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**Australian Senate
Community Affairs References Committee
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
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Inquiry into the Social and Economic Impact of Rural Wind Farms

Dear Senators,

It's disappointing that the politicians at a State and Federal level have taken years to start to understand the impact they may have had with their policies relating to wind energy. The handballing of this issue when it has appeared to become too hard has been most pathetic.

The dramatic impact that wind energy has had in our local area of Smeaton, a small rural community in central Victoria has been as something that words cannot describe.

In 2007 a nineteen turbine windfarm was proposed by Windpower pty ltd and its directors Andrew Newbold, Steve Buckle and Vaughan Hulme at a location locally known as Tuki, which was covered by a Victorian Planning Overlay known as a Significant Landscape Overlay. This wind company some two years later would fold and be taken over by Origin Energy.

In a few point forms the following has resulted in our community because of the short mindedness of the former State Brumby Government and the lack of foresight by the Federal Gillard Government;

1. People no longer trust their neighbours because some wanted wind turbines. By having some members sign up to secret contracts without informing their immediate neighbours the long term trust in a rural setting is destroyed.
2. Community cohesion has broken down to such a low level that community groups are now struggling to survive as once longer term relationships are fractured as greed and narrow mindedness took over.
3. People have removed their children from the local school because of the Principal's support of wind energy, which promised the school money, instead of playing a role that was neutral to the issue.
4. The local shire council has lost a great deal of community co-operation as they supported placing wind turbines near homes in a bid to gain revenue from the wind turbines
5. Community groups such as the CFA, Landcare, and sporting groups have suffered fallout as the community is fractured because of wind turbines and the differing views.
6. Many members of the community have become politically active who wouldn't have otherwise; this has seen a change of State Government because of pressure groups from various issues across regional Victoria taking the fight up to the former government.
7. The dramatic fallout in property values; in our area rural properties were unsalable until the Tuki wind farm was rolled, since then there has been a flood of

properties offered as people are wishing to exit the area and return to regional centres where they don't have the threat of wind turbines. This is evident in many rural real estate agents valuations of properties when sited near wind turbines, there is a 30 to 50% property devaluation.

8. People who oppose the placement of wind turbines near their home and property are often labelled as trouble makers and face constant public ridicule from the various levels of Government.
9. In our situation at Smeaton the members of the Spa Country Guardians (www.spacountryguardians.org.au) spent three years fighting the State Brumby Government, Windpower pty ltd and then in the last stages Origin Energy. It took vast amounts of time and energy whilst people had to continue their day to day lives and work commitments, something that the Wind Companies prey upon as they are only too well aware that the majority of people aren't able to fight such an issue. In our situation we were fortunate to roll the largest energy retailer in the country.
10. Wind companies can propose sites that are even viable or meet planning guidelines and there is no regulation to say at the very early stages that that project is not viable. With the Tuki wind farm site Origin Energy and Windpower pty ltd knew from day one that the sited was protected from developments such as wind turbines as it had a Significant Landscape Overlay. Yet the former Brumby Government and State Agricultural Minister and the member for the area Mr Joe Helper and the local government authority the Hepburn Shire Council refused to acknowledge the planning scheme of the Hepburn Shire. This in itself was a disgrace as the planning scheme is there to protect the very people it serves.

The situation in our district has forever changed the very dynamics that makes up a rural community. The people who come and offered the carrot of cash simply have left the area whilst the locals are left to pick up the pieces. Such a situation should never have happened, and did only happen because of the short sightedness of the very politicians who implement policies that enable "fly by night" developers to do such a thing.

It's now time the politicians should be asking is it Australian to impose something upon people that adversely affects their home, lifestyle, health and property values without any due consideration.

Also if wind turbines were such a benefit to the whole community why is it that the wind farm contracts, which are available at www.spacountryguardians.org.au ie Origin Energy wind farm contract; are so secretive in nature. These contracts should take into account the neighbours that have to live near these wind installations. In the United States wind companies are now being made to sign contracts that guarantee the neighbours of such projects protection that their health and property will not be adversely affected.

It is the very least that one can expect this senate inquiry to have an outcome that prevents any situation such as the one a Smeaton ever being repeated elsewhere in Australia.

Yours Sincerely

Will Elsworth

