

ELECTRICITY ACT 1989

TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING (SCOTLAND) ACT 1997

DPEA CODE OF PRACTICE FOR ELECTRICITY ACT INQUIRIES

TEALING TO KINTORE UPGRADE PROJECT (TKUP) TRI-120-1

Community Hearing Statement on MENTAL HEALTH IMPACTS by EILEEN WEST

My name is Eileen West. I live north of a line between Drumoak and Banchory. Before I begin my statement I wish to refer to my 13 page submission on Mental Health impacts which the Reporters have inexplicably declined to admit to the Inquiry, use as supporting documentation or exhibit on the DPEA website. This is especially disappointing as it indicates that the community's wellbeing is really of no concern. 'Planning is for People' never felt so hollow, despite the fact that the only people in this room whose wellbeing is jeopardised by this project are members of that community."

Drumoak is a close-knit village that, for the last three years, has lived under the sword of Damocles of SSEN's overhead line proposal.

I'm here to speak not about steel and infrastructure, but about people. About families. About community. About the human cost of a process and a project that have shown far too little compassion and far too little respect for the people expected to live with the consequences.

Let's be honest about what is happening here.

This is not an abstract planning debate. This is not a technical exercise that exists only on maps and engineering drawings. This is a proposal that has already brought fear, anxiety, grief, anger and despair into people's homes before one single pylon has been erected.

That alone should stop every decision-maker in their tracks.

A survey by Crathes, Drumoak and Durriss Community Council found that 80.9% of respondents said these proposals were already having a detrimental effect on their health and wellbeing. More than four in five people. That is an extraordinary figure. It is a figure that should ring alarm bells throughout this inquiry, throughout government and throughout SSEN.

If any other project generated such a stark warning about physical health, it would be treated as a serious and urgent matter. Mental health deserves exactly the same seriousness. Instead, communities have too often been met with indifference, minimisation and contemptuous shrugs.

People are living under constant strain. They fear what these enormous structures will do to the places they call home. They fear the years of dangerous construction traffic on narrow rural roads. They fear the industrialisation of landscapes that have sustained their wellbeing for decades.

And these fears are not irrational nor are they exaggerated. They are deeply human responses to a threat that feels imposed, relentless and profoundly unjust.

There is much talk of sleeplessness. Of living on edge. Of feeling triggered by the sight of an SSEN vehicle. Of no longer feeling at peace in their own homes or on their own roads. Of dread when unfamiliar vans appear at the end of a lane. Of anger at seeing cherished woods, habitats and green spaces treated as expendable. Of grief - real grief - at the possible loss of places woven into the emotional fabric of their lives.

These are not trivial reactions. They are evidence of harm.

And what has too often met that harm? Not compassion. Not care. Not empathy. But dismissal.

And most troubling of all, mental health has been sidelined. Scoped out. Treated as something to be dealt with “internally” by SSEN rather than independently assessed with the seriousness it clearly demands.

That is unacceptable.

To scope out mental health in a case where over 80% of surveyed residents report harm to their wellbeing is not just an oversight. It is an indictment of priorities. It says, loudly and clearly, that the emotional and psychological toll on communities is somehow secondary. Something to be managed, rather than confronted.

But people are not collateral. Communities are not an inconvenience. And wellbeing is not an optional extra.

What is under threat here is not only landscape. It is the fabric of rural life itself.

Neither SSEN nor Government cannot wash its hands of this.

There is a deep and growing sense that public authorities have failed to stand up for the people they are meant to serve. Many residents feel crushing disappointment that local and national government appear willing to endorse a project causing visible distress while invoking “national need” as if that phrase overrides and trumps everything.

It does not.

Planning and Electricity Act policy do not require infrastructure at any human cost. A just transition is supposed to be JUST. National policy is supposed to support healthy, resilient communities, not sacrifice them. Ministers are required to weigh amenity, environment,

community impact and human wellbeing. Mental health is not peripheral to that exercise. It is central.

And if decision-makers ignore that or treat it as secondary to engineering convenience, then they will not merely fail communities, they will fail the law's requirement to take material considerations properly into account.

We are not anti-progress. We are not anti-energy. We are not standing in the way of decarbonisation. We are asking for something much more reasonable ... that our lives, our health, our homes and our communities should matter.

We are asking not to be treated as expendable.

I urge this Inquiry to place mental health and wellbeing at the centre of your deliberations where they belong. Insist upon an INDEPENDENT and robust mental health impact assessment. Give real weight to the evidence of distress already before you. Re-examine whether this project, in its current form, is truly necessary and proportionate. And do not allow vague references to national policy to become a licence for avoidable human harm.

Behind every line on a map is a home.

Behind every transmission route is a community.

And behind every policy decision are people who must live with its consequences.

They deserve compassion, honesty and protection.

So far, they have had far too little of these.

Eileen West

12 May 2026