

**Submission  
No 107**

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

**Name:** Mrs Myree Russell

**Date Received:** 31 January 2025

---

The Hon. Mark Banasiak MLC, Committee Chair  
Inquiry into the Impact of Renewable Energy Zones on  
Rural and Regional Communities and Industries in NSW  
Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Regional NSW  
NSW Parliament House  
6 Macquarie Street  
SYDNEY NSW 2000

30<sup>TH</sup> January 2025

Dear Mr Banasiak and Committee Members,

I welcome this important inquiry into the impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) on and in particular to rural and regional communities in NSW and the opportunity to make a submission.

My husband and I are landholders and our property at Mount Thorley is within the proposed north corridor of the Hunter Transmission Project (HTP). The HTP involves building a new 500kV transmission line to connect Bayswater to Eraring. The aim of the HTP is to unlock the supply of electricity from the Central-West Orana and New England REZs allowing it to be then imported to the grid via Bayswater and then delivered to consumers in the Hunter, Sydney and Illawarra.

### **BACKGROUND**

The Russell family purchased land at Mount Thorley, some ten kilometres from the Singleton township, in 1928. My husband has spent his entire life, some seventy plus years, living and working on this property and has seen many changes to the Mount Thorley area during his lifetime. These include the introduction of open cut coal mining with numerous expansions of the surrounding mines, the development of the industrial area and the coal corridor. As one of the few remaining private landholders in the area, we have learnt to co-exist with these developments.

Our dairy farmer neighbour, as well as my husband and I, have vigorously opposed the HTP corridor from the onset due to its permanent detrimental impact on strategic agricultural land and farming enterprises. Our properties are farming business enterprises, not grazing properties and both have been used for agriculture for some 100 years. It is our vision to continue to do so for the future generations as we both have adult children actively working on our farms and wishing to continue the farming legacy.

### **AGRICULTURAL IMPACTS**

The proposed HTP easement on both farms, with its high voltage 500kV transmission lines, is to be on classified biophysical strategic agricultural land (BSAL). This land with its fertile soil and reliable water source, the Hunter River, is some of the best farmland in the Hunter Valley. The land within the easement will in effect become "sterilized", as it is common knowledge that water and electricity do not mix. In 2012 some 2.74 million hectares of BSAL was mapped in NSW for protection and the management of proposed competing land uses. Any state significant mining or coal seam gas (CSG) proposal on BSAL was subjected to an additional level of scrutiny. In 2020, as part of the NSW electricity infrastructure roadmap, amendments to the Electricity Infrastructure Investment Act 2020 No 44 enabled such energy infrastructure as required by the HTP permissible on BSAL. Our land is our livelihood and no amount of compensation offered for hosting transmission lines could ever compensate for the loss of such valuable land.

Agricultural production is being impacted as many landholders and farmers across rural and regional NSW are being imposed to host REZ transmission lines and associated infrastructure, resulting in the elimination and “sterilization” of prime cropping and farmland. There is also the temporary loss of crop production due to the construction and then at completion, the incompatibility of agricultural activities beneath or within the transmission line easement.

### **COMMUNITY DIVISION**

Many landholders have made the choice, and embrace the opportunity to supplement their income by hosting renewable energy infrastructure, sometimes to the disgruntlement of their neighbours. This can create community division and discord.

The transmission infrastructure required to transport all of this additional energy is being imposed on landholders, there isn't a choice. The irony is that the energy being transported by the high voltage 500kV lines with their associated hazards and health risks, is not for the benefit of the landholder and the local community, but for the metropolitan population on the east coast of NSW. The land will be acquired regardless, either by mutual agreement or compulsory acquisition.

Why hasn't it been made a requirement for every industrial building in Metropolitan NSW to host solar panels and a mandate for inner city car parks to do the same? This is where the energy is most needed and it would free up our important agricultural land needed to continue to feed and clothe our nation.

### **CONSULTATION**

I have attended EnergyCo “Drop In” Sessions for both the Hunter Transmission Project and the Port to REZ. These sessions provided a very general overview and the attending consultants had very little knowledge of exact details. As a local community member impacted by both projects, I would expect the people coming to “showcase” any particular project to know their product and be familiar with the general area.

The consultation process and engagement has been extremely frustrating as the people from EnergyCo have had very little knowledge or understanding of intense farming and farming practices in general, for meaningful engagement. There is little comprehension of the disruption and destruction transmission lines will have on farmland and farming enterprises.

On the 12<sup>th</sup> December 2024, nearly twelve months to the day from when we were informed, we “may be impacted” by the HTP, my husband and I, as well as our dairy farmer neighbour, were given opening letters of acquisition from EnergyCo and the alignment across our properties finally revealed.

The insensitivity of EnergyCo issuing opening letters of acquisition some thirteen days before Christmas is totally inconsiderate and a reflection of the entire “consultation” process.

### **FINANCIAL IMPACT**

It is noted in the Inquiry's Terms of Reference section d under ‘proposed compensation to regional NSW residents impacted by REZ transmission lines’ and in particular part III ‘financial impact of compensation on the State's economy.’

Having only recently been issued an opening acquisition letter, a compensation amount is yet to be discussed. I encourage the committee to explore the costing thus far of any one of the projects included in the REZs, before any compensation amounts have been paid to landholders and neighbours.

The many various consultants contracted to EnergyCo for technical services, acquisition, planning, engagement, geotechnical investigation, etc and the EIS preparation. What is the financial impact on the State's economy for all of this?

### **MENTAL HEALTH IMPACTS**

The mental health impact of affected landholders impacted by the REZs must not be overlooked and taken into careful consideration. Many landholders across rural NSW would have similar family history, roots and deep connection to their properties, as my husband does.

On a personal level, the interaction with EnergyCo and the HTP have caused us much distress and frustration, sometimes occasioning out of character behaviour. There is great apprehension at knowing future farming operations are going to be severely affected to this property and anger at the loss of its visual beauty. The emotions my husband and I are experiencing with regard to the HTP and its proposed corridor over our property are those associated with grief – sadness, anger, shock, denial and depression.

### **SOCIAL LICENCE**

As primary producers and farmers we are required and are constantly working to maintain our social licence to operate to produce food and fibre, not only for here in Australia, but for export overseas.

The HTP as a State Significant Development (SSD) does not require local council to assess and consent. As a priority transmission infrastructure project designated by the NSW Government this project may proceed under different regulatory frameworks.

The Local Environmental Plan for Singleton lists the four objectives of the Land Use Table under Zone RU1 Primary Production as:

- to encourage sustainable primary production by maintaining and enhancing the natural resource base
- to encourage diversity in primary industry enterprises and systems appropriate for the area
- to minimise the fragmentation and alienation of resource lands
- to minimise conflict between land uses within this zone and land uses with adjoining zones.

As landholders we are continually working to achieve the above objectives, but the HTP with its special provisions allow it to be developed despite potential conflicts with local objectives.

In summary, farmers across rural and regional NSW are bearing the burden of significant infrastructure such as transmission lines in the move to renewables.

The significance of renewable infrastructure projects, such as the HTP, for energy security is continuously being emphasised, but it is just as critical to get their placement and location correct. These are to be a forever piece of infrastructure that will be replaced and upgraded in the future as the easement will have been secured. The existing powerlines in our local area, such as the surrounding 300kV, have avoided going directly across as much strategic farmland as possible.

I am not against renewables, but am very much for preserving every square metre of productive and biophysical strategic agricultural land (BSAL) we have left. All of our strategic agricultural land must be warranted protection from all forms of development. If our farming capabilities are lost, we lose the ability to feed our nation and its ever-increasing population.

I appreciate the opportunity to raise my concerns regarding the impacts of Renewable Energy Zones on rural and regional communities.

Yours faithfully

MRS MYREE RUSSELL