



EYRE PENINSULA LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION

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

Dear Sir/Madam,

Inquiry into the Social and Economic Impact of Rural Wind Farms.

ISSUE: PLANNING ISSUES

I operate a regional local government organisation (Eyre Peninsula Local Government Association) for all eleven Member Councils based in the West of South Australia. Our geography means we enjoy particularly good wind speeds (often in excess of 10m/sec) so have attracted a good deal of interest from both the State Government (mentioned in July by Premier Rann in announcing his Green Grid vision) and wind farm operators. Currently, we have 68 turbines in 2 windfarms; one along the Cleve Hills (35 turbines) and the other along our Southern coast at Cathedral Rocks (33 turbines.) Each has a claimed capacity of 2MW. However, we are poised to potentially receive applications for many farms.

The existing Cathedral Rocks farm (I live 30kms away and can see it) has not to my knowledge raised great public debate with all turbines on a single farming property with no residents within several kms of the farm. Anecdotally, I am told that at least one of the residents near Cleve suffers some of the cluster of symptoms referred to as “wind turbine syndrome” but signed a gag order as part of their agreement with the operators. I have heard no major outcry from residents near that windfarm either.

Premier Rann suggests that EP may be able to support another 5,000 turbines and, keen to provide updated planning briefing for all our Members, I turned to the Planning SA Better Development Plan Policy Library, the basis of our Planning system in SA. The advice to our Councils about the framework and principles they need to apply, in those instances where they are the relevant planning authority, were last updated in 2002. The 2010 version of the BDP Policy library has a single page that makes no mention of the cumulative impacts, one of the main issues globally where residents impact is highest. Indeed, currently residents in the Mid North of SA are voicing strong opposition to the scale of development along ridgelines there and we are keen to ensure our members receive the best planning

briefing possible prior to significant further developments in our region. I have had several contacts with Planning SA who has told me they currently have no one available to consider windfarm planning issues and to update their advice to Councils as their workload is dedicated to the Plan for Greater Adelaide. I am still pursuing this as a matter of priority for our region.

In my opinion, the following specific planning issues have potential to cause our Councils concern.

- **Noise level.** We know NZ6808 has set a maximum noise level of 40dB, as has I understand Denmark. However, there are issues associated with how that is measured, what it means in reality etc etc. The SA EPA Noise Guidelines (July 2009) seem to be a moving target in terms of background issues, noise monitoring etc and seems to have no compliance “grunt” in demanding noise levels be adhered to. I’m not sure they represent direction to planners.
- **Turbine setback from residential housing.** I’ve sought a recommended safe setback for each turbine and can find no such defined target. The WHO (World Health Org) has previously issued guidelines and different set backs are suggested by a number of authors. The official planning advice I was given by Planning SA is that there is no known link between windfarms and adverse health effects for humans (the so called “wind turbine syndrome.”) Searching the many doctors’ papers on the internet, and referred to in medical journals, it seems the missing information may be that no baseline health data has been collected on a community prior to windfarms being established. Consistently, the medical profession (including doctors in SA) have expressed concern at the cluster of similar symptoms experienced by some people in the vicinity of turbines but disappearing as soon as a person moves away. The Ontario Health Study, writings of American Dr Nina Pierpont and many others should be cause for some caution and it is interesting that standards of set back, erring on the side of conservatism, are not suggested for planning authorities.

The health of regional Australia needs better attention!

- **Turbine Wake Plume and effects on airplane movements.** Few authorities have given planning advice in relation to turbine wake plume although aviators in Australia have expressed concern. I am aware of a paper from Ralph Holland (November 2009) who looked at potential impact on Crookwell airport. His calculations suggested the extent of velocity deficit extended a considerable distance from wind turbines are represented a safety issue for light and ultra light craft either taking off or landing. Exactly who would be the relevant planning authority in relation to this consideration is not clear. I’m unclear if CASA would be likely to make comment but, with emergency air ambulance flights an integral part of our primary health care system, this is an important planning considerations for our Councils.
- **Status of National Windfarm Development Guidelines 2010 (DRAFT)** Although not apparently released and endorsed by Planning SA, this has been available on the Environment Protection and Heritage web this year. Even if not endorsed, it represents an attempt to plug a clear deficiency in not having a standard planning approach to windfarm development in rural Australia. Interestingly, the effects on human health and visual amenity are rarely dealt with and there are no standards suggested.

While there are no set back guidelines, no consistency in planning information in relation to the cumulative impacts and generally poor information available for planning authorities, the public response from those who live in close proximity will be often less than enthusiastic. No doubt you will receive several submissions dealing with loss of amenity, economic impacts from being surrounded by windfarms (property may not be saleable so be worthless.)

- **Impacts on neighbouring property**> For planning authorities, many of the adverse reactions of residents don't really emerge until the development is in place. The sheer scale of modern turbines, coupled with the aggregation of numbers, is causing problems. However, the economic inflows are only available to the landowners with turbines on them, so other affected residents are then forced to turn their attention to the planning authorities to seek solution. Ultimately, we know this often ends in litigation.
- **Benefits of windfarms?**
Governments are often keen to endorse windfarms as they are popular with the "green" voter who typically lives in a regional or metro centre, is not exposed to the negative impacts, and blindly believes they are a solution to our AGW climate change panic. Even Denmark struggles to show emissions reduction from their increased reliance of wind power, typically a high cost, low efficiency, non-baseline power source.

As a matter of urgency, we need to develop an integrated national planning system that provides a consistent approach to planning for windfarms and that offers protection to rural residents from the well documented negative effects of these massive industrial developments.

Diana Laube