



MAYORAL COLUMN: 14 June 2023

REZ TRANSMISSION LINES

Last Thursday saw the public release of the Energy Corporation of NSW (EnergyCo) draft corridor for the new transmission lines to link the old Bayswater Power Station site to the New England Renewable Energy Zone (NEREZ). This will see two 550kVA lines built and as expected one will enter the Walcha LGA north east of Tamworth, turn near Tallara Road and exit towards Wollun. A spur line runs south east to near the junction of Wauchs Road and Thunderbolts Way. The map, although somewhat difficult to interpret, is available on EnergyCo's website.

Residents affected by this path should have by now been contacted by EnergyCo in regards to the impact on land and operations. If you feel you may be impacted and haven't been suitably informed, please reach out to myself or Council and we will give you the details on who to contact. EnergyCo committed to keep everyone informed and if this is not happening we need to know so we can both maintain pressure and let EnergyCo know where their communications gaps are. These lines are just part of 10,000 kms of new transmission infrastructure, integral to the restructure Australia's power grid as we move towards a renewable energy future. Already delayed by two years, reduction in generation capacity and with budgeting pressures the path forward for NERESZ will not be all plain sailing.

The Winterbourne Wind Project faces its own delays with answers to submissions pushed until at least mid-December. While my role is not one of being the social police I believe we need to remember the core values that make Walcha's community what it is and hopefully will be into the future. Ultimately, it is State and Federal Government policy and legislation that is driving the transition and facilitating progress, and they are the ones that can change it.

Following this, Interim General Manager and myself had an hour long Zoom Meeting with the Department of Planning (DP) last Thursday. This meeting formed part of our three monthly catch up with them and offers us an opportunity to engage with the people who design the path forward for renewable energy in our region. We further clarified how our Development Control Plan can be referenced to inform the process, provided input into submissions around the Oxley Highway and the work and social impacts of accelerated traffic volumes, bio security issues and covering financial costs and benefits to our community.

WASTE DEPOT

Last week's closure of the Walcha Waste Management Facility due to lack of staff to open it on Friday and Sunday understandably caused a reaction around the community. As Council we are committed to supplying a reliable service and the



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closures were a failure of that commitment. It was opened Monday to compensate but this doesn't alleviate the problem. Staff shortages due to illness and leave cannot always be avoided, but there is immediate action being taken to train more staff in this area as a backup. I often hear "there can't be much training needed", but there is. Compliance with EPA and WHS make the operation of this facility challenging and this will only become more onerous moving forward. Staff connected to this facility receive praise from our regulators and all users have a responsibility to make this a smooth plan. This applies to our outlying transfer stations as well.

In relation to our waste issue, last week Council put on public display our Draft Waste Strategy¹. This document took many hours to research and compile and is now there for your comment. One of the hot topics around the tip is always opening hours, and these are addressed in this draft document, so this is your opportunity to comment and express your views. The implementation of a voucher scheme for rural residents is also explained and there is 28 days for feedback. Moving forward it is imperative that all our facilities in this department cover their costs and avoid cross subsidisation.

DRAFT BUDGET

While on the topic of public exhibition of documents Walcha Council's 2023-2024 Operational Plan, which includes the budget, is out on display and also open for a comment. An integral part of our community engagement meetings a couple of weeks ago it forms an important part of our commitment to tighten internal financial controls following application for a Special Rate Variation.

On behalf of Council and Councillors thank you to all people who attended these meetings. Your feedback is taken seriously and obviously roads were the main focus. We have been the recipient of multiple rounds of additional road funding and although inadequate for all our requirements, will improve many of the worst sections of roads over the next year.

OFFICE OPENING HOURS

A proposal came to Council last week to adjust the opening hours for the main office. Recognition of 'power up and power down' time of modern workplaces will see face-to-face and Service NSW interactions being slightly reduced to 9:00am to 4:30pm.

¹ The Draft Waste Strategy is not on public exhibition at the moment but will be from 29 June to 28 July 2023. It has been to a Workshop and will be presented to the next Council Meeting on Wednesday 28 June 2023. It will then be placed on Public Exhibition inviting submissions during the exhibition period. Council will present it to the August Ordinary Council Meeting for adoption after discussing the submissions and making amendments if required.



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General phone enquiries will still be available from 8:30am to 5:00pm. The change will improve operational efficiency and also brings Walcha Council in line with most other regional councils.

CONGRATULATIONS

The awarding of the Order of Australia Medals to Bill Heazlett and Don Murchie recognises the many years of service the recipients have given to the community of Walcha. Both Bill and Don have had a very positive impact on the foundations that make many parts of our community function. Selfless in their commitment and humble in their acknowledgment, both should be proud to look back on their achievements.

Clr Eric Noakes
Mayor of Walcha