

Senate Community Affairs Committee

Senate Inquiry: The Social and Economic Impact of Rural Wind Farms

Dear Senate Committee members,

I am writing with reference to the above inquiry into the Social and Economic impacts of Wind Farms in rural areas. In keeping with the title of the Inquiry, I have separated the impacts into Social and Economic. In making this submission, I have tried to briefly identify the issues rather than discuss each in depth as I believe many of these issues require significant further investigation, potentially by experts in the relevant fields.

Social Impacts

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION:

No wind farm installation should be constructed without extensive community consultation and ultimately the overwhelming support of the community around the site. Whilst there are examples of wind farm operators which have conducted such community engagement and gained community support, there are many other examples where this has not happened. The wind farm proponents at Bald Hills for example did virtually nothing to engage the local community.

This community is totally against any wind farm installation as evidenced at the Planning Hearing where some 1400 people either presented or sent in objections against the wind farm and only 40 submissions or presentations were in favour – and yet the planning permit was issued! In other instances I have heard of, the proponent will withdraw their application in the face of such overwhelming opposition however the proponents at Bald Hills were not interested in the local community.

NOISE:

There is now extensive evidence world wide that wind farms cause serious health issues through constant and repetitive sound and vibrations. People who live up to 2 klms away from wind farms have experienced significant illnesses which have been traced back to their proximity to the wind farm.

One solution for the wind farm operators has been to buy out the effected land owner and move them away, with the transaction shrouded in Non Disclosure

Agreements ("NDA") so the former land owner cannot tell others of the issues they experienced.

I am personally aware of this occurring at Toora in South Gippsland where a local farmer was relocated (including moving their house) to Jamieson with all costs paid for by the wind farm operator on the proviso that they signed an NDA. This is a clear indication of the reality of the problem.

PLANNING APPROVAL PROCESS:

The Planning Approval Process is biased totally in favour of the wind farm operators. As an example, the Terms of Reference for the Bald Hills wind farm application were so narrow that the Panel Chairman advised us some 12 months after the panel hearing that "*there was no way the planning application was not going to be approved*".

This same attitude has been mirrored by the Victorian State Labour Government which has pushed through approvals and amendments to approvals with little concern for the fairness of the process. Former Planning Minister Madden recently approved an increase in height for the Bald Hills turbines of approximately 30% (from 110m – 135m) on the basis that it was an insignificant change!

VISUAL AMENITY:

Wind farms are visually highly unattractive installations that often get placed or proposed near stunning coastal areas. This is certainly the case at Bald Hills. Further, there is no requirement on the proposed operators to make good the area after the installation has reached the end of its operating life. Given each turbine will have over 600 tonnes of concrete at the base and will stand at 135m tall, the proposed turbines will be a scar on the South Gippsland coastline for decades to come if they are permitted to be built.

OTHER IMPACTS:

Wind farms cause a number of other social impacts. The proposed Bald Hills installation for example will have negative implications on the following:

- Bird Life – The proposed installation sites are situated beside a wet lands and an animal sanctuary.
- Aboriginal heritage – the area proposed was home to aboriginal communities prior to settlement and therefore any industrial development such as a wind farm will undoubtedly disturb aboriginal artifacts.

Economic Impacts

INEFFICIENCY OF WIND FARMS:

The reality is, wind farms only produce a fraction of their claimed capacity. On average, turbines will deliver approximately 25% of their capacity in any given year. This means that they are highly inefficient, particularly when you consider that these farms are generally heavily subsidized to try and make them economically viable.

LAND VALUES:

Whilst wind farm proponents will deny it, every real estate agent I have spoken to has been of the firm view that wind farm installations have a detrimental effect on surrounding land values. It is totally unreasonable that anyone who happens to live near a wind farm has the value of their primary asset diminished due to a neighbor allowing the wind farm operator to lease their land?

ECONOMIC INEQUITY:

The structure of wind farm leases mean that the only people in the local community who benefit from them are those that lease their land to the operators. This, combined with the negative impact they have on land values, means that wind farms represent a totally inequitable economic proposition for any community they operate in.

Thank-you for considering the information contained in this submission. As a result of this inquiry and in light of the overwhelming evidence against wind farms worldwide, I would hope that all wind farms that are not yet constructed in Australia or are still in the planning process, are reconsidered and, where they are found to be inappropriate, their planning permits are terminated or not issued.

Yours faithfully

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