

Submission
No 4

**INQUIRY INTO IMPACT OF RENEWABLE ENERGY
ZONES (REZ) ON RURAL AND REGIONAL
COMMUNITIES AND INDUSTRIES IN NEW SOUTH
WALES**

Name: Mrs Julia James

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Submission: The Impact of Renewable Energy Development on Rural Communities

As Australia accelerates its transition to renewable energy, rural communities like mine are increasingly bearing the brunt of this shift. While the push toward net-zero emissions is necessary for addressing environmental concerns, the rapid development of renewable energy infrastructure—especially wind farms, solar farms, and the vast network of transmission lines—poses significant risks to the sustainability and well-being of our rural areas.

Our communities depend heavily on shared natural resources—agricultural land, forests, and water systems—to sustain our way of life. But the development of large-scale transmission lines, along with wind and solar farms, threatens to upend this delicate balance. These projects consume vast tracts of land and enormous amounts of water to create concrete, ultimately sacrificing agriculture in favour of renewables.

At the core of the issue is the inherently unfair classification of Significant State Infrastructure (SSI) and Critical State Significant Infrastructure (CSSI). When land is compulsorily acquired under these designations, procedural fairness is completely disregarded. Procedural fairness is a fundamental aspect of the rule of law, ensuring that administrative decisions are made transparently, without bias, and by an impartial decision-maker. However, once a CSSI declaration is made, any semblance of fairness is effectively thrown out the window.

Moreover, the CSSI declaration fails the Public Purpose Test, which is intended to ensure that land is not compulsorily acquired for private gain without serving a broader public need. If EnergyCo is building transmission lines on behalf of network operators, are we not sacrificing farmers for private benefit? Will Athena Energy be sharing its profits with the New England area?

The sprawling web of transmission lines needed to link these renewable energy projects to the grid is nothing short of a nightmare. The construction and maintenance of these structures will sever our vital access roads, force immense sacrifices on every single one of us, and tear our landscapes apart. They'll render our airstrips useless, expose us to severe biosecurity threats, and dramatically increase the risk of bushfires. This isn't just about the destruction of biodiversity—it's about the complete desecration of the natural beauty and ecological integrity of our land. A land that has been a source of deep pride and cultural significance for First Nations, a cornerstone of our community, and the lifeblood of our farming heritage. What's happening here is nothing short of environmental vandalism, sacrificing agriculture in the name of net zero.

The constant stream of workers hauling oversized vehicles up and down our narrow roads is also creating serious risks. These roads weren't built to handle two-way traffic, let alone the heavy traffic associated with these projects. The relentless construction brings years of stress and danger that no one in our community should have to endure.

Renewable energy developments, particularly solar farms, also have significant impacts on water resources. The construction process often involves extensive land clearing, leading to soil erosion and contamination of local water bodies with sediment and pollutants. The ongoing operation of some renewable energy facilities may require water for cooling or cleaning, further straining our already limited water supplies. This has serious consequences for communities like ours that depend on these water resources for irrigation and livestock.

The thought of massive camps being built in rural communities with just a single police officer to maintain order is downright terrifying. A 1,000-man camp to construct these towers? Specialists being flown in from halfway across the world? Imagine being in the middle of nowhere, with your wife and kids on a farm right next to that 1,000-man camp. As a woman living on a farm with a young child, the anxiety this brings is unimaginable.

The influx of construction workers and the looming presence of industrial-scale energy facilities threaten to completely change the fabric of our small towns and rural landscapes. This isn't just about physical changes—it's about the erosion of our cultural heritage and the tight-knit community bonds we've worked so hard to maintain. Property values are already plummeting, with no one able to sell their place while this uncertainty hangs over us. And who would want to buy into a community when there's the real possibility of becoming host to this intrusive infrastructure? The fear of being forced into an access agreement, of having men and trucks invade your property for years on end, only to have a massive hole blasted out of your land so they can string up a 80m high tower on a 250-metre-wide easement that leaves you staring at—and hearing—industrial infrastructure from your back door! This is a nightmare no one should have to face, yet this is what farmers are being told they must endure.

I have spent countless unpaid hours doing submissions and fighting to get farmers a fair go. Negotiating with the government has forced the farming community to become 'experts.' We have to prove to the government that our land hosts endangered species or culturally significant areas. We're the ones who have to hire lawyers, ecologists, and valuers out of our own pockets. We're the ones who have to decipher the convoluted language of the Private Agreements document. And just when we think we're getting a handle on it, they throw another 260 pages at us to study while we struggle to ensure we don't get duped by a so-called government 'representative.' Where do we send our invoice for the endless hours we've already spent on these documents and the many more hours we're yet to endure? This burden shouldn't fall on us, but it does, and it's draining us every step of the way.

While the broader population benefits from the clean energy produced, rural communities are left to disproportionately bear the burdens of renewable energy development. We face the loss of land, resources, and environmental quality, while the financial benefits are reaped by foreign corporations.

Yes, the transition to renewable energy is essential, but it's crucial to acknowledge and address the significant impacts on rural communities like ours. We should not be viewed merely as sites for resource extraction but as partners in the energy transition. Efforts must be made to minimise environmental damage, protect local resources, and ensure that the benefits of

renewable energy development are equitably shared. The communities being disrupted must be supported. This includes proper compensation for land use, investment in local infrastructure, and the creation of sustainable job opportunities that genuinely benefit rural populations. Without careful planning and consideration, the rush to renewable energy is leading to long-lasting harm to the very communities that are essential to maintaining the environmental and social fabric of our nation. The distrust of the government is at an all-time high, and for good reason.