

## THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACT OF RURAL WINDFARMS

I wish to make comment on the enormous social and economic impact wind farms are already having and will have in rural Australia, particularly on south-western district of Victoria .

My husband and I have been involved for seven years now, along with many other adjoining neighbours, in opposition to the MACARTHUR wind farm of 140 turbines, which will span an area of more than 55 square kilometres between the towns of Penshurst, Hawkesdale and Macarthur in Victoria. We also have last year discovered we will be impacted upon by a proposal for a massive 225 turbine wind farm (PENSHURST wind farm RES Australia) five kilometres to the north and east of us, and another proposed wind farm, the WILLATOOK wind farm of 190 turbines only two kilometres to the south of the Macarthur wind farm. If these are all constructed we will be surrounded to the north, east, and south by 555 turbines of up to 175 metres in height, the cumulative impact of which will be horrific, and that's a gross understatement !!!

Adjoining landholders were first informed of Macarthur Wind farm ( originally owned by Southern Hydro but now AGL and Meridian Energy)'s intention to construct a wind farm in December 2004, two weeks AFTER the 7000 residents were notified in Hamilton, nearly 40 kms to the north of the wind farm site. This was our first experience of the arrogance and extremely disrespectful attitude of wind farm developing companies, towards those to be most affected, the adjoining landholders. During this time and for the following years, this company worked within the community of Macarthur, a very sleepy town which lies 15 kms to the west of the wind farm site with donations for community organisations and promises of hundreds of jobs for locals, in order to garner support for their project. I enclose a copy of my submission entitled "Community Consultation" for the Macarthur wind farm panel in 2006 which outlines the deceitful manner in which this company was able to claim, and still claims around 87% community support. At the time, and during the panel, AGL claimed the neighbours so vehemently objecting to this wind farm development were in fact jealous they were not having wind turbines on their properties. I quote from Macarthur Windfarm's documentation for the Panel "it is apparent that some objections were perhaps motivated by the fact that they had failed to secure turbines on their own land" which in fact, is far from the truth.

As an upfront objector to the Macarthur wind farm, I was singled out particularly by the Freehills solicitor acting on behalf of Macarthur Windfarm Pty. Ltd. and subjected to bullying and intimidatory tactics on several occasions. We applied in 2005 to our Moyne Shire for a Planning Permit to construct two farmstay dwellings on our property, near to the wind farm. This would enable us to fulfil our business plan devised when we first bought the property in 1980, which was to diversify our business by venturing into tourism, utilising our ultra-fine shedded sheep enterprise (one of only 25 in Australia) as one of many attractions. The Moyne Shire approved our application. However, it was evident at the time that Macarthur Windfarm Pty. Ltd. put pressure on the shire, and subsequently took us to VCAT. Ted Baillieu, the then Opposition Minister for Planning, spoke in Victorian Parliament claiming that Macarthur Windfarm Pty. Ltd. had acted in an intimidatory and grossly hypocritical manner in its claim that our two one-storey

farmstay units would damage the environment, but that its own 183 turbines originally to be 135 metres high, WOULD NOT. Of course VCAT overturned the Moyne shire's decision to grant us a Planning Permit. As a result of this supposed "landmark" case, my husband and I were subjected to some appalling media articles Australia wide, including cartoons, which were extremely upsetting and indeed, quite defamatory. I wrote on several occasions to complain about this unacceptable bullying behaviour on behalf of VCAT but Mr. Stuart Morris' reply to me was "Mrs. Gardner, on this occasion I say bad luck" As one commentator claimed to me at the time "the government did a good job on you"!!!. It is interesting to note that AGL took us to VCAT and the Moyne Shire decision was overturned in July 2006, well BEFORE the Macarthur wind farm approval was announced in October 2006. So due to our proximity to a wind farm WE WERE DENIED OUR RIGHT TO DEVELOP OUR PROPERTY AND OUR BUSINESS AS WE WISHED. As a result of this decision, we have suffered from a substantial loss of income over the last four years at least, from this proposed business venture, and will continue to. In the mean time our neighbours will benefit from unbelievable income (individually possibly between \$500,000 and \$750,000 or more per year) from turbines, for the next 25 years, at our expense.

As a result of our constant opposition to the Macarthur wind farm we have been subject to much criticism in local newspapers particularly from the community whom Macarthur Windfarm Pty. Ltd. have "conned" with their spin about the benefits of this monster project in our district. As a family we have been isolated from the community and since 2005 have no longer had anything to do with the community. The manner in which wind farms have DIVIDED COMMUNITIES in this Western district of Victoria is just a disgrace. In farming communities neighbours rely on each other, to help each other when times are tough and look out for one another. NOT ANY MORE IN THIS DISTRICT.

The Macarthur/Gerrigerrup/Ripponhurst area which is the site of the soon to be constructed Macarthur wind farm has displayed wonderful community spirit in the 30 years since we've lived here. There have been working bees where the community has rallied for neighbours in difficulty. For example -

1. In 1983 when thousands of sheep were lost off shears in this district during a cold snap, neighbours came from everywhere to help bury the dead sheep. We lost 600.
2. When a farmer broke his leg and was unable to bale his hay, the neighbouring farmers stepped in and finished making his hay for him.
3. One farmer's wife was killed in a car crash so once again, the community rallied and crutched all of his sheep for him.

The numerous wind farm proposals in south-western Victoria have pitted friend against friend, and neighbour against neighbour. In our own family, a rift has occurred between siblings due to the Macarthur wind farm, so all communication with that family ceased in 2005. In fact, the wife of the largest participating landholder for the Macarthur wind farm, until December 2004 was my closest friend. Needless to say, that friendship no longer exists.

In early 2005 at an Open Day for the Macarthur wind farm, my husband was outside handing out leaflets indicating the effects of wind farms and local CFA members with whom he'd fought fires for more than 25 years, walked straight past him.

I refer to the recent floods in Queensland and Victoria which have given such strong examples of the importance of community in rural areas. I quote from the radio last week when a lady who organised feeding hundreds of volunteers sand bagging the town of Charlton in central Victoria told "We band together. We help one another and because of this strong community spirit, we're going to get through this". This brought tears to my eyes as I know this will not happen in this district ever again, thanks to greedy wind farm developers and greedy landholders. On 12<sup>th</sup> January, the Acting Opposition Leader said "help a neighbour, help a friend, help a stranger" and we've all watched numerous stories covering the recent floods where so many people have volunteered to help people they haven't ever met before.

Instead, in this district I've heard several wind farm neighbouring farmers, when discussing the extreme fire danger the proliferation of wind turbines will pose, say "don't call me to go on the fire truck - I'll be in my solicitor's office organising litigation against the wind farm participating landholders". At a recent Open Day for the proposed Peshurst wind farm by RES Australia, I heard one of our neighbours, go past another local farmer who we've just recently discovered has signed up to have turbines on his property, and say to him "I hope you rot in hell"!!!

Our local community has been divided now since the beginning of 2005, at least six years, and the Macarthur wind farm construction has not even begun. We are yet to experience the unbelievable health effects from our proximity to literally hundreds of wind turbines, at least 135 metres high. In fact, construction will take at least two years, so we will be forced to endure the noise of heavy machinery near our boundary, particularly rock crushing and most probably blasting with explosives for the two years prior to commencement. Macarthur Windfarm Pty. Ltd. was, in 2006, granted a planning permit for 183 V90 turbines of 1.8 MW with 45 metre blades, but in July 2010 the Victorian Minister for Planning, Mr. Justin Madden agreed to multiple amendments for this project, without any public consultation whatsoever. We will now be living next to around 140 V112 wind turbines with 56 metre blades, each generating 3.0 MW of power, for which NO NEW NOISE DATA has been given. The ROTOR SWEPT AREA of these new V 112 turbines is 55% greater than the V90's. So the excess noise and vibrations for homes and workplaces up to 10 kilometres from the wind farm site will be unbearable. There is sufficient evidence worldwide and Australia wide now that the low frequency noise emitted from the blades passing the tower causes sleep deprivation, nausea, dizziness, tinnitus, headaches, high blood pressure and extreme anxiety. However, unfortunately the wind farm developers and our recent Victorian Labour government and health organisations have vehemently denied this. Apart from inability to sleep at night, we as farmers fear WE WILL NOT BE ABLE TO PROVIDE a SAFE WORK PLACE for our employees, but once again this has been denied by authorities.

Governments need immediately to develop new Planning Laws enforcing far greater

setbacks for turbines from homes and workplaces. In the city, Planning Laws ensure that industrial developments are mostly segregated from residential areas and those factories usually only operate in daylight hours. **WHY IS IT THAT COUNTRY PEOPLE ARE NOT GIVEN THE SAME CONSIDERATION AS THEIR CITY COUNTERPARTS, AND ARE FORCED TO LIVE NEXT TO AN INDUSTRIAL WIND FARM WHICH OPERATES 24 HOURS A DAY ?**

The economic impact caused by the proliferation of our Western Victorian rich agricultural land by wind turbines will be enormous, and that's an understatement. It is well known, but once again denied by developers and governments, that land in close proximity to a wind farm suffers quite a substantial decrease in value, that is if it is able to be sold at all. Nobody wants to live next to a wind farm and it has also recently been established that farm animals suffer from proximity to turbines. So indeed, nobody wants to farm next to a wind farm. There are so many wind farms proposed for this south-western district of Victoria that most farms are in proximity to wind farms, should they all be constructed. As has taken place overseas, and more recently in Australia, particularly at Waubra, as time goes by, more and more families are either bought out by the developers, or are forced to leave their properties as they just cannot stand to live and work there any more. The economic impact of such an exodus from the land next to wind farms, apart from reduction in land value itself, will place a huge burden on this district, and may I say, on the Commonwealth government as many of these farmers will walk away with nothing. For most farmers their farm is their superannuation and if they can't sell their farms, they'll have nowhere to live and nothing to live on. Of course, as the farming population declines, this will place enormous pressure on the nearby small towns, which will literally die, with a severely diminished surrounding population.

As farm animals suffer quite considerably from the health effects of wind turbines, then agricultural production will be greatly reduced and the south-western district of Victoria, some of the richest grazing country in Australia will be economically devastated. This district has the capacity to be the food bowl of Australia and the recent floods in a large proportion of Victoria and in Queensland which is currently the food bowl of Australia have demonstrated just how valuable our district is - and they're going to desecrate it with wind farms, for an extremely expensive form of power **WHICH CANNOT EVEN PROVIDE BASE LOAD POWER !!!**

Sadly, it appears that the general population are unaware of the enormous impact the proliferation of wind farms will have on their lives and livelihoods. We neighbours objecting are known as "crackpots". In fact, I've been referred to as "that bitch" as I dare to oppose a development which will supposedly bring so many jobs to this local district, that no longer will our young ones have to travel to Melbourne for employment. The wind farm developing companies display false photo montages which show the turbines placed amongst the background. These montages are so distorted that in many cases the huge turbines which are to be up to 175 metres high (to blade tip) look not much taller than telegraph poles. If anyone is told they're taller than a 50 storey building, they nearly die. So if all the wind farms in this district (at least 22 approved and more than 25 awaiting approval in our Moyne Shire alone) are constructed the general population will

be aghast. Already with pre-construction traffic some farmers are horrified at the over-use of our inadequate country roads. Locals to the east side of the Macarthur wind farm site were horrified recently to hear that their narrow road was to be doubled in width and that more than 150 semi-trailers and B double trucks will be using that road EACH DAY. They're outraged, but weren't willing to listen to we "crackpots" when we were attempting to inform the people prior to the approval of the Macarthur windfarm.

It breaks my heart to think that our family will not be able to live on our magnificent property for much longer. We bought our small farm in 1980 and have spent the last thirty years working very hard to improve what was a very run down establishment. In latter years we have been able to afford some substantial renovations, albeit much of the hard work done ourselves. After thirty years we finally have a most attractive homestead, beautiful garden and a very well improved and productive working farm, which enables us to run our most successful ultra-fine shedded sheep enterprise. We would have liked to have seen our daughters married on our home property but fear we will be forced to leave before this time. This is not only our home, but that of our children who are devastated to think that they will not be able to bring their children in the future to experience the wonderful farm life they were brought up with. Where we'll go I don't know as this farm is all we have and if we can't sell it, there'll be nothing to buy a house or to live on.

Wind farms throughout the magnificent Australian countryside will inflict far greater devastation on this land, through social, health and economic effects, than any war ever has. And there's no going back once constructed. Nobody will demolish the thousands of turbines which will litter our wonderful country and the legacy will remain for generations to come. The developers will have gone and the landholders, if by some chance they're still living on their properties, will not be able to afford to remove the towers, let alone the hundreds of tonnes of cement under the ground at the base of each of the thousands of turbines proposed.

I sincerely hope that the members of the Senate Review Committee are able to recognise just how wind farms will **TOTALLY DESTROY** what were once **VIABLE, COMPATIBLE** and **CO-OPERATIVE COUNTRY COMMUNITIES**, apart from **INFLECTING SERIOUS HEALTH PROBLEMS ON LITERALLY THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE** in the **WESTERN DISTRICT OF VICTORIA** alone.