

## **Hard News Story**

### **Community Left Unheard**

Power Alliance Campaign Leader Nathan Lidgett said it will take a “grand swell of support” for the State Government to recognise their campaign against AusNet’s Western Transmission Network Project.

The Moorabool and Central Highlands Power Alliance met with locals at Rowsley Hall on Wednesday night to discuss their campaign to put the transmission lines underground.

“The campaign for us is to try and open doors...open doors for politicians who can make the change,” said Mr Lidgett.

Correspondence with influential politicians and AusNet services is difficult for the Power Alliance.

Minister for Energy and the Environment Lily D’Ambrosio can override AusNet’s plans but her offices told the Power Alliance it would be “inappropriate” for her to discuss the project with them.

Coimadai landowner Bill Saunders shared his experience as a member of the “AusNet Community Consultative Committee” at the meeting.

The Committee was established by AusNet to create a forum between AusNet and community representatives.

Mr Saunders, 68, said, “The overwhelming impression I got is that AusNet is just not listening to us.”

The purpose of the recent meeting Mr Saunders attended was to discuss AusNet’s communication with the community. Mr Saunders did not believe AusNet attempted to reconcile this issue.

“AusNet haven’t given me anything to go back to the community with which will give them any encouragement whatsoever to believe AusNet cares about them,” said Mr Saunders.

Mr Saunders agrees the lines must go underground and would like to see AusNet develop a walking trail on top of the buried cables to create tourism opportunities for landowners.

“There’s a whole million things that could happen if it was transformed into a community resource instead of a private company rip off,” said Mr Saunders.

AusNet Services declined to comment on the Western Transmission Network project.

## **Colour Story**

### **Myrniong Local Stands up to AusNet**

Myrniong resident Emma Muir and her husband Peter received a phone call in June last year that turned their lives upside down.

AusNet unveiled the “Western Victoria Transmission Project”.

The project plans to build 190 kilometres of overhead transmission towers to connect Bulgana to Melbourne’s West.

Ms Muir heard whispers of the project but she never imagined transmission towers the size of MCG’s light towers would be developed within three kilometres of her family property.

Ms Muir said, “There was no consultation. It was this is what is going to happen: We will compulsory acquire your property and you will be compensated accordingly”.

When Ms Muir and her husband refused compensation, AusNet “bullied” them and advised the couple “it didn’t matter” what they said, their property would be compulsory acquired.

AusNet’s proposed plans would strip Ms Muir and surrounding communities of their “entire livelihoods”.

Ms Muir and her husband live with their two children Annabelle, 18, and George, 16. Ms Muir refuses to take any risks when it comes to the health and wellbeing of her loved ones.

“It would devastate us as a family. The powerlines would be 50 [metres] to 100 metres from our house,” said Ms Muir.

“It’s just not safe. I honestly don’t think I could let my children live here.”

The devastating effects of the plans drove Ms Muir to become a steering committee member in the “Moorabool and Central Highland Power Alliance”, a group designed to represent local communities and campaign against the project.

Ms Muir and other founding members of the alliance were pleasantly surprised by the immediate support they received from local communities at their first meeting last year.

“We thought with COVID we would only get about twenty people. We ended up with four hundred people at the meeting.”

Ms Muir is hopeful the State Government will recognise the community’s outrage and choose to put the transmission lines underground.

Underground cables will stop the transmission lines from eating away at Victoria’s food bowls, communities and the tourism industry.

“There will come a point where the Government will see it is such an unpalatable decision,” said Ms Muir.

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## Reflection

My first consideration in writing the two pieces was the target audience. The stories were written for the Moorabool News, a local newspaper written for the community. Readers of the Moorabool News have an invested interest in the Western Transmission Network Project as it is likely that the Transmission Towers will affect their land value, or the land value of people they know. The stories are relevant because the Alliance meeting occurred recently, and Emma's story adds a personal element to the issue.

The two pieces are written in different styles but there are news writing rules which apply to both hard and colour news stories. The stories are written objectively, as I have not allowed my opinion to influence the way in which I wrote these pieces. I found writing objectively to be particularly difficult in these pieces, as AusNet's project affects my family and the people who surround me. The stories are written in active voice, and I avoided using wordy, meaningless language. This allowed the stories to be clear and easy to understand, targeting the general community of the Moorabool Shire. I kept to past tense, to ensure my stories were consistent.

In the hard news story, I used the inverted pyramid structure, following the 'form over function' rule. I included the most important information, the Power Alliance's campaign against AusNet's project, at the start of my piece. I included Bill Saunders' information at the latter of the story because it was the least pressing news. I did not use any emotive language and attempted to convey the information quickly. The quotes I used were direct and strong, adding clear value to the piece.

In the colour news story, I conveyed Emma's strong and emotional investment in the issue. To humanise her voice, I included her husband and children's names, as well as the ages of her children. I also used a combination of short and long pars for affect. Throughout the story, I used colloquial language and familiar cliches such as "turning their lives upside down" and "eating away at" to highlight the colourful style of the piece. In her interview, Emma spoke emotively about the issue. I conveyed this in the quotes I chose to use, as each quote was designed to emit a certain response from readers.

Journalists must adhere to public responsibilities in order to protect their democratic role. In each story I took care to ensure my writing was

fair, balanced and accurate to protect the public sphere. To provide balance, I attempted to contact AusNet Services through their media enquiries line but unfortunately the receiver told me AusNet only speak to “real” media outlets. In order to ensure my writing was accurate and fair, I asked for Bill and Emma’s permission to record their interviews and the local meeting. I also advised Bill, Emma and Nathan that I was a student journalist and asked their permission to include their quotes in my stories. I did not at any stage abuse my position or take advantage of any interviewees.