

13w Fitzroy Street Walcha NSW 2354

9 May 2023

Voice for Walcha us@voiceforwalcha.com

Attention: Voice for Walcha

Dear Voice for Walcha,

RE: Ruby Hills Wind Project – Community Drop-In Session 10th and 11th May 2023

Your questions are appreciated. Walcha Energy recognises that some people in the community may have reservations about transitioning to renewable energy, and we believe that it is important to acknowledge and address these concerns. We believe that it is important to have an open and honest dialogue about renewable energy and its potential impact on our community. It is our hope that we can work together to find solutions that benefit everyone, while addressing any concerns that may arise.

We have endeavoured to respond to your questions to the best of our ability. However, please note as the Project is only at the pre-Scoping Report stage, we do not have all the answers just yet. We encourage you to come along to the drop-in sessions to further continue the conversation.

Alongside the Walcha Energy team, we will have the following technical experts to assist:

- Eco Logical Australia, who is preparing the Scoping Report on our behalf in accordance with the State Significant Development Guidelines – Preparing a Scoping Report (DPE, 2022) available here: <u>State significant development guidelines – preparing a scoping</u> report (nsw.gov.au)
- Eco Logical Australia is also undertaking the preliminary biodiversity, heritage, bushfire, and water assessments.
- Marshall Day Acoustics, who is preparing the Preliminary Noise and Vibration Impact Assessment to accompany the Scoping Report in accordance with the Wind Energy: Noise Assessment Bulletin (DPE, 2016) available here: <u>Wind Energy: Noise Assessment</u> <u>Bulletin (nsw.gov.au)</u>

- Moir Landscape Architecture, who is preparing the Preliminary Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment to accompany the Scoping Report in accordance with the Wind Energy: Visual Assessment Bulletin (DPE, 2016) available here: <u>Wind Energy: Visual</u> <u>Assessment Bulletin (nsw.gov.au)</u>
- AAP Consulting, who is preparing the Preliminary Social Impact Assessment in accordance with the *Social Impact Assessment Guideline* (DPE, 2023) available here: <u>Social Impact Assessment Guideline (nsw.gov.au</u>).

As we go through the environmental approval process and further information becomes available, Walcha Energy will provide further updates on some of the topics below.

Kind Regards

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Dan Muller

Walcha Energy, Project Development Manager

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	The cumulative noise created by Winterbourne Wind and Ruby Hills Winds' 260 turbines to the east and west of town will result in a noise assessment that is a two-year study. What stage is this study up too and who is the reputable Noise Consultant being used to conduct these	The Preliminary Noise and Vibration Impact Assessment undertaken by Marshall Day Acoustics has assessed operational wind turbine noise to all dwellings within 5 km of a turbine in accordance with the NSW Noise Assessment Bulletin (DPE,2016). The Ruby Hills Wind Farm site is located approximately 12 km west and 10 km southwest of the Walcha township. A preliminary cumulative noise impact assessment has been undertaken, considering Winterbourne Wind Farm, which indicates that cumulative noise levels at non-associated receivers located between the two projects are predicted below the base noise limit of 35 dB L _{Aeq} . This indicates that cumulative noise is not expected to be a relevant consideration for the Ruby Hills Wind Farm project and the Winterbourne Wind Farm project, consistent with the relatively large separating distance
	studies?	between the two projects.
	If we have 2 projects with 260 around town, will we hear the turbines from in town? Will we hear them at night?	Preliminary consideration of Thunderbolt Wind Farm, based on the same method employed for Winterbourne Wind Farm, indicates similar conclusions, with cumulative noise levels from both the Ruby Hills Wind Farm and the Thunderbolt Wind Farm project predicted to be below the base noise limit of 35 dB L _{Aeq} for relevant receivers. Further cumulative noise impacts associated with other renewable energy projects in the area, at greater distance from the Ruby Hills Wind Farm project, will be considered as part of the EIS.
Noise		It should be noted that the NSW Noise Assessment Bulletin states: "The purpose of setting noise level objectives for wind turbines is to retain noise levels that are compatible with surrounding land uses and to ensure that noise levels do not significantly affect the living experience of people residing in the area."
		On this basis the 35 dB L _{Aeq} base noise limit is designed for compatibility between a wind farm project and the surrounding community, however compliance with the base noise limit does not mean that wind turbines will be inaudible. Whilst an assessment of audibility is not required as part of the NSW Noise Assessment Bulletin (DPE, 2016), the distance to Walcha township (considered to start at Legge Street) is in the order of 9 km from the nearest Ruby Hills Wind Farm wind turbine. Predicted noise levels from wind turbine operation are in the order of 20 dB L _{Aeq} . Noise levels of this magnitude are unlikely to be audible above typical background noise levels in most conditions.
		It is also noted that the noise criteria in the NSW Noise Assessment Bulletin (DPE, 2016) is one of the most stringent when compared to other noise guidelines around the world (refer to Figure 1 of the NSW Noise Assessment Bulletin (DPE, 2016)).
	Do you feel that there should be a buffer around town, and affected residents, of at least 5km to reduce your risk and potential impacts to the health of the Walcha community?	The buffers we will propose around both the Walcha township and affected residents will be dictated by the environmental studies and compliance with the relevant guidelines, in particularly the noise and visual assessments. Currently, no non-associated dwelling is closer than 2 km from a turbine. As the environmental studies progress, if it is determined that this is not suitable to individual dwellings, Walcha Energy will remove or relocate turbines, as required.
Biodiversity	What percentage of the Ruby Hills Wind project will be on land that will need to be cleared? What land is required for the	 For ease of reference, the following terminology is utilised: The Development Footprint - The extent of ground disturbance including earthworks associated with permanent infrastructure and temporary facilities in the Project Site.

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	transmission lines? What impacts will this have to the biodiversity of the affected area?	• The Development Corridor – The area generally bound by a buffer of 100 m radius around the Development Footprint. It is noted that this buffer will be significantly reduced during the EIS stage as the Project layout design is refined.
		Please note that the biodiversity assessments and associated surveys commenced in 2020 and are still preliminary in nature. To date Eco Logical Australia have validated approximately 85% of the vegetation within the Development Corridor, have undertaken one survey season of bird and bat utilisation surveys to assist with bird and bat strike modelling and have commenced some targeted threatened flora and fauna surveys. Of the 85% of the Development Corridor surveyed, approximately 30% is exotic vegetation, 31% is native vegetation, 23% is native vegetation that conforms to a Threatened Ecological Community and 1% is planted vegetation.
		Walcha Energy is working with Eco Logical Australia to further refine the Development Footprint to avoid Threatened Ecological Communities and threatened species habitat, where feasible. Given where we are in the environmental planning process, exact impacts are not yet known.
		A Biodiversity Development Assessment Report will be prepared to accompany the EIS which will detail the exact impacts and credit obligations and how the Project has followed the design hierarchy of avoid, minimise, mitigate, and offset.
Resources	Where is your gravel and water resource for the project coming from? Have they considered this in light of the fact that Winterbourne Wind Farm will have proceeded before them and exhausted a lot of the existing resources?	A resource and waste assessment will be undertaken as part of the EIS. Gravel and water resources in the locality will be reviewed in consultation with the relevant councils to determine the most appropriate sources. This assessment will also factor in cumulative impacts associated with other renewable energy projects in the region.
	How many km of internal farm tracks will need to be built for the project? How many kms of Walcha shire roads will be travelled in the construction period of the project?	The exact distance of internal farm tracks for the Project is not yet know. Where feasible, Walcha Energy are aiming to utilise existing farm tracks within the Project Site for the Project's internal access roads to limit the number of resources needed to construct new infrastructure.
Traffic	The community has identified traffic and transport as a major issue with Winterbourne Wind Farm. What impact will 2 projects have on roads and our ability to move around our council area? How will other industries in Walcha be affected and how can these impacts (with both projects, and Bendemeer solar farm) be mitigated.	Cumulative traffic impacts will be assessed in detail at the EIS stage and appropriate mitigation measures will be implemented, such as staging construction periods with other projects in the region, if required. It is anticipated that major turbine components will be delivered to the Project Site from the Port of Newcastle and transported to the Project Site via the New England Highway. It is assumed that the most likely route would utilise the national transport network of the New England Highway for most of the journey then exit the New England Highway near Bendemeer onto the Oxley Highway (B56), which then traverses the Project Site. In saying this, it is the aim of Walcha Energy to not have any transport routes traversing through the Walcha township. A Route Study, along with a Traffic and Transport Impact Assessment, will be undertaken at the EIS stage to further determine appropriate mitigation measures on council and State

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		managed roads. It is also noted that EnergyCo are currently investigating the traffic issues associated with the REZ as a whole, including road upgrades from Newcastle to the REZ.
	With Winterbourne Wind now in the planning process and the timeline being pushed back, the Thunderbolt Wind and Bendemeer Energy Hub being slightly ahead of the Ruby Hills Wind Project, does Walcha Energy feel that these projects of such a large Scale are appropriate for our small town?	Renewable energy generation is critical to Australia's clean energy transition and achieving the <i>Climate Change Act 2022</i> target of a 43% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030. Wind energy generation is key to decarbonising Australia's electricity system and is currently the second largest contributor to the clean energy transition in the country. The Australian Energy Market Operator estimates that twice the current amount of wind capacity will be required by 2030 to meet electricity demand. The Project Site is within the New England Renewable Energy Zone (REZ), which was chosen following a detailed state-wide geospatial mapping exercise undertaken by the NSW Government in 2018. This initial analysis sought to identify optimal locations to host renewable energy generation around the State, including areas with strong renewable energy resource potential, proximity to the existing electricity network, and consideration of potential interactions with existing land uses, including agricultural lands and biodiversity conservation.
		Walcha Energy understands the disruption the location of the New England REZ has had on the Walcha community and is committed to assessing the cumulative impacts of all renewable energy projects in the locality appropriately in accordance with the <i>Cumulative Impact Assessment Guidelines for State Significant Developments</i> (DPE, 2022).
Cumulative Impacts		It is also our understanding that EnergyCo has been engaging with REZ communities to understand local priorities and inform whole-of-REZ planning that seeks to balance generation, social, environmental, and other land use considerations. This engagement has helped identify and shape a range of technical studies to investigate the cumulative impacts and demands of projects, and identify strategic opportunities to value stack investments, minimise disruption and optimise outcomes for local communities. These include:
		 Workforce accommodation Training and skills development Roads and traffic management Telecommunication improvements waste management Minimising impacts and disruptions to small towns such as Walcha will be a priority for this Project and addressed to the best
		of our ability within the EIS in consultation with the relevant councils, stakeholders, EnergyCo and the community.
	If so, what are the clear benefits to community?	The exact benefits associated with the Project will be detailed in both the Social Impact Assessment and Economic Impact Assessment, prepared at the EIS stage. However, some include:
		 Ongoing economic stimulus associated with the operation of the Project is anticipated, which includes host landowner returns, neighbouring property returns, operational wage stimulus, and community and Council returns.

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	 The Project will involve over \$30 million in investment during the construction Equivalent positions both during the construction and operations periods. The Project will provide significant participation opportunities for businesses and having regard for the good match of skills and resources available. Construction workers relocating to the region would be expected to inject stin economy over the construction phase No loss of employment associated with the Project Site is anticipated, either directl chain, as grazing activities can continue across the Project Site. A number of local roads accessing the Project Site will be upgraded prior to the commencing. Exact roads are yet to be determined. The Project has the capacity to supply sufficient clean energy to power the equivalent. 	 Equivalent positions both during the construction and operations periods. The Project will provide significant participation opportunities for businesses and workers located in the locality, having regard for the good match of skills and resources available. Construction workers relocating to the region would be expected to inject stimulus in new spending into the economy over the construction phase No loss of employment associated with the Project Site is anticipated, either directly (on-site) or through the supply chain, as grazing activities can continue across the Project Site. A number of local roads accessing the Project Site will be upgraded prior to the Project's construction phase
	Have you considered the cumulative effect of the construction of Winterbourne Wind Farm, Bendemeer Solar and Wind, Salisbury Solar, Thunderbolts Wind Farm and Ruby Hills Wind overlapping?	As discussed above, Walcha Energy is committed to assessing the cumulative impacts of all renewable energy projects in the locality appropriately in accordance with the <i>Cumulative Impact Assessment Guidelines for State Significant Developments</i> (DPE, 2022). This will be undertaken at the EIS stage and will involve consultation with the relevant councils, stakeholders, EnergyCo and the community. The preliminary noise and visual assessments that will accompany the Scoping Report will showcase preliminary cumulative impact assessments.
Social License	Guidelines for wind farms say developers require social license. This is a confusing term. Can you please explain what social license is? How does a developer demonstrate social license? How can such a large project that will have so many impacts on our community hope to achieve social license, especially as it follows on from WWF, another large project proposed for our LGA?	 Walcha Energy believes that there is no one definition to describe social license however, there are several components that we aim to abide by to showcase we are aiming to design and develop our projects with social responsibility in mind. These include: Credibility: Walcha Energy's capacity to provide true and clear information to the community and fulfil any commitments made. Trust: Our willingness to be vulnerable to the actions of another and build meaningful relationships within the community. We understand that there is a growing expectation that renewable energy developers should take a more active role in the communities in leading positive change and going beyond the status quo and legal requirements. To do this, we will be actively engaging with stakeholders and are prepared to listen, and reflect, on the concerns of the community. There is no simple list of requirements that have to be met in order to be granted a social licence to operate. However, to list a few, Walcha Energy will see through the following: Creating partnerships with the community Collaborating with all relevant stakeholders

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		 Being a 'good neighbour' Creating a Community Benefit Scheme that appropriately addresses community concerns.
	What is the ownership structure of the Ruby Hills project? What are the current owners' intentions going forward?	Ruby Hills Wind is owned by Walcha Energy. Due to the scale of funding required to construct large renewable energy projects like Ruby Hills a very large investor, consortium or development fund (like a large superannuation fund) will be required to finance the project. There will be an appropriate time when it is likely that the project will be sold on to an appropriate investor. Walcha Energy directors and staff will continue to play key roles in the development moving forward.
	On the Ruby Hills website the following is stated, "MirusWind was founded in 2003 and has extensive experience developing large scale renewable energy and infrastructure projects. The team strives to collaborate with local communities to develop and deliver high calibre, technically and commercially robust projects". Can you please provide the names and details of these projects?	 MirusWind assisted in the initial licensing, site selection and feasibility studies for the Coppabella Wind Farm, south of Yass. It is now owned by Goldwind Australia. Further information can be found here: <u>Coppabella Wind Farm</u> MirusWind also assisted in the initial licensing, site selection, feasibility studies and development of the Winterbourne Wind Farm, before on selling to Vestas in June 2019. Renewable development activities were undertaken in New Zealand Walcha Energy are also developing the proposed Salisbury Solar Farm, just south of Uralla, which is currently undergoing the environmental approval process and the ongoing development of the Dungowan Pumped Hydro Storage project proposed in the Dungowan Valley.
General	What is the structure of the Community Consultation Committee for the project? Who will determine who is on the committee and what relevance will it have in listening to the community and shaping the project?	 The purpose of a Community Consultative Committee (CCC) is to provide a forum for discussion between a proponent and representatives of the community, stakeholder groups and the local councils on issues directly relating to the Project. DPE will decide whether a CCC should be established and will make it a requirement in either the Secretary's Environmental Assessment Requirements (SEARs) or as a condition of consent. If required, the CCC will comprise of: An independent chairperson Up to seven community and stakeholder representatives A council representative from each local government area concerned Up to three representatives from the proponent including the person with direct responsibility for environmental
		management of the project. DPE will not be a member of any CCC but may attend certain meetings, if required. Community representatives will be invited through an Expression of Interest advertisement and have at least 28 days to respond. The independent chairperson will then review applications and provide recommendations to DPE, who will then appoint the community representatives. For further information please see here: <u>Community Consultative Committee Guideline – January 2019 (acquia-sites.com).</u>

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	Can you outline the proposed Community Benefit Fund?	As the Project is in the early stages of the environmental planning approval process, the specifics of the Community Benefit Fund are not yet known. Walcha Energy will work closely with Walcha Council, Tamworth Regional Council and Uralla Shire Council to develop a community fund.
		The intent of the fund is to provide financial support for community-based initiatives and projects that produce lasting community benefits and reflect local priorities. How the funds are distributed is not yet known however, may be managed by the councils or the CCC.
		It is also noted that EnergyCo will also have a Community Benefit Scheme for the REZ as a whole. Once this is made available, Walcha Energy will review the details to assist in structuring the scheme proposed for the Project.
	Can you please explain the decommissioning intentions of the development? What is the monetary and legal commitments to this plan from the developer?	There are several options when a wind farm reaches the end of its design life, including extending the lifetime of the asset, partial or full repowering, and decommissioning. Decommissioning involves several different processes, including dismantling the wind turbine, removing it from site and rehabilitating the land, or in some cases building a new wind farm on the same site. The decommissioning of the Project will be the responsibility of the development and will also be a condition in the landowner least agreements.
		If the Project is approved, the development consent conditions will likely request the preparation of a Decommissioning and Rehabilitation Plan, which will be required to be implemented within 18 months of operations ceasing. Generally, the following rehabilitation objectives will need to be met:
		 The Project Site is safe, stable, and non-polluting. Visual impacts of any above ground ancillary infrastructure agreed to be retained for an alternative use are minimised as far as is reasonable and feasible. Native vegetation is restored. Above ground wind turbine infrastructure (excluding wind turbine pads) is decommissioned and removed. Wind turbine pads are covered with soil and/or rock and revegetated. Above ground ancillary infrastructure (including the battery storage facility) is decommissioned and removed. Internal access roads are decommissioned and removed.
		 Underground cabling is decommissioned and removed. Land capability is restored or maintained to pre-existing use. Public safety is ensured at all times.
		Therefore, legally this Plan will be required to be prepared and implemented to satisfy the development consent conditions. The monetary commitments associated with this will not be known until the Plan is prepared. The decommissioning of the Project Site will be the responsibility of the owner of the wind farm.
		Once a wind turbine is no longer needed, a key question is what happens to the old wind turbine parts. A wind turbine is predominantly made of recyclable metals:

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- Steel
- Aluminium
- Copper
- Cast iron

The non-metal components include epoxies, oils, and composite materials. Approximately 85–94% of a wind turbine (by mass) is recyclable and can be recycled in Australia. This recovery exceeds the National Waste Policy Action Plan target of 80% average resource recovery rate from all waste streams by 2030.

The wind industry is currently seeking to go further and avoid any disposal of waste. The biggest opportunity to further reduce waste in the industry is establishing an end-of-life pathway for turbine blades, which are mainly made of fibreglass and carbon fibre (composite materials). There are currently very limited commercial or feasible end-of-life options for composite materials, which are materials used by many industries. It is estimated that by 2034, a total of 15,000 tonnes of blade composite waste will have been created in Australia due to decommissioned wind farms, and up to 4,000 tonnes in any given year. Without a clear pathway for the management of composite waste, there is a risk that these blades will be disposed of into landfill. There are, however, several innovative solutions emerging globally to sustainably manage blades at their end of life and Walcha Energy is hopeful that by the time the Project is ready to be decommissioned (30 years) such solutions are ready to be utilised.

For further information please refer to the recently released report from the Clean Energy Council titled "Winding Up: Decommissioning, Recycling and Waste Management of Australian Wind Turbines".

Can you guarantee with the large workforce Norequired for Winterbourne Wind Farm and su then Ruby Hills Wind that rental prices will the not increase forcing locals to leave town? ar

No, we cannot guarantee this however, Walcha Energy is very aware of the short-term accommodation impacts large projects such as the Ruby Hills Wind Project can have on small towns. Walcha Energy will be working with the relevant councils throughout the EIS phase to determine the most appropriate accommodation strategy. It is also likely that the preparation of an Accommodation and Employment Strategy will be required as a condition of consent if the Project is approved. This will include, but not be limited to:

- A strategy to ensure there is sufficient accommodation for the workforce associated with the Project.
- Consideration of the cumulative impacts associated with other State Significant Development projects in the area.
- Investigation of options for prioritising the employment of local workers for the construction and operation of the development, where feasible.
- Inclusion of a program to monitor and review effectiveness of the strategy over the life of the Project, including regular monitoring and review during construction.

Why do you make potential landholders signThe landholders associated with the Project have been asked to sign a Licence Agreement, which allows Walcha Energy
exclusive rights to access the landholder's land to undertake preliminary environmental studies to assist with the feasibility
and early stages of the Project. Within these agreements, confidentiality refers to landholders not engaging with other

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	create. What is it that these clauses are required for? What do these confidentiality clauses mean? Are people who have signed these agreements allowed to talk about the project with others?	developers. Walcha Energy encourage landholders to discuss the Project with their neighbours and indeed the community. This is showcased through the several combined group landowner / neighbour meetings that have been held to date.
	How big is the Ruby Hills Wind project? 860 or 1000 megawatts?	The Ruby Hills Wind Project will involve the construction, operation and decommissioning of up to 160 turbines and associated ancillary infrastructure, with a total capacity around 870 megawatts.
		The main components of the Project include:
		 Wind Turbine Generators – including the siting of up to 160 turbines Transmission Works – including new electricity transmission lines to connect the generation works to the existing electricity transmission network, new electricity transmission infrastructure and the construction and operation of two (2) new network substations and several collector substations Ancillary Infrastructure – including (but not limited to) internal access roads, utilities and communications infrastructure, operation & maintenance compounds, hardstands, Battery Energy Storage Systems and meteorological masts Temporary Facilities – including site construction compounds and construction power supply, laydown areas, stockpiles, rock crushing and concrete batch plants (if required), temporary roads, and up to 4 temporary meteorological masts. Further details will be provided within the Scoping Report, anticipated to be submitted in Q3 2023.
	What is the actual area that the Ruby Hills	For ease of reference, the following terminology is utilised:
	Wind project will cover, as the map is not to scale, nor does it say anywhere on the website.	 The Project Site – this includes the land required for the Project and follows the relevant property boundaries. The Development Footprint - The extent of ground disturbance including earthworks associated with permanent Infrastructure and temporary facilities in the Project Site. The Development Corridor – The area generally bound by a buffer of 100 m radius around the Development Footprint.
		At present date, the Project Site is approximately 20,730 ha and the Development Corridor is 4,400 ha. The Project layout is preliminary in nature and will undergo several iterations during the EIS process to accommodate environmental and social constraints. The actual size of the Development Footprint will be far less than these numbers and will be confirmed during the EIS stage, when the Project layout is finalised.
	Can they provide a detailed map showing properties that will be affected within the zone and adjacent to the zone? Even if you	Walcha Energy is unable to circulate detailed Project maps at this point in time given the preliminary stage we are at in the environmental approval process. The Project layout is preliminary in nature and will undergo several iterations during the EIS process to accommodate environmental and social constraints. Due to the Scoping Report not being publicly available at this

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		can give the relevant map co-ordinates from Google Earth so that it is clear which	point in time, preliminary maps are unable to be circulated. Once submitted, these preliminary maps will be available through the Major Projects website.
		properties will be affected.	The most up to date Project maps will be presented at the community drop-in sessions, which will include the preliminary noise and visual maps. The visual maps will identify the visual magnitude zones in accordance with the Visual Bulletin (DPE, 2016) (i.e., the Blue and Black lines) and will identify which dwellings are within both zones.