

SUBMISSION TO AEMO - ISP

RE: SUBMISSION TO 2024 INTEGRATED SYSTEM PLAN
TO: AEMO
FROM: DR JOE McGIRR, MP, Member for the State Seat of Wagga Wagga
DATE: 30 January 2024

Thank you for considering this submission.

First, I would like to state that as a strong supporter of a renewable energy future, I believe development of the appropriate infrastructure is a key component of efforts to reach Australia's emissions reduction targets and provide a better future for all.

However, it is my firm belief that these projects should only proceed with the appropriate social licence – that is, a genuine commitment to engagement, including a willingness to make transformative change that is guided by community feedback.

Only in this way can developers overcome a deep-seated opposition by many in rural and regional Australia to renewables projects. Accordingly, the social licence needed to remove barriers to a renewable-energy future cannot be achieved without true consultation and a willingness to act, rather than just listen.

Every modern corporation is expected to take account of social licence. Yet the ISP process does not fully do so.

The only input from consumers concerns price, that is, the minimisation of the financial impact of infrastructure construction on the final price electricity consumers pay. This inevitably means that the cheapest option will always be chosen irrespective of environmental and community impact, unless a government intervenes to mandate protection for environment.

We all agree that consumers should have access to the cheapest and most reliable electricity supply as possible but even before any new infrastructure is built, a change in attitude is needed to ensure those directly affected by the infrastructure have an opportunity to make real and lasting improvements to the way in which the infrastructure is planned and built.

While noting that stakeholder engagement does currently take place, there are too many instances in which that engagement simply spells out the intention of the build, without providing those most affected with avenues to alter the works to protect their own livelihoods, properties and quality of life.

In effect, these builds are delivered without the social licence that would enable their acceptance by affected communities.

An example can be found in the development of Transgrid's HumeLink project through my electorate of Wagga Wagga.

In some instances, landholders are told what will happen rather than asked what should be done and in the worst instances, these stakeholders are told that if they do not agree with the proposal, the developers would compulsorily acquire their land.

This has been devastating to those affected in the past and continues to present a real threat to the way of life enjoyed by people along the proposed route. As such, this approach is not about true consultation and cannot hope to achieve social licence.

Engagement without respect can have a major impact on the financial, physical and mental health of those affected, and does nothing to encourage communities to change their opposition to projects they see as intrusive, damaging and inflexible.

A selection of media reports below illustrates how some regional stakeholders feel about having no viable say in developments that will change their lives.

['Cheap and nasty'](#)

[Opposition threatens climate goals](#)

[Farmer fury](#)

[Upper House inquiry](#)

While cost remains the over-riding factor in decision making, compromise cannot be achieved.

In the HumeLink case, agreement to underground at least some of the power lines along the route would go a long way towards uniting the community in support, rather than opposition, to the project.

However, even when a study by Amplitude found the cost of undergrounding was significantly less than that first claimed, stakeholders were told the undergrounding option would not be considered. Worse, some go on to learn that their properties will be subject to compulsory acquisition, which has devastating impacts on those people, some of whom have lived and worked on family farms for generations.

Rural and regional communities know that renewable energy projects are transformative, nation-building works that will pave the way to a cleaner and greener future. However, many in those communities believe that none of their concerns will be genuinely assessed and that projects will be delivered with or without support from those most affected.

Essentially, the removal of barriers to these works will not be achieved without first securing social licence, and social licence cannot be achieved without genuine consultation, and compromise where appropriate.

Accordingly, it is my submission that the delivery of renewable infrastructure must go beyond an over-riding assessment of cost and instead factor in a willingness to make reasonable changes based on evidence given by those stakeholders directly affected by these works.

This many mean costs to developers or even consumers could face upward pressure but in the long term, renewables infrastructure delivered with the support of communities, rather than with opposition, will happen sooner, more harmoniously and ultimately, more efficiently and this will lead to significant savings.

Joe McGirr
Member for Wagga Wagga
January 30, 2024