bowman and the majestic mare Winx. It's a sight to behold.

40 Today in this room there are lots of people who have never spoken before in a public meeting run by the state government. In contrast, you and your organisation are very powerful and are used to such undertakings. Together with the developer, Squadron Energy, and the Department of Planning, you wield the power to decide what happens in the backyard of the ordinary folk who fill this room and live in and love this community. Therefore, Council calls on the IPC to share some of that
45 power with the locals and with the councillors who are elected to govern for their ratepayers. Please listen to and act upon their voices.

When making your decision on Spicers Creek Wind Farm, please remember the project is just one piece in a larger jigsaw that features approximately 40 wind, solar and transmission developments in the Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone. Eleven of these are in the Warrumbungle Shire Council. The Shire has been a rural region for nearly 200 years. The economic, social and cultural scene is rural to its bootstraps. In 2021, the New South Wales government established the REZ and now plans to build 6 gigawatts of energy generation here.

Council wishes to hear the truth about what are the environmental, social and economic costs and benefits and furthermore, who reaps the benefits and who is burdened by the costs. There are adverse cumulative impacts arising from the 40 odd projects. The impacts encompass various areas, including the strain on roads, the need for housing for 10,000 construction workers, the demands on health and emergency services, the potential effects on biodiversity and changes to the visual landscape. However, there will be a few operational jobs once the construction is actually complete.

In para 156 of the assessment report, the DPHI states there are four proposed energy projects near Spicers Creek Wind Farm, namely Sandy Creek Solar Farm, Cobbora Solar Farm and Dapper Solar Farm and Orana Wind Farm. We say that there are six on the list, the other two are the Avonside Solar Farm and EnergyCo transmission line.

In para 159 of the assessment report, the DPHI asserts the cumulative impacts of the same will be addressed in the EIS on the other four. We say six. But not the Spicers Creek EIS because it is the first cab off the rank. To be clear, none of the EIS tabled to date for the other projects have assessed and quantified the collective impacts. Given this omission, Council calls on the IPC to defer the final decision on the proposed Spicers Creek Wind Farm until such time as the cumulative impacts are adequately identified and the environmental, social and economic costs are properly compensated.

A key issue for Council is the impact on local roads. Paragraph 201 of DPHI's report says the applicant must restrict project related vehicles to the approved access routes. We agree but how? How will this be done? We ask the IPC to revamp condition B30 to require the developer to actively manage traffic compliance. There should be also online real time transparent data on the traffic movements and strong penalties for non-compliance.

A key risk to Council is that non-prescribed minor roads or backroads quickly become shortcuts or rat runs for workers, resulting in damage that is left for ratepayers to fix. It is not acceptable to impose this cost on to locals. There must be consequences for the developer in traffic associated with the project uses such roads.

Aside from the protecting roads not to be approved access routes, Council also urges the IPC to safeguard those 11 km of roads within Warrumbungle Shire that

are likely to be designated access routes with the traffic not only crossing said roads but travelling along them. These roads are Bald Hill Road, Sandy Creek Road, Dapper Road, Diehm Road, Lambing Hill Road. Council urges the IPC to ensure that they are rigorous conditions of consent that protect these assets. The conditions of consent should address upgrade requirements prior to project construction, dilapidation surveys pre, post-project construction, upgrade refurbishments and repowering and decommissioning activities.

Council understands the developer processes to access 11 turbines, three site compounds and one electrical substation by on farm tracks and roads rather than along council roads. Whilst this concept may be fine in theory, the practical reality could well be that workers will be tempted to use the council roads because it will be more convenient and save time.

Therefore, with regard to consenting the project, Council requests that the precautionary approach be to safeguard these public roads with developer held accountable for the road repair and maintenance. Attached for your consideration are the recommendation amendments to the DPHI's draft conditions of consent relating to roads and traffic.

A second key issue is that with six major projects, all side by side in this part of the Shire, what standard of road upgrade will be required to withstand the collective impact of heavy and oversize, over mass vehicles from all six projects?

So to conclude, I repeat, Council calls on the IPC to defer a final decision on the proposed project until such time as the cumulative impacts have been properly quantified and compensated. Thank you.

PROF MENZIES: Thank you, Councillor. Thank you very much. Let me just note that we had an excellent meeting with the Council. Mayor Doolan was able to join us. And also that we had the opportunity to drive along a number of the roads that the Council had flagged as potentially problematic yesterday so that we – visiting the site is far better than any description or looking at Google Earth. So we did have the opportunity to have a look.

And finally, let me note that I have granted Councillor Hogden an extension of time. So please don't read that he was allowed to continue to speak as licence for everyone to do so. Councillor, I didn't want to disturb you in the middle of excellent material. Okay. We move on. Our next speaker is Christine O'Leary and Christine's here in person. Welcome, Christine. Excellent. Thank you.

MS CHRISTINE O'LEARY: Good morning and thank you to the Commission for allowing me to speak. My name is Christine O'Leary and along with my husband and two of my adult sons, we farm three properties on the Golden Highway at Elong Elong. We grow crops, run a registered Angus stud and a registered Poll Dorset stud, selling bulls and rams across that area. We also breed Merino sheep and prime lambs. We are both fifth generational farmers in this area

and our three sons being the sixth. We are passionate about both farming and our local community.

5 We are direct neighbours to the Spicers Creek Wind Farm project and we oppose the project. We love where we live, work and run our business. We are devastated that our beautiful local, scenic farming and bushland landscape will be ruined by the ugliness of 257 metre tall turbines. Our homestead at [REDACTED], where our eldest son lives, dwelling GH007, according to the assessment has 106 visible turbines. The closest to the homestead, 4.33 km.

10 Our other son's home on our property, [REDACTED], dwelling GH10, has potentially 117 turbines visible and that is all the turbines in the project. We live in our home on [REDACTED] 00:48:40] dwelling GH009, which is directly behind that homestead, but we don't have a montage for that house.

15 We are farmers and spend most of our time working outside around the farms. From our boundary fence, there are several turbines under a kilometre away. The Department's assessment clarifies us in the Golden Highway and Upper Sandy Creek cluster and recommends mitigation with screening vegetation. This is not a
20 feasible or a workable solution.

25 We are extremely worried about the noise and vibration from these turbines not only affecting our health and wellbeing but the negative impact on conception rates for stock grazing nearby. Happy stock thrive. We are elite stock breeders, selling seed stock. Farming is 100% our income for all four of us working on the farm. The Department's assessment document does not address any potential impact on stock. We are sure that our land will be devalued because of this project.

30 We have farmed here all our lives, over 50 years, and have worked extremely hard in very adverse conditions. Several droughts, high interest rates, floods, mouse plagues and the list goes on. The farms are our superannuation, everything has gone into improving our farms. This is not only our retirement plan but our sons' future and hopefully for generations to come. Some reports suggest one third of
35 the value of land could be lost. This equates to millions of dollars of our assets. This would also impact on future borrowings to move ahead and impact on our whole business plan.

40 The Department's assessment alludes to no changes in values anticipated with the project. However, there is no precedent of a renewable energy zone, let alone one of the size of the Central-West Orana REZ, and that appears to be expanding unrestrictedly.

45 We are very concerned for the future of our community. The division is very evident and quite frankly it's heartbreaking. In these small farming areas, communities are what keep us going. I can't stress this enough. It is a fact from other projects that host families often take the money and move off their farm to

live elsewhere. Another loss to the community, both financially and physically.

5 Biosecurity is extremely important on farms and none of the assessment addressed the issue. As registered breeders and farmers, we manage and monitor movements of traffic across our front gates. Biosecurity covers water, feed and animals coming on to your property, machinery movements on and off your property, chemicals and fertiliser entering your property. The significant movement of workers, water, chemicals and machinery across neighbouring farms is a major risk for the spread of disease and noxious weeds if biosecurity is not addressed.

10 We respectfully request the Commission had this issue identified and addressed. This is an agricultural area and all the documentation reads that it will be restored to agriculture.

15 So I'd like to conclude by saying that I have or we have many more concerns with this project but not enough time to cover them all. I'm sure they will be covered by other speakers. Thank you for the time and the opportunity to speak.

20 **PROF MENZIES:** Thank you, Christine, both for a very succinct presentation. I do particularly note the issue of biosecurity and I'll just flag to the Department, who'll be speaking later in the day, that we would like them to elaborate a little bit on how that's been considered. So thank you very much. Okay, our next speaker is Grant Piper, speaking on behalf of the National Rational Energy Network Inc. Welcome, Grant.

25 **MR GRANT PIPER:** Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Commissioners, for coming to our district again for some of you. Welcome back. I'm probably not going to address any of the assessment report, given our 100% failure to change a decision yet. This is more of a case of informing yourselves and your staff and anybody else about our concerns because playing by the rules doesn't seem to work too well.

30 So wind power reliability conversion is grossly inefficient and only produces an average of 29% of its installed capacity, according to AMO 2022 data. 29% is two days a week. So can the Commissioners please tell us where the 395,000 homes are going to get their power the other five days of the week?

40 If approved, the Commission has defined dispatchable power performance standards and request this to be met by Spicers Creek in line with the CSIRO GenCost modelling, which is above 40% and we ask for penalties be applied if they don't meet those performance standards.

45 With a short working life of maybe 20 years and the loss of efficiency over time, wind turbines will have to be replaced three to four times during the life of a conventional thermal power station, incurring multiple whole of life emissions as well as further local environmental degradation and economic cost. Adding battery systems produces no power at all at high environmental cost due to the sunk

energy and materials used in their manufacture and their even shorter working life than wind turbines. The short life again incurs a recurring remove and replace environmental and emissions cost. Uncontrollable battery fires are another serious hazard to the local community.

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Due to the distributed nature of solar wind, additional transmission lines are needed, which further adds to the environmental cost and which until now have been unnecessary. All this leads to the conclusion that wind turbine projects like this one are counterproductive to the stated aims of cheap, reliable and environmentally friendly power.

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The Central-West Orana REZ is approved for 4.5, possibly six, I stand corrected if I'm wrong there, dispatchable power with expansion to 8 gigawatt in the planning. We've counted 54 projects at the moment for the REZ, totalling 14.6 gigawatt of installed capacity, comprising 1,024 turbines and 9 million solar panels plus the numerous BESS. For perspective, the whole of New South Wales consumes 8 to 11 gigawatt at any time. So the REZ is installing 14.6 gigawatt capacity and the state itself only uses 8 to 11 at any time and that's a massive overbuild.

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So considering that, the economic environmental cost is huge because of the gross overbuild. Squadron has approved a project to install a gas turbine at Dubbo, which shows that the planning authorities know that despite Dubbo being surrounded by the 14.6 gigawatt capacity, a gas turbine will still be needed.

25

What conditions is the IPC imposing on Squadron to ensure the operating company does not disappear, leaving decommissioning and clean-up costs to landowners and taxpayers?

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We cannot trust the New South Wales government's intentions regarding farming and food production. The New South Wales Emissions Reduction Act 2023, which is touted to codify the 2015 Paris agreement principles, excludes the proviso, "Develop low greenhouse gas emissions development in a matter that does not threaten food production." That phrase was in the Paris agreement but was excluded from the New South Wales Act.

35

GenCost and AEMO ISP are deficient and cannot be quoted as reliable information in regard to the least cost or most efficient development pathway. Both have been debunked by experts and organisations working in this field. The National Electricity Law, which is attached, does not prioritise emissions reduction over the other longstanding objectives of price, quality, safety and security. The IPC must consider these objectives equal in priority when assessing novel power generation projects such as Spicers Creek.

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The National Electricity Law was only amended in September 2023 to add these emissions targeted as an additional objective and even then hedged their bets by including the phrase, "Likely to contribute to reducing emissions." It does not sound like the legal team was confident that these projects would reduce emissions

and so they included a legal out for future indemnity when the current government policy is finally publicly acknowledged to be absurd, destructive and counterproductive.

5 The Commissioners must consider the whole of life emissions of the project. Have
you done so? This calculation would include raw materials, mining, transport
manufacture, installation, decommissioning, any recycling emissions and the
multiple replacements needed per the above, not just the operating emissions.
10 Could the Commissioners provide their calculations of total emissions in that
regard?

Squadron is here to take advantage of our generous subsidy scheme for wind
turbines and when that fails, make more money running emergency backup gas
15 turbines at Dubbo, under the AEMO's Frequency Control Ancillary Services
scheme. Wind projects such as Spicers Creek project have no electrical power
engineering merit, economic justification, nor environmental benefit and should
not be approved without stringent performance standards and heavy oversight.
Thank you.

20 **PROF MENZIES:** Thank you, Grant. Okay, our next speaker is Rafe Champion,
who's joining us on the telephone. Rafe?

MR RAFAE CHAMPION: Hello?

25 **PROF MENZIES:** Hello, Rafe. You are speaking to the panel and to our
audience, so please proceed.

30 **MR CHAMPION:** Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to your
deliberations. The chief scientist a few years ago indicated quite clearly that
nothing that Australia does about emissions will make a measurable difference to
the total picture or to the future climate. Under those circumstances, it seems
totally redundant to spend large amounts of money in hopefully reducing
emissions.

35 My more serious concern is – immediate concern, which I submitted in writing
along with other general objections to all schemes under the net zero program, the
problem is the predominant of wind droughts when there's next to no wind across
the whole of southeast Australia for up to three days and nights.

40 Under those circumstances, regardless of the amount of capacity, there'll be
effectively no wind and solar power delivered on nights during wind droughts.
That means that the whole experiment is doomed to fail. It will fail. It can't work
and the sooner we develop an exit strategy to roll back and stop putting more
useless equipment on the face of the Earth, the better it will be for our budget and
45 household expenses, the cost of living and the preservation of our farmlands and
forests.

So I think that's a serious thing you need to take into account. It's very clear, the factual matter. It can easily be backed up by reputable information from official sources [unintelligible 01:00:20] it's all over, red rover. So enjoy your day and thank you again for giving me a platform for a minute.

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PROF MENZIES: Thank you, Rafe, and thanks for a very succinct presentation. Our next presenter is Sally Edwards. Welcome, Sally. Cool.

10 **MS SALLY EDWARDS:** Good morning, Chairperson and the panel Commissioners. My name is Sally Edwards. For the past 15 years, I've worked across the Warrumbungle region in community development and capacity building. Next slide, please.

15 I would like to address a number of key concerns that I have from reading the Department's assessment of the project. Spicers Creek Wind, next slide, is but what project in an array of SSD infrastructure projects across the REZ. While it can be noted that the proponent has reduced footprint areas and therefore potentially reduced impacts, is it fairly concluded that the 275 hectares of native
20 vegetation loss is then justified because it is only 19% of the project footprint? I am mystified that the government policies, plans and guidelines that are in place, and some for many years, to protect our environment, our lands, our industries and our people, can be ignored or overlooked when assessing state significant development. Next slide.

25 This map demonstrates the location of Spicers Creek within CWO REZ and displays the multitude of projects in the area. This unfortunately also increases the likelihood of significant impacts and cumulative impacts to the environment, to water and soil, to residents, to communities and to already under resourced local government authorities. Next slide.

30

This map highlights the saturation of projects across the country between Elong, Dunedoo and Gulgong. Next slide. Due to state significance, this project demands public input and scrutiny from not only neighbours but community and members of the wider region. Is it fair to acknowledge that neighbours receiving neighbour
35 payments are by nature paid to support the project? Why wouldn't neighbour payments ever just simply be compensation to those that are forced to live within X amount of kilometres of such a significant project and not a contractual agreement. To save time, I would like to skip to slide 13, please.

40 Cumulative impacts. Could the IPC and the Department please review the assessment made on cumulative impacts, in particular how the proponent clearly defined the study area for each separate matter requiring cumulative assessment and why those boundaries were selected? While I disagree with the fact that the proponent selects the study areas for each matter of cumulative assessment, this is
45 what the guidelines clearly state and expect in s 3.2. Next slide.

This slide shows the detail included in the proponent's scoping report, which is

essentially a reconfiguration of the words from the guidelines and shows no specifics on the study areas will be defined. I was unable to find any further detail in the EIS, appendix 23, the cumulative impact scoping summary and the Department's assessment. Next slide.

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This slide shows the first page of seven pages which make up table 1 in the proponent's cumulative impact scoping summary. This page demonstrates an analysis of projects that are operational and under construction. The green squares conclude that no potential overlap in impacts between project and existing future project that would warrant any consideration in the cumulative impact assessment. No potential overlap of noise and vibration with Bodangora Wind. No potential overlap of biodiversity and heritage or water and soils with Bodangora, Beryl, Suntop, Wellington and Wollar solar projects.

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Could the Department and IPC please review both the way the study areas were defined for each matter identified as requiring cumulative assessment and also how a conclusion was drawn for so many of these potential impacts, that there are no potential impacts that warrant any consideration? There was also no potential overlap of impacts identified for risk, water, soils and for air quality. Next slide.

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I would like the IPC to consider that no consideration has been given to the number of SSD energy projects within each LGA. Many of the cumulative impacts that affect Council directly are not bound by a 30 km radius. These include traffic and transport, roads, water and soils, waste, social and economic and potential land and risk. Next slide.

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This slide demonstrates the number of SSD applications currently in the major project portal for the Dubbo LGA. Forty-three. Next slide. Warrumbungle LGA. Thirteen. Next slide. Mid-Western LGA. Thirty-two. Could the IPC please consider that the 30 km radius is ineffective in councils of large geographical areas and is ineffective in adequately considering the potential cumulative impacts. Next slide.

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Biodiversity and risk of serious and irreversible impacts. It appears the proponent and the Department have utilised an estimation of box gum woodland provided by Dr Driscoll in relation to the Moolarben coal project. Given this is a New South Wales government assessment process, shouldn't the New South Wales government use the most current estimations it has utilised for its current and relevant legislation and guidelines, such as the New South Wales threatened species committee and conservation assessment reports? Next slide, please.

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To utilise a different estimation of quantity of box gum woodland for the purpose of this assessment should either suggest this is not eligible or suggest an immediate review of all the other New South Wales policy legislation and guidelines that depend on this information, including the critically endangered ecological community listing. Until the government formally adopts this research, should it be permissible in the assessment of this project? Next slide.

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The New South Wales Threatened Species Scientific Committee, as shown here from the Department of Environment and Heritage website, states that since 1750, box gum woodland has undergone a very large and historical reduction in geographical distribution over more than 90%. Next slide.

Item 114 in the assessment report concludes that a cumulative impact of less than 1% is unlikely to contribute significantly to extinction of box gum woodland and therefore unlikely to be SAI. Could the IPC consider the accuracy of this claim when (a) the CIA study area for biodiversity has not been clearly defined or explained; (b) the estimation figure of box gum woodland in New South Wales is not currently accepted by the government; and (c) there has been no consideration of the fact that the area left is less than 10% of what was once here.

I acknowledge that New South Wales would not be the New South Wales it is today, the cities, the farmland, the connecting infrastructure, without this loss of box gum woodland. But surely it could be accepted that since the 1980s, we have all been working to conserve and protect what is left. Farmers have been active in protective woodlands and also been active in replanting species that have declined. It is with this priority to conserve biodiversity, maintain ecosystem functions and protect at risk flora and fauna that both the Department and the IPC are being relied upon to scrutinise this cumulative impact assessment diligently. Next slide.

Community impacts. Community division and community health and wellbeing were two issues highlighted. The column on the right is the Department's consideration. Next slide. Can the panel consider that these issues faced by community are decreasing the functionality and capacity of the backbone of rural towns, the people. Community division and community health and wellbeing, where and how have these been addressed and considered appropriately? They were raised in close to 50% of the objection submissions to the EIS. Next slide.

I've come to value the principles of small town revitalisation and seek to see our rural communities thrive. This slide lists eight characteristics of a healthy, vibrant, resilient and enterprising community and local economy. The future of our communities depends on the input of the people who care, their input into design and their willingness to band together and work together. Community division disempowers rural people and rural communities. Throwing buckets of money at divided communities further widens the division.

This project, the REZ, the cumulative impacts, these communities are seemingly powerless to ask for consultation, involvement or collaboration, unless of course you are personally financially incentivised. At some point surely someone will observe that without treating the systemic issues of large scale top down developments with the attention they deserve, our unique and valued character of community will continue to be destroyed. I'm out of time, I'll need to skip through to the second last slide, please, slide 33.

Community division has inhibited many residents from seeking to ask their questions or from showing their public objection or support, so as not to lose their feeling of belonging. I fear that if the Department and the IPC don't demand fair and equitable consultation and involvement for our communities, not just associated neighbours, that the cost to our communities will be hard to overcome and that no amount of money will be able to remedy them.

Squadron, while you have presented a graphically impressive proposal, a nice, shiny, neat and tidy project with seemingly applaudable reductions and a cleverly compiled list of associated neighbours who support your project, I would like to urge you to sit aside your preconceptions about those who object to your project and consider that these objections could be coming from a place of deep care and concern for the places we call home, the places where we raise our children, the places that provide our means to live, the places we seek to protect for the future. Last slide.

I urge the IPC to review these assessment concerns and the ones that I haven't been able to speak on and seek to have them scrutinised and addressed and I sincerely thank you for your efforts in doing so.

PROF MENZIES: Thank you, Sally. And thank you for the detailed submission. That's great. Okay, our next speaker is Rick Campbell and Rick is here. Welcome, Rick.

MR RICK CAMPBELL: Thank you. I'm Rick Campbell, I'm a farmer who lives between Dunedoo and Gulgong. I'm going to concentrate on two topics, fires and fairness. Concerning fires, the coronial inquiry into the Victorian Black Sunday bushfires in 2009, there were 11 major fires. Six, six of them were caused by powerlines. There were 173 people killed, 159 of them attributable to the powerline fires. We come to this REZ, it has been given a fire classification of E by the AEMO. That's the worst classification you can get.

We are introducing all of this electrical infrastructure that can cause fires. Not a smart move. The prediction is from climate change that the extreme weather events that caused the Victorian fires will become much more common. Then we have the means to control these fires. Lithium batteries, can't use water. Solar farms, RFS personnel cannot safely go into solar farms. Wind farms and powerlines, cannot operate aerial water bombing in the vicinity. This is a trifecta of stupidity. The EnergyCo have adopted the mantra that to save the village we need to destroy the village. It beggars belief.

Okay. Now, we have to look at options. Look at offshore wind. Not a lot of bushfires, not many powerlines and they are on the sea floor and they've got better wind at any rate. So now, in terms of offshore wind, the communities down there, they hate wind turbines just as much as we do. With the Hunter Offshore Wind Farm, they complained, got it reduced in half. We complain, our REZ doubled in size.

Right. Getting back to the Hunter Offshore Wind, Chris Bowen decreased or increased, I should say, the setback of coastal communities from 10 to 20 km. This now applies to the Illawarra Wind Farm as well. What do we get in this REZ?
5 Two kilometres. Why is this so? Well, not a lot of people out there. They can wear it for the greater good.

And this is the exact reason we have anti-discrimination law. It is to protect and not persecute or exploit minorities in the community and that is us. Now, the state government will try and get around this by saying – well, I should say that the Commonwealth anti-discrimination law specifies place of residence in its charter. The state government will try and get around this by saying, “Oh, offshore wind is Commonwealth, onshore wind is state jurisdiction.”

15 Okay, what’s our solution? The Commonwealth Capacity Investment Scheme underwrites all these projects. If they support these projects, they are contravening their own legislation.

PROF MENZIERS: I need to stop you there.

20 **MR CAMPBELL:** Sorry.

PROF MENZIERS: Your time is up. So thank you very much.

25 **MR CAMPBELL:** Okay.

PROF MENZIERS: Our next speaker is John McGrath on behalf of the Yass Landscape Guardians and I understand that John is joining us by telephone. John, are you able to hear us?

30 **MR JOHN MCGRATH:** Yes, I am. Thank you.

PROF MENZIERS: Okay, we can hear you. So you’re speaking to the panel and our audience. So please proceed.

35 **MR MCGRATH:** Thank you very much and thank you for the opportunity to speak to the Spicers Creek Independent Planning Commission panellists. What I want to address – there’s two things I want to address, please. There is no compulsory decommissioning legislation for any so called renewable energy project Australia wide. Therefore, so called wind farm lease agreements are not regulated by the government.

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45 Plus there is no compulsory bond set aside for decommissioning any so called wind or renewable energy project and even if decommissioning clauses are in place in any contract, the first proponent or developer and the host landholders or so called renewable energy project, these company very quickly more into a \$2 shell company. There is financial fortitude to decommission these assets at the end

of life.

Therefore invariably the cost of decommissioning falls to the host landholder. The likelihood of the host landholder decommissioning any wind turbine is slim for the following reasons. I've just got some figures here. The New South Wales Planning, Housing and Infrastructure estimated conservatively in February 2024 to decommission a large wind – the Spicers Creek turbines are 265 metres, then with an estimated value of \$563,132 per turbine. Thus to decommission projects like Spicers Creek with 117 turbines, estimated \$65,886,440.

Reading The Weekly Times, 9 August, the law firm McCullough Robertson estimated between 450 to 600,000 per turbine to decommission. Therefore 177 – 265 turbines in Spicers Creek would cost \$70,200,000. I'd suggest these figures are conservative across the board with wind turbine decommissioning figures now in the range of 800 to a million dollars per turbine. So if you use the 800,000 figure, that still comes to \$93,600,000.

Without compulsory decommissioning legislation and the panel have to remember this is no decommissioning legislation, so these things are there in perpetuity. So who picks up the cost of decommissioning projects like Spicers Creek? Invariably, the taxpayer.

The other thing that the Spicers Creek IPC needs to be aware of is the capacity and I'd suggest that the 330 kV Wollar-Wellington transmission, it's been a problem in two other wind turbine developments, both Bango and Coppabella were approved with no capacity in the adjoining 132 kV transgrid line.

So it's of nominal capacity but 330 transmission line is in the vicinity of 1,000 kilovolt amps or 1,000 megawatts. Squadron Energy are moving the expected output of Spicers Creek to 700 megawatts. Therefore the associated 330 kV transmission line would need to be almost completely devoid of generation to accept the 700 megawatts that Squadron Energy reckon they'll get out of Spicers Creek.

So therefore, I implore the Spicers Creek Independent Planning Commission panellists not to approve further this project. Thank you very much.

PROF MENZIERS: Thank you, John. Okay, our next speaker is Rae Craft and I understand Rae's here. Of course, Rae. Welcome.

MS RAE CRAFT: Thank you. Good morning. My name is Rae Craft and I have lived and worked in the Elong Elong community for over 50 years. My husband's family has been in the Cobbora, Elong, Gollan area since the 1860s. That is over 160 years. Our properties lie on the Golden Highway, almost exactly halfway between Elong Elong village and the project, Spicers Creek project.

I have many concerns regarding the effects of the project upon the communities

surrounding me, my family and my neighbours. I'll just address two of my major concerns today and they are water and property values. In my 40 plus years in farming, I have lived through a number of droughts where the stock were entirely dependent upon river and groundwater for survival. As farmers, we know and respect the value and importance of a reliable water supply.

Spicers Creek Wind project has an expected construction phase of 40 months. The water requirement during this period is listed as 80 to 100 megalitres per year. That is 80 million to 120 million litres of water for dust suppression, concrete production, vehicle and equipment wash down, firefighting and amenities. That is a minimum of 267 million litres of water and this is just one project. The issue of water for the Spicers Creek project seemed to have a number of solutions suggested and there is no avenue that has not been covered, including access to groundwater if needed.

To quote on p 49 of the assessment report, the project – “To ensure the development has adequate water supplies for the project and that it obtains any necessary licences under the Water Act 1912 or Water Management Act 2000.” I make this point to draw attention to the fact that this project and others in the area appear to have carte blanche over the water supply in our catchment. They can harvest water by whatever means that would be best for their enterprise.

Now, with regard to property values, there appears to be a complete misrepresentation and misunderstanding of the nature of the properties involved. These are not just houses, investment or otherwise. They are businesses, built up through the hard work of many generations and heavily reliant on property value to underpin their operations. Lower property value means a reduction in borrowing capacity, thus increasing the risk of financial hardship and affecting the ability to handle the vagaries of farming.

In its assessment report, the Department has very little to say regarding property values. However, it is implied that if property value is affected, to quote, “The Department considers that the social and economic benefits of the project outweigh the negative social and economic impacts. As such, the project is in the public interest.” That’s on p 54 of the assessment report.

The only measurement we can go by is the evidence. Properties sold prior to the project sold well and similar property with a neighbour agreement for the project has been on the market for an extended period with no market offers being received. The first question prospective property buyers are asking agents is “What renewables are planned close by?”

Now, multiply the effects for just these two factors by 21. Now, on p 3 of the assessment report, there is a list of 21 other projects within 30 km. A total of over 9 gigawatts of power, including future capacity of 4 gigawatts. This brings the amount to 13 gigawatts within 35 km of my home. The situation that we find ourselves in is unprecedented. There is no measurement that can be appropriately

held up as a standard as the impacts of this project and others are completely unknown and untested.

5 The cumulative effects of all these projects together must be considered as a whole. Only then will you be able to really assess the full implications of the area on which they are being developed. When these REZs were announced, the Department proudly declares these areas would be modern day power stations. I really don't believe that anyone within the area affected had any idea what was to be inflicted upon them and I believe they still don't.

10 The gold rush attitude of the proponents is encouraged and welcomed by the organisations that are involved in this race to net zero. Change is inevitable but it has to be managed. I implore the IPC to consider this project as a part of a whole and assess the impact of all these projects on our small, regional communities and allow everyone to be able to participate in a fair deal. This process should not have winners and losers but should be a win-win for everyone concerned. Thank you.

15 **PROF MENZIERS:** Thank you, Rae. We're moving to Stan Moore is our next presentation.

20 **MR STAN MOORE:** You're ready for my presentation?

PROF MENZIERS: So this is Dennis Armstrong online?

25 **MR MOORE:** No, I'm Stan Moore.

PROF MENZIERS: Stand Moore. Sorry, Stan. I missed that you were a telephone call. So let me just firstly say that I'm hearing you clearly, so you're speaking to the panel and to the audience that's here with us. So please proceed.

30 **MR MOORE:** Look, thank you very much for the opportunity and I appreciate the opportunity to talk before the panel on this. And firstly, my apologies, originally I was down to present in person, however it conflicts with the Bush Summit that's currently being held in Orange and I'm in Orange, although I'm from Goulburn.

35 I'd like to make comment and ask the Commission to consider two areas that need to be addressed in relation to the development of this Spicers Creek Wind factory. They are public liability insurance for neighbours and the issue around contamination, pollution and how it may be addressed. Firstly on the public liability, farmers usually have between 10 and 20 million as their public liability insurance.

40 For instance, let's say a piece of machinery burns a bearing out, it catches fire and the fire burns on to a neighbour and if the neighbour is a farm, \$20 million usually covers that. However, having a renewable energy facility as a neighbour increases the chance of a higher claim. Now, in my experience and I know the same of

others, is that it is impossible to get public liability of more than 50 million, even 50 million is extremely expensive.

5 And the only solution I can see is that the developer and/or the owner and operator of such facilities should indemnify their neighbours should there be a public liability incident where they would be claiming against insurance. I think that's going to be something that needs to be addressed because it really does disadvantage – well, and financially impact on neighbours who usually have a facility that's imposed on them beside them as a neighbour.

10 The second one I want to talk about and in relation to wind turbines is the blades are made out of fibre glass and BPA or bisphenol A is one of those ingredients, it's a hardening ingredient in the wind turbine blades. They shed over time, they shed really badly if they break and crush on the ground. They also shed if they catch fire.

15 And I really ask the Commission to consider how it may deal with any sort of contamination that may occur. And I suggest in the first instance that the developer and/or operator are required to conduct a base level test of soil and water on the construction sites prior to any development on those sites. Now, what that does is it sets a base level against which to measure any future contamination or pollution.

20 Secondly, in relation to this, should there be, what I'd say, a potential contamination event, that the operator is required to conduct tests for bisphenol A, BPA, that may have polluted the area and probably within about 400 metres of each tower, whenever there is such an event. And finally, in relation to decommissioning and remediation, if you've taken a base level, there should be a final level for remediation and should there be any solution, well that needs to be addressed during the remediation of the facility. That's all I'd like to mention and I'd ask that the Commission take those into account when considering what conditions may need to be applied to the developer. So thank you for your time.

25 **PROF MENZIES:** Thank you very much, Stan. And I particularly wanted to note to you and to everyone who's presenting that we would appreciate your thoughts in writing submitted to the Commission. So Stan, you gave us some ideas as to how we can deal with the problems you were raising. It's useful for us to have those as a submission, if you haven't already made one.

30 **MR MOORE:** No, I'll ensure that I place a submission before the closing date.

PROF MENZIES: Thank you very much.

35 **MR MOORE:** Thank you for the opportunity. Bye now.

40 **PROF MENZIES:** Okay. Our next speaker is Kathryn Reynolds and I think Kathryn is here in person. Welcome, Kathryn.

MS KATHRYN REYNOLDS: Thank you for the opportunity to raise our concerns with this panel. We're looking forward to evidence this process is independent and genuine.

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This IPC panel today carries the responsibility of ensuring that our agricultural land and our regional communities are not destroyed by Squadron Energy. I note that Squadron Energy stipulated in the neighbour agreements that all who signed publicly support the Spicers Creek Wind Farm. Evidence of this is already in the IPC submissions folder. Many would consider that a conflict of interest.

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So what motivates the objectors? We're not paid to object. Given that we each only have five minutes, you're only hearing some of our specific objections. This project is about money, not affordable, sustainable energy solutions. Squadron have already demonstrated their questionable ethics by encouraging our communities to invest in this project via DomaCom. DomaCom is an unlisted public company. Unlisted due to lack of funds. DomaCom came with a roadshow with Squadron to obtain funds for Spicers Creek Wind Farm.

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We were perplexed about the motive. It appeared to be akin to a pyramid or a Ponzi scheme as it was not possible to exit the investment unless another investor was found. Plus if sufficient funds were not raised, the investors would be proportionally liable for the campaign costs. Remember, Spicers Creek Pty Ltd is a \$10 company. Therefore there was never going to be any negative impacts toward the directors.

25

Is this the sort of fundraising campaign condoned by the Department and this panel for the IPC? It appears that this project has been propelled through the process. I wonder if this is due to political donations or to pressure from project directors, given the large amount of government funding being funnelled to this network of companies.

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Regarding ethics, can Squadron please evidence that they have advised the neighbours of Spicers Creek of all the impacts? After all, DomaCom clearly outlined the fact that investing in the community fund carried risk and they spelt out the risks, although they did forget to mention they were delisted from the ASX due to lack of funds.

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Approving this project cements profits for Squadron Energy and unreliable, unaffordable energy. Everyone in this room knows that wind power is unreliable. Next will be the Squadron gas power generation, supplied by the Squadron gas import terminal at Port Kembla. Undoubtedly the gas power stations are backed up by diesel generators, given that wind is unreliable and it will be impossible to know when and how much gas to have on hand to top up the system.

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The Department state that this project will save 2,060,000 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions per year. Can the Department please publish how that figure was

derived? For example, does it include the building of the gas power stations, the gas import terminal, the gas pipelines and the gas shipping? The Department also states that Spicers Creek will generate 700 megawatts of renewable energy, sufficient to power 370,000 homes per year. Will this power be available 24/7? Is this strictly wind or does it include energy from the gas power station? Where are these 370,000 homes? Are any in the Central-West?

The Department state that the development is located on land where wind development is permissible with consent. Yet Orange Minerals Pty Ltd state that they have had an exploration licence within Spicers Creek Wind Farm area that predates the wind project. I'm pretty sure the entity with the deepest pockets and the best government connections will win that one.

I question the Department's ability to ensure that Squadron will adhere to their conditions of consent. To date in the Central-West we have witnessed Beryl Solar forget to plant their screening, no consequence. We've witnessed Dubbo Solar cause three B-double rollovers on the Golden Highway within six weeks. No consequence. And interesting, no procedure for the cleanup of the three loads of solar panels. There was no EPA or New South Wales Transport investigation. Nothing.

It is not difficult to believe that Squadron will get the same treatment. Do what you like, we'll fund it with taxpayers' money. Whatever the negative impacts, it's simply collateral damage, too bad, so sad. Meanwhile, the people of New South Wales can expect that the cost of their electricity by gas will be controlled by Squadron, there will be likely diesel shortages. Remember this is all backed up by diesel generators. Electricity will be unaffordable, unreliable and impending food shortages will arrive at our doorstep due to the loss of agricultural land, unreliable, unaffordable diesel and electricity.

For those that know nothing about farming, diesel drives tractors and trucks. Tractors and trucks are vital for food production. There's not a battery truck or a battery tractor that can replace the diesel variety, given the weight of the battery and the fact that we're working 24/7 on soft ground. This project is not in the public interest and will not benefit the people of New South Wales but it will benefit Squadron Energy. Thank you.

PROF MENZIES: We're now going back to Grant Piper, who's presenting on his own behalf on this occasion. Grant.

MR PIPER: Yes, I'm presenting on my own behalf. I'm a landowner down the road but this affects aerial firefighting and it'll affect everyone in the REZ surrounded by all these projects. I'm ex-Air Force. I've got 1,600 hours on a C-130 Herc, which is one of the aircraft types used for large aerial tanking. I saw them flying and it's also the type that crashed in the Snowys in the 2019-20 fire season, with the death of all crew.

After flying Hercs, I retrained as a forward air controller, where we were approved down to 50 foot and most of our flying was below 500 foot. So other additional duties during that time, flying safety officer, detachment commander, flight commander and also completed courses in flying safety and risk management and air crew team management. I also hold civilian low level endorsements, including aerobatics to ground level and have held training in issuing for aerobatics to ground level.

I've also been a long time member of the New South Wales RFS and have observed for professional interest aerial firefighting operations during the 2017 Sir Ivan fire, which burnt 55,000 hectares here and then the 2019-2020 fire season. And just last February, we had a fire next door to our property. Is that the first or the second video? First. Could you go back to the first one, please?

So this is from the hill on our property on the neighbours and this is a Boeing 737 tanker, another type used and they even use 747s these days. And you can see the 737 has a wingspan between 102 and 120 feet, depending on its model. I think this is the later model. Entering the smoke, obviously visibility is poor and he's dropping there and if you look at the wingspans compared to the height above the trees, it'd have to be less – you know, 2 to 250 feet max, 250 feet.

Okay, this is from Spain, this is a CL-415, a slightly different aircraft but look at the way he has to soar at the controls to manoeuvre the aircraft and the lack of response of the aircraft, the slow response. And through the turbulence and smoke, visibility, but okay, you can stop it there. Thank you. So you can see the difficulty in controlling the aircraft. They're not that manoeuvrable. A Hercules has a wingspan of 132 feet, it weighs 150,000 pound loaded and you'd be flying at 250 km/h. You are not going to go between turbines like a slalom to drop on target. You're going to stay away.

Now, the RFS, I've seen them at undergrounding inquiries and in other forums and they just deflect from this problem. They don't acknowledge it. They say that the aviation experts will do their risk assessment and it's not up to them to say whether it will happen or not. The reality is the risk assessment of any responsible aviation operator will be you stay away, you do not fly into the turbine.

So that means you have to stay outside the turbine area and some proponents propose initially that they could drop from above, which would mean dropping from 1,000 feet. These turbines are 8 to 900 feet high. We just saw the aircraft dropping between 2 and 250 feet over the target and you need to be down there to hit the target. Dropping from about 1,000 feet, the retardant disperses and you'd be lucky to have any effect whatsoever, so it would be totally useless.

So in my opinion, the RFS management is negligent in their duty to protect life and property by not addressing this very real concern. It's not an esoteric argument. We all live out her and we'll face the fire danger and the consequences of not being able to use aerial firefighting effectively to put out fires until they

5 leave a proponent's project area and then it's 2 or 3 or 5 km closer to your property. Now, we've got a project near us, there and a half ks west of our house on the next ridge and if there's a fire over there, we won't be able to use aviation, which has become the major means of fighting these large firs over the last decade or two and that'll be removed from us.

10 The proponents say that the roads will give access for ground RFS volunteers to go in and fight the fires. So that'll mostly be the neighbours like myself who disagree with the project and could foresee the problems in the first place and that is inequitable. And this is just one project in the REZ, so with a thousand odd turbines across the REZ, everyone's going to be at risk and there's going to be a shortage of ground resources to go in on and fight these on the ground without using aerial support.

15 So you're being asked, Commissioners, to approve a project that is going to lead to catastrophic consequences one day and hopefully we'll be alive to say, "I told you so."

20 If approved, a condition of consent at least should be the Commission requires Squadron Energy and all the other proponents to station several suitably qualified and equipped fire crews within the project areas 24/7 during fire season. It is not the responsibility of us to pick up the tab and go in and fight within these projects. Any questions?

25 **MR WRIGHT:** Sorry, could I just ask a question about helicopters and I know – I'm not sure whether you do fly helicopters or not, are there similar issues, you think, in terms of helicopters?

30 **MR PIPER:** The other aircraft types are small air tankers such as crop dusters, large crop dusters and helicopters. Helicopters, obviously much more smaller and manoeuvrable but it's not as effective. I mean, you're looking at a 737, I don't know what load they carry of retardant, where if you've got helicopters carrying 500, maybe a thousand kilos of water, they can't cover the same fire front.

35 They're only used for point defence, at which they're very effective as, but still the obstacles, the wind monitoring towers are impossible to see at the best of times, let alone in smoke, and the turbines, I doubt that a responsible operator will go within the project area unless there's a very clear flight path ahead. They will still have to stay away but they won't be as restricted as the large fixed wing.

40 **MR WRIGHT:** Thank you.

45 **PROF MENZIES:** Thank you very much, Grant. Our next speaker is Tracie Davies, who's joining us on the telephone. Tracie, are you able to hear me?

MS TRACIE DAVIES: Yes, I can. Thank you.

PROF MENZIES: Okay. So Tracie, you are speaking to the panel and to the community who are gathered here with us.

MS DAVIES: Okay. Thank you. I start?

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PROF MENZIES: By all means.

MS DAVIES: Yes, thank you. Hello all there. I just want to do a quick overview about – I'll just go. So what I wanted to say is the environmental and social and financial and the health costs of [unintelligible 01:45:55] wind energy turbines is out of proportion to any benefit in the form of reducing emissions. That's a huge topic. I just wanted to [unintelligible 01:46:08] concentrate on one area because I've only got five minutes.

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15 So firstly [unintelligible 01:46:13] they're known worldwide [unintelligible 01:46:16] large amounts of bird life and bats, especially the large [unintelligible 01:46:21] eagles. There's all sorts of different birds but usually the large birds, which are rarer because they're large and they're predators, so they breed less but they're much more [unintelligible 01:46:31] lots of little sparrows.

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Second thing, the industrialisation of our pristine landscapes and our beautiful and very precious agricultural land. I'm finding it really difficult to understand why so many of these things are going in the most beautiful landscapes and also taking up our most precious land which makes our food. Irreversible ecological damage. So the habitats are destroyed where they are. Animals do not stay there because of the health and obviously the noise, the disturbance of their habitats.

25

Community division, everywhere – I've heard this everywhere, everywhere we go, communities are bitterly divided. Bitterly divided about these things. Those who are making money from them and the rest, especially those who live near them that cannot bear to live there and are very angry, very upset, sick mentally, mentally very angry and mentally disturbed because there's so much aggravation from these things.

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35 So noise pollution first, those who live near them, obviously there's the constant noise, especially whenever there's a wind. The biggest problem with this, I've learnt from looking at various bits of research, is sleep deprivation. Because the noise changes constantly and it's loud and it's different, it is really – and it just really is different to say an occasional train or noise traffic or other industrial traffic, which becomes repetitious. This, with the wind changes, these noises are very different and there's been lots of people talking about this who really just cannot bear it anymore.

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45 And sleep deprivation is a form of torture. If you cannot sleep, it makes you very sick. It is awful. Also, that would be migraines and headaches and real nervousness, anxiety, stress, all of those sorts of things. Even worse than noise pollution is the infrasound. Infrasounds are low hertz waves. They are a very slow,

long wave, which is like a big vibration and it goes right through biological life. It goes through houses. It bounces around the houses and actually seems to increase.

5 Now, this I'm not just saying off the top of my head, this is proven by scientific research. There's some of it out there, mostly all around the globe, a little bit in Australia, but it's real and we know it's real because of all the different people everywhere that gets the impacts everywhere they go. So some of these – so
10 infrasound for a start, you have to have a huge buffer between people and animals and the infrasound that these things cause and the research says from 15 to 20 km, which is way more than the typical buffer, which is only about 1 km, one a half, something like that.

15 So this is a real problem and more and more, this is becoming a thing that doctors are having to look at or at least scientists, medical scientists and doctors. Some of these things that affect – it seems to hit the person's flight or fight response and they're constantly in that stressed form of – it just seemed to hit that area of them. It's very – I don't know, what would you call it? Primeval. But it's real and people talk about it and the doctors talk about it, the scientists talk about it.

20 But sadly, proponents and I guess the government don't believe in this, but then they don't actually put the money forward and the research forward to actually test this out and of course there's an agenda there which obviously it's money versus people and habitat and that's really sad. I find that really, really sad. But it's not unusual. With the infrasound, it doesn't happen straight away. Sensitivity to it is
25 very [unintelligible 01:50:52]. Along with this [unintelligible 01:50:58] –

PROF MENZIERS: Tracie, we need to bring your presentation to an end at that point.

30 **MS DAVIES:** Okay. [unintelligible 01:51:05].

PROF MENZIERS: At points your voice wasn't clear, so if you would like to make a written submission, that would be appreciated.

35 **MS DAVIES:** Okay. Sorry, that's a shame.

PROF MENZIERS: No, that's mostly we got your message loud and clear but I think take the opportunity to write to us as well.

40 **MS DAVIES:** Can I say just one last point?

PROF MENZIERS: No, Tracie. We really are enforcing the time limits to be fair to people.

45 **MS DAVIES:** Okay. Thank you. Thank you very much. Bye bye.

PROF MENZIERS: We're going to take a short break now. So 10 minutes to have

a walk around, go to the toilet, refresh yourselves and we'll be back. I'm looking for the time, so 11.30 now, let's be back in here by 11.40.

> **SHORT BREAK**

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PROF MENZIES: Thank you everyone for rejoining us. We took a slightly longer break than I'd indicated because we're ahead of schedule. We'd missed a couple of people this morning. One of the people that we missed, Dennis Armstrong, is now available. Dennis, can you hear me on the phone?

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MR DENNIS ARMSTRONG: Yes. I can, Chair.

PROF MENZIES: Okay, Dennis. So, you're speaking to the panel and the community who are gathered here with us. Please proceed with your presentation.

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MR ARMSTRONG: Thank you very much. Good afternoon, panel. Thank you for the opportunity for Save our Surroundings to address the commissioners today. The Department has put a lot of effort into justifying approval of the Spicers Creek and BESS project; however the justifications and recommended conditions have all changed from similar projects of several years ago. This is despite the evidence now available that contradicts many of the claims made by both the proponent and by the Department.

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The proponent, in its EIS, states that, quote, "The Spicers Creek Wind Farm will help provide cleaner, cheaper and reliable electricity, while also reducing greenhouse gas emissions and the impacts of climate change," end of quote, as its justification as to why the project is needed. The Department repeats these claims in its assessment. If all, or even several of these claims are in fact false or unsubstantiated, then by the proponent's own admission, the project is not needed and therefore is not approvable. Save our Surroundings has submitted evidence over the years, including as witnesses at two federal parliamentary inquiries that refutes these often repeated but unsubstantiated claims. Today, SOS will only briefly touch on these claims and then consider the Department's assertion that the project is, quote, "In the public interest and approvable." End of quote.

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So, firstly, the claim that it will provide cleaner electricity. This is not true because China, who generates 30 plus% of human produced greenhouse gas emissions, manufactures nearly all the world's wind works components, including the batteries, and so have the greatest [unintelligible 02:23:21] of emissions for this project. Next point, the wide range of minerals used in wind electricity generating works relies on environmentally damaging, highly toxic processes. Also, the project relies on fossil fuels for manufacturing, transport, construction and operation well into the next decade and beyond.

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The next claim, that it will provide cheaper electricity. Not true, because electricity prices have risen multiple times faster than inflation despite the NEM grid having the highest wind and solar capacity ever. Just look at your electricity bills of five

years ago and now. South Australia has about 60% of wind and solar capacity but have not only the highest retail electricity prices in Australia but are amongst the highest in the world. Every country in the world that has over 30% wind and solar capacity also have amongst the highest electricity costs.

5

The next claim, the claim that it will provide reliable electricity. Not true because wind droughts, of which we have several this year alone, mean little or no wind-generated electricity. Wind power cannot be guaranteed before any time when needed due to the vagaries of the wind. Batteries are largely net consumers of electricity and, at best, some can only supply a few hours of electricity once a day if enough electricity was available to fully charge them.

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The next claim, that it will reduce greenhouse emissions, not true because the project will actually create significant upfront greenhouse emissions from initial mining to final construction, as well as cause other emissions creating construction in support of the project, such as transmission lines, standalone battery energy storage systems and pumped hydro storage. SOS has shown previously that just the wind turbines alone of the proposed size requires up to 17.7 times more weight of materials per megawatt hour than any other form of fully operating electricity generation. By extension, all other emissions created to bring the project to operating stage and its integration into the NEM network cannot be offset during the likely less than 20-year economic life of the project. This is an unsustainable use of the earth's resources.

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Also, the claim that it will reduce the impacts of climate change. This is a meaningless and greenwashing claim because during 2017, the Australian Chief Scientist, Dr Alan Finkel, admitted in a senate hearing that if Australia reduced its total carbon emissions to zero, that it would do virtually nothing to reduce global temperatures. Neither the proponent nor the Department has provided any evidence or provided any quantification for their claim for this project.

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I'd like to now proceed with an example of the unreliability, high costs and exaggerated claims of battery backup. South Australia currently has renewables generating capacity of 60% and Australia's largest battery storage. On 4 June this year, during a peak demand period between 6:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m., the battery started at 6% of providing electricity but were quickly flattened. By 9:00 p.m. of the high demand period and until the next morning, power came from 97% gas fired plants and 3% diesel generators. Zero wind. Zero batteries. And zero solar generation for that whole duration.

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By the way, the whole NEM in this example, had zero solar generation, zero electricity from batteries and only 1% from wind. Power came from coal, gas, diesel and hydroelectric generation. Several wind and sun droughts have occurred this year already, so running down gas reserves, requiring frequent shut down of high energy users and further increasing wholesale electricity costs. Clearly, claims of reliable, cheap and emissions free electricity generation by wind and solar plants with BESS backup are a fallacy. Electricity costs increased by 20–

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MS REYNOLDS: This IPC panel today carries the responsibility of ensuring that our agricultural land, our regional communities are not destroyed by Squadron Energy and the other 40–50 odd industrial energy developments in our backyard. As farmers, we are required to adhere to certain standards to access different
5 markets for our produce. We’re regularly audited to ensure that we uphold those standards. Often the standards we follow are set by the EU. We find that whatever is happening in European markets filters through to us within a year or two. The EU is in the process of banning the use of bisphenol-A (BPA) and other
10 bisphenols in food contact materials.

BPA research published in Australia recently by the Minderoo Foundation, ironically that’s a philanthropic organisation led by Andrew and Nicola Forest, and the Florey Institute, the largest brain research centre in the southern
15 hemisphere, indicate that BPA exposure increases a number of health risks to infants, children and adults. BPA is the main build block used to make polycarbonate plastic and epoxy resins. It is used as a hardening agent in plastics and wind turbine blades. Turbine blades erode. They’re in constant weather on the tops of ridges, so likely they erode consistently. This is called leading edge erosion or blade rot.
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The composition of the turbine blades mean they’re currently not recyclable. Spicers Creek will have 117 turbines, each with three blades, total 351 blades. The project site is 17,645 hectares. Will the farmers in this 17,645 hectares find that their pastures, crops and water are contaminated by contact with BPA? Aren’t we
25 meant to be reducing our consumption of BPA, not increasing it? Aren’t we meant to be avoiding BPA, given the extremely alarming evidence of harm to infants, children and adults? Has anyone considered the harm to livestock, wildlife and the neighbours of this project?

We’ve all seen the pictures of the blades that washed up on Nantucket beachers from the liberated blades. They’re the ones that break off. At last count, the central west has over 1,000 wind turbines in the planning portal. That’s over 3,000 blades. All of these are located in areas perfectly placed to spread BPA far and wide
35 across productive land and water. There is no end-of-life solution for turbine blades. There is currently no useful product that can be made from the materials extracted from obsolete turbine blades. Leading edge erosion impacts on performance, so we’re going to see a lot of obsolete turbine blades. Exactly how much BPA will be distributed over our environment? Just one kilo of BPA can contaminate one billion litres of water. We want a robust study to quantify how
40 much BPA will be released into the environment.

In Squadron’s response to submissions, it did not confirm or deny that there is BPA in the blades but simply put the onus back on the NSW Government by stating that the NSW Government’s position is that wind turbine electricity does
45 not involve the production of pollutants, emissions or waste that can have significant effects on our health or wellbeing. Squadron also state that BPA is still used in food containers. Until when will BPA be used in food containers? The EU

are in the process of banning the use of BPA in food containers. The wind turbines will be in situ for 15–30 years or forever, depending on whether there’s any decommissioning funds. The unsupported fact sheet, published by American Clean Power, as quoted in Squadron’s response to submissions, does not represent a robust study. This is more like client bias. Afterall, we know with developer funded research, you get what you pay for.

There has been no peer review study completed on the amount of BPA in turbine blades. There’s been no peer review study completed on the impact of airborne BPA on agricultural land, produce, communities and water. There is currently legislation underway in the EU to ban BPA in food containers. Turbine blades are subject to much higher risk of degradation; thus the release of bound BPA is highly likely. When will our grain, meat and fibre be banned from EU markets given BPA contamination from leading edge erosion on turbine blades? We would like a condition of consent for this project to be that a robust study be completed on the study of safety of agricultural land with regard to the distribution of BPA. I applaud what Stan Moore said before where he asked that a condition of consent be that the soil be sampled and the water be sampled for BPA prior to construction. Thank you.

PROF MENZIES: Thank you, Kathryn. And just to repeat my earlier request for – put it in writing to us. Thanks. Our next speaker will be Louise Hennessy. Welcome, Louise.

MS LOUISE HENNESSY: Sorry, I just have to look at your wonderful lady with slides at the same time so that I don’t waste my five minutes. Thank you. So, my family live here, 7.8 kilometres away from 117 turbines. The north west visual impact is not addressed in the Department’s assessment report at page 24. Today though, I am focusing on engagement, waterways and health. My background is in community engagement across the Central-West Orana and 23 years in health. The project footprint on the lift, the Elong footprint in the middle and I have overlaid them both. Elong is a significant part of the project. The two main entrances to the site are in Elong.

The assessment writes they displayed on their website for 28 days, advertised in the Dubbo paper, the Mudgee paper and the Australian and they wrote to those within 8 kilometres of the project. Squadron, they say they posted letters too. Well, residents in Elong do not have individual letterboxes. We have one store. If a name or an envelope is addressed incorrectly, it’s not received. There has been no audit or governance to ensure letters were received. Did anyone receive a letter? Squadron say they identified stakeholders in the towns of Goolma, Gulgong and Dunedoo. Community services in Dunedoo, Mid Macquarie, Wellington, Geurie, Central-West. There is no mention of Elong.

I am a member of the council’s Villages Consultative Committee. The plans for Squadron were not raised in that committee until December ‘23. Committee members are gagged by the terms of reference until the minutes are released. That

was February this year, '24. So in January this year, I looked for locals in Elong area with real knowledge of what was proposed. I found none. Hosts, those with neighbourhood agreements, those who did not sign at all and those – or kept to their contracts and stayed gagged. I wrote to all state and federal members to alert them Elong was forgotten.

Squadron's proposal introduction. Even if Elong residents did receive a letter, they would not have responded as the town Gulgong is in the next LGA and Wellington is some 63 kilometres away. The Department's assessment is closer but not accurate in identifying the locations but the Department is completely wrong with our statistics on populations. They are only quoting the villagers. Those impacted most are on the agricultural land and the Department has completely ignored them. In February, EnergyCo and in March, Squadron, made it to the consultation table but the consultation horse had left the stable.

My next point is waterways. The assessment states Squadron is using the Blue Book to manage stormwater. The Blue Book says rural and bushland changes have the potential to adversely affect areas downstream. Dubbo Council grades our roads and these pictures are the results of small grading changes to them. The left is the Elong Village with stormwater pouring down the road and flooding through the local RFS shed. The right photo is my road, Wattle Road, with a three-foot gully down the middle of the road.

The Department's assessment notes that the site is within the Macquarie-Bogan River system. They say the site is not prone to flooding. Squadron's main EIS map, you can see my house on the left. The yellow arrow is the Baragonumbel Creek and the star represents on the map where that creek ends. They're my additions. The star end point has both turbines and dirt roads crossing the creek. I am referencing the Baragonumbel Creek as that flows through my property. I have firsthand knowledge of it but the issue is for all creeks within the site and downstream of the site.

Squadron's map, appendix 15, water resources impact. The end point of the creek, the star, now extends all the way through the project. Squadron says turbine 17 and 97, which I have labelled, could have some flooding impact. But the Department and Squadron limit their scope to the project site. As the Blue Book states, downstream is also a concern and so it is. Locals know the course of water and what evidence will be accepted that it has changed over the 165 kilometres of roads and 117 turbines? These two pictures are my property. They show downstream. The risk of changing water courses is to stop crops and, most importantly, the safety of individual landholders.

My last point is on the health impacts. This is an area of contention and is not fully addressed by the Department or Squadron. There's only two pages about noise in the assessment and it covers all those topics. Squadron predicts they would comply with the operational noise criteria. My meetings with Squadron have only presented the one-page 2014 AMA statement in regards to health impacts. This is

my final slide.

PROF MENZIENS: Please keep going, Louise.

5 **MS HENNESSY:** Sorry, I have rushed. Thank you. This is my final slide. There
is a growing controversy about information around the health impacts of turbines.
You've heard of that today by a number of people. I concur with the 2015 Select
Committee on wind turbines, which it says, "There is a need for more
10 evidence-based research on the human health impact. Our local farming
community also needs reassurance of the same, not just for themselves but for
their stock."

The fact that Squadron relied upon a one-page AMA statement in regards to health
impacts is what motivates me to add that to my cause today. This is not a research
15 paper. It is a statement and those who read it will see that it's a political statement.
My main message today is more work needs to be done before this proceeds. I
appreciate you coming and listening to our community. It is not OK to say that the
impacts of this will be minimised or mitigated or offset in city areas when you're
talking about the livelihood and the lives of our farming communities. Thank you.

20 **PROF MENZIENS:** Questions? Could I just flag to Squadron that we would like to
hear a little bit more about what ongoing consultation you'll be doing as you move
forward, given some of Louise's comments and others that have been made during
the course of the morning. I'm also interested in the potential impact of the
25 infrastructure that's going to be built on water flows and erosion and potential for
outfall from the site to downstream. So if you could either this afternoon, when
you have the opportunity to speak to us, or if you need to take it on notice and
respond to us later. Thank you, Louise.

30 Ten minutes. We're taking another 10-minute break? OK. We're speaking in code
here to each other. We're still ahead of schedule and we want to make sure that
people who we have given times that we're ahead of, get the opportunity to speak.
So we're going to take another 10-minute break. I'm sorry to prolong –

35 **UNKNOWN SPEAKER:** Ten minutes then to the end. That's it.

PROF MENZIENS: Ten minutes and then we're back on schedule and we go to
the end so take a break for a little while.

40 **>SHORT BREAK**

PROF MENZIENS: Welcome back, everyone. Our next speaker is Rebecca
Glencross. I've just noted Rebecca is on phone so, Rebecca, can you hear me?

45 **MS REBECCA GLENCROSS:** Yes, I can. Thank you.

PROF MENZIENS: OK. So, Rebecca, you're speaking to the panel and to the

community gathered here with us. So, over to you.

MS GLENCROSS: Thank you. Yes, so my name's Rebecca Glencross. I am a resident of Gollan and unsigned neighbour of the Spicers Creek Wind Farm project. I want to give you a bit of an overview of the history of the consultation and the impacts that this wind farm will have on my home and my farm business.

So, just quickly, Squadron Energy first attended our property in February of 2023. This is when we first became aware that there was going to be a wind farm project in close proximity to our property within the village of Gollan. At that time, Squadron were pressuring us to sign a neighbour agreement before April 2023, stating that's when the EIS would be submitted. This was untrue, that we later found out. The agreement was enormous. Thirty pages. We could not have proper legal consultation in the time that they allowed.

So, eventually we did get an appointment with our solicitors and within the contract, it did state that we could receive some financial contribution towards the legal interpretation. The solicitor said the contract could not be interpreted for the value being offered by Squadron Energy due to the complexity of the contract. But we requested the interpretation anyway because we felt this was our only option for support and this is what Squadron had alluded to at the time. They would only pay for that consultation if the contract was signed and which we did not sign it. So, Squadron continued to contact our solicitors directly beyond that date to enquire about our decisions. We felt that was an invasion of privacy.

We were feeling quite hopeless in reaching out for help and in our help seeking, we ended up with contacts from the outgoing Energy commissioner, Andrew Dyer, who requested to see the contract because he just simply didn't believe the points I raised were within it. We did provide him with the contract upon his request and, upon viewing that, he was disgusted. He believed it was a violation of the guidelines he recommended to the Commission and he encouraged us to take legal action. So the contract, it had confidentiality. We weren't allowed to talk to anyone about being a signed neighbour but then Squadron went about hosting events with signed neighbours and hosts, obviously excluding all other community members that were not signed.

Within this contract, we had to accept all visual and sound impacts, not knowing what they were and Squadron had not represented themselves to us honestly or with integrity so we were not feeling like we could sign to those terms. The contract removed all rights to complaint directly or through others and we could not take legal action even if the impacts exceeded the estimates. We were not allowed to access the authorities or relevant channels, such as the Energy commissioner, which is a right and underneath it, there were guidelines as the Commission would understand.

So, there was also consent within this for Squadron acquiring some or all of our land if this was recommended as a point within the Planning Department or the

Commission and we would obviously want negotiation around that. There was also a condition of support. So, within the condition of support, we were not to object. We were not to support an objection. We were to support all consent of all permits and approvals or licences. So sitting with the Commission today, the document that's been signed by all signed neighbours and hosts to show support, they are contractually obligated and they are being paid to provide that support. I would like the Commission to note this document.

There was also a caveat in the agreement. So that was a right to charge the title to the developer depending on how the development performed. So, for the bargain basement price of \$10,000 a year, the caveat could allow Squadron Energy to take financial control of our property. If anyone has a look at the recent sales of the land, it's worth substantially more than \$10,000 a year. Squadron do keep pressuring us to name a price that we would sign this contract for but we've never been provided with a new contract and we have provided Squadron with terms that we may consider to sign the contract. But, without seeing a contract, we're never going to sign or name a price.

I would like to note that the distance of the closest turbines to our property. There is a handful that sit between 4–5 kilometres. But it's cumulative impacts on our land value business operations and obviously a personal impact on sense of place and our mental health that do not have a price. Knowing that we have to face 117 of 117 turbines and we would see every single one. In the new energy guidelines that are not being considered in this case, that are more fit for a project of this size, where it would be deemed as extreme impacts on our property. We would expect that this should be recommended and should be recognised. Also, knowing that the community is afraid to speak up. They can't speak up because they are paid and they are contractually obligated to continue to support the project. I would like the Commission to know this today. So, thank you for listening to me and knowing that I'm speaking with [audio gap 03:01:39] –

PROF MENZIES: Thank you very much, Rebecca. I'd like to just note that the panel visited Rebecca's residence yesterday and were greeted by her husband so that we could evaluate their location relative to where the wind farm's proposed to be built. So, once again, thank you, Rebecca. Our next speaker is Mayor Mathew Dickerson from the Dubbo Regional Council. Mayor Dickerson, welcome.

MAYOR MATHEW DICKERSON: Thank you and thanks to the panel for having me come along and present to you today. Obviously, as you know, and as people in the room know, council is not the consent authority for this particular project or any of the renewable projects. One of the things that we see from a council perspective is the opportunity, assuming these are going ahead, to maximise the benefits for our community. That's one thing that this council sets out to do. So I want to talk to the panel today about some of those areas that we see that we can maximise those benefits and deliver real benefits to our community.

The first, of course, is in roads. We work very closely with Squadron Energy, in particular around the Spicers Creek Wind Farm for the roads that they'll need to deliver these various components when they're doing the build. What we believe is that those roads will need to be at a condition, I'm sure – will need to be
5 upgraded to a certain standard, but then that will leave those roads in a better condition for those residents forevermore. Giving a benefit to those residents but also a benefit to council in that that will reduce the maintenance needs for those roads around that area.

10 The second area is in the VPA. One of our great frustrations at council is that V stands for voluntary, not C, compulsory. We'd prefer to see a compulsory planning agreement. That's not the case. We worked on our own framework. We've developed our own framework to deliver, we believe, something that's
15 reasonable. 1.5% of capital investment value from each project that we have discussions with. Now, that's hard when it's not compulsory but we've found Squadron, in this particular project, were quite good. They came to the table, they negotiated and we've now signed that agreement at that 1.5%, which is going to deliver \$30 million in today's terms for our community. But, more importantly, it's helped us with other negotiations we've had with other proponents, because
20 we've already got that one and a half% agreed to by Squadron.

We've also worked on a way where that money will be delivered around the particular area. So, in other words, we have a small radius where most of that money will be spent and, as that radius increases, less money is spent. So the fear
25 of having all that money spent from the Spicers Creek area back in Dubbo City, for example, is unfounded because that planning agreement says it will be delivered in a different way. Then we started to look at other ways we could deliver long term benefits to our community. Squadron Energy said they needed water. They might need, say, 2 gigs of water over the next five years. They can
30 buy that on the open market. That will reduce the amount of water for the farming community.

We sat down and negotiated and said, "We've got a sewerage treatment plant that has four gigs of water that we currently deliver to a farm to grow crops. A better
35 use for that water would be in our community on our sporting fields but we sit over an aquifer. We can't use that sewerage treatment water over an aquifer." Squadron Energy have agreed, and we've got an MOU signed, and we've got permission from the OLG to continue on with a PPP, a \$3.6 million advanced waste water treatment facility will be built in Dubbo. Squadron will have access to
40 that water during construction. After the construction phase, Dubbo will have access to that water. Some 700 megs a year forevermore, delivering ongoing, lasting benefits forever.

45 Housing's another issue. We've said to Squadron in this project, we don't want a workers' camp. We want those people living in the community in Dubbo, in Wellington, in the villages, because that will deliver better economic benefits to our community. One of those areas that they've worked on is a 10-hectare area of

land that we've agreed to lease to Squadron. They'll put the underground infrastructure, the pipes, the sewerage, the water, for telecommunications, et cetera, in the ground. They'll build on that workers' accommodation, higher density. In the end, when they've finished with that and they've got a five-year lease with a five-year option, that higher density housing will be removed. We'll be left with ground with all the underground infrastructure to build out an area that can used for more affordable housing. So, again, a huge benefit to our community.

We've also talked to Squadron about having social benefits delivered. One of the areas we've certainly talked about there is further employment in area and to that end, Squadron have now opened up an office not only in Dubbo but also in Wellington. Ten employees in the Wellington area. A huge benefit to the Wellington community.

The last area that we've really focused on is with a REACT Centre. A Renewable Energy Awareness and Career Training Centre. Now, this is a thing that we believe will deliver significant benefits economically to our community in the short term with the training requirements that we'll have but, in the long term, we see this similar to a Parkes Telescope Visitor Centre, a Snowy Discovery Centre in the Snowy Hydro Scheme. Somewhere that will attract potentially 100,000 visitors a year coming through the community of Wellington and that number of visitors will fundamentally change the economy of Wellington.

So, from a council perspective, again, as I mentioned, we're not the consent authority. We don't get to say yes or no. We're not trying to say yes or no. What we are trying to do is deliver significant benefits to our community. With those various components that I've just laid out there, we believe the Spicers Creek Wind Farm, if it goes ahead, will deliver significant economic benefits to the Dubbo Regional Council LGA. Thank you.

PROF MENZIERS: Thank you, Mayor. Questions? No. We're good. OK, we're now moving to Nicole Brewer, who's going to speak on behalf of the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure. Nicole's online. Nicole, can you hear us?

MS NICOLE BREWER: I can hear you.

PROF MENZIERS: Excellent, so you are speaking to the panel but also to the community who are gathered here with us. Nicole, I have some questions for you but they haven't yet come through to me on my device.

MS BREWER: That's OK.

PROF MENZIERS: So, I'm just waiting for my support team to bring something across to me so I can read my questions to you. Thank you. So, I've just got a couple of questions here, Nicole, and then we'll allow you to address the group on the basis of what you've heard during the course of the meeting. Things that you wanted to respond to on behalf of the Department.

5 The first one of the issues that were raised by us as a panel – and I’m going to read this out so that we get it right. “In light of recent guidance from the Court of Appeal in the Bowdens matter, are there any likely impacts of this development that, although they may not form part of this present application, the panel should consider in its determination?”

10 **MS BREWER:** Thanks, Neal. That decision by the Court of Appeal on the Bowdens Silver Project was only made in the last two weeks. So, the Department’s currently considering that judgement and the implications of the decision.

15 **PROF MENZIES:** OK, so that we will hear from you in due course with guidance as to how we should act?

MS BREWER: Well, I can take that on notice. Yes.

20 **PROF MENZIES:** Yes. Thanks, Nicole. That’s the correct language for what I was trying to say. One of the matters that came up during the course of the day that I was particularly interested in as an agriculturalist was the question of biosecurity for the farms who are both part of the scheme but also the neighbours. Could you comment on whether the Department considered biosecurity as an issue?

25 **MS BREWER:** It has been considered in the assessment. There were a number of commitments that Squadron provided around the ongoing implementation of biosecurity controls and access controls throughout construction, operation and decommissioning in order to manage to the risks for regional agricultural resources and productivity. So the sorts of things that those commitments included were around weed management, making sure that machinery equipment is cleaned thoroughly prior to entering the development footprint. Squadron have also committed to fencing so that those areas are demarcated and that there are access control measures to manage biosecurity issues. So there are a number of commitments made in the EIS by Squadron.

30 Squadron’s also committed that management plans will contain measures for those regular inspections relating to weeds and pests. In addition, the Department included requirements in its recommended conditions to address some of the biosecurity issues around controlling weeds and feral pests, controlling erosion and also having regard to the hygiene guidelines. The protocols to protect priority by diversity areas in New South Wales. So this was specifically included due to the proximity of the project site to the Dapper Nature Reserve.

35 So, DPI Agriculture also reviewed our recommended conditions, and they didn’t raise any issues with the proposed conditions.

40 **PROF MENZIES:** Thanks, Nicole. My next question is this is one of the early

developments in the REZ. Can you elaborate on cumulative impact considerations and how the study area boundaries are defined in relation to the cumulative impact assessment studies?

5 **MS BREWER:** Thanks, Neal. The study area for cumulative impact studies and
cumulative impact assessment of each matter will vary. That depends on the
specific characteristics of that matter and the scale and nature of the potential
impacts from the project with other relevant future projects. So, that study area
needs to be broad enough to capture the cumulative impact but not so
10 unnecessarily large that it might be trying to consider impacts that might be
negligible relative to the baseline condition.

Several of the projects that were considered for cumulative impact are either under
construction or currently operating. But most of the potential cumulative impacts
15 would be experienced when the construction period of multiple projects overlap.
So, material cumulative impacts aren't considered likely with the construction
periods of these projects. Such that the construction periods with Spicers Creek
Wind Farm would overlap.

20 So for projects that have not yet been submitted for planning assessment, the
projects coming later would be required to include consideration and assessment
of the potential cumulative impact in EISs. Having regard to the existing and
approved energy projects that are in close proximity to that project being
considered. So, the Department's assessment report did consider the cumulative
25 impact for particular projects where we thought there might be a potential overlap
and that was Sandy Creek, which has recently been exhibited and Cobbora and
Dapper Solar Farms, which the EIS is not yet submitted. The approved
Central-West REZ Transmission Project. So, they're probably a couple of key
areas where those construction impacts might overlap.

30 One area that has been raised a concern for a number of councils in the REZ is
around workers' accommodation but, in this instance, and I think we just heard
from the Dubbo mayor around the temporary workers' accommodation camp that
Squadron have proposed, with that agreement of council, so that that would mean
35 the project wouldn't compete with other surrounding projects for accommodation.

Cumulative traffic impacts is one that is also a key issue in the development of the
REZ. The transport assessment for the project found that the Golden Highway has
ample spare capacity to cater for the estimated future traffic volume. The transport
40 assessment also looked at the local road network and found that there was also
spare capacity for the proposed project, but that there were some road upgrades
that were needed to the local network. But there are no other proposed projects
that would be using those local roads. That's Sweeneys Lane and Saxa Road
where it exits off the state road network. So Squadron's committed to undertake
45 those works in consultation with the relevant roads authorities and Energy
Corporation as relevant.

The recommended conditions also include the traffic management plan and requires them to detail measures to minimise those potential cumulative traffic impacts at the point in time when a little bit more is known about that scheduling. So, we don't feel that there is likely to be a significant issue here because the local roads – there isn't a cumulative impact on the local roads off the highways and the highway has sufficient capacity. But, should it be an issue at the point when they're commencing construction, there's facility in the traffic management plan to address that.

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The other issues where we're looking at cumulative impact, potentially for projects, there's a cumulative visual impact. But there weren't any projects that were likely to cause a cumulative visual impact with this project. We've also considered biodiversity and the cumulative impacts on biodiversity and particularly on box-gum woodland. Our assessment report did consider that there are 10–12 projects at various stages of the planning process in the Central-West region, including this project and that there could be a total area of up to 2,000 hectares of box-gum woodland that might be impacted.

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Now, even with the variation of what you might consider is the existing extent of that community, the Department felt that that would represent between 0.3% and 0.85% of the total area of box-gum woodland in New South Wales. So the Department considered that it was reasonable to conclude that a cumulative impact of less than 1%, even using the most conservative assumptions is still unlikely to contribute significantly to extinction of box-gum woodland and therefore unlikely to be a serious and irreversible impact.

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But all the biodiversity impacts for the project would be offset in accordance with the biodiversity offset scheme. Squadron has also committed to additional measures for box-gum woodland and that is in addition to the offset that would already be required for box-gum woodland. They're proposing an additional area of around 54 hectares that would be secured in perpetuity. That's to achieve, you know, some positive outcomes. It might help further protect box-gum woodland community.

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So, I guess, in summary, the Department has considered cumulative impacts to the extent that they're relevant for each of the matters that we've considered in our assessment. I've just, I guess, given a little bit of an overview of the ones that we think are more the key issues for potential cumulative impact.

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PROF MENZIES: Thank you, Nicole. The other issue that's come up repeatedly through the course of the morning is what happens at the end of the life of projects like this. So we're interested in the government's position on rehabilitation and decommissioning. Questions like security bonds, ongoing responsibilities, et cetera. Could you speak to that, please?

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MS BREWER: Thank you. So, it's NSW Government policy that financial assurances should not be required by the conditions of consent. And any financial

assurances should be dealt with in commercial arrangements outside of the planning system. So the agreements with host landowners should include arrangements for decommissioning and rehabilitation of that project infrastructure.

5 The recommended conditions require the application to rehabilitate the site in accordance with a number of objectives, which include that the site must be safe, stable and non-polluting. That above ground infrastructure and access roads and underground cabling must be removed unless the Planning Secretary agrees otherwise and that the land must be rehabilitated and restored to the pre-existing
10 use. So, it's the Department's position, I guess, that with the implementation of those objective-based conditions, that the Department considers the project would be suitably decommissioned at the end of the project life and the site would be appropriately rehabilitated.

15 If an applicant or a landholder fails to meet those decommissioning and rehabilitation obligations, that would be prescribed by any relevant development consent, the Department can then use its enforcement powers under the EP&A Act to address any breaches of the consent conditions.

20 **PROF MENZIES:** Thank you, Nicole. Nicole, we wondered whether there were other issues that had come up during the course of the day that you wanted to respond to?

25 **MS BREWER:** No, there wasn't anything additional other than, I guess, the questions that you've raised today that we heard discussion on.

30 **PROF MENZIES:** OK, let me just check with my fellow commissioners that they have no further questions for you before we let you go. Michael, you're good? Suellen?

MS FITZGERALD: Yes, I'm good.

35 **PROF MENZIES:** OK. OK, Nicole. Thank you very much. Our final speaker for the session is Trish McDonald for Squadron Energy. Trish, we're looking to you to address any of the things that you've heard during the course of the day that you can respond to immediately or those that you consider important that you're going to come back to us on.

40 **MS MCDONALD:** So, firstly, I'd like to thank the speakers present here today and also those online for presenting and participating in this very important process. I will take the opportunity to respond to some of the issues that have been realised today. Also noting your request, Neal, to talk about ongoing engagement, which I will absolutely do. So, firstly, the idea that we, as Squadron, have
45 preconceived ideas about objectives. Squadron Energy and the Spicers Creek Wind Farm team values our relationships with the community. We understand and respect all viewpoints, even though they may not always be the same as ours.

With respect to ongoing engagement, the Chair has requested some further information. So, the project team will continue to engage with all stakeholders going forward as we move into the various phases of the project, including construction and operations, should the project be approved. That engagement will be in accordance with our stakeholder engagement plan, which guides our discussions. So this plan will be updated for construction and operational purposes. We also have a stakeholder engagement database, which records all of our communication, both face to face and in writing. This will be used throughout the construction and operation phases also.

Some of the mechanisms for engagement will continue to include face-to-face engagement, one-on-one meetings, newsletters, our website. We have the free call information line and we're also aware of the Elong Elong Community Progress Association that is recently formed. Our regional economic development coordinator, who's actually in the audience today, has been in touch with this group regarding support options for the Rural Fire Service. I'd be happy to provide any further information around our engagement processes going forward should the Commission require.

Just briefly touching on neighbour agreements, which has been raised today. Squadron Energy's neighbour agreements are entered into voluntarily. We recommend all landowners obtain legal advice prior to entering into the agreement. Squadron Energy pays for this. Agreements include personal and commercially sensitive information for both parties, so confidentiality clauses are included to protect that information. Our neighbour agreements are industry standard and we do not limit a landowner from raising concerns about breaches of approvals. However, those neighbour agreements do contain clauses that limit a landowner from objecting to our project and the impacts the landowner has agreed to accept.

In relation to Rebecca's submission, I would like to note that we first engaged with her in early 2020, not 2023, and it was made clear that the family did not wish to be involved in the project. We took on board that feedback and designed the project with appropriate buffer distances.

I'd like to take the opportunity to respond more fully to the specific issues raised separately. Biosecurity, I think that's been covered by the Department adequately so I had similar points in relation to that, Mr Chair. Regarding water, some comments were noted around the description of water use in the EIS and the submissions report. At the time those documents were prepared, we were working with Dubbo Regional Council on a public private partnership for the advanced waste water treatment plant. Sign off on this was needed from the Office of Local Government, as noted by the mayor earlier, which has since been received. So we are now able to talk about that more publicly and I can confirm, as I mentioned in my presentation this morning, that 250 megalitres per year of recycled water will be provided by the plant for construction at Spicers Creek Wind Farm.

Just looking to see what else I can cover off on for you. Bushfire, absolutely that's a very key issue. I would like to note the Australasian Fire Authorities Council has developed a national position and guidelines on wind farms and bushfire prevention, preparedness, response and recovery. The guideline states that wind farm operators should be responsible for ensuring the relevant emergency protocols and plans are properly executed in an emergency. Relevant operational requirements will be addressed via a bushfire emergency management plan to be prepared in consultation with RFS.

Wind turbines can actually be remotely shutdown during emergency provisions. This actually happened in December 2023 at our Crudine Ridge Wind Farm, which is 50 kilometres south of Mudgee. There was a local fire in a neighbouring property and the wind turbines were shut down. I would also be happy to respond more fully to the Commission on bushfire.

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: BPA.

MS MCDONALD: Just regarding decommissioning, if that's OK? Picking up on a point that was noted by the Department, I can confirm that Squadron is responsible for the costs of decommissioning and rehabilitation. They are actually included in all of our host landowner agreements. So, look, I think there's certainly been some important issues raised today. Issues around infrasound, BPA, specific water and erosion examples for relevant turbines, I probably can't really do those justice here today but I would like to take those on notice and to respond more fully. Thanks, everyone.

PROF MENZIES: Hold, Trish, while I just check with my fellow commissioners whether they have questions.

MS MCDONALD: Sorry.

PROF MENZIES: Suellen?

MS FITZGERALD: Yes. Yes, I do. Chair, I've got a few. You mentioned in your first presentation about ongoing consultation with those non-associated residents who – around visual mitigation. I'm wondering if those ongoing consultations and potential eventual works require a neighbourhood agreement?

MS MCDONALD: Look, we'd be happy to enter into a neighbour agreement. As I'm sure you're aware, the recommended conditions require us to engage with neighbours, should they request it, on screening and other mitigation measures.

MS FITZGERALD: Right, but it doesn't require necessarily a neighbourhood agreement to do mitigation measures? No?

MS MCDONALD: No.

MS FITZGERALD: OK.

MS MCDONALD: It's entirely voluntary.

5 **MS FITZGERALD:** Thank you. My second question is around during operations. How will Squadron contain project traffic from leaking into non-designated roads during the course of the construction?

10 **MS MCDONALD:** So, there are a number of ways to do this. It's been employed on many large-scale industrial projects and mine sites. But as indicated in the submissions report, we will commit to implementing a very comprehensive traffic management plan. One of the elements of that plan will be that all employees that come to site and contractors and suppliers will be required to sign on to a driver code of conduct. That code of conduct will quite clearly articulate the specified routes.

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20 There will be monitoring measures put in place around that code of conduct so that it would basically be sort of like a three strikes and you're out policy. If it was found that those requirements weren't being complied with, then that particular individual or company or supplier would not be allowed back on site. Some of the ways that we can actually monitor traffic include spot checks, cameras, actual GPS sort of tracking devices for the heavy vehicles. It's an important issue that will be taken very seriously during operations and construction, sorry.

25 **MS FITZGERALD:** Thank you. And that includes public roads within the project site that are not designated for construction use?

MS MCDONALD: That's correct.

30 **MS FITZGERALD:** Thanks, Chair.

PROF MENZIES: Michael?

35 **MR WRIGHT:** Just one question, Trish, while you're up there. The issue of public liability insurance was raised by one of the speakers here today. A view that coverage available to a farmer may not be sufficient to cover the damage that might be caused by, for example, a fire escaping from a neighbouring farm on to a wind farm. Does Squadron have a view on that issue?

40 **MS MCDONALD:** We do. It has been raised previously. I would like the opportunity to take that one on notice –

MR WRIGHT: Sure.

45 **MS MCDONALD:** – and respond more fully, if that's OK. But it has been raised. We're aware of it and we note it as an important issue.

MR WRIGHT: Thank you.

PROF MENZIENS: Thank you, Trish. So there are a few things there that you'll take on notice and provide us with information. That's appreciated. I have a closing statement to make, ladies and gentlemen.

Thank you for sharing the morning with us. This brings us to the end of the public meeting into Spicers Creek Wind Farm SSD41134610. Thank you everyone who's participated in this process and to my fellow commissioners. We've appreciated the input that's been made today. There have been a lot of really thoughtful presentations made to us and that's been greatly appreciated. Just a reminder that it's not too late to have your say on this application. Simply click on to the make a submission portal on our website or send us a submission via email or post. The deadline for written comments is 5:00 p.m. next Friday, 6 September 2024.

In the interest of openness and transparency, we'll be making a full transcript of this public meeting available on our website in the next few days. At the time of determination, the Commission will publish its statement of reasons for decision, which will outline how the panel took the community's views into consideration as part of our decision-making process. Finally, I want to publicly thank my fellow commissioners, Suellen Fitzgerald and Michael Wright. Indeed to thank you all for participating and those of you who are here but also those of you who are online. From all of us at the Commission, enjoy the rest of your day and good afternoon.

>THE MEETING CONCLUDED