

SUMMARY OF MAIN POINTS

Submission No:

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SUBMISSION TO HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STANDING COMMITTEE ON INDUSTRY AND RESOURCES

1. Impact proposal for MACARTHUR WIND FARM has had on personal lives and surrounding communities.
2. Developers AGL (formerly Southern Hydro P/L) began by trying to buy support (by way of financial donation to community groups and schools) for proposal, with hollow promises of jobs for locals and tourist industry.
3. Objecting neighbours adjacent to proposed site treated very shabbily and subjected to intimidation and bullying by AGL as they dared oppose project.
4. Lies told by AGL with false promises of benefits to district resulting in DIVISION OF COMMUNITY.
5. DISHONEST reporting in all media locally and nationally of strong "local" support. More than 50% of signatories were family and friends of participating landholders and great majority from areas a great distance away from site, even overseas.
6. VCAT case brought upon us as neighbours by AGL to prevent us from building farmstay units on land near wind farm where our sheep will not graze due to proximity to turbines.
7. HUMILIATION inflicted upon us by media reports as a result of being crushed by AGL at VCAT hearing.
8. INTIMIDATION and persecution carried out over two years and particularly at Panel Hearing for wind farm towards those neighbours whose lives and livelihoods will be severely affected.
9. Total desecration of the south-western district of Victoria due to proliferation of wind farms which will not only ruin the landscape, but seriously affect the economy of the region.
10. FIRE RISK increased by construction of wind farms in inaccessible rocky country
11. HEALTH effects already experienced by those who are trying to protect their livelihoods.

We are wishing to enlighten the Committee on the huge impact wind energy has had on our personal life, and on the surrounding communities within which we have lived for the last 27 years.

The wind farm we relate to is the huge Macarthur wind farm of 183 turbines, 135 metres high to be built on the boundary of our small farming property. Mind you, this wind farm hasn't even begun construction yet, but the impact has been devastating already.

In January, 2005, a group of concerned adjoining neighbours began objecting to the proposed Macarthur wind farm, which will be constructed over 55 square kilometres of prime agricultural land ten kilometres from Macarthur and Hawkesdale in Victoria's Western District.

As has been the case with wind farms throughout Australia, adjoining neighbours were the last to be notified (even two weeks later than the 7,000 residents of Hamilton 35 kilometres north). The shifty developers AGL (formerly Southern Hydro Pty. Ltd.) had been working in the town of Macarthur 24 kilometres away from our property, spreading their dishonest "spin" about how this wind farm will solve all the districts' problems with promises of massive jobs for locals and an influx of tourists. The township of Macarthur was voted the most boring town in Victoria over 15 years ago and has never recovered from this stigma, along with the general rural decline since then. Even before we knew of the proposed wind farm, AGL had begun their donations in the towns of Hawkesdale and Macarthur, buying the local town populations. These "carpetbaggers" became Macarthur's holy saviour, with money given to the footy club for new jumpers, to schools, sponsorship for local events, and the promise of a new fire truck for the Hawkesdale fire brigade. These townspeople will not be physically affected in any way by this monster wind farm and have formed the attitude of "how dare the adjoining neighbours oppose this project which will solve the country's greenhouse gas emission problems, and at the same time put an end to rural poverty, unemployment and bring a thriving tourist business to our town".

As objecting neighbours, we have been treated like outcasts in society. Children of an objecting family were ostracised within the Macarthur primary school, and we do not dare travel to Macarthur our closest town any more, for fear of antagonism towards us. As leader of the group opposing this proposed wind farm, I am referred to as "that bitch" amongst townspeople in Hamilton, who are related to the participating landholders. We also know of many locals who have not dared speak out against this project locally, for fear of retribution and negative effects on their local businesses. Another huge and most upsetting impact of this proposal is that the wife of the main proponent has been my very closest friend in this district until the wind farm was proposed, and we were also friendly with our adjacent neighbours, the other participating landholders. Needless to say, these friendships have been ruined, as has been the relationship with my husband's sister, who plays cards and golf with these participating landholders, and hasn't had the strength to support her own family, for fear of "losing face" amongst her friends. When shopping in Hamilton, I now wear my sunglasses even inside the shops, for fear of being recognised

as "that bitch" who dared to speak out against the proposals of our wealthy neighbours, AGL, and the Bracks Labour government.

We do not participate in any local activities from now, including CFA, Landcare etc. for fear of being ostracised. All relationships with our neighbours and these close friends are gone forever. Even if this wind farm doesn't proceed, nothing can repair these relationships as we will never get over the way we have been treated by these developers, who were invited to this district by our neighbours.

The saddest impact of this wind farm proposal, as with so many other such proposals Australia-wide has been the manner in which AGL has divided our community, which in our rural area, has been the backbone of our life. The lies which have been told by this company, to shore support for their project, are just unforgivable. Apart from the false statistics, telling the ignorant locals of the efficiency of wind power, and the large number homes it will power, the most outrageous lie which AGL have spun to the public in general, the locals in this district and the Bracks Labour government, is that the Macarthur wind farm, has 89% local support. This is absolute rubbish, as I have copies of all the written submissions for and against, and names and addresses of the approximately 1100 people who signed in support. As we know the participating landholders so well, I am able to recognise that over 50% of the supporting letters were from friends and family, and a great deal of the remaining supporting letters were from business associates. Of the approximately 1100 submission forms over 50% are NOT from this district, in fact, once again, many were family, and addresses were spread right throughout Australia and overseas. Many of the signatories from this district live far enough away from the wind farm not to be affected in any way. Some of the overseas supporters were in fact Southern Hydro staff from New Zealand. Of course Southern Hydro, having received at least 1500 submissions against their "Dollar" proposal in Gippsland were obviously instructed to move into this district and obtain as many signatures right from the beginning, to claim that the "locals" supported their proposal. The participating landholders carried out intensive submission drives, walking the streets of Hamilton 35 kilometres way, leaving submission forms in shops, in addition to taking submission forms to golf tournaments at Barwon Heads Golf Club, where they are members. None of those who signed in support will even see these huge wind turbines, let alone hear them, yet they have played a significant part in determining the effect on the lives and livelihoods of adjacent neighbours.

In addition to being paddock woolgrowers, we operate a shedded sheep enterprise, one of only thirty in Australia and the world. Our four hundred housed sheep are highly sensitive, extremely fine micron sheep producing elite wool for the Italian high fashion industry. We breed the sheep for this enterprise, and as they have such a delicate, highly sensitive nervous system, the construction of a huge wind farm with turbines 70 metres from our boundary will greatly affect our paddock enterprise, as a result, reducing our ability to breed sheep for the shed (which are extremely difficult to source in Australia). Hence we fear this project will ruin our enterprise and in an effort to diversify and remain viable, we applied to build farm stay units close to our boundary, adjacent to the wind

farm, where our sheep will not graze with the constant swish of 45 metre blades, in addition to shadow flicker. Our Moyne Shire approved this application, however AGL objected, and took us to VCAT, where we were absolutely crucified. The way we were treated by AGL and VCAT, no doubt under instruction from the Bracks Labour government, was just appalling. After our defeat in VCAT a most damning and persecuting news report was circulated to all media Australia wide by VCAT and hence our names, photographs of our sheep, and an article particularly damaging to our reputation was plastered all over the daily newspapers in the most cruel and disgraceful manner. We were literally portrayed as criminals by AGL throughout the nearly two years duration of our case.

The supposed "independent" Planning Panel conducted by the government over five weeks in February and March 2006, was the most humiliating and degrading experience we have ever been through. This was carried out by three broken down bureaucrats handpicked by the Bracks labour government to implement the Labour government's wind energy policy. Looking back on the panel, we neighbours gave five weeks of our working time, each driving 70 to 100 kilometres a day to attend this charade, when in fact we really should not have bothered and stayed home to look after our animals and farms, suffering due to extreme heat, and bushfire threat. We have never experienced such humiliation and aggressive persecution as was inflicted upon us by AGL and its solicitors Freehills, and to see grown men crying, presenting their submissions having to justify why they were objecting and why they were so vigorously protecting their livelihood and properties, was just pitiful.

One of the greatest disappointments during the last two years has been the total lack of support from local politicians, in particular our local Federal member, Mr. David Hawker, and the other three State members. On several occasions, I wrote to Mr. Hawker, outlining our numerous concerns, only to receive in reply a letter saying how he strongly supported wind farms, as they would bring jobs and income to the district. He did not bother to attend or send a representative to the five week panel, to listen to the heartfelt stories of the locals, his constituents who will be so badly affected by this massive industrial development.

This South Western Victorian district is some of the most beautiful and most productive grazing land in Australia, and there are, apart from the monster 183 turbine Macarthur wind farm, at least fourteen other wind farm proposals which the Bracks labour government is keen to have constructed. If these are constructed, the whole landscape will be joined together like a pincushion with hundreds of these "rotating political sculptures". When governments realise how inefficient and unreliable wind power is, in years to come, as has already taken place in Europe, the entire Western District west of Geelong, will be an industrial scrap heap, littered with hundreds of ugly, rusting old turbines, as there is no way the participating landholders will be prepared to pay the exorbitant cost of removing towers, let alone the 600 to 1000 tonnes of cement in the ground. As a result, the effect on tourism and development in south-west Victoria will be enormous.

The south-western district of Victoria is also, along with California, the most fire prone area in the world. Wind turbines do ignite, due to many reasons, mainly leaking of oil, and there are many examples of turbine fires around the world in areas which do not present as being fire risk areas. My husband presented a submission detailing the adjacent neighbours' fear of fire, but the CFA have been gagged obviously by the Victorian government, and during the panel, the CFA local representative was brought in, to squash our claims as false. However, a fire took place at the Lake Bonney wind farm in South Australia in January 2006, causing \$3million worth of damage. Just locally this summer a fire was caused by negligence of the wind farm developer at "Aringa North", just south of the proposed Macarthur wind farm site. This fire burnt around 3,500 acres of neighbouring farming land, and this is our fear with the Macarthur wind farm, particularly as it is proposed to be built in volcanic rocky country, which is totally inaccessible for fire fighting.

I haven't really enlightened the Committee on the enormous impact on the entire district which will take place due to devaluation of our farming land and the massive impact on the grazing ability of neighbouring farms due to close proximity of wind turbines to our agricultural enterprises. I am enclosing an estimation of the financial impact this facility will impose on the 24 neighbouring farming businesses, and hence the entire district, which was included in one of my letters requesting support from our local member Mr. David Hawker, which as before mentioned, was not forthcoming.

But, who cares about the neighbours and their livelihoods?

Who cares that many neighbours have developed illnesses due to the stress caused by persecution over the last two years?

Who cares that several farmers developed suicidal tendencies as a result of the tactics employed by AGL (Southern Hydro) and the Bracks labour government prior, during and after the wind farm panel, and the fear of the effect on their enterprises?

Who cares about the massive devaluation of the neighbours' properties due to their close proximity to the wind farm, those properties which individual farmers and their fathers have built up through sheer hard work, as soldier settlers post war?

This is the impact the Macarthur wind farm has had on our family's life and that of many other adjoining farmers. This is the impact on our widespread community, of a wind farm which hasn't even begun construction.

Have a think about the devastating way in which this particular form of energy has ripped into the rural communities and lives of farming families Australia wide.

The lies and total dishonesty displayed by powerful, wealthy developers, backed by taxpayers money are destroying the very fabric of Australian rural life. Rural

communities and landscapes can recover from the ravages of fire, drought and flood, but they will never recover from the ruthless damage and huge wedges caused by wind power.

In a supposed democratic society, those who dare speak out against wind farm proposals are being crushed brutally by developers and State governments Australia wide. This is an absolute disgrace!!!

Yours sincerely

ANN C. GARDNER



ANDREW R. GARDNER

