

SUBMISSION TO ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE INQUIRY INTO THE APPROVAL PROCESSES FOR RENEWABLE ENERGY PROJECTS IN VICTORIA.

INTRODUCTION

Residents Against Turbines Inc was formed five years ago to attempt to protect the McHarg Ranges area of Central Victoria from the development of a 150 turbine windfarm on top of the Great Dividing Range. This Submission covers two recent developments of relevance to the first three of the Committee's Terms of Reference. These are:

- The need for the approval process to more adequately deal with fire risk caused by wind turbines; and
- The issue of low frequency noise caused by wind turbines.

GENERAL POSITION

Before turning to those two specific issues, we wish to make some general comment.

The Committee's Terms of Reference seem heavily slanted toward further easing the way for windfarm developers in what already seem to residents of communities facing these developments one-sided developer- oriented procedures. We would hope that the Committee would see its task as being to assess the appropriate balance between the Government's policy of promoting windfarm development, as compared with the rights of Victorian citizens to a fair hearing and to the reasonable protection of their property rights.

Windfarm developers benefit from substantial , in effect, subsidies to underwrite their investments. There is substantial argument that their contribution to lower emissions will turn out to be much less than they claim because of the back-up capacity which has to be in spinning reserve. A Report was commissioned from Access Economics into the economics of a windfarm in the McHarg Ranges. The Report is attached. Among the findings by Access was that:

‘A 200MW McHarg Ranges windfarm does not represent a cost effective approach to greenhouse gas abatement in the long term. To that extent, it fails against a key Government objective of wind power in Victoria’.

Particularly given those factors and the over-riding of normal planning processes that windfarm developers already enjoy in Victoria, it is difficult to see any argument for further planning concessions. There is no reason why this industry should be free of the normal planning checks and balances. Further concessions would need to be explicitly justified by the Committee. Planning concessions to windfarms are inevitably at the expense of the democratic rights of the people in the communities affected.

If further concessions were to be contemplated, we believe the Committee should recommend measures that would compensate individuals affected by windfarm development.

FIRE RISK

Wind turbines cause fires. While this is not a common occurrence, it is frequent enough around the world to be relevant to the approvals process and of major concern to residents of especially fire prone districts.

Victoria, along with Southern California and Spain is one of the most fire prone areas on the planet—because of the combination of high fuel levels and hot summers. Within Victoria, there are areas that historically have been designated as especially prone to wildfire. These historically were areas given Wildfire Management Overlay (WMO) status for Council Planning purposes, imposing condition and limitations on the construction of dwellings in such areas. The guidelines for the development of windfarms place no emphasis on fire risk, though the existence of WMOs could be argued to be a relevant factor in the approval process.

A large part of the McHarg Ranges was subject to a WMO restriction for as far back as most residents can remember. It recently became known in the area that in 2006 the Minister for Planning approved the removal of 99% of the land previously covered by the WMO. This was done on the recommendation of the CFA organisation without consulting either the Tooborac or Nullavale CFA branches, the two brigades with the greatest knowledge of the area.

The attached map shows the area historically covered by the WMO, the area now covered, the Black Saturday Redesdale fire footprint, the 2005 fire in the Ranges and the area likely to be host to wind turbines if the proposed development proceeds.

It is not known why the WMO was removed. There was no consultation with the local community. The decision was not given any publicity and was not known to anyone in the area until recently—three years later.

The Committee should seek answers to the following questions:

- **Why was the WMO removed?**
- **Why was it done without consultation with the local community?**
- **Should windfarms be allowed in areas where WMOs currently or previously existed?**
- **Have any windfarms been developed in areas that are currently or have previously been subject to WMOs?**
- **Did the removal of the WMO have anything to do with the prospective windfarm development in the McHarg Ranges.?**

LOW FREQUENCY NOISE

Wind turbines cause low frequency vibrations. There are many examples already in Victoria of families affected by this, who have become ill and have often had to abandon.

After denying the problem for years the Victorian Government has finally acknowledged that the problem might be real and has asked relevant departments to look into the matter. This is welcome, but utterly unconvincing. A Departmental inquiry will inevitably be seen as not being independent, and thus not credible.

The Committee should recommend:

- **An independent inquiry into the health affects of low frequency noise associated with wind turbines; and**
- **A moratorium on any further windfarm developments until that Inquiry has reported its findings.**

Signed by Peter McLaughlin

Residents Against Turbines
October 2009