



SOUTHERN & HILLS LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION

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20 January 2011

Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Sir,

RE : RURAL WIND FARMS - FEDERAL INQUIRY

Submission to the Senate Community Affairs Committee Inquiry into The Social and Economic Impact of Rural Wind Farms.

The Region

The Southern & Hills Local Government Association is a regional association of seven Councils that includes the tourism regions of the Barossa Valley, The Adelaide Hills, The Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island. Significant areas within the region are under primary production include highly productive farm, horticulture, viticulture, forestry and intensive animal keeping enterprises and in the more undulating parts sheep farming, cereal growing and dairying. Significant urban developments are also proposed within the region as part of the 30 Year Plan for Greater Adelaide. The region has a total population of more than 130,000 people.

Need for National Development Standards

The District Council of Yankalilla (DCY) situated on the southern part of the Fleurieu Peninsula has an existing wind farm and there have been two other proposals that have not proceeded.

The Wind Farm provisions within the District Council of Yankalilla Development Plan were introduced by way of a Ministerial Plan Amendment and they are pretty general in nature, although there are other council wide planning principles and objectives that can be applied to different aspects of this type of development. The issue is that the conditions are of a general nature and making a case to support or reject can mean paying for expert consultants. Over the last several years, international and interstate standards have become more detailed and more 'performance based', seeking to establish greater setback distances to more adequately deal with low frequency sound impacts on human health etc. The Planning Principles within South Australia have not been updated since they were introduced in 2003.

The EPA in South Australia has updated certain aspects of their Noise Guidelines for Wind Farms but in trying to define different levels of acceptable noise limits between Primary Industry and Rural Living areas, they are missing the point about recognising that it is the on-ground pattern of development and density of nearby residences within rural areas where wind farms may be proposed (regardless of what zone it is), that should form part of the criteria for establishing the limits. A further factor is that they are only guidelines and on appeal has

DCY has had three wind farm applications within its district.

1. The Starfish Hill Wind farm was processed as a Crown Development where the applicant was the State Department of Industry and Trade back in 2001 - 2002 and was approved with what seem like minimal conditions. The approval by Minister Laidlaw dated 28th February 2002 is attached. This farm was subsequently constructed.

http://www.tsinfrastructurefund.com/page/Infrastructure_Assets/Starfish_Hill_wind_farm

2. The Myponga/Sellicks Hill Wind farm was dealt with as a Major Project under the Development Act 1993 between 2003 and 2009 and the attached Government Gazette extract gives some idea of the timeframe, amendments and consequent decisions that were made to approve that development. The conditions of consent are a lot more detailed than for Starfish Hill. The approval for the development is contained in the attached pages of the South Australian Government Gazette of 23rd July 2009 pages 3244 to 3246. This development has not been commenced and there has been an announcement that the proponents will not be developing the site. The approval is due to expire later this year.
3. Council dealt with a Non Complying Wind farm Development Application (DA) by Origin Energy in 2004 (over 380 representations lodged and a very lengthy public submissions process at the CDAP meetings, spanning 3 nights). DCY engaged Nolan Rumsby, Planners, to assess the DA and DCY refused the application. As a non-complying development there were no appeal rights. As DCY had carefully dealt with the processing of the DA the applicant did not seek a judicial review.

Need for National Emergency Management Standards for Wind Farms

The following information was taken from an article in the Victor Harbor Times as a result of a fire within one of the turbines at the Star Fish Hill Wind farm.

Saturday 30th of October 2010 at 2.33 pm the Southern Fleurieu CFS group was alerted to a fire at the Star Fish Hill Wind Farm, near Cape Jervis, in which a turbine had caught alight.

On arrival CFS Officers could do little but watch the blaze from half a kilometre away as the situation was deemed too dangerous to approach.

When Work Safe SA arrived to the scene CFS officers were told to retreat a further 500 metres away from the fire as the blades continued to spin.

CFS Officers kept watch for spot fires but were unable to extinguish those close to the turbine.

Water cannot be used to extinguish the cause of the wind turbine fire as the turbine's hub contains a large electrical network and from the ground to blade tip the turbines stand 100 meters tall.

In the event of a wind turbine fire during the fire danger season aerial support could aid CFS by extinguishing fires caused by embers around the turbine.

The Southern Fleurieu CFS Group is in ongoing discussions with the regional CFS officer and representatives from Star Fish Hill wind farms on the issue.

The outcome of the Starfish Hill tower fire was that the tower self destructed causing \$3 million dollars damage.

<http://www.victorharbortimes.com.au/news/local/news/general/cant-fight-the-fire/1987235.aspx>

The Starfish Hill wind turbine fire is the third in South Australia since 2006, with a blaze at the Lake Bonney Wind Farm in January 2006, and another at Cathedral Rocks Wind Farm, Port Lincoln in February 2009.

Almost all wind farms are established in rural areas and for the summer months a failing wind farm tower presents as an extreme fire risk to the region. Had the Star Fish Hill tower failed in the summer then it would have started a bushfire.

It is believed that in South Australia the operator of a wind farm is unable to be directed to shut down the wind farm on a day of catastrophic fire danger. It is at the operator's discretion to take such action.

There is a need for a national standard for emergency management of wind farms that should include the ability to isolate a failing tower from the supply grid, built in fire control technology, standards of safe distances, the availability appropriately approved and trained fighting equipment and fire fighters for industrial scale electrical fires, and an emergency management risk assessment of the wind farm as part of the application process.

Yours faithfully



Fred Pedler
EXECUTIVE OFFICER