



STOP AUSNET'S TOWERS

MEDIA RELEASE

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Serious Mental Health Concerns for Western Victorian' Communities affected by the Proposed High Voltage Transmission Project

The proposed high voltage transmission line and terminal station project being undertaken by AusNet's services running through western Victoria is causing a dramatic increase in community mental health issues.

The project will have a devastating and irreversible effect on the region, it's tens of thousands of community members, hundreds of businesses and on the natural environment. Parts of the proposed route run through Victoria's most high-risk bushfire areas as well as prime agricultural land.

"In spite of significant community opposition supported by a wealth of evidence that demonstrates the severe economic and environmental damage combined with considerable heightened risks, AusNet continues to steamroll ahead with no regard for the community's wellbeing", said Emma Muir, Stop AusNet's Towers Campaign Chair.

"Community members are anxious, angry and distraught that AusNet has at no stage been serious in considering the grave concerns about the project voiced consistently by the community. Any 'engagement' by AusNet has always been very obviously just a tick and flick exercise"

"The mental health of so many local people is being seriously impacted by both AusNet's behaviour and by the proposed high voltage transmission project. This project will have an irreversible and devastating impact on the communities. AusNet's final preferred overhead transmission path announcement is a continued demonstration of their unwillingness to absorb and suitably respond to the many thousands of voices opposed to the project."

"The community in western Victoria is facing a serious challenge that is creating high levels of stress and mental fatigue", said Cate Lancashire, a local landholder. *"The threat of losing everything you have worked for with the impact of the current overhead transmission tower route - there is an immense mental health impact".*

"People have recently stated 'I don't know how much more of this I can take'. This is the very real experience of communities and farmers the length of the Western Victorian Transmission Network", said Cate. *"Our communities and farmers are at crisis point - will it take the loss of lives for our politicians to start listening? I have talked with many community members who are dealing with depression due to the situation they now find themselves in."*

We need our politicians to stand up and be counted - they have the power and the ability to change this project which will save our food bowl, protect our beautiful environment, reduce future fire risk, and remove the massive mental health burden on so many local people.

The Victorian Government can halt or amend this controversial and devastating project as announced last week by AusNet. The project as currently proposed has no social licence from the thousands of communities impacted.

Our community has decided to take a stand. The proposed approach by AusNet cannot be allowed to proceed. There is too much at stake, not just for our large community of concerned citizens, but for all Victorians. The impact on our communities is irreversible and unacceptable when there are better ways to

deliver this project that need to be explored.

Local third generation farmer, Gerard 'Arch' Conroy has summed up the anxiety and frustration of so many local people this week in this open letter to the Victorian Government:

"What is important to Me" a victim of the proposed AusNet transmission line.

"My farm is where I watch the sun come up every morning and watch it set - at the moment without the ever creeping shadows of a proposed High Voltage Transmission Line.

It's where I choose to live and raise my family in what's a pristine and unique slice of our great Australian countryside. A home for many people is part of their self-definition, which is why we do things like beautify our houses and take care of our animals, environment and lawns etc. with this said, our farms serve a greater purpose than just a place to live.

It's where friendships have been made and strengthened, It's where the walls are lined with photos to show others these past times we've enjoyed, it's where trees have been planted not for my generation to enjoy but so my future generations can find shade and shelter and reflect on this legacy.

I can look out of my windows at places where I have had both triumphs and trying times, I consider each of those places a part of me, my being and the home I live in. When laid out altogether, it forms the basis of the attachment country people like me and many others have to their homes! The seasons come and go and we go about our farming lives in a way that faces adversity on a daily basis, hampered by an ever unpredictable climate, but still we persist and we are stronger for it. When you live the story you tell, it shows integrity and truth, a value we regard above all else and which AEMO and AusNet wouldn't know the first thing about.

In all these emotions, I find it very hard to engage with a person or company who are hell bent on destroying my environment and the lives of so many of my friends, my family and my neighbours both young and old. I believe there is a better way to achieve the goals of transmitting the green energy to Melbourne, but to deny us a voice and dismiss our views as 'whimsical' leaves me questioning the character of the government who are supposed to represent all their constituents equitably and fairly.

When we do try to engage with the representatives of AusNet, it is all one way! The very definition of communication is to impart or exchange information but AusNet has never had true intent to do this from the start. To have questions unanswered for over 18 months and to only hear about the project's developments minutes before a PR media release breaks my heart as a landowner, a farmer, a father and a custodian of the land.

The reality is AusNet and AEMO are not talking to or listening to the people most affected by this project, who in reality should have the greatest voice of all.

So again tonight, with dusk falling over the land I have grown up on and raised my own family like my parents and grandparents before me, I will go around my paddocks to check the livestock, fences, water, shade, weeds, get ready to make hay, think about the upcoming fire risk this summer, talk to my kids, and drive where the proposed alignment will go, and I will think again about how a project that is intended to deliver clean energy for the next 100 years is being rushed through by AusNet and AEMO.

Our resilience as a community stems from generations of blood, sweat and tears between people who were once just neighbours, but now are community. Together we stand in this fight to protect ourselves, our livelihoods and our homes from the proposed Western Victorian Transmission Project.

We are not the enemy! We are the community our government is supposed to protect and stand beside us in times like this."

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MORE INFORMATION: stopausnetstowers.com.au or facebook.com/stopausnetstowers