Dear (MP name),

**Help prevent bushfires – get Transgrid’s proposed overhead powerlines put underground**

A proposal for a high voltage overhead transmission line from Wagga and the Snowy Mountains to the outskirts of the Southern Highlands could make already fire-prone parts of southern NSW even more susceptible to devastating bushfires.

The risk is real and undergrounding needs to be negotiated before Transgrid is given the green light to proceed with this dangerous overhead transmission line proposal.

I am asking you, to look into the issue and make sure your State and federal colleagues, stop and rethink the proposal to transmit energy using 19th century technology instead of undergrounding the line.

While Transgrid is telling the community, there is nothing that can be done and the Towers will be built, we are urging governments to take a leadership position and ensure the foreign owned company doesn’t add to the already high bushfire risks in our community.

There are two main issues to consider around bushfire risk concerning HumeLink:

1. the power lines sparking fires in bushfire prone areas with communities still reeling from the Black Summer bushfires of 2019-20; and
2. restricted access (no-go zones) that transmission lines and towers cause, that impede fire fighters’ ability to control fires and so save lives and homes.

**Fires are regularly caused by power lines.**

Faults in electrical networks are one of the primary sources of major bushfires. Power line related faults cause 2-4% of all rural fires in Australia. [However, when weather conditions elevate fire risk, up to 50% of major fires are ignited by faults in networks](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0169204617301548).

A study by Wollongong University found powerline-caused ignitions were the most over-represented cause of bushfires with the most houses destroyed. We have also seen AusNet Services Group report to Energy Safe Victoria and the Australian Energy Regulator, that there were 79 ‘fire-start’ incidents in the 6 months between January and June 2016.  Of these, 59 were attributed to: lightning strikes; contacts with birds, animals, or objects, HV fuse failures; and other infrastructure failures. It is noted that the arc distance for a 500kV overhead power line that is hit by lightning is up to 50m from the base of the tower.

But the problem with overhead powerlines isn’t restricted to the increased threat of starting fires, but the impediment they present in fighting fires.

High Voltage powerlines effectively stop the management of bushfires in the vicinity because the space above and under powerlines are no go zones for firefighters.

Further dams that have been used to refill aerial firefighting fleet in southern NSW won’t be accessible if HumeLink runs overhead. Nowadays aerial water bombing is a commonly used method of fire control.

There are landowners who already have lower voltage transmission lines than the proposed 500kV line on their properties who lost significant parts of their property during the Black Summer bushfires of 2019-20 as a result of not being able to fight the fires in the vicinity of the lines.

In neighbouring Victoria, the threat of electricity assets and towers to bushfire-prone communities and wildlife is well recognised, with the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission highlighting that the *“State has a history of electricity assets causing bushfires. In 1969 and 1977 the failure of electricity assets—including the clashing of conductors, conductors contacting trees, and inefficient fuses—caused major bushfires. This history was repeated on 7 February 2009, when five of the 11 major fires that began that day were caused by failed electricity assets; among the fires was that at Kilmore East, as a result of which 119 people died.”*

Similarly in California in the United States, its largest electricity provider has commenced undergrounding its electricity assets days after a preliminary report by the state regulators said that its equipment was responsible for several fires that destroyed the town of Paradise and killed 85 people in 2018.

I ask you, what will you say to families if their homes and livelihoods are destroyed because of the transmission lines, either causing a fire or preventing fire control?

Underground electricity transmission [is best practice around the world](https://www.tdworld.com/grid-innovations/transmission/article/20966809/reimagining-the-grid). It is more reliable, safer, and more efficient and will not be impacted by extreme weather or increase the risk of catastrophic bushfires.

Do you want to be responsible for another devastating bushfire like the ‘Black Summer’ bushfires by letting a private company minimise construction costs, while at the same time neglecting the evidence and best practice surrounding these powerlines and fire impacts?

I urge you to support undergrounding HumeLink so that we have low bushfire risk electricity transmission, as we transition to a low carbon energy future.

Regards,