

# UNDERSTANDING VISUAL IMPACT

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## Part 1 – Why Visual Impact Matters

### Introduction

Visual impact is one of the key considerations assessed during the planning of major developments in New South Wales. It is not simply about whether people like or dislike a development. Rather, it examines how a proposal changes the appearance and character of the landscape, and how those changes are experienced by people who live, work and travel through the area.



### What is Visual Impact?

Visual impact refers to the effect a development has on the landscape and on the people who experience it. Professional landscape specialists assess how visible a development will be, how dominant it may appear, and whether it changes the existing landscape character.

- Landscape character
- Scenic quality
- Visual amenity
- Visual catchment
- Public and private viewpoints

## GLOSSARY: KEY PLANNING TERMS

These terms are commonly used in Visual Impact Assessments to understand how a development may affect a landscape and the people who experience it.

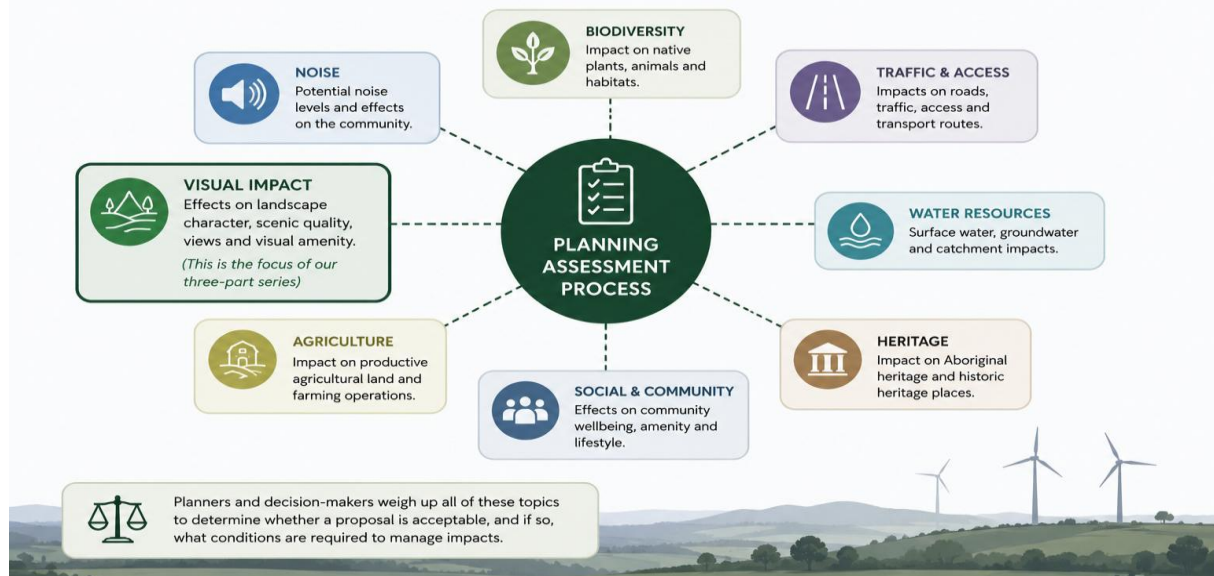
| LANDSCAPE CHARACTER                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | SCENIC QUALITY                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | VISUAL AMENITY                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | VISUAL CATCHMENT                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | PUBLIC AND PRIVATE VIEWPOINTS                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
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| <p>The combination of natural and human elements that make an area distinctive and unique. It includes landform, vegetation, water, land use and settlement patterns.</p> <p><b>KEY POINT</b><br/>Every landscape has its own character that the community values.</p> | <p>The value people place on the attractiveness of a landscape. Scenic quality can be influenced by natural beauty, openness, views, tranquility and a sense of place.</p> <p><b>KEY POINT</b><br/>Landscapes with high scenic quality are often highly valued by communities and visitors.</p> | <p>The pleasantness of views and surroundings as experienced by people in their everyday lives. It relates to how a development may affect the views people have from their homes, work or local area.</p> <p><b>KEY POINT</b><br/>Good visual amenity contributes to people's wellbeing and enjoyment of their surroundings.</p> | <p>The geographical area from which a development may be visible. This can range from nearby properties to many kilometres away depending on the height of the development and landform.</p> <p><b>KEY POINT</b><br/>Tall structures on ridges can be visible over very large distances.</p> | <p>The places where people may see a development. These include public locations (roads, parks, lookouts, walking tracks) and private locations (homes, farms, businesses).</p> <p><b>KEY POINT</b><br/>Assessments consider both public and private viewpoints.</p> |
| <p> These terms help planners and the community understand how a proposed development might change the landscape and the views that people value.</p>                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |

## Why Does Planning Consider Visual Impact?

NSW planning legislation recognises that landscapes are shared community assets. Visual impacts are assessed alongside matters such as noise, biodiversity, heritage, traffic and agriculture. The aim is to determine whether a development is appropriate for its setting and whether impacts are acceptable.

## THE PLANNING ASSESSMENT PROCESS

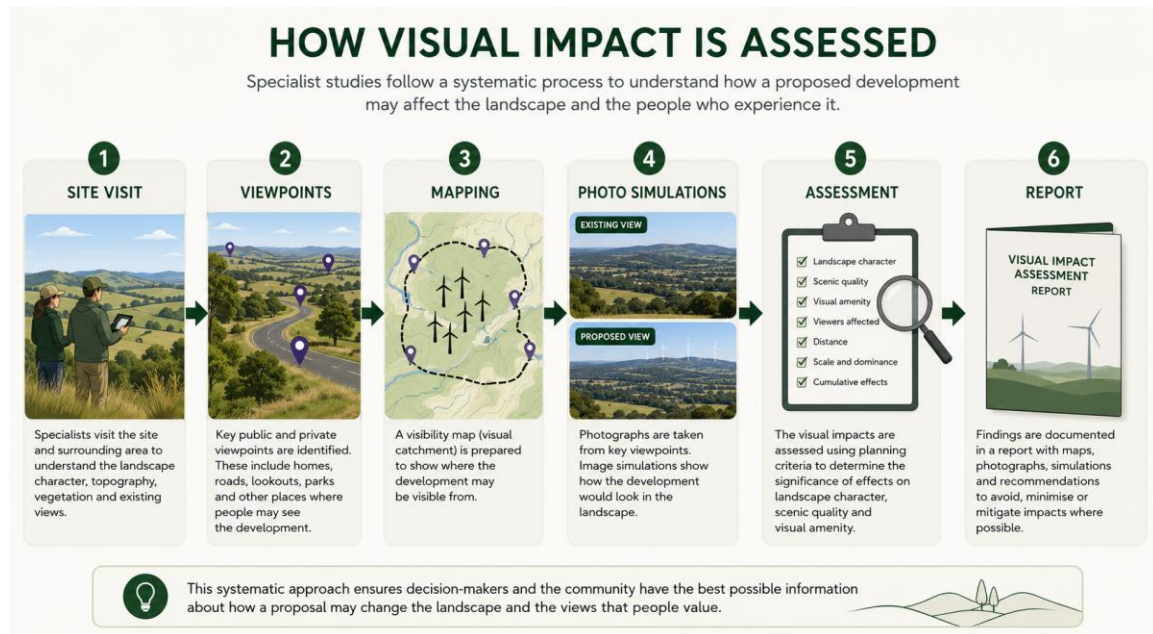
When a major development is proposed, a range of potential impacts are assessed. Visual impact is one of several important topics considered.



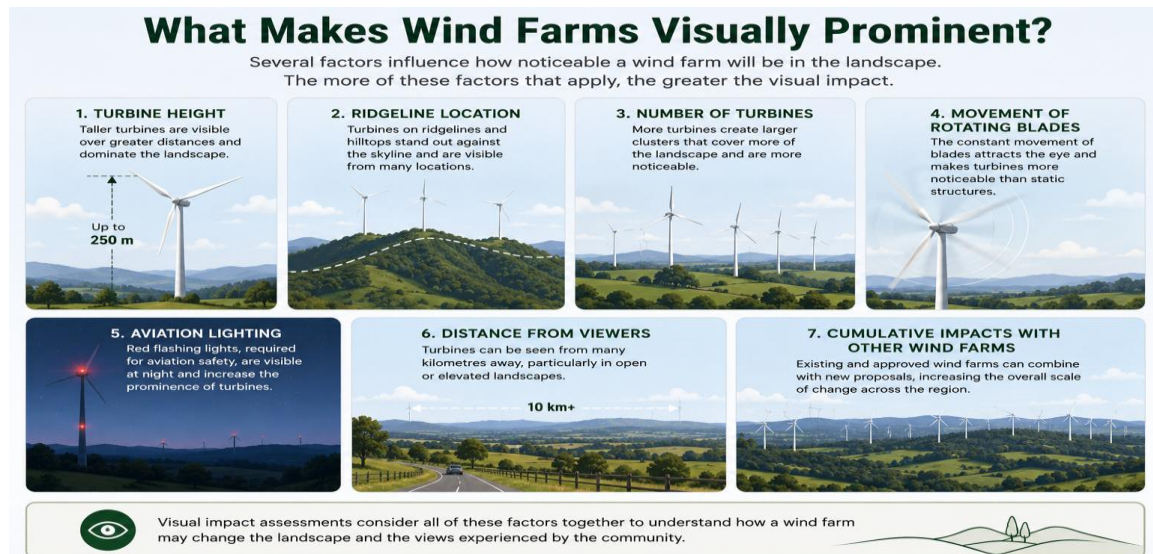
## How is Visual Impact Assessed?

A typical assessment includes:

1. Site inspections by qualified landscape specialists.
2. Identification of key public and private viewpoints.
3. Preparation of visibility mapping.
4. Production of photo simulations.
5. Assessment of landscape sensitivity and significance.
6. Recommendations to avoid or reduce impacts where possible.



## What Makes Wind Farms Visually Prominent?

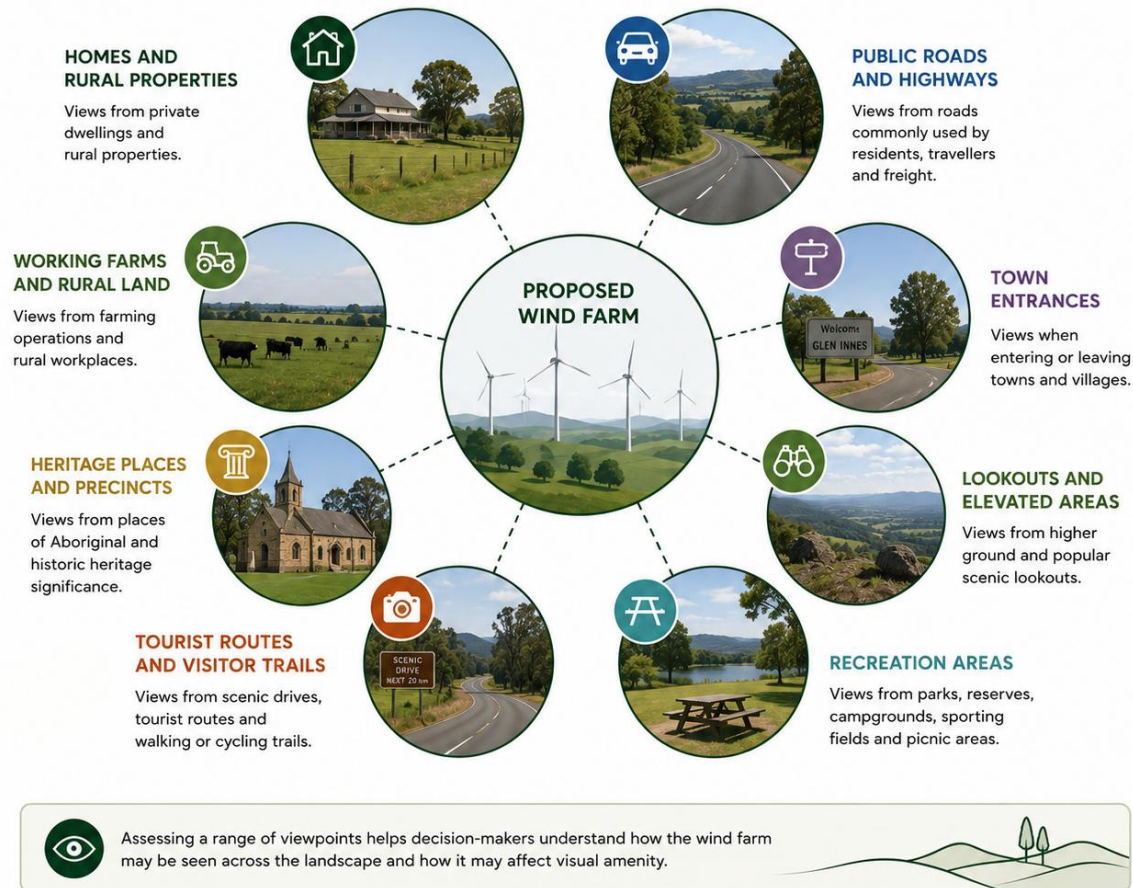


## Visual Impact Isn't Just About Nearby Homes

Visual assessments consider the wider community, including views from public roads, towns, scenic lookouts, tourist routes, recreation areas and surrounding rural properties.

### EXAMPLES OF VIEWPOINTS CONSIDERED IN A VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Visual impact assessments consider views from a range of public and private locations. The exact viewpoints are selected based on the project area, local roads, nearby homes, topography and places valued by the community.



## Local Planning Context

The assessment of the former Glen Innes Wind Farm demonstrates that visual impact can be a significant planning issue. The Independent Planning Commission concluded that the proposal's visual and cumulative landscape impacts were unacceptable, and these findings formed part of the reasons for refusing the project.

# Notice of Refusal of Modification Application

## Section 75W of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*

As delegate of the Minister for Planning, pursuant to Section 75W of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*, I determine the modification application referred to in Schedule 1, by refusing to modify the project approval referred to in Schedule 2 and Appendix 1, for the reasons outlined in Schedule 3.



Mike Young  
Executive Director  
Energy, Resources and Compliance

Sydney      2 September      2020

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### SCHEDULE 1

Modification application "Glen Innes Wind Farm – Modification 4" submitted by Glen Innes Windpower Pty Ltd on 7 August 2017.

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### SCHEDULE 2

The project approval (07\_0036) for the Glen Innes Wind Farm, granted by the Minister for Planning on 2 October 2009, comprising the land identified in Appendix 1.

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### SCHEDULE 3

The reasons for refusing the modification application are:

1. the proposed modification would result in unacceptable visual impacts on surrounding residences and the local landscape;
2. the proposed modification is not supported by the majority of local residents; and
3. the proposed modification is not in the public interest.

## Key Takeaways

- Visual impact is a recognised planning issue.
- It is assessed using established professional methods.
- It considers impacts on the wider community.
- Scale, location and movement all influence visual prominence.
- Every proposal is assessed on its own merits.

## Part 2

### The Highlands Precincts Activation Framework & Strategy

Why It Matters to the Visual Impact Discussion

#### Looking to the Future

The Glen Innes Severn Council's Highlands Precincts Activation Framework & Strategy sets out a long-term vision for how the Highlands should grow while protecting the characteristics that make the region unique. It recognises that landscape, scenic quality and sense of place are valuable community assets that should be considered in future planning decisions.

#### What Does the Framework Say?

The Framework promotes a future for the Highlands that:

- Protects the unique landscape character of the region.
- Enhances scenic quality and community identity.
- Supports tourism and visitor experiences.
- Encourages development that complements the natural and rural environment.
- Strengthens pride in place and the long-term liveability of the district.

These objectives recognise that the landscape itself is one of the Highlands' defining assets.



### **Why Is This Relevant to Visual Impact?**

Visual impact assessments consider whether a development is appropriate for its landscape setting. The Framework asks a similar question at a strategic level: will future development protect and enhance the qualities that define the Glen Innes Highlands?

The proposed Reddestone Wind Farm is located on the prominent Range, approximately 10 kilometres west of Glen Innes. Because of its elevated location, the ridgeline forms part of the broader landscape experienced by residents and visitors. For that reason, the relationship between the proposal and the long-term vision outlined in the Framework deserves careful consideration.

### **A Question for the Community**

If the Highlands' landscapes are recognised as one of the region's greatest assets, how should proposals that may significantly alter those landscapes be assessed?

This is not simply a question about renewable energy. It is a planning question. Every major proposal should be considered alongside the strategic vision Council has established for the Highlands and whether it complements the region's landscape, tourism appeal, liveability and sense of place.

### **Visual Impact Is About More Than Individual Views**

Visual impact extends beyond individual properties. The Framework reminds us that landscapes are shared by the entire community. Residents experience them every day, visitors remember them long after they leave, businesses rely on them to attract tourism, and future generations inherit the planning decisions made today.

Protecting landscape character is therefore about more than preserving a view—it is about safeguarding one of the Highlands' most valuable and enduring assets.



### **Key Framework Messages**

Protect the unique landscape character of the Highlands.

Enhance scenic quality and sense of place.

Support tourism and local businesses.

Strengthen community identity.

Plan for future generations.