



EcoNetwork – Port Stephens Inc.

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NSW Government – EnergyCo

## Submission: Hunter Transmission Project – Preliminary Corridor

### About EcoNetwork Port Stephens

EcoNetwork Port Stephens is a grassroots community-based environmental and sustainability network comprising more than 25 community and environment groups and eco-businesses from the Port Stephens local government area with a focus on sustainable planning. We are non party-political and do not donate to political parties.

### Submission

EcoNetwork Port Stephens is very concerned about the serious adverse environmental impacts likely to result from the Hunter Transmission Project (HTP) preliminary corridor, as currently proposed.

We are aware of, and fully support, detailed critiques of the environmental impacts submitted by a wide range of other environment groups with more direct knowledge of the preferred route.

Their concerns encompass Biodiversity and habitat loss, Cultural heritage, Scenic impacts and Bushfire risk.

We fully appreciate and support the need for urgent action to provide transmission capacity to support the necessary transition to renewable energy. But the HTP will remain a critical infrastructure asset for generations to come. Short-term considerations such as speed of construction and cost minimization should not be allowed to overshadow long-term considerations and full life-cycle cost-benefit analysis. We must find the best *overall long term* solution for such major infrastructure.

In the case of the HTP, alternatives such as using existing easements, and selective undergrounding, should be considered, following international best practice.

The HTP should be planned from the outset to be ‘nature positive’. This goes well beyond simplistic assessment of impacts on threatened species and proposals for ‘offsets’, which are a widely discredited mechanism that do not adequately compensate for losses.

Proposals that don’t have social licence will inevitably generate unnecessary controversy and disputes. This is completely counterproductive, leading to increased costs and lengthy delays.

Another barrier to community support for major infrastructure is an unfortunate loss of trust in expert reports. For good reasons, based on experience, the community is highly sceptical of environmental assessments written by consultants commissioned by proponents. These are often seen, whether fairly or not, as inherently biased to favour the project.

If governments are serious about reducing community resistance to many controversial projects, we need a completely new approach to environmental assessments, whereby they

are carried out by genuinely independent experts engaged by a trusted third party (although with the cost still met by project proponents).

In the case of the HTP, a fully independent review of alternative routes and technical options is justified, even if it adds a few months to the timeline. A process that is more credible can hopefully avoid the delays that will inevitably result from challenges and legal appeals if the project is seen to be rushed through with a pre-determined outcome.

We have no objection to this submission being published in full and unredacted.

EcoNetwork Port Stephens Inc.

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