

Thursday, 31 December 2020

Ms Kami Kaur
General Manager, A/g Australian Energy Regulator PO Box 520
Melbourne VIC 3001

To the Australian Energy Regulator

To the Australian Energy Regulator,

Dear Ms Kaur,

I reside and operate a dairy farming business in Tyrendarra. I am providing this letter to support the proposed pilot project researched and delivered by Powercor for a 3-phase power upgrade in the Portland region of Victoria. The purpose of this email is to formally request you to approve three-phase power upgrades in the outer communities of Portland being Tyrendarra, Strathdownie, Cape Bridgewater and Gorae West.

Whilst my dairy business runs close to the Princes Hwy that runs in line with a 66000-volt distribution line network expanding much of our region, my 1400 cow dairy farming business is reliant on 2x200KVA generators to run my dairy platform and feeding mill as a result of a deficient SWER line infrastructure that connects my farm (need 2 generators one as a backup). I employ 12 full time staff and support many other businesses and service providers throughout Western Victoria as do my staff.

In my community of Tyrendarra, there are a variety of local service Agriculture business providers, used by me and other farmers. These include engineer [REDACTED], builders [REDACTED], stock carrier [REDACTED], 3 quarry owners [REDACTED], fertiliser spreading [REDACTED], nursery owners [REDACTED], hay contractor carrier [REDACTED], refrigeration technician [REDACTED]. All of whom reside locally. This is only a small sample of businesses that lies in the outer regions of Portland and all must work within the constraints of a limiting power infrastructure.

The lack of reliable efficient power is a frustration we talk about most days. Whilst I appreciate that unless one lives side by side with other businesses and residences all sharing a single wire beyond its limit, one cannot really appreciate or understand the reality that we are working in, in this "first world country". Therefore, one does not understand the frustration at the lack of vision, concern and understanding of the curbing of the economic potential in our region when the government keeps knocking you back when asking to upgrade from this archaic infrastructure.

Our community got together over five years ago, mobilised by the same problem – it is tough to run a business off a single wire unreliable transmission line, this coupled with the inability to adopt new technology and systems because we cannot run them reliably is crippling our manufacturing outputs potential and abilities. The obvious knock-on effect of this is the reduced capacity to attract and/or employ more staff. Tolerating second rate technologies and just making do is the order of the day.

The township of Narrawong and Tyrendarra share a strong sporting club, an annual rural show event, recreational camping grounds, a very popular Primary School and post office service. The Tyrendarra region, expanding over 40 km along the Princess Hwy from Yambuk to Narrawong, is being held back by this lack of investment in 3 phase infrastructures. Its economic ability and capacity stagnated and limited from the benefits it could deliver. Even on the popular Tyrendarra Agriculture show day many show participants need to provide their own generators with displays and activities.

I moved to Tyrendarra in 1996 and have contributed on many levels back to my regional and rural community. As an active member and supporter of the Tyrendarra sports community, as an elected representative on the United Dairy Farmers Victoria Policy Council and Australian Dairy Farmers National Council care deeply about the survival, the advancement, the safety and resilience of my community. Having been actively involved in the aftermath of the St Patrick's Day Fires I feel even more strongly that Western Victoria has historically and irresponsibly been discounted and neglected. I refer to the documented outcomes of the findings of the St Patrick Day fires.

In Western Victoria we are being hailed as the leader in the green renewable energy sector however as no doubt you realise that potential capacity is being foolishly limited by poor infrastructure, namely the inability to feed back into the grid.

We in Western Victoria supply world class products to global markets, all the while meeting the highest quality control food and animal welfare standards. However, we are competing with the world and if we cannot/ unable to innovate and adopt the best technologies due to a lack of investment in improving transmission infrastructure, we will no longer be cost-effective, environmentally sustainable or at the same quality as our competitors such as New Zealand.

Having heard that we were being considered for three phase power transmission upgrades we as representatives of the many business communities felt we have finally been listened to, that at last, we would have meaningful advancement of the growth in our region, realisation of its capacity and long-term vision bringing jobs, customers, profitability, investment, sustainability and dynamic, innovative and expanding communities.

To now hear that you do not think this relatively small investment by Powercor of less than \$9.5 million to help deliver 3phase power would be justified and that you have recommended against it based on the very limited and frankly irresponsible view of a benefit to just 4 dairy farmers out of over 1000 beneficiaries within these communities of Portland outer regions does beggars belief, one can only take it as a vote of no confidence in regional Victoria by the AER. This is an insult; it demonstrates a lack of understanding of the

economic capacity and potential of the region and it financial blow to these communities which has responded with credible advocacy efforts done in this regard over many years.

Renewable investments need access to an effective reliable distribution infrastructure network to maximise their potential. This region needs improved, reliable, and safe infrastructure to protect our communities with the fire hazards.

I am concerned that communities and regions like ours will remain stagnated by your decision-making 'bureaucracies' not responding to our needs thus disadvantaging regional investment business cases. Correct, we do not have the same number of customers as the city areas, yet the outer regions comparatively contribute significantly to the economic wellbeing of the urban centres. This Powercor proposition needs to be reconsidered by AER because the whole regional community of Portland needs this upgrade to grow and progress. It will benefit not only the power companies but all of us, it will dramatically enable the increase in the region's economic footprint and attract other entrepreneurial businesses in our current and post COVID-19 times.

To emphasize every regional customer should have access to 3 phase power in the same way as our city cousins have. The socialising of infrastructure has been and should remain an efficient cost-effective function of Government to deliver facilities and services for the common interest of communities as all benefit. Privatisation of the electricity assets with the power companies should not be a cop-out with this necessity and with Governments not to deliver upgraded essential services and infrastructure. The ad-hoc sporadic roll-out of customer user pays power infrastructure to meet the needs of the moment has proven that it has not been an efficient cost-efficient practice and has resulted with deficient visionary policy outcomes. AER needs to urgently respond to rectify this historical wasteful practice by encouraging Power companies and Government to take control and deliver a partnered solution to act in the common interest favouring the 3 phase power upgrades to its constituents and customers in our regions.

I, as a proven business leader and a contributor to regional Victoria economic revenue requests that you revisit and approve the proposal.

It is not fair for a continuation to ask electricity consumers to pay directly for an electricity transmission infrastructure asset they do not directly own, it is time to advance other solutions for the common best interest and equalisation of benefit for all Victorians. It is long overdue that the governments partnered with power companies to take responsibility to fund the upgrades. This would be by far more effective and efficient with the economic potential advanced significantly with this delivery and outcomes. It is not reinventing the wheel with this approach for infrastructure roll-out as it is a common practice in other States and countries.

We as the business communities will do our bit as consumers paying for the energy we use, we will innovate and expand creating more jobs attracting and employing more people, we will invest in solar panels to contribute energy to the public grid and invest in new technology systems on-farm and in our businesses, we and our employees will spend our money locally, and pay more taxes.

Please do not hesitate to call me to discuss any aspect of my personal submission. I would be delighted to discuss how my business will grow and how this investment would drive confidence to grow our economy, region and economic contributions back to State and Federal.

Yours sincerely,

Bruce Knowles

Mob No [REDACTED]

EM: [REDACTED]

Resident/ Business Owner Tyrendarra