

Rural Voices on the Net Zero Transition

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Executive Summary

Rural Australians are carrying a disproportionate burden from the Federal Government's net zero transition policies. While cities reap the benefits of subsidised renewable energy, regional communities are being forced to host industrial-scale wind, solar, and transmission projects with little or no say.

The Rural Voices Survey (2025), still open, already shows overwhelming concerns: farmland lost, livestock affected, communities divided, BPA, PFAS and Cadmium leaching and widespread health impacts. Households report stress, anxiety, and sleep disturbance; farmers are walking off the land they've tended for generations. These are not isolated experiences – they are consistent across the survey and across Australia.

Despite these harms, governments and developers continue to promote renewables as “cheap and clean” while ignoring the hidden economic, health, and environmental costs. This submission outlines those costs in detail.

1. Economic and Energy Costs

- **Subsidies and Transmission Costs**

Billions in subsidies have been allocated to renewable energy projects, yet costs are passed directly onto taxpayers and consumers. Transmission infrastructure for Renewable Energy Zones (REZs) in NSW alone is projected to cost more than **\$16 billion** – a figure carried by households through higher power bills.

- **Rising Power Bills**

Despite promises of cheaper energy, electricity prices remain volatile and have increased significantly. Households in regional NSW are already paying among the highest rates in the country. The need for backup generation (gas, diesel, batteries) adds further costs.

- **Productivity Losses**

Rural economies are losing valuable land from food and fibre production to industrial energy use. This not only threatens farm incomes but also undermines Australia's food security.

2. Agriculture and Land Use

- **Loss of Prime Farmland**

Projects are being approved on high-value cropping and grazing land. This is incompatible with Australia's role as a global food supplier and undermines long-term national security.

- **Impacts on Livestock**

Farmers report livestock stress, weight loss, decreased fertility, and behavioural changes near wind and solar projects. These effects have financial consequences in reduced productivity and animal welfare concerns.

- **Environmental Impacts**

Farmland cleared for large-scale renewables results in biodiversity loss, soil erosion, and destruction of rural landscapes.

3. Health and Community Wellbeing

- **Survey Findings (Raw Data)**

Preliminary Rural Voices Survey results show:

- **Over 70%** of respondents report increased anxiety, depression, or stress linked to nearby renewable projects.
- **More than 60%** report sleep disturbance or headaches.
- Families report needing to leave their homes to find relief from noise, vibration, and light flicker.

- **Peer-Reviewed Evidence**

International research confirms that infrasound from wind turbines can travel up to **90 km**. Documented health impacts include:

- Sleep disturbance
- Headaches
- Cognitive impairment
- Anxiety and depression
- Cardiovascular stress

These health concerns are well recognised by global experts, yet Australia continues to rely on **outdated SA 2009 Guidelines** – designed when turbines were less than half the size of those now being installed.

- **Economic Cost of Mental Health**

The Productivity Commission estimates the annual cost of mental ill-health in Australia exceeds **\$60 billion**. Rural Australians already face higher suicide and depression rates. Adding chronic stressors such as industrial noise and community conflict only increases this burden.

If just **10% of the affected rural population in NSW incurs \$5,000 annually in treatment, lost productivity, and support costs**, the hidden health costs could easily run into **hundreds of millions of dollars per year**.

4. Community Impacts

- **Division and Distrust**

Consultation processes have been misleading and manipulative. Many residents were promised smaller turbines, fewer structures, or limited visibility – yet were delivered much larger projects with little recourse.

Communities are now divided, with some receiving payments while neighbours live with the impacts.

- **Property Values**

Landholders report significant loss of property value when located near wind or solar projects. Families who wish to sell cannot, trapping them in unhealthy environments.

5. Case Studies

- **Crookwell Region**

Residents near Crookwell 2 and Crookwell 3 report turbine noise at **56.4 dB** – above accepted thresholds – alongside infrasound, shadow flicker, and red aviation light flicker. EPA officers visiting the area confirmed noise levels and witnessed health concerns reported by multiple households.

- **Surveyed Landholders**

Farmers report livestock stress, reduced productivity, and increased personal anxiety. Some report family members experiencing such severe headaches and sleep disturbance that they must abandon work to rest indoors.

6. Recommendations

1. **Update Health Guidelines**

Replace outdated SA 2009 standards with modern, independent research that accounts for turbine size and infrasound.

2. **Protect Agricultural Land**

Exclude prime farmland from renewable energy developments to safeguard food production and rural economies.

3. **Transparency on Costs**

Publish full accounting of subsidies, transmission costs, and hidden price impacts on consumers.

4. **Independent Health Studies**

Conduct comprehensive health assessments in affected regions, with data collection on sleep disturbance, cardiovascular effects, and mental health outcomes.

5. **Respect Rural Voices**

Ensure genuine consultation with communities, not tokenistic or misleading processes.

Conclusion

The net zero transition, as currently implemented, is failing rural Australians. While the cities receive the energy, rural communities are left with the costs: loss of farmland, declining health, divided communities, and higher power prices.

Our **Rural Voices Survey** provides clear evidence that these impacts are real, widespread, and escalating. Unless urgent action is taken, the damage to Australia's rural lands, livestock, communities, and national food security will be irreversible.

We urge the Federal Government to take immediate steps to protect rural Australians, ensure fair and transparent processes, and place people, land, and wellbeing at the centre of the energy transition.

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