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COMMUNITY AFFAIRS REFERENCES COMMITTEE

Reference: Social and economic impact of rural wind farms

MONDAY, 28 MARCH 2011

BALLARAT

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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SENATE COMMUNITY AFFAIRS

REFERENCES COMMITTEE

Monday, 28 March 2011

Members: Senator Siewert (Chair), Senator Moore (Deputy Chair) and Senators Adams, Boyce, Carol Brown and Coonan

Participating members: Senators Abetz, Back, Barnett, Bernardi, Bilyk, Birmingham, Mark Bishop, Boswell, Brandis, Bob Brown, Bushby, Cameron, Cash, Colbeck, Cormann, Crossin, Eggleston, Faulkner, Ferguson, Fielding, Fierravanti-Wells, Fifield, Fisher, Forshaw, Furner, Hanson-Young, Heffernan, Humphries, Hurley, Hutchins, Johnston, Joyce, Kroger, Ludlam, Ian Macdonald, McEwen, McGauran, Marshall, Mason, Milne, Minchin, Nash, O'Brien, Parry, Payne, Polley, Pratt, Ronaldson, Ryan, Scullion, Stephens, Sterle, Troeth, Trood, Williams, Wortley and Xenophon

Senators in attendance: Senators Adams, Boyce, Fielding, Moore and Siewert

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

The social and economic impacts of rural wind farms, and in particular:

- (a) Any adverse health effects for people living in close proximity to wind farms;
- (b) Concerns over the excessive noise and vibrations emitted by wind farms, which are in close proximity to people's homes;
- (c) The impact of rural wind farms on property values, employment opportunities and farm income;
- (d) The interface between Commonwealth, state and local planning laws as they pertain to wind farms; and
- (e) Any other relevant matters.

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Committee met at 1.30 pm**DEAN, Mr Noel Lindsay, Private capacity****STEPNELL, Mr Carl Peter, Private capacity****STEPNELL, Mrs Samantha Leah, Private capacity**

CHAIR (Senator Siewert)—Good afternoon everybody. Today the Community Affairs References Committee continues its public hearings for its inquiry into the social and economic impacts of rural wind farms. The committee will be holding a community forum, as I think many of you will know, at the end of today's public hearing.

The media are here with the permission of senators. If any witnesses feel like they do not want to give evidence in front of the media, please indicate that, because we do have the right to ask the media to leave if you do not want to give evidence in front of the media. If any witnesses want to give evidence in camera, which means there are no people in the audience, please also let me know.

I would now like to welcome Mr Carl and Mrs Samantha Stepnell and Mr Noel Dean. I understand that each of you will have been given information on parliamentary privilege and the protection of witness in evidence, is that correct?

Mr Stepnell—Yes, that paper is here.

CHAIR—Do you appear representing yourselves?

Mr Dean—I represent myself and my family.

CHAIR—I just need to make sure that is clear for the *Hansard*. We have your submissions, which are numbered 129,130 and 647 respectively. I would like to invite you each to make an opening statement. If you do not feel you want to, that is fine. Then we will ask you some questions.

Mr Stepnell—I will start off. I will just read through what I have written down.

I wanted to start off by describing the situation we were in from day one when we were approached by a representative from Windpower Australia Pty Ltd. We were just working in our shearing shed on the Sunraysia Highway, and he came in and offered us a situation where we could have four wind turbines on our farm on this particular site. It was not even an option for us; we just flatly turned it down. My wife and I work our farm with my parents. There are usually discussions on those sorts of things but in this situation there was no discussion at all, we just flatly denied wanting to share our farm with a wind energy company.

Once everything was set up we did not get too involved in all the protesting and disputes; we probably stayed right out of it thinking they could not be that bad. We knew they were going to be visually bad, but we did not think about any of this thing in the future. Once the foundations were laid at Waubra and the roads were in, the Lexton wind farm was proposed—which is

probably going a little bit off track at first. We had a visit from a representative from Windpower again, telling us all about the Lexton wind farm and how they were going to put an aboveground power line straight through our farm to link up Lexton to Waubra; as I say, straight through our farm. We flatly denied that we wanted that to happen.

Coincidentally, three weeks later I had another visit from a representative from Acciona Energy offering us a further four to make a total of eight wind turbines. After the foundations were laid and they were on the verge of putting these up, all of a sudden they had done some further testing and they wanted four, which is really insulting as they wanted to go through our farm with an aboveground power line and they thought they could probably con us with an extra four turbines. So that is just a bit of a sideline story that I will never forget. In total, we have declined eight turbines, for which we have absolutely no regret.

The aboveground power lines are a big concern. The existing ones that they have put up for the Waubra wind farm are bad enough, and now we are confronted with the new Lexton wind farm. The power lines are not going through our farm but will weave their way by a road which is practically through our farm. There are going to be at least six lines on this aboveground power line, but it probably does not matter whether it is one or two: one is enough. They are going through native grasses on the sides of the roads which cannot be grazed by stock, mown, slashed, burned or anything—but a power line is going through. Then they will go through another area of our farm which is wall-to-wall native trees; all those trees will be cut down, and there is the magic word ‘offsets’, so they can do what they want. It is very disturbing—sorry about this.

Mr Dean—I might just speak. Thank you for inviting me, and giving me this opportunity. I will go through a statement I have printed out.

The deterioration of my personal and my family’s physical and emotional health is somewhat disturbing. My wife quite often cries because she does not really know where her home is any more. Acciona has shown ignorance and arrogance for not accepting the conclusions and recommendations of the Dean report, of which you all would be aware. There has been no reference to it in the way of a peer reviewed response. No-one has any courage or knowledge to mediate between me and Acciona. They are a pack of Bs; you cannot trust them, so you sort of left out on a limb.

The main concerns we have about the wind farm are that false, unsubstantiated information is being conveyed to the public and to the Senate hearing about estimated wind or noise emissions instead of using measurements. They just guess everything; there is not one measurement done. If they wanted to measure the noise in our house, they would measure it with a meter like this. You can measure this within minutes to know what is there. They say it cannot be done. It damn well can be done and they do not do it. We live in the house. The levels in the house should be measured where we sleep; if it is not done that way, it is irrelevant.

There are lies and deception in Origin’s document. The submission by Origin stating that the sound from wind farms is at very low levels, less than at a beach and also less than the central business district, is a load of bull crap. I went down and measured that yesterday.

CHAIR—Sorry, Mr Dean.

Senator MOORE—Sorry, Mr Dean. I know you are really, really upset but there are provisions in the Senate process about language.

Mr Dean—Sorry. I went down and checked that yesterday. These are the measurements I did with that meter between two turbines. It is quite clear. I will pass that information along—

CHAIR—Mr Dean, would you like to table that document? That means it becomes part of our evidence.

Mr Dean—Yes. These are noise measurements at the beach and noise measurements between two towers which are about 300 metres away. The A-weighting noise is on top, that is the noise at the beach, and between the towers is on the bottom. That means all the low-frequency noise at the beach is below hearing level. Noise is measured in decibels—that is pressure—so we are talking about pressure not the information of whether the sound might be high or low. We are talking about decibels; that is pressure that goes in our inner ear. That means all the pressure going in our inner ear between the turbines at Waubra is all low-frequency noise and what goes in our inner ear on the beach is all high-frequency noise. So there is a big difference between those pressures going in our ears. It is all high-frequency noise at the beach and it is all infrasound, below 20 hertz, at Waubra between the turbines. That is low-frequency infrasound that our bodies cannot bear.

CHAIR—Mr Dean, could you tell us the name of the instrument that you used so that we have got it on the record?

Mr Dean—This is a SVAN 959.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Mr Dean—It is not available in Australia; you have got to import it. The industry do not use it because they reckon there is no noise there, but there is.

The claim that levels recorded at residences with more than 300 metres separation from working turbines are significantly lower, again, is also false. That is false, because anyone in the industry would know that infrasound stays the same pressure pretty much for kilometres; it will only drop a couple of decibels a kilometre. To say that infrasound is less at a bit further than 300 metres is not correct. Acciona claims that low-frequency noise reported at my home by international experts is no different to the inside of other homes in country areas. This has not been substantiated; one can only presume that the report does not exist, that they have lied. They have lied to deliberately defame me.

CHAIR—Sorry, Mr Dean, we are just talking about where the camera can go so we are not interrupting your flow. We do apologise. There are rules in the Senate about where the media can go, and we are required to maintain those rules.

Mr Dean—What I was saying is that Acciona deliberately lied in letters to the editor and on ABC in September 2009 about an international report done in our house. It was never completed; this is a misrepresentation to mislead the public. They are a multibillion dollar

company, they have defamed me and I had no means of response. They lied and a lot of people have suffered because of their lies. These guys in my opinion are criminals.

CHAIR—Mr Dean, I apologise for continuing to interrupt you. I must let you know that when you make what we technically call an adverse comment, we go back to the person or the company that the adverse comment is about and they will get to respond. Just be aware that we will in fact be able to test this out with the company and get some response.

Mr Dean—They have not given us any information to substantiate their claim that it has been done, so one can only presume that it has not been done. I have been asking for 22 months for this report that was done in our house. I am entitled to it and I have never received it. There is no information to say it exists. It has not been presented to the Senate, and it has not been presented to me, so that is why I am—

CHAIR—The point I was making is that we will follow that up and ask for it.

Mr Dean—The 35 decibel contour map is part of New Zealand's standard. It was not done at Waubra. When I asked for the information, they did not give it to me, and the people at Acciona said they had never seen one before. This contour map revealed that all of our properties at Waubra—Waubra township, including the school—were at risk of being subject to emissions above the permit conditions. That is the map which an engineer would take into consideration. In the planning permit conditions for Waubra wind farm, a panel said there must be provisions for five decibels for special audible characteristics or for low-frequency noise that harms people. The prediction method to estimate the noise or predict the noise a kilometre away from the turbines is plus or minus three decibels out, so it could be three decibels higher than what the prediction is. By the time you take three decibels for prediction, five decibels for special audible characteristics, which in the Dean report have been identified at the Waubra wind farm, we should be at a 32 decibel contour line not 40 decibel. If we were at the 32 decibel contour, the wind turbines would have to be some distance away or pulled down.

CHAIR—While you are looking at that, Mr Dean, again are you tabling those documents for us so that we can keep them on record?

Mr Dean—Yes, I laminated them so you could all view it, because I wanted to make sure that everything I said was supported by evidence.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Mr Dean—The Dean report includes evidence of high sound-pressure levels in the infrasound range, the low-frequency range, in a pulsing pattern that has been identified in sonograms as having the potential to cause adverse health effects. This report has not been challenged by any peer reviewed independent research or evidence or critiqued by qualified professionals. In conclusion, these turbines are instruments of war, being placed too close to each other and too close to residents. At Waubra, the noise pollution that comes from these towers is torture to a lot of people.

The lack of basic engineering principles has created a mess. The acoustic people involved, Christopher Delaire, Graham White and the Sonus people, have not signed off as acoustic

engineers in the submissions of their work, so one can only assume they are not. This is a disgrace. Our dads served in the Second World War to keep our families out of harm's way and now we are refugees in our own country.

Last week David Clarke, Acciona's community officer, met with a small group of residents who live up to 3.5 kilometres away from turbines and have had ongoing noise complaints for 18 months. He told them that wind farms are noisy; but it is a fat lot of good admitting that wind farms are noisy after they are built. The sound pressure coming from the wind farm is far too great for a lot of us to handle. Please reduce the sound pressure in the four- to 20-hertz range to that audible range to decrease the risk of infrasound entering the inner ear to a safe level and adopt the recommendations of the Dean report. It is a life or death situation for a lot of people in the community as there have been at least two people who have suffered heart attacks, many have moved out and a lot of us have had many visits to doctors and hospitals and been advised to move. Thank you.

CHAIR—Thank you, Mr Dean. Mr Stepnell, do you wish to continue?

Mr Stepnell—Yes. The day the wind turbines started operating near our house was just very disappointing and very stressful. Today is a good day out there. They were not spinning at all this morning, they might have got going a bit this afternoon, but there are occasional days like today. I guess when they are not spinning they are not producing anything so they are useless on good days. When we have a good day or a good couple of days, we are usually very disappointed the following day when we wake up and away they go again. They seem to be twice as bad then because you get a bit of a break from them. I have never heard anything like it.

We knew they were going to be visually disgraceful, but I had no idea they were going to be so noisy and affect our health. It took at least six months before they started to affect my health. It started with the headaches and the tingling in the head and then eventually the sleep problems—waking up at two to three in the morning and not being able to go back to sleep. It was just every night, maybe until five or six nights of absolute fatigue set in and then you would sleep. It took that long to do it and then away you go again. Then eventually I had heart palpitations, which were a massive concern. We met quite a few times with Acciona, trying to talk to them. They offered us to make a 'wish list' of what we wanted and that was to turn them off, and obviously that was not part of the plan; and they did not. I had quite a few phone calls with Brett Wickham from Acciona and in the end he told us, Sam and I, to go to the doctor and see a doctor about our problems. We went to the doctor; he understood what we were going through but obviously it is circumstantial. He offered to put my wife on antidepressants; she was that bad, she sort of hit rock bottom. There no way we are going to be turning to medication so we can live in our own house 900 metres from wind turbines, so there was no other option but to move. We bought a house in Ballarat, which we had to just initially buy ourselves. It was a huge financial cost to us to move away from our farm. We both work now on the farm so we have to travel to our farm almost every day, which is a massive inconvenience.

Another related concern is asset value on our farm as the wind turbines are 900 metres from our house on our farm, but they are obviously only a couple of hundred metres from our property boundary. In that area where they are close, the asset value would be destroyed; it would be just worthless. I cannot imagine anyone wanting to buy it. I cannot imagine me wanting to sell it to

anyone. You would not want to put anyone through what we have been through. Also of concern is the constant flashing lights at night; you just cannot get away from them at night either.

They have got every corner covered with us: it is the health effects; the noise you can hear; the noise that you cannot hear that I, without any scientific back-up, think is the noise that affects your health; the visual disgracefulness of them; the flashing lights at night that is just so disappointing. On a beautiful night you go out and it is just wall-to-wall red flashing lights and it is quite amazing to have that in the country. It just seems to be a 24-hour thing; you cannot get away from it.

I probably want to finish up in saying that our whole family, my parents included, have been involved in planting thousands of trees on our farm and fencing off creeks and bush. We have been members of the Lexton Landcare group for about 20 years. We used to have six broilgas quite close to our house. We have not seen them for over 12 months now; they used to breed every year down the road from our house and they have gone. We used to hear bats at our house and now we do not hear any bats at night. The bats were very obvious at night and we have not heard a single bat since these things started turning. We are all for the environment and all for renewable energy but there has just got to be some sort of compromise with these things.

CHAIR—Thank you. Mrs Stepnell, did you want to say anything?

Mrs Stepnell—I would like to say that before Acciona wind turbines began operating in Waubra I had a wonderful life with my family on the farm. Our farm is our business. My husband and I both work on the farm. I have never suffered from any health problems or illness that has caused me to feel so unwell. Our farm is our workplace and life. Since the turbines started operating in our area I have found working on our farm extremely uncomfortable. I find it very difficult to go out to work. I have to because it is our business and that is what we do, that is how we make our living but I find it extremely difficult. The hardest decision we have ever made was to walk away from our family home and take our youngest son, Josh, out of Waubra Primary School and to leave his friends. When he started his school in Ballarat, he cried for weeks. It was very, very hard. One day he was that sad and he just wanted to go back to Waubra and be with his friends. He said to me, ‘Mum, why did they build the turbines so close to our house?’ I said, ‘I don’t know.’ We had to move away because they were obviously built too close to residents.

We do not make up health problems. I am not one of these people who make up that I have got health issues. The pressure on my ears and my head, the nausea and the whole thing including the sleepless nights has completely destroyed what we had on our farm. It has turned our whole life upside down. Our farm is our world and we just have to drive away and then drive back into the same problem. It is a huge concern. There has obviously got to be better planning. I do not want to happen to other families what has happened to us, what we have been through and are still going through. I do not know the whole technical side of things. All I know is how it has affected me and my health. There obviously needs to be more studies done on the health problems that they cause for some people. They might not cause these problems for other people but they well and truly cause health problems for me. Thank you.

CHAIR—Thank you. I will ask Senator Fielding to ask some questions.

Senator FIELDING—I appreciate the courage you have shown to share a bit today. I know it must be very difficult for you and the turmoil that I have just heard is quite sad to hear. I am hoping you will not take the questions as being insensitive, but I think it is important while we are here to hear first-hand. I will come to you next, Mr Dean, about some of the technical aspects that you have uncovered in your particular report. There are people that would say that there are no adverse health effects from living close by to wind turbines. What do you say about that, Carl and Samantha?

Mr Stepnell—It seems to be fairly upsetting when you do hear that from people. I have not heard it from anyone that has got them. I do not know if we really talk about that sort of thing a lot. A lot of them are our neighbours. We still have to work in the area and we are still part of the community. You do not talk about them to the people who have got them. It is upsetting when you do get told that from people from companies like Acciona or from certain politicians or so-called experts that do not live near them.

It is different to go out there for an hour or two or even a couple of days compared to when you are exposed to them 24 hours a day practically, seven days a week, apart from going away occasionally. When you live with something and when you are sleeping there every night you know what the whole environment is and what the birds and the normal noises are. To get told things by people in charge of companies like Acciona, like Brett Thomas saying they are no different than the noise of a wind going through a tree, is just ridiculous. It is absolutely ridiculous. They are not near them; they do not live near them. It is different to take a bus around and look at them. Some people are not affected by them visually but some people are. We like the look of the land as well. It is not all about taking out of the land, we like to put back in with the trees and all that sort of thing and the bird life and the nature, but to live near them is totally different than going for a four-hour tour.

Senator FIELDING—When you have moved away from the area, do you find there is a difference? Could you share a bit about what happens?

Mrs Stepnell—The first night we slept in the house in Ballarat—mind you, we live near a highway now—I could sleep at night. I cannot work that one out. We have gone from having no road noise, nothing, to being not far from the highway and I can sleep at night. I wake up feeling like I have been to sleep. I wake up feeling that I have had a good night's sleep and am ready for the day ahead, but I never felt like that at Waubra. I was just drained. I woke up feeling like I had not been to sleep. The people that I have seen, the experts who have said there are no health effects, have never experienced living near them. Until you actually experience it yourself for even 12 months I do not think you can turn around and say there are no health effects.

Senator FIELDING—Mr Dean, could you maybe help us as a committee try and understand the measurement of noise, dB(A) versus C and some of the others technical terms in terms of noise pressure, about the noise you cannot hear per se? Could you walk us through that in a fairly succinct way, if you can, because I know it is quite a difficult topic?

Mr Dean—I will try and relate sound pressure to water. Regarding sound pressures, A-weighting is what you can normally hear and C-weighting is low frequency sound, but not infrasound. Low frequency down to 20 hertz is regarded as low frequency sound. There is a broad spectrum right through the environment. No matter where you go there is infrasound, low

frequency sound and high frequency sound, but they are in different proportions. As I was saying, down at the sea it is upside down to the wind for wind turbines; at the sea A-weighting is above all the low frequency infrasound but at Waubra the A-weighting is below it so the dominant force of pressure is in the infrasound. The infrasound is going in our ears causing balance problems. Inside our inner ear are the organs of balance.

The biggest problem I have after being out there is as if you have got a swollen head, your brain has swollen up, so as soon as you get on your feet you get a pain in the head and you have to sit down again. That is because it is affecting the inner ear. It is going in your ear. The only way you can stop infrasound getting in your ear is to lower the amount of frequencies at infrasound and increase the high frequency sound. The low frequency infrasound goes pretty well in a straight line, whereas high frequency goes like that. It is the difference between getting hit with a big squirt of water in one go, or a fog nozzle. The infrasound hits pretty hard, you do not get the frequency, it only goes up there once a second instead of about a thousand times or five hundred times a second.

The biggest problem for people to understand is that the infrasound at one hertz creates a wave and a lot of other sounds piggy-back on it. The noise that resonates inside our house is actually at a frequency of one hertz but it is like a caterpillar up and down with 400 and 500 hertz on it. That goes in and out of your hearing threshold so it annoys the heck out of you but you cannot hear anything. You feel uncomfortable and you have got to get the heck out of there. It is worse inside than outside. When you get outside and the wind is pretty strong, the vibration in the wind nearly tears your ears out. I have not lived out there for 18 months or more so I do not sleep there of a night, but when it is calm, the graphs indicate that during the night the wind may well drop at the house. When it is fairly calm the A-weighting noise is probably only about 20 decibels but when you get infrasound noise, the predominant one is four hertz. Everything has a frequency and the frequency of the blades out there is four hertz. The vibration flies off the end of the blades because the turbines are going due to the wind up on the hill and the van den Berg effect and stability. So the turbines are going but there is no noise. Because infrasound travels so far, we have had people waking up at three o'clock in the morning, 3.5 kilometres away; they are copping all that infrasound coming towards them because it is going in and it is the dominant force of pressure.

Senator FIELDING—Is that pressure from the infrasound that you may not be able to physically or mentally know that you are hearing—

Mr Dean—You will probably feel the vibrations. You will get really bad effects three or four times a year. When we got badly affected, even though we lived in Ballarat it took about 10 weeks for our bodies to stop vibrating and five months for our bodies to gain proper temperature again. That might only happen three or four times a year. It happened in May. When you get some rain coming in, it gets fairly calm, the night is fairly eerie and you can hear the sound of the turbines. They go whoosh as the blade goes down because of the different speeds of air going past. There is a diagram here. When we went inside we did not hear anything but by heck we woke up with a thumping headache; it was as if your head was going to burst. That is because the A-weighting is low where you live and the pressure of infrasound is high from where the turbines are and it runs through down to where you are.

Senator FIELDING—Is the meter that you have got something that measures those pressures?

Mr Dean—Yes, it is a sound pressure meter.

Senator FIELDING—You are saying that the companies at the moment do not use those measurements at all?

Mr Dean—No. In our house they took data; their equipment took measurements at five-minute intervals and it went down to 6.3 hertz. We got the data but the measurements that came out of it would not have had a microphone to pick up everything below 20 hertz. I went down to the beach yesterday with this meter. Because I am taking 100 samples a second, which is probably so many thousand times more than what they do, I can get a picture of the sound with this meter within a couple of minutes. For the companies to say it cannot be measured is just baloney; it can be measured. We have put this in the house of our neighbours, Zena and Donald Thomas. Over a 10-day period you can see the separation of that four hertz and you can see that the four hertz frequency has more power than all other frequencies put together. One frequency has more power, it is a dominating feature. If you looked at the Z-weighting filter, that is all the noise it is over and above, you would see that the four hertz is the dominant one that is causing a lot of the trouble.

Senator FIELDING—Why do the companies not use that measurement?

Mr Dean—None of them use it.

Senator FIELDING—But why?

Mr Dean—Because they do not want to find infrasound or low frequency noise. It does them out of business.

CHAIR—We will follow that up with the companies. Excuse me I am being a bit strict with time but we are going to run out because we have a lot of people to hear from.

Senator ADAMS—Thank you all for your evidence and also for your submissions because I think we have all learnt a lot about the health problems you have experienced. I am a nurse, so I do fully understand. I am interested in a letter that Dr Scott Taylor has submitted. I know it is a wee bit personal but could you tell me what ongoing treatment he has suggested for you?

Mrs Stepnell—He suggested that we move. I put that in my submission. There were no answers. There is no scientific evidence. It is not like a broken arm or leg; you cannot see what is happening to you. He wanted to put me onto antidepressant tablets because I got that bad but I was not depressed, I am not that type of person, but obviously living there with no sleep, the health effects it was causing me were causing that. I have not got a depression illness; he just said that there is no way out.

Senator ADAMS—With the moving you have not had to take any medication?

Mrs Stepnell—No, I was not on any medication. He suggested if we were to stay there to try and do that.

Senator ADAMS—Mr Stepnell, how have you gone?

Mr Stepnell—It occurs instantly when I am away from them. When we bought the house in Ballarat, we could not get in there fast enough. Concerning my chest, I started thinking the worst—that I was not going to wake up one day. I have never had any heart problems, but these heart palpitations were just ridiculous. We suffered similar things such as the sleepless nights but even though she is out a lot, Sam was probably exposed to them a lot more as she was at home more. I would go out on the farm a bit more and move away from them a bit more. He said that Sam should be on antidepressants. That is when she hit rock bottom and we thought, ‘We’re not going to take medication.’

Senator ADAMS—She has obviously managed well?

Mr Stepnell—Yes.

Senator ADAMS—Mr Dean, how about you and your family?

Mr Dean—My family was fairly affected because we had to move straight away; we could not stay another night because my head felt as if it was going to burst. When I went to the doctor the doctor did not know anything about it. I had to wait about two months to get an appointment to see a specialist. He did not seem to think there was much wrong, but he told me to get acupuncture. All the muscles were tightened up in the back of my head. After about 10 or 12 visits for acupuncture, the guy said that it would only work if I did not go back to the farm. I tried to stay away from the farm as much as I could but I had to make a dollar somehow so we went back. Every time I went back if the turbines were going it would probably take me 10 days to get over it.

It is probably a fortnight since I have been out at the farm, I do not go out there. We have got a property up north, thank goodness, and we just go up there. We will not even travel through Waubra because we get affected just travelling through Waubra, we go through Maryborough. When we initially went to Ballarat it took something like 10 weeks for our bodies to stop vibrating. You would wake up in the morning and next thing your body would be vibrating. It took about 10 weeks for that to go away. Janine and I both had problems with temperature in the lower parts of our bodies and that took about five months to go away. You would wake up even in summer time with your legs feeling cold and wet. I have been married to Janine for 35 years and this is the first time she has had to put on long-legged pyjamas to keep warm, regardless of the time of year. Your feet would go wet and cold and stuff like that.

A later thing that happened, and of which we were not aware, was that if turbines are placed in a row they have more effect on vortex shedding. I was on the side of the road talking to a neighbour and I started to feel ill. That was over 12 months ago and since then I have had a pain in the head when I stand up and I have to sit down to get rid of it. That could take a week or ten days or so to go away without going near the place. A lot of trouble is now happening with the stiffness in my neck. I am not sure what is happening to my body but a lot of the muscles down the backs of my legs are stiffening up. I have to get up during the night and rub the pain out to

get back to sleep. It takes a fair while away from the farm for that to go away. It is taking longer and longer for it to go away.

Senator ADAMS—With your property, did Acciona approach you before the development began?

Mr Dean—No. They were supposed to have talked to people from all properties of over 40 hectares. We had a number of properties with that and they never ever came near us. The only person I had come near us was someone in a little red BMW that turned up on our place. I told him to go to the neighbour. He asked whether I wanted turbines or not. I told him that I have only got low country and it would not suit me on the hill. I would not say whether I was for them or not. He asked if I had any objections to turbines. I told him I did not as long as they are not noisy. He said, ‘They don’t make any noise’; it could not have been further from the truth. That is the only visual contact I had with them until they were putting the underground main in when they asked my son Rod whether they could put the mains through his property. He pretty much told them where to go.

We were talking to one of their engineers—Philip Munari I think was his name—and he told us that it takes nearly two kilometres for the noise to come down from these turbines. They will only measure at about a kilometre or they ignore you. All our properties should have been in the noise management plan as should all the residences in Waubra. That 35 decibel contour was supposed to be done—it is part of New Zealand standard. It was not done so that has had a big impact on what has happened to us.

We went down to talk to Acciona and spoke to James Nancarrow and other people afterwards but initially we went to the EPA and said, ‘You’ve got to go to see the head bloke at Acciona.’ I went there and they would not let me talk to anyone, only junior staff. When we were coming home, I said to Rod, ‘We’re going to have to shift out of there.’ So he put his block on the market. He just went up to the agent and put his block on the market. We have property up north but because all our property around there was a nucleus to our set up, we had nowhere to work. We had nowhere to live other than in Janine’s father’s place. We had to go and hire a building and buy a building to do our maintenance in. We had nowhere to go and they would not even talk to us. We complained to them and they said, ‘Oh well, we’ll put a meter in your house’, but they would not give us the results. The data showed extensive pulsing—of probably about one every 60 measurements, which is equivalent to probably five big bolts every second over 100 decibels—and they would not even discuss it with us. They would not say that the results were okay.

We wrote a letter to them after they asked us 19 questions and we said we wanted to know whether it was safe to work and live. They have not even replied yet so we did not know where it was safe to work and live. I commissioned this report. The decibel contour line shows there is nowhere safe to live or work. We are just nicking out as soon as we can. Since then I sold the back half of my property. That sale was negotiated pretty well the same time as the first block. When we thought we were the only ones affected we made that sale because we wanted to limit our exposure to the place where we worked. Our house is probably the one worst affected because it is in the middle of a lot of the turbines—it is about 1.5 to two kilometres away—so we were in line to cop it good and proper. We get a lot of vortex shedding from turbines a fair way away.

We have got nothing. We cannot do anything. Like Carl, we wonder who we would want to sell our house to. You would not want anyone else to go through the pain and suffering. It is hell on earth out there; it is torture. So what can we do? We have got a property down the road, even if we did sell the property, we have got prime real estate of 500 acres down the road and we still cannot work it. You cannot work in your tractor three or four kilometres away because it resonates in your cabin and you get sick. It is better if you have got a noisy tractor, as I was saying before, because it balances up the pressure that goes in your ears. We have used ear pressure plugs that goes in the aeroplanes which makes it a bit easier about three or four kilometres away it but once you get close within a couple of kilometres it does not make any difference because there is too big a pressure difference.

Senator MOORE—We are running out of time, so we cannot ask all the questions we would like. I have two questions for all of you. One is to do with the value of your properties and both of you have mentioned that in your submissions and your statements. Has there been any independent valuation done of the area to look at the impact of these issues on the valuation of properties? I would imagine you probably would know that, because you have both been in that situation. The second question is in terms of the process. These things have been there for two years now and there are only a certain number of complaints. Why do you think it is that some people are more vulnerable to the impacts that you have all talked about—the really immediate impacts that you have suffered? Why is it that everybody in the area is not having similar effects? Do you know what percentage of people are complaining? We have got the stats from the company and it certainly does not reflect the whole of the community.

Mr Stepnell—I think it is like a group of people in this room getting on a fishing boat and some people get sick from it and some people do not.

Senator MOORE—You think there could be a vulnerability with some people?

Mr Stepnell—That is what I think. I think everybody is different.

Senator MOORE—What about the valuation?

Mr Stepnell—No, we have not done any valuations.

Senator MOORE—No one locally has said about the impact on your property, that it was worth X and now it is worth Y?

Mr Stepnell—No-one in the real estate industry has said that to me. All I did was attach a letter from Elders Real Estate. He said that it has a massive effect on real estate. There are always different situations. There could be pockets of land for sure around there that suit some people. There are a whole lot of different circumstances. I would be fairly confident that we would struggle to sell where our house is, that is for sure.

Senator MOORE—Mrs Stepnell, do you want to add anything to that?

Mrs Stepnell—Regarding the health side of it, everyone is different. The people who have got turbines have been told that they cannot speak out, that they are not allowed to speak out. So there could be—

Senator MOORE—Something in a contract?

Mrs Stepnell—Yes, I have not seen a contract so I do not know that side of it. This is a small country town so people do talk along the grapevine but they are suffering in silence, I reckon. I feel sorry for a lot of them that have got them, because they cannot speak out. We can obviously say what is happening to us, but personally I think there would be a lot of people who have got them who are really suffering. Land values? Who would want to live there?

Senator MOORE—Mr Dean, on those two questions about value and complaints?

Mr Dean—Our land sale was negotiated before it was known to be a problem even to us. We thought that it only affected our house. The properties that we sold were when it would have been hardly going a month, and when I talked to the neighbours they did not have any problems when I had problems. The property that got sold recently was bought by a cashed-up turbine owner, so that equates to the value of the place. Someone with a heap of turbines can buy the neighbour and they can just buy at reasonable value. If you have a property for which there is no-one cashed up from turbines, you would have to wait a while to sell.

Regarding complaints, they do not write the complaints down or register them. There are a lot of complaints not registered. They only started registering and putting numbers on complaints pretty much 12 months after it was going. A lot of people get sick of ringing them up, getting abused and chastised and being told they are a hypochondriac and all this sort of stuff. I have made so many complaints that I only make complaints when we get affected now because the lawyer said that if they have got complaints they have got to answer them. A lot of people ring up and make a complaint and it is a bad experience.

I rang up in June last year to make a complaint and they said: 'We are not registering your complaint. We want your contact details.' I told them I want to make a complaint. I just hung up. They chastise you and argue with you and then they would not register my complaint. I complained to the shire, to Joe Helper I think at the department of planning, and they wrote a letter straightaway and informed me that Brett Wickham was going to come and talk to us. He said that he will come up and sort the problem out, whatever it takes. He came up and we had a meeting. He said that it was only a statement that I was making but I had all the information. He said, 'I don't want to see that today, we will talk about that later,' and nothing ever happened from that meeting. It was only a cover-up for not registering complaints.

If you make a complaint, it is supposed to be attended to within a 10-day period to work out what the problem is, and the resolution is supposed to be worked out. We made a complaint 22 months ago and since then I have spoken to one person, Brett Wickham, but that was just to make a statement and he was not interested in our concerns. In fact it was at that meeting that we told him that the 50 turbines are supposed to be low noise mode and he did not even know about it. The bloke at the complex up there did not know either. I told him that the two turbines closest to us are supposed to be in low noise mode but how do we know they are? He did not even know which ones they were. They do not even know what is going on.

Acciona design and write their own noise management plan and the environment management plan and it just does not work because they are in control of everything. We have no-one to mediate. We have to make our complaint to Acciona. They sort out the complaints, they say, 'It

is no complaint, nick off.' That is what is happening. We have no-one to go to. The shire planning department has no-one experienced to know what we are talking about. The guys who are doing the measurement of noise have not been educated to know what is going on, let alone there being anyone else to see what needs to be done to know whether it is right or wrong. People have not been educated. Christophe Delaire, who was doing ours out at Moorabool, was asked what qualifications or what education he has had since he has been there. He has not done any. He was an engineer over in France but has not done any schooling since. We are up against that type of thing. These people have not been properly educated to know what is going on. They have been educated by the wind industry to do what the wind industry wants and that is all they have to do.

CHAIR—Thank you, Mr Dean.

Senator BOYCE—I have two questions following up on what you were saying, Mr Dean. The council, the EPA and the state department of planning have done no independent investigation whatsoever of your complaints, is that what you are saying?

Mr Dean—Our complaint has not been investigated. They might be doing something—

Senator BOYCE—Have you complained to all those organisations?

Mr Dean—Yes, we have written to them and all they said was that compliance was for compliance with planning permit conditions and not to conditions of permit. They do not know the difference. They complied with the conditions to get the permit and they say everything complies but compliance is by prediction. Their predictions are miles out and we have to put up with their predictions. They could be up to 10 decibels out.

I saw information from the New South Wales health department which said that 10 decibels could be 10 times more pressure we are suffering, and no-one gives a damn. It could be 10 times more. The 10 decibels compliance is New Zealand standard and yet the neighbours who have turbines have to put up with an extra five decibels because Christophe Delaire said it is all right, because they said it is all right overseas. So if you take five decibels—special audible—and load an extra five decibels, all the people who have signed contracts, signed contracts on the predictions of Marshall Day. They could be suffering 10 times more pressure than what they signed to. My brother has two turbines. He is going to have to sell his place and get out of there. He signed a contract thinking the predictions were accurate but there could be 10 times more pressure there than what was predicted.

Senator BOYCE—Mr Stepnell, you mentioned initially that you did not know much about wind turbines or wind farms but that you did not even need to have a family meeting to know you did not want them on the property. Could you explain why that was?

Mr Stepnell—Because I knew that we did not want to share a farm with a wind farm operator. We just did not want to share our farm. Obviously we knew what wind turbines looked like and we certainly could not picture them on our farm, regardless of how much they were going to pay us.

CHAIR—Thank you very much for your evidence. I know it took a lot to come here and explain to us in front of a whole lot of people, so thank you very much. It is very much appreciated.

Mr Dean—Thank you.

CHAIR—We have gone over time and I have done that deliberately because I did not feel that we could cut you off. So thank you very much.

[2.27 pm]

GABB, Mr Andrew Charles, Chair, Western Plains Landscape Guardians

JACKSON, Mr David, Committee Member, Western Plains Landscape Guardians

LACEY, Dr Alan, Public Officer, Prom Coast Guardians Inc.

LYON, Mr. Adrian, Secretary, Grampians-Glenloch Landscape Guardians Inc.

LYON, Mrs Helen, Committee Member, Grampians-Glenloch Landscape Guardians Inc.

McKINLAY, Mr Alexander, President, Prom Coast Guardians Inc.

MITCHELL, Mr Peter Richard, Member, Technical and Economic Committee, Australian Landscape Guardians

MISKELLY, Mr Paul Charles, Member, Technical and Economic Committee, Australian Landscape Guardians

READ, Mrs Megan, Secretary, Western Plains Landscape Guardians

RUSSELL-CLARKE, Mr Peter, President, Artists for the Environment Landscape Guardians

VANRENEN, Mrs Judy, President, Grampians-Glenloch Landscape Guardians Inc.

WINGETT, Mr Peter, Secretary, Prom Coast Guardians Inc.

CHAIR—I welcome representatives of the Australian Landscape Guardians, Artists for the Environment Landscape Guardians, the Prom Coast Guardians Inc, the Grampians-Glenloch Landscape Guardians Inc and the Western Plains Landscape Guardians. I do need to ask you to make sure that you have all had information on parliamentary privilege and the protection of witnesses and evidence. For anybody who needs a little crash course we have some more information over there. Who would like to start first because by the sound of it you all have presentations?

Mr Mitchell—If no one else wants that position?

CHAIR—You put your hand up first, so you are it.

Mr Mitchell—Can I just say a word of thanks to your staff. They have been patient, thorough and very, very helpful and remained cheerful through this whole process. They are superb.

CHAIR—Thank you and we recognise that too, but I do not think they get told often enough, so thank you.

Mr Mitchell—That is the good news. Most of the members of the various landscape guardians groups are rural residents and practising conservationists—an old word that we do not use anymore. We have in common our love of our land, our experience and continuing determination in respect of its preservation, and our despair about its disfigurement by large aggregations of industrial machines. In pure landscape terms, wind farms are a disaster of serious and major proportions. The Australian Landscape Guardians' submission is largely directed at the technical and economic characteristics of wind. Without proper technical assessment one cannot form a stable base for analysis of this industry. The submission concludes that wind power fails and fails spectacularly on both technical and economic grounds. I think you will be able to see that in our submission and also in a personal submission that Paul Miskelly made. He has done a very thorough analysis and explanation of how to manage grids.

Despite what we may wish and, indeed, need from a renewable energy source, the multiple and complete failures of wind power generation are the disappointing truth. Not only is it truth; it is the whole truth, sadly lacking in this business, and nothing but the truth. Society is beginning to grasp this conclusion, slowly at first but I can see the gates opening. We hope this committee will materially help the government move in the same direction as a society.

Frustratingly, we and other experienced engineers—we two are engineers—scientists and economists have presented the same facts to government members, senior bureaucrats, planning panels, parliamentary hearings of one form or another and to the media for over half a decade, with virtually no acknowledgement, no engagement or discussion and no interest. We feel, however, that our collective voices can only increase and become more effective. We do, however, provide the facts that we have uncovered to a very appreciative and grateful audience, being the increasing number of people who are trying to protect themselves and their families from the cruel damage that follows wind projects wherever they go in Australia. When these people come to understand the specific damage they face, and it is often late in the process, they get very angry. They get very angry when they find out that, despite their forced suffering—and it is forced, as you have heard—injustice is to no credible purpose or general community benefit, and that is argued in our submissions. Quite the opposite occurs. We believe this level of justifiable anger and reaction will rise as more wind capacity is installed and more is understood of the wind farm scam. I use that word because it is appropriate and because an English ecologist—an ecologist, mark you—decided that something was wrong with wind about four or five years ago and he took two years off to study it.

CHAIR—Could you say what the book is for Hansard, please?

Mr Mitchell—Yes. It is called *The wind farm scam: an ecologist's evaluation*, written by John Etherington and published by Stacey International Publishers. If I may, I will leave this copy for the pleasure of the committee?

CHAIR—Yes, so you will table that for us. Thank you.

Mr Mitchell—The anger is exacerbated when these people come to realise that the promoters and even the large and otherwise respectable developers have been promoting projects in a manner that would not meet the basic standards of full and honest disclosure. If you are offering a scheme to more than 20 investors, you would have to publish a product disclosure statement. If you do not tell the truth in your product disclosure statement, then it is off to jail. This does not

apply and this is a scheme. Appeals by us to ASIC, to monitor and set standards for disclosure for this industry's marketing of their projects to landholders, are just batted aside. Full disclosure requirements would probably be the end of the industry in its present form and in the locations they choose, as untruthful or incomplete disclosure—in other words, partial truths can be untruths—is a most serious offence for companies and the directors involved. For full disclosure, they would have to describe the industry the way we describe it. We do not need to spin about this industry; we just need to work hard to discover the truth. You can see what a farmer like Noel Dean has done; he has educated himself to the level of quite a serious acoustician—very interesting.

We hope the committee will ask the question: why are rural Australians being so casually and so cruelly placed in this position. You can see it is cruel from just listening to those three people and tomorrow you will hear Dr Sarah Laurie tell you about another 60. Why is it? I think the behaviour of developers can only be described as inhumane and we have told the major developers this. We have sent letter after letter to their directors. Is it because rural residents are simply a whingeing underclass and fair game to be treated as such? Within a democracy that is not possible, is it? But that is how we all see them and I am one of those landholders. Is it simply a repeat of other capitalist industries of profiting whilst creating major health problems for workers and customers until sufferers like Noel and the Stepnells somehow force action? I think it probably is. We can only remember the asbestos, tobacco and parts of the drug industries that have been down this path before. Maybe it is a fault in the renewable energy target scheme. In our submission, we say that scheme is badly based because it says that all renewables save greenhouse gas. We then go on to show that wind is the industry that does not. What we should be talking about is not a renewable energy target but a real target, a target that means something and that is a greenhouse gas reduction target. That will sort out the false industries, the ones that are not paying their way in greenhouse gas and in other ways, and it will force people to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions instead of putting up these machines in rural Australia close to or right in population.

CHAIR—Mr Mitchell, I am conscious that we have to hear from a number of people, so if you could conclude that would be appreciated thank you.

Mr Mitchell—Okay. Or can this be explained by what is known as the 'noble cause hypothesis'? Renewable energy is considered by many as a noble cause, and it probably is, but noble causes are dangerous. Once identified and couched in the right terms they can quickly take root and they need no further proof of nobility or cause. You do not have to take regard of people if it is a noble cause. Think about the Crusades.

To summarise, we have an industry that fails its purpose, is immensely destructive, is a massive waste of capital and we have not got anywhere with governments or industry in arguing that. Turbines are a serious danger to their neighbours' health. We have talked to the affected. The NHMRC and the state departments of health have not got off their chairs. They do not know what is going on. People, rural communities and turbines do not mix. Let us find a real not a faux solution. A failed solution is no solution, just a disastrous and cruel waste. Thank you.

CHAIR—Mr Mitchell, did you finish what you had on your paper or would you like to table some further notes?

Mr Mitchell—I would like to table some further documents. I will be present tomorrow and I will table them tomorrow. They are just things that have come up since we put in our submission.

CHAIR—That is fine, thank you. Mr Wingett?

Mr Wingett—I am the secretary of the Prom Coast Guardians. Our community group arose from the adverse effects of wind farms in our closely settled scenic district and the threat that more and bigger ones would be built. The first true, commercial wind farm in Australia was probably the one at Toora. From experience the co-members of the committee were intimately exposed to the effects on the people up there and that led us to become active in this organisation.

As elsewhere, some of the people who suffer from the noise and shadow flicker initially welcomed the wind farm, but awoke to its dark side when it commenced operation. To be fair, the operators subsequently purchased the properties of the most severely affected people who were able to rebuild their lives elsewhere, but they had to go through several years of agony to get there—and it was really agony. I have been on the properties myself just as a short-term visitor. I have experienced the effects of the low-frequency noise discussed here and they are real. It is galling when wind farm proponents misrepresent broad church groups such as ours as climate change deniers or nimbys. We are a broad church, we are an old group of citizens who are concerned. Equally galling is the astonishing spin that the problems experienced by people forced to live near wind farms are due to their wrong perceptions, which could have been avoided if the proponents had acted nicely during the community consultations about the farm. That is almost obscene, it really is appalling.

We urge you to ignore such sophistry and in your humanity give the full weight to the genuine anguish of the people suffering from their proximity to wind farms as demonstrated here today. They are decent folk who do not deserve to have their lives blighted for the convenience of large companies who would site their turbines well away from neighbouring dwellings if mandatory placement criteria were required. It is very encouraging to see that the Victorian state government is now introducing a two-kilometre setback for future wind farms, which will make one hell of a difference.

Wind farm proponents often dismiss the adverse effects of low-frequency, repetitive sounds on some individuals and cite the absence of peer-reviewed literature on the phenomenon. They frequently cite a National Health and Medical Research Council document entitled *Wind Turbines and Health—A Rapid Review of the Evidence*, July 2010. A critique of that report by the Society for Wind Vigilance in Canada included the comment:

The “Rapid Review” places an inappropriate level of credence in wind energy industry produced and or sponsored material to support its assertions. To compound this bias the “Rapid Review” selectively cites references which favour the wind energy industry while inexplicitly omitting relevant citations which do not.

The National Health and Medical Research Council’s report was by anonymous authors. The critique was by a bunch of medical and engineering professionals who all appended their name to the critique. We included the book *Wind Turbine Syndrome* by Nina Pierpont MD, in the references supplied with our written submission. We urge you to recognise that she undertook

the work detailed in her book out of a concern for the people she encountered who were suffering for the effects of low-frequency sound. Her professional motivation and altruism command respect. She does not deserve to be treated as somebody with an agenda doing this from the sidelines. She did it as a paediatrician of some standing who did not need to do this activity. It is out of altruism that she did it and her work demands your attention.

Adequate mandatory setbacks and rigorous enforcement of maximum noise standards would reduce the adverse impacts on properties neighbouring wind farms. A minimum setback of two kilometres or 20 times the maximum height, including the blades, of wind turbines to the nearest dwelling would be a desirable first step. Banning wind farms in recognised scenic areas as well as national parks will prevent the industrialisation of their landscapes by arrays of massive turbines and preserve their appeal to tourists. In turn, this will protect the income that tourism generates. Such placement and noise constraints would not prevent wind farms being built as the proponents sometimes suggest but it would encourage developers to choose sparsely populated and less scenic areas. There are plenty of such areas with good wind resource in our wide brown land. Thank you for considering these comments and our written submission.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Mrs Vanrenen—As Helen said, our concern is the Oaklands Hill wind farm that is presently being built with 32 turbines. Interestingly enough, under the new Victorian coalition policy that has just been announced—with more announcements to be made over the next few months—these wind turbines would not be allowed to be built because a lot of them are within two kilometres of residences, and certainly within one kilometre of property boundaries. Unfortunately, the permit was approved just too early for most of our members in this beautiful scenic location; otherwise it would not be happening.

Oaklands Hill wind farm is 15 kilometres from the scenic Grampians, with the most spectacular views of the southern part of the Grampians. It is an amazing part of the countryside, and really, visually, the farm should not have been allowed to go ahead. What I would really like to talk about, and the thing that inspired me to take on the role as president of our organisation, was the social impact and the disharmony that this whole process has brought to our local community.

It started in 2005 when Windlab Systems started coming onto properties—onto mine, in particular, without permission—and monitoring wind. They then signed up our neighbours to contracts, without us all knowing. We did not find out until quite some time later. They actually wanted quite a few of our neighbours and me to have turbines on the place. Like the previous people, we decided when we did our investigation that this was not the way to go. Initially we thought it was a good idea until we investigated.

The members of our organisation are all lay people, with no concept of what a wind turbine was about or of planning processes, but we have learned so much. My husband said to me this morning that each of the members have been out there; they have spent a year researching just to go and present at a planning panel meeting which took 15 days. One of the disappointing things is that this was the application by the proponent for our permit, and we spent 15 days in a panel hearing where everybody acted professionally—they did their research, we had outside consultants to present and solicitors on our case. Do you know what was disappointing with the

whole process? At the end of that, this permit was issued and there were really no changes to the permit from what happened there. So, we had all wasted our time, we had wasted government tax time, our businesses had suffered and we had gone through enormous emotional angst just to get absolutely nowhere.

That should not happen in Australia today. We live in a democracy where community consultation should be open and transparent, and where we should all be able to feel that we make a difference—particularly when we put in an effort. That is what we find is the most disappointing thing about the whole process. Hopefully it is going to be fixed, because some of the solicitors and expert witnesses that we tried to get would not come because they had government contracts. There were a couple that eventually came because they said, ‘The process is wrong, we believe it should be changed and on that basis we will come and give evidence for you.’ I do not know if that has actually changed, but I would really like you to investigate that.

I will talk now on a more personal note. I come from four generations of farmers on both sides of my family. Through family history I have never heard of such disruption and disharmony in country regions. There is nothing that has impacted country regions as much as this, and forced distrust and mistrust between neighbours. I find that really disappointing. For those of us who live in the city—and I live part of my time in the city—you can live anonymously. You do not have to belong to committees, but in the country you do. Everybody belongs to the church hall, the kindergarten, the football club, the Foxoff baits, Landcare and the fire brigade. We all do community work. I am afraid now this mistrust is making us not want to work with our neighbours, and that is really sad. Where is it going to leave the social fabric of the rural areas of Australia in the future? I think that is a real concern. I have problems walking into our shop in the local town, because I spoke out about these things and so they believe that I was going to take money out of their pockets. They forgot that my family had been providing money there for 60-odd years, and so had all the members of our organisation. The community distrust is a huge exercise.

I am not going to talk about health, because I listened earlier, and I know that most of our members are. Two of the turbines are up now. We are looking at them and we did not realise they were going to be so big. Most of my neighbours who did not understand said, ‘We did not realise it was going to be so big; what can we do to help?’ Well, it is a bit late, because they did not ask the questions. People talk about tourism and how great it is going to be. I run a global tourism company, I sit on the Grampians Tourism Board and I run tours to the area, and I can tell you I do not think this is going to be good for tourism; not wall-to-wall turbines.

I also wanted to say a little bit about the construction phase. I heard people talk earlier about whether you can trust the developers and what they say. We have been going through construction now since last August. We talk about it being green; I can tell you that hundreds and hundreds of truckloads of concrete and gravel have been pouring along our roads, with cement has being made. I wonder, is that really green? We are going through native vegetation removals at the moment: trees being taken down to put the power lines up. What is green about this really?

The other issue has been the construction. The developers are behind so they want to work seven days a week. They came and promised us there would be no noise on weekends. What did I find when I got up yesterday morning? I went outside at 8.30 in the morning and I could hear nothing but crashing and banging, and excavators obviously working that were supposed to be

silent. We have all had to complain about the noise of the reverse beepers that are travelling up to three to five kilometres. They just say that they cannot do anything about it. Unfortunately, when we do object we are also told that we are the only person who has objected. Of course members of the group talk to each other and discover that we are not. I do not think that is fair. I do not think anyone deserves to be treated like that. I would really like you to examine the processes so it is more open and transparent and so there cannot be this divide and conquer going on in country rural areas, because we are going to have no social fabric left if it continues.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Mrs Read—I am here in the capacity of secretary of the Western Plains Landscape Guardians association. I am also here with personal experience of owning a neighbouring property to the Stockyard Hill wind farm proposal.

Before I read out our introduction, can I just say we have never met the Glenthompson-Grampians Landscape Guardians, but Judy could have spoken for us just then; what she said mirrored exactly what we have been going through for the last five years.

The Western Plains Landscape Guardians Association was established five years ago by concerned local residents in the Stockyard Hill region. Our aims were and are to provide truthful and unbiased information, to represent the non-participating landowners and to achieve a fairer outcome for the entire local community. The Western Plains Landscape Guardians are in favour of renewable energy, but we firmly believe in immediate changes to the planning policies and guidelines regarding wind facilities.

Our experience of defending and seeking justice regarding a wind farm is not unique. The rapid onslaught of wind farm proposals and developments have affected thousands of regional Australians, and many groups such as ours have had to form because there are no other avenues of assistance or transparent information. Many of our committee members spent the entire six weeks at the Stockyard Hill planning panel hearing last year and successfully highlighted numerous flaws and discrepancies that Origin Energy and their expert witnesses presented as part of their planning proposal. The former Victorian state government rushed four wind farm permits through, which included Stockyard Hill, 24 hours before they went into caretaker mode at last year's state election. This is a clear sign of a desperate grab for green votes without thorough analysis, and another example of politics turning a blind eye to the rural voice of concern.

The Western Plains submission to this Senate inquiry further outlines the negative social and economic impacts that rural wind farms have on regional communities. Local short-term economic benefits are massively overwhelmed by loss of property values, population decline, job losses and restriction of agricultural business operations.

Wind farms are not viable without government mandated and public funded subsidies. It is totally misleading to suggest that the benefits are predominantly localised and only of a positive nature. The certainty of serious health effects imposed upon our communities, as witnessed throughout Australia and the world, is a complete social injustice. Social impacts included negative health effects from turbine noise and infrasound, breakdown in community connectedness and the overall feeling of ongoing helplessness.

It is essential that approved wind farms not proceed until current, independent health studies have been completed. A national approach to the planning and policy guidelines should be implemented so that all states are consistent with federal regulations. Appropriate locations should be proposed instead of populated, productive agricultural land. Independent studies for scientifically proven setbacks between turbines and residential dwellings should be commissioned immediately. Neighbouring non-participating landowners should have equal rights to the stakeholders, should be fully consulted at the commencement of any proposal and should have input into the planning process. Developers of wind farms have a duty to pay compensation for loss of property value to neighbouring or affected properties. Community consultation and education should be independent, transparent, thorough and conducted right from the start, and developers should guarantee no interference with health and quiet enjoyment of rural properties and workplaces.

Thank you very much for this opportunity of a Senate inquiry. We really appreciate this. We ask for a moratorium on all proposed and approved wind farms and appeal for immediate action and change to the wind industry and its guidelines. Thank you.

CHAIR—Mr Jackson, you look like you want to say something.

Mr Jackson—I will keep it very brief. I have done a little model over the last couple of nights in the workshop just to illustrate how wind turbines have increased in size over the last few years. We have heard they have been around for 30 years. Russell Marsh from the Clean Energy Council quoted that they have been around for 30 years. Thirty years ago in the 1980s they were 15 to 20 metres tall. Then we came to the nineties and they were between 40 and 50 metres tall. In Chalice Hills—and you have received a lot of submissions saying they have been out to Chalice Hills and there are not too many problems—they are 90 metres tall with 30-metre blades. The Waubra wind farms are between the two. They have 1½-megawatt turbines and Stockyard Hill has three-megawatt turbines. At the Stockyard Hill wind farm the turbines are twice the capacity of those at the Waubra wind farm. The radius of this is just under one hectare.

CHAIR—How tall are they?

Mr Jackson—They are 132 metres tall. The wind farm that has been proposed at Ballan will have turbines 150 metres tall. I have got that in a paper for you. There are over 1,400 wind farms in Denmark and there are between one and six turbines per wind farm. They are about 700 kilowatts, so the average turbine size there is 200 or 300 kilowatts. These are three megawatts, so these are 10 times the size of the average wind turbine in Denmark.

In my model, this is a house and these are people, big people too—two metres tall! It is all to scale. This shows why all these issues are just starting to arise. You can say they have been around for years but the turbines now are much, much bigger than what has been proposed. They are much taller. As was said earlier, they are put up higher so they can capture the wind. It can be windy up high and still down below, but when it is still down below the noise carries. It is engineering, but it needs to be understood that we are not comparing apples with apples. There is a more detailed paper, and if you have any questions I would be happy to answer them.

CHAIR—Are you tabling that paper and the model for us? Thank you.

Mr Jackson—Yes, and the model.

CHAIR—Thank you. Mr Russell-Clarke?

Mr Russell-Clarke—Congratulations on having this hearing and thank you for allowing me to talk. I am, as I told you earlier, a member of the Artists for the Environment Landscape Guardians. That does not mean we are artistic gardeners, nor does it mean that all of us actually paint landscape paintings, but most of us do. We are a diverse group but all of us, being artists, are concerned with form, texture, shape and colour. We get our inspiration usually from our wives but, if they are not available, from nature itself. That has been going on ever since people have scribbled in the sand. We realise that nature comes in all shapes and sizes—like wives, actually, now I come to think of it, and mine has changed over the years. Not all gum trees, for instance, are beautiful things but they are part of nature and nature is diverse. The visuals of nature are diverse, as are all paintings. As artists, we do not just want pretty little pictures; what we want is to have a landscape which inspires us. If we start mucking around too much with that landscape then we will not have that inspiration.

Good music has a rhythm and a balance, and so has nature. It has that harmony. That nature and rhythm and harmony is not designed by man; it is designed by God or those who copy God—or Mrs God. Anyway, it is true that all visuals in nature can easily be ruined. If, say, Constable painted one of his paintings but in that painting he had wind towers marching across the English Lake District, or if Turner painted a seascape and had giant turbines amongst the fishermen's boats with their multicoloured sails and seagulls, wind towers would jar, wouldn't they?

But, if you put wind towers, say, in a streetscape which separates the high-rise modern buildings built of steel and aluminium, then those wind turbines in a streetscape could look quite smart really because technical compounds of glass, concrete and steel would well suit a slick, modern wind turbine; that is true, isn't it? Why don't we site these wind turbines in our cities, because that is where we have modern technical designs?

My argument is not that wind turbines are ugly but that their industrial design and manufacture just does not suit a rural landscape. They are not appropriate. They are not relevant to the harmony of nature's designs. You would not put wind towers on Uluru or around Uluru or you would not put them in the botanical gardens. Imagine, if you can, wind turbines up and down the tree lined streets of Canberra or around the lawns of Parliament House. Of course you cannot imagine that, and why should you? They would be despoiling that place, wouldn't they? Then why should they despoil where I come from, the McHarg Ranges at Tooborac?

The McHarg Ranges are simply beautiful. They have unique rock structures, like huge granite boulders that balance on each other's shoulders, as if God was playing marbles with the winner getting a free trip to heaven. The Northern Territory rightly skites that they have mammoth boulders to amaze tourists; the Bungle Bungles bedazzle the world and so do the rock paintings of Kakadu. The McHarg Ranges, where I come from, have all these natural features and much, much more, but the money-hungry developers seek to blast this area to smithereens. They want to powder these unique granite boulders to excavate great pits to fill with concrete to anchor these huge monsters that you have seen. The area is the home to beautiful eagles with seven-foot wingspans. They are just going to be chopped up by those things.

We believe all citizens have the right and indeed the need to share the beauty of an unpolluted rural area. You remember when doctors would say, 'Go and have a sea change'; well what they meant is just have an environmental change. Seventy per cent of our citizens live in five of our major cities. The factory workers and the office workers need to get out into the rural countryside and recharge their batteries, so we do not really want to move industry out into that countryside.

I will not go on with flora and fauna and all of the rest of it, because I know you want me to be quick so I will skip all that stuff. Like the real estate agents say in the cities, 'Please buy this block of land because they are not making any more,' well they are not making any more rural countryside either. When I speak to my local council they tell me that they will not allow people to put any structures that go above the ridge lines, and yet these buggers are allowed to put their huge towers above the ridge lines. That is not right.

The Artists for the Environment Landscape Guardians are protecting what is important for enlivening their canvasses and their cards because artists need beauty to inspire them, and wind farms and their substations and meccano style pylons marching across the countryside carrying cables certainly do not conjure up great thoughts of artistic beauty. I am saying that our group, our painters—including John Olsen, the fellow who did the roof in the Melbourne art museum and stacks of fellows right across Australia—are simply concerned that these things will muck up what really is a part of our heritage as Australians. We love our landscapes and we must protect them from this industrial thuggery.

Thank you for your courtesy and your consideration. I wish you well in your deliberations and I am sorry about that word aluminium. Thank you very much.

CHAIR—We have a short time for questions so I will ask witnesses to keep their answers short, if possible, so that we can get more in.

Senator FIELDING—Not one of my questions, hopefully one of the group's questions: could someone very quickly explain what the map in front of us is?

Mr Gabb—That map was put together by the Western Plains Landscape Guardians as a presentation to the Stockyard Hill panel hearing. That map shows proposed and currently built wind farms west of Ballarat to the edge of the Grampians, and that is just the start of what is already on the landscape for this district. You can see that there is an absolute enormous number of towers to go in there and this includes all these groups here.

CHAIR—Could you tell us the difference between the red and black, because we cannot see the key from here?

Mr Gabb—The black are approved or built and operating, and the orange are proposed or in the pipeline.

CHAIR—The black ones are further progressed?

Mrs Read—I believe the black are operating and red are proposed.

Mr Gabb—That map is just basically to highlight to the Senate inquiry the enormous impact that these wind turbine developments are going to have just on this small pocket of western Victoria. If they continue at the rate that they are being approved and planned, western Victoria will be awash with wind farms. You will not be able to drive through western Victoria from Ballarat nor east of Ballarat—because Moorabool is not on that map and there are 107 to be built at Moorabool—without seeing the impost of these huge turbines. Already we are talking 150 metres, but the next stage is 200 metres high. The impost on us as rural citizens is just going to be onerous and you have heard what other people have said. Our children are the fifth generation on our farm. We settled there on 23 September 1889. Try telling your children one day what their future is when they are passionate about farming. It is a pretty hard pill to swallow.

Senator FIELDING—We heard on Friday that there is going to be a very large increase of wind turbines across Australia, I do not want to underestimate that, so what you have got there I think is probably the bare minimum probably of what you will see. Firstly, I would like to say that we should not underestimate this inquiry. I believe it is one of the world's first where a parliament is actually having an open look at the impact of wind farms from a health perspective but also from a planning perspective. These things have just grown like topsy-turvy in overseas areas and the same thing looks like happening here in Australia. This is an inquiry that is open; it does not have any predetermined outcomes. What we are hearing today is very, very important.

I am going to focus on some of the pieces in the submission on the adverse health impacts of wind turbines. Maybe Mr Mitchell may want to expand on what I saw on your submission and which I state here:

The ALG had no trouble locating an attention focusing on a number of quality studies and documents, starting with a NASA document in 1990 that associated wind turbines and infrasound. It is clear that developers have had increasing access to information relating to: infrasound from turbines, infrasound and health, and wind turbines and health for up to ten years.

Mr Mitchell—That is a fact. NASA were doing some work in a totally different way and found that all their instruments were being interfered with. They sat down and said, 'We have got to work this out,' and they did. They found that wind turbines, quite small ones, were emitting infrasound which was destroying what their instruments were doing. We also found a study from Japan. So the industry does its homework and can find these things which show that infrasound is injurious to people's health. You also find people getting sick around wind turbines. So it is not hard to join the dots. Now people say that there is no proof linking. What they mean is that we do not understand in detail the bodily mechanism in terms of the infrasound—we understand how it is received but not how it works through the body. There will be work done on that. Importantly, work needs to be done right now, before one more turbine is erected on setbacks that are not sensible. We do not need a compromise; we need turbines set far enough away from our houses so that we can live in our houses. I am quite certain we will not be able to live in our heritage house after Stockyard Hill gets built, because we are only two kilometres away. We thought two kilometres was okay when we started doing work three years ago, but it is now looking like two kilometres is nowhere near enough distance. The turbines should not be placed in closely settled rural areas. Get them out somewhere else.

Senator FIELDING—We went out to the Waubra wind turbine farm today. After standing there for a little while—I have been out there before, by the way—I could see why it would be

very easy to be lulled into some sort of sense that they are green, they are safe and there are no health issues at all. What do you say when people say that there are no health impacts and that, when people feel better when they move away from wind farms and worse when they move back, it is just a symptom of them being anti wind farms? Is this what it is about?

Mr Wingett—When the Toora wind farm was established there were people up there who were very pro the process; one guy signed the petition four times. But when the thing was built the adverse effects became evident. Some of those people were within 500 metres of the wind turbines, which are pygmies compared with the ones that are being erected in the western part of the state. There were people whose health was totally destroyed, as you heard earlier today. Some got sick and some almost needed psychiatric help.

At the Dollar wind farm inquiry a local doctor who had made a study of this, David Iser, gave evidence that he had quite a number of people under treatment for the adverse health effects of that wind farm, and this was four years ago. The same sort of situation has been happening since then. The proponents of wind farms deny that the problem exists. It does exist; people get sick.

The people who have been bought out by the operators of the Toora wind farm and now live away from the site have regained their health. I think that is testimony enough to what goes on. It is hard evidence. There is enough evidence from people like Dr Nina Pierpont that there are clinical reasons why people get sick from these things and we would urge your committee to take notice of that.

Senator FIELDING—On that point, we did hear from Dr Pierpont on Friday. We have had others disputing how much of an expert she is. I think this is the problem that we are going to have in this deliberation. But we have heard from her.

Mr Miskelly—For the Traralgon matter back in 2006 we brought Dr Frits van den Berg to Australia to appear as a noise expert. He was, and he certainly still is, well up there as the recognised international expert on wind turbine noise. The industry still takes no notice of Dr van den Berg's findings. I am not talking about infrasound; I am simply saying that we have several layers of evidence that are still being ignored. The science of the stable atmosphere effect, the so-called 'van den Berg effect', is established, it is clear. The noise at night is far worse than it is during the day, and all of the people sitting behind me now will tell you exactly that. People come around during the day time; they do not come back at four o'clock in the morning. The point is that the science is established and the industry is still denying that science.

Mr Gabb—Senator Fielding, in regard to health, I have here 10 copies of Dr Iser's personal study that I want to table. I have spoken to Dr Iser personally. He did that study through his own observations of people in his own clinic. He did not continue with it because, when he saw a past patient in the street one day, he asked why they did not come to his clinic anymore and the reply was that they had been bought out and moved away—his survey died because all of his patients were bought out. I have 10 copies of that survey. It is signed by him.

I would also like to note a recommendation from the chair of the Stockyard Hill panel hearing to do with health. The panel advisory committee set up to review the Stockyard Hill wind farm recommended formal investigation into the possible health effects associated with living near turbines. You are probably well aware that there is no policy in Australia by a government that

needs to take health into account. The wind industry can build a wind farm and they do not have to account for people's health. They are not allowed to build them in national parks, so we protect them but we do not protect our health.

Further, the committee said 'a properly designed and professionally conducted' investigation by the government and the wind industry should be undertaken where there have been health complaints. It called for 'all reports of noise assessment' to be made 'publicly available', with the introduction of a 'management system to minimise noise'. The panel said it was not possible to make a 'definitive assessment' of the 'alleged health impacts' of wind farm proximity and stated:

Nor do we take a position on whether the allegations of adverse health effects linked to Waubra Wind Farm are justified or not. We simply believe that it is not in the interests of any party to have further similar claims, again whether justified or otherwise, arise at another facility.

I suggest that, if we continue down this path, they will continue to arise.

Mr Russell-Clarke—Senator, you may be wondering why people allow wind towers to be put on their properties if this health issue is so great. In our area, once they get their money they shoot through and live on the Gold Coast, or at least that is what they want to do. They do not say when the towers go up, 'I am going to sit under them'; they go somewhere else and allow me to sit under them.

Senator ADAMS—I will come back to the Stockyard Hill wind farm development. In your submission you are saying that it is estimated that approximately \$25 million of devalued agricultural land will result when this farm is developed. Do you have any evidence that the land will be devalued? Have you got any written evidence from the real estate people or anyone like that that you could supply to us?

Mr Russell-Clarke—We got Access Economics to do a paper on it, and we are very happy to share that with you.

Senator ADAMS—Thank you.

Mr Russell-Clarke—I will have this done.

CHAIR—Could you take that on as homework to provide to us?

Mr Russell-Clarke—Most certainly, yes.

Mr Gabb—I also have copies of a letter from the rural national sales manager from Elders Australia in which he has compared the impost of wind turbines in rural Australia to major power lines, piggeries and chook breeding facilities and the effect that they have on the land values. He has stated in writing that he believes that we could see land values decrease between 30 and 40 per cent. That is his professional opinion having been a land valuer and the national sales rural manager for Elders Australia. I have copies of that letter as well, which I can submit.

Senator ADAMS—Thank you very much, that is good. I have one other question—one we have asked in other areas. Some submitters have argued that wind farms are being imposed on rural areas against the wishes of local residents for the benefit of those in the metropolitan areas. Do you believe that this is the case?

Mrs Read—Evidence would suggest that at Stockyard Hill there were close to 300 objections, a lot of which were local. We have 100 signed-up members but that would be three times more if people were comfortable in coming out publicly. A lot are not, which I can understand.

Mr Lyon—My answer to that is: who is the direct neighbour? If you are looking at numbers of your shire centre against those direct neighbours, we do not stack up as a very large number, but those of us who are within, say, the first five kilometres, who have looked at what has happened and been to visit other wind farms, I think we are a significant number. When you look at the incentive, I notice in the submission when you talk about rateable income, it is a fair incentive for the shire to forget about those or to scheme against those on the outskirts of their shires. I know I cannot get an answer from ours. The Southern Grampians shire has not even bothered to submit to this hearing and I am very disappointed in that.

CHAIR—Mr Miskelly and then I have a question from Senator Boyce—we have totally run out of time.

Mr Miskelly—Thank you, Madam Chair. I have lodged that document mentioned by the Elders national sales manager in my submission, so that may be of some use. Senator Adams and Senator Moore have both asked questions about property valuations and I think our personal experience, and I will not go into it here, also in that submission is possibly relevant too. We have had our property on the market for the last four years, et cetera.

Mr Mitchell—The wind industry does a survey in the area of our Stockyard Hill and they go and they survey all the people in Ararat who are never going to see a turbine. They do not know anything but they get 70,000 votes there and then they go into the country and they get 300. Guess what the survey says? It says a partial truth.

Senator BOYCE—Thank you, that probably feeds into my question. It has already been suggested that a proper analysis of the health effects of wind farms is one thing that this group would like to see and that setbacks be increased based on that survey. What else would this group believe that the federal government could be doing in relation to wind farms?

Mr Lyon—Setbacks are not really, in my opinion anyway, of much use because the circumstances of a wind farm change. Really if you know that a particular noise level will cause health problems, get out and measure and make sure that is not occurring in somebody's house because I am convinced that it is and that is a fact. It is not a setback or a planning regime. Make sure a problem does not occur.

Senator BOYCE—So that is the analysis of potential health effects that you are talking about? Is there anything else?

Mr Wingett—Could I quickly comment on the measures that the federal government could do? One is to the industry if necessary by providing more infrastructure in terms of electrical

reticulation to remote areas. One of the reasons that they choose closely settled areas is because of good electrical reticulation in those areas. If the federal government were to provide the means for extending power lines, if you like, to remote areas then you might find that wind farm developers would be more attracted to go there.

CHAIR—Grid development in other words?

Mr Wingett—Yes. Could I also mention just quickly that the New Zealand standard NZ6808: 2010, which is used in Australia by the wind industry, does not cover very low frequency sound. That standard needs to be amended to cover that.

Mrs Lyon—We find that there are currently legislated laws for country Victorians that are not being adhered to. A minister has decided that the New Zealand laws or rules be followed but the testing was not even done in accordance with it. We have one minister deciding, as opposed to current acts of parliament in Victoria. As aside to that, local government is the preferred authority that has to oversee and police. If we had the legislated laws, the local government would have the authority and the means, if it was set up, by which to monitor the health of us country rural Victorians. We could ring the local government, they would be able to enforce it, they would be able to register it and they would be able to have the equipment, as opposed to the self-regulating industry. To Senator Judith Adams, our eyes and our whole human body is so complex and sophisticated that the noise testing machines and the visual assessments are done on an individual basis. We are so complex that we hear, we look, we feel, we see, not in separate bits but almost intuitively all the time. We are very sophisticated, as you know, being a nurse, and that is one of the things: we need to make it simple, concise, in everybody's language and the model actually highlights it. Finally, Senator Steve Fielding, thank you so much for keeping your pre-election promise.

Mr Gabb—I believe that the wind industry has exploited a very weak planning policy because every state has different planning policies and guidelines. We believe that a national approach should be taken and this is what we would like you senators to take on board. We need a national guideline and policy which sets the standard for all Australians here and then the states have to toe the line according to that standard and its policy. That standard and policy needs to be set in consultation with all parties, with parties who are trying to promote the wind industry and with those people who have major concerns, like ourselves about the wind industry. Until that happens, this wind industry will continue to roll out across this countryside and no-one will be able to stop it. That is why we are here appealing for this to happen.

I really think the answer lies with you people to go back and call a moratorium as of now until we sort the issues out because in 25 years time it will be too late. It is too late now almost, but by the time the rest of it has got momentum we will be in a tragic situation. I urge it to become a federal guideline policy in which all states adhere to the same policies. We cannot have one state saying two kilometre setbacks and another, New South Wales, building them within 100 metres and 200 metres of farmhouses. It is crazy. It is inconsistent. The wind industry has had this window of opportunity to exploit us. We would like to see some firm guidelines. Thank you very much.

CHAIR—Mr Russell-Clarke is next. Dr Lacey, I know that you have not said anything so if you had a very short statement you wanted to make I will come back to you.

Mr Russell-Clarke—I will be very quick. Senator Boyce, you asked what the federal government could do. Well, they could stop the wind industry. The problem in my area is that no land has sold in the last many years because of a threat of the wind industry going up. If you have a mortgage on your farm, for instance, and the wind farm is threatened in your area, the bank will ring you up and say, ‘You borrowed money on the value of your land being X, we have reassessed your value and it is now Y, would you please give some of the money back.’

Senator BOYCE—Do you have evidence of that, Mr Russell-Clarke, because it would be interesting to have that provided?

Mr Russell-Clarke—No, I do not but others do. Fortunately I have a son who helps me out when I go broke so that is not my problem at the moment. There are others who do have that problem, who are being asked by the bank to give some money back so they can stabilise the borrowings that they had on a farm that was worth X but which is now worth Y because there is a threat of an inefficient wind farm going in. Thank you.

CHAIR—Dr Lacey.

Dr Lacey—Just very briefly, I am really impressed with what I have heard from this group of presenters and also particularly from the first group of presenters. One cannot be other than moved by what you heard. To see firsthand, and I have done this, the difficulties of health on this original Toora wind farm backs up the sort of things that our first group of presenters were talking about, and I must emphasise this.

There has been a lot of nonsense actually spoken by the wind industry. We have used the word ‘sophistry’. You will be aware, of course, of what the word sophistry means. Sophistry is clever, subtle but deliberately misleading reasoning and I have heard a lot of that from the wind industry and I would like you just to take that on board.

CHAIR—Thank you. And thank you all very much for taking the time and trouble to come and present to us today. I think some of you have homework to do in terms of giving us further documents and information that you have promised us. We have got that on record through Hansard but if you need any further contact details just talk to Sophie, who will be able to give you details of what you promised to do for us as well. I remind people that if they want to be part of the forum later on they need to fill in a Hansard form so then we can work out how much time we can give each speaker. I am going to make the break now fairly short because we have run over time.

Proceedings suspended from 3.45 pm to 3.59 pm

DEAM, Mr Sydney Cameron, Group Manager Planning and Economic Development, Glenelg Shire Council

CLARK, Mr David, Councillor, Mitchell Riding, Pyrenees Shire Council

CORNISH, Mr Stephen, Chief Executive Officer, Pyrenees Shire Council

GUEST, Mr Russell, Manager, Strategic Planning, Moyne Shire Council

HALL, Mr Chris, Senior Town Planner, Pyrenees Shire Council

KELSEY, Ms Sharon, Chief Executive Officer, Glenelg Shire Council

CHAIR—I welcome representatives of Moyne Shire Council, Glenelg Shire Council and Pyrenees Shire Council. I understand that each of you have been given information on parliamentary privilege and the protection of witnesses and evidence. If you need a refresher course, we have more on hand. As local government officers, you will not be asked to give opinions on matters of policy, although this does not preclude us asking you questions for explanations of policy or factual questions about when and how policies were formed.

We have submissions from the various organisations—169, 364 and 646 respectively. I would like to ask each of the organisations to make a brief statement if you want to, and then we will ask you some questions.

Mr Guest—I have had a long reflection on the opportunity of what to say at this hearing, and the shire is quite happy to have the opportunity because of the significance of the issue of wind farms. Moyne has about 40 per cent of the proposed wind energy facilities in Victoria. To date we have two very small ones built on the coast, one of which was the first in Victoria and one that started construction at Macarthur, which is about \$1 billion and 140 towers. There are about another 12. One of the attachments, a map, has a list of all of the farms, where they are, and who is proposing them, et cetera. There are a few more coming that are not yet public. One thing we did with this—and it is on some of the other maps we have as attachments—was we drew a two kilometre setback as best we could from the neighbouring houses. If you are interested in what a two kilometre setback does, it is instructive.

I would like to concentrate on the fact that there are three parts to a planning process: before you make the application, when you make the application, and afterwards. There are also two things that you need to do during that process: one is you have to have the expertise available; and the other is that you have to have the money to do it. In terms of costs, you would be aware that the state government has just put the responsibility for all wind farms back onto councils. The minister has made it plain that we could call it back in but that is a sham; I am not sure whether it makes a huge difference. Moyne shire has been left in the position to date where—except for four small wind farms that are under 30 megawatts, all the others have been state government proposed—we have never seen a fee for it. Even if that was significant, for a \$500 million wind farm which would appear to be about 60 to 80 towers, one per cent of that is \$5 million and 0.1 per cent is \$500,000; the maximum fee for a wind farm is \$16,000. We might get

rates when they are built but until they are built, we get nothing. It would not cover the cost of one peer review of one report, and that is part of the problem.

The second thing with the interaction is that the process is back to front. People go to the EPBC people in Canberra, which is generally where we first find out about things, and then they apply to the state government for environmental effects clearance. That is generally before they have done most of the studies that find out if there is anything there. If the studies subsequently find out there is something there, it is a bit late, and that is causing some angst to us.

The second thing with what is done beforehand is the level of information you get, and it varies. Some proponents are very good; some are not. The best way to extract the appropriate information in Victoria is to have an environmental effects process followed, because that sets up a technical reference group which puts all of the agencies and the proponent in the room until they sort out what information is required, and then produce it. If you do not do it that way, and you treat it as a normal application, you get what you are given. We have been given things ranging from a proponent downloading the environment effects statement information from the EPBC site for a neighbouring farm and using that as the sole basis of their environmental application. We have people who do not do traffic reports. We have people who do not carry out the information requirements that are mandated by the current policy. So that is one issue.

As to the second issue of what happens when there is an application, all the reports are made, there is an advertising period. The people who do not like it do not like it; the people who do think they are wonderful, and it goes off generally to a panel appointed by the minister or, presumably in the future, one appointed by the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal. That fight is a blood bath. It is a waste of time and resources on many things. I have just been listening to the previous witnesses, and a lot of them raised the question, 'What about landscape?' At the moment there is nothing that indicates what part of western Victoria plains is of good enough landscape significance that it would prevent a proposal from being supported. There is nothing saying that if you are in an area in Moyne shire and 10 per cent of your view involved the wind farm, that that was appropriate. If that went until you got three more wind farms so that 170 degrees of your view was obstructed, is that not appropriate? We have had long discussions with even proponents and some of them in the industry about what landscape values mean, and there is not an answer yet. So, to some extent, my view would be that someone should bite the bullet and say, 'The landscape will stop nothing; do not bother wasting your money; put it on the stuff that counts.'

The two things that count to us as a shire are the lack of a road network and what happens to it, the flora and fauna that is associated with that, and the environmental management plan. We are, of course, interested in the community, but in the way that it is structured. When the minister runs permits we get to comment on mainly those two issues. When we run them, we get to comment on everything.

Just to summarise the last part on what happens afterwards, it has been mentioned about who does enforcement and who does monitoring. I will leave that to my colleagues down the end because they are the leaders of the charge on that. We believe that it has to be done by an appropriately resourced agency. It cannot be done by a council. We simply do not have the expertise or the money to have people to do it.

Turning to the two last factors, the expertise factor and the cost, if we wanted to do a noise survey and get the environmental protection agency involved, the EPA representative at a meeting on this subject two weeks ago which I and the others here attended said there was one person in the EPA in Victoria who could probably do it. The level of expertise is minor. That spreads into the flora and fauna people. If we wanted an independent review, who does it? There is no one left that is not working for the proponents. Who does the traffic engineering? There is no one left that is not working for the proponents.

I am not sure how much the senators follow the intricacies of planning, but there is a thing called secondary consents. When a permit is issued for a wind farm, it will state that you must prepare a plan and that must be endorsed and approved. That can be done three or four years after the event. We have had a case where the traffic management plan for one of our wind farms was endorsed and approved, but the people who did that did not read it and did not consider it, but sent it to us and our traffic engineers made 31 detailed comments. It took them a week of hard work. The 31 detailed comments were totally and utterly ignored. As a result, I said to the panel considering the next application, 'Tell me who in the department of planning has a traffic engineering qualification.' The answer is nobody. But, they are assessing the traffic engineering applications.

Lastly on the fees and the costs, there are two elements to that. One is simply the cost of running these processes is phenomenal to the people involved. It is no doubt expensive to the industry. As I said, the fee is one per cent. Let us assume that one per cent is \$5 million. A former premier of Victoria, Jeff Kennett, once said that if you do not have five per cent up front, you are not serious about your proposal. If they cannot find \$5 million to do the research properly, then are they serious?

Finally, council refused an application for one of the smaller wind farms it was responsible for on noise and cumulative impact grounds. The proponents exercised their right, and I have no problem with that, of taking a legal challenge to the Supreme Court on whether he did it legally or not.

The legal challenge was basically that at that time the New Zealand noise standards of 1998, I think, were used. The 2010 standards were not used. Therefore, they said we should not have used the 2010 standards to say it was too noisy. When that happens, the council is the first defendant and has to come up with the Supreme Court costs. The tribunal does not; the state government does not. The second, third, fourth and fifth defendants are the people that objected. It did not go to a hearing because our legal advice was that the challenge was accurate. The farce of all of this is that, as of 14 March, the 2010 guidelines are the ones that apply in the state of Victoria. So, when it goes back to VCAT for rehearing on 9 June, they will be the ones that will be used. The entire thing is a waste of everyone's time and money. It caused immense grief to the community, some of whom are here, and it cost a lot of time and money for months.

That is an introduction, but in my submission and in other things, we have tried to come up with ways of doing the process better. We have been doing it for eight or nine years, and there is nothing that has been said today or that you would have heard over the last few days, or will hear, that the various panels and submissions have not said for four or five years, but nothing much has happened about it.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Ms Kelsey—First of all I would like to thank you for the opportunity for Glenelg shire to provide information in relation to its submission. Perhaps I will start by saying that Glenelg shire, for those who may not be aware, is located in that far south-west corner of Victoria. We consider ourselves an important part of the green triangle economic region, with partnerships not only with our council partners in Victoria but also with council partners in South Australia.

There are a number of key aspects regarding wind farms in our shire. One of the most compelling is that it is a complex issue for which local government feels that it does not have significant resources in relation to managing the complexities, particularly as it becomes the relevant authority. While our shire does have a number of wind farms, we have not been the relevant authority in relation to those planning aspects. As a result, in matters that have arisen in relation to those it has been largely up to council to find the resources to manage the ongoing monitoring and enforcement aspects.

Those parts aside, in relation to wind farms, we are a key manufacturing site, with Pacific Hydro located within the Glenelg shire. They not only provide a source of employment for our local community but also are considered one of the key stakeholders in our industries, coupled with the Port of Portland which provides a key locale for the export of the manufactured equipment. As a key source of employment, it means that it is not just direct in relation to Pacific Hydro but of course a run-on effect in relation to our local businesses and our local community. This means that we are essentially a microcosm of some of the challenges that you will face as a committee grappling with competing interests. Certainly Glenelg shire has a number of those that it continues to grapple with.

As we said, we have some major industry stakeholders. We have the Portland Wind Energy Project that has been developed by Pacific Hydro. It has basically been constructed in four stages. The first three stages have been completed. With the completion of all four stages, these wind farms will generate a total of up to 670 gigawatt hours per annum or the equivalent of powering 120,000 households each year.

In relation to the economic impacts of wind farms, there is obviously a rating component relative to the shire's annual revenue. That amount aside, as I said, it still means that we have to grapple with our resources to deal with a range of complexities for which council may not have and, in fact, in some instances does not have, the required expertise on which to be able to provide informed independent views.

The economic benefits are both direct and indirect, from engineers through to tradespeople working on site, through to businesses supplying products and services, or even through to local cafes making lunches for workers. A number of jobs have been created as a direct result of the wind farm manufacturing presence within our shire. This is, again, a run-on effect as to rental payments for landholders hosting turbines, although the committee would be aware that there has been some potentially compelling commentary in relation to what benefit that may provide.

Whilst council has not been the relevant authority, this meant that if there have been considerable complaints in relation to the health impacts within Glenelg shire, it is unlikely that they would have been received by council. Indeed, it is more likely that they would have been

received by Pacific Hydro. Notwithstanding that, council's complaints register does indicate that there have been five complaints against wind farms within our shire area. Four of those have been lodged by one family and relatives, and generally they relate to noise, low frequency noise and oil leaks. The additional complaint was in relation to noise from the wind turbines.

Council has supported the construction of wind farms in the shire and considers that they make an important contribution to the shire's economy and community through the rate revenue and community grants that are offered by the manufacturers. In addition, council also acknowledges that turbines can impact adversely on neighbouring residents, and is of the view that careful planning is needed to ensure these adverse impacts for future developments are absolutely minimised. Council also advises that it is not the responsible authority for the determination of major wind farm planning applications and, as such, does not necessarily hold the data relating to the impacts of wind farms. As I have indicated, this data is held by the state government's Department of Planning and Community Development. That is all we would like to say at the moment, thank you.

CHAIR—Thank you very much.

Mr Clark—If I could just make a couple of opening comments. We are a council that has been supportive of the developments, although we do have issues with certain parts of the guidelines around that. Very much our role in this as council is as a planning authority. We have one approved and built wind farm, Waubra, which you saw today. We have three approved, one in planning, and another two in prospective stage at this time. So we have a significant number of developments. Our submission will concentrate on that, and I will pass to Chris Hall to make some comments about some of the specific things that we see the planning system needs to address.

Mr Hall—Thank you for the opportunity to present before this particular hearing. The Pyrenees shire believes that the current Victorian guidelines, the policy and planning guidelines for the development of wind energy facilities in Victoria—which were again recently revised this month—are not currently robust enough in a number of specific areas to protect the amenity impacts of adjoining non-stakeholder residents and fail to provide adequate direction on the assessment requirements in specific areas.

Council would like to see the following issues addressed through an amendment to these guidelines, and we have been actively working along with our fellow councillors at the table here and other councils in the region through the MAV wind farm working group to lobby the state government for action on these particular matters. We have been pushing for a requirement to be included within the guidelines for the siting of wind towers to be at least two kilometres from non-stakeholder residents. However, we do acknowledge that this may need to be increased to even greater distances if very large capacity turbines are proposed, or if there are large clumps of turbines and the atmospheric and geographic impacts are such that they may warrant a greater setback. A number of studies that have been done, both federally and interstate previously, have recommended two kilometres as an arbitrary setback, and we believe that that should be adopted in Victoria for the majority of turbines.

We have also suggested both through the MAV working group and at the Stockyard Hill wind farm panel hearing to which we submitted that there should be at least a minimum of a 400-

metre setback of turbines from any non-stakeholder property boundaries for the purpose of providing a safety buffer in the unlikely event of a blade shear, and to protect the adjoining landholder's property rights.

We have suggested that no aviation lighting be required on wind turbines unless in close proximity to an airport or specifically required by CASA. We have a situation with the Waubra wind farm where initially the panel, in assessing that application, recommended that no aviation lighting be included on those turbines, but, subsequent to the permit being issued, the minister at the time actually granted a secondary consent amendment to the permit, without any consultation with the adjoining ratepayers, to add 57 aviation lights for those turbines. This has had a major impact on the amenity of that surrounding area. The bright red lights, flashing on and off, can be seen for up to 30 to 40 kilometres away. It does have a big impact. We understand that there is an application before DPCD at present to have those lights removed. Those sorts of considerations need to be addressed, and we are strongly pushing for no aviation lighting to be required unless it is required by CASA.

We need projects to include details of all infrastructure such as electricity grid connections. At the moment, often we get piecemeal applications submitted both to council and the DPCD when the 30-megawatt demarcation existed. Often things like the electricity grid connection and native vegetation removal components would be missing and would be submitted at a later date for consideration. We suggest that the wind industry needs to get its act together and ensure that all of those elements of their project are in order and ready to be submitted for consideration as a complete package.

We have lobbied for the appointment of a department project manager from within DPCD to oversee the assessment of each wind energy facility project. Obviously given the recent decision this month to hand responsibility back to local government it is probably unlikely that that will occur within the short term, but we believe that given the capacity constraints within local government that should occur. It has also been recommended by both a number of regional councils and the Environment and Natural Resources Committee inquiry into the approvals process for rural energy projects in Victoria that came out in 2010 that a technical reference group be established and integrated into the assessment process for wind farm applications. That would be a committee comprised of technical experts with experience in areas such as flora, fauna and noise, where local government does not have the capacity or the resources internally, and we understand that DPCD does not, to properly assess these matters. They are the ones that are causing the significant impacts on the ratepayers, so we are suggesting a technical committee needs to be established within DPCD that local government can draw on to get the expertise we need to make proper decisions. We believe there is a need for greater policy guidance to assist with the assessment of cumulative impacts. That is currently lacking within the policy document, which we basically need to rely on to make decisions.

The Waubra wind farm is currently the largest operating wind farm in the state of Victoria. It is the only operating wind farm within the Pyrenees shire. We have 109 turbines within our shire boundary; the remaining 28 are within the city of Ballarat. We have received significant complaints regarding noise and health amenity impact issues since that wind farm first came into operation, or since the first turbines were commissioned, which I think was around July 2009. We have 32 complaints registered on our records. The vast majority of the audible noise complaints are from residents within 1.5 kilometres of turbines. There are a number less than

1,000 metres from turbines, which is really way too close. We are talking large clumps of turbines. I have actually visited some of these properties personally, and the audible noise impacts are quite noticeable, even on days where the background noise levels are fairly high.

If I was to put any consistency around the periods when the complaints seemed to emanate it would be generally of a night time, when you have more stable atmospheric conditions, with high windshear coefficients occurring with low wind speeds at ground level but enough wind up at turbine height to make the things work, so the sound can be heard in people's homes when they are trying to sleep. Naturally, background noise levels are lower anyway over those periods. There are reports of modulation noise and mechanical noise associated with the particular design of the turbines. We have not been made fully privy to any of the details relating to this particular project, even though we have been advised by the department that we are supposed to be responsible for enforcement at various times. I have put a few dot points together here on the issues where we feel the noise reports and the assessment has let down the community and caused a number of these complaints to occur.

There was a lack of independent review undertaken in the initial noise assessment provided by Marshall Day at the time of assessing the wind farm development. I do not believe that the panel requested that. When I looked at the report, there were a number of properties at 38 or 39 dB(A) based on the noise power output predictions that were provided. That is one or two dB(A) over the acceptable standard. There should have been an independent peer review done at that stage. We have had a lot of setbacks where, for instance, we had two or three property owners bought out who lived less than one kilometre from turbines. That just highlights the case we put earlier about the need for a minimum setback.

There has been a lack of detail within the New Zealand standard NZ6808:1998 which applied at the time on how to assess special audible characteristics. There is further detail within the now adopted 2010 version of that standard. We believe that that has led to a number of properties that probably do meet the criteria for the special or characteristic five dB(A) penalty not being applied. That is currently being investigated.

There were also a number of potential inaccuracies in the background noise testing data that have been provided post compliance by the proponents' noise testing company, Marshall Day. Significantly, changes were made also to the turbine design and an increase in the hub height which was done post the permit being issued and was signed off by the minister under secondary consent. We have been provided no evidence that a new noise report was provided at that time. If it was, it certainly was not tested or checked internally, and there was no independent testing of that report done by anyone with any experience or the appropriate qualifications to do so. That just highlights what can happen under the current system, and it will continue to happen unless some changes are made. We have put forward a number of these recommendations to the state government for action.

I will touch briefly on the issuing of enforcements. The current position of the state government in its policy guidelines is that councils are responsible for enforcing and administering all planning permits regardless of the 30-megawatt demarcation or whether or not they were called in under the section 96 call-in powers under the Planning and Environment Act. We have had legal opinions—one from a QC and the other from a well-respected planning lawyer—to the contrary, that unequivocally back the council position that, in situations where

those applications are called in, the minister actually becomes the responsible authority for administering and enforcing the permit.

It is our strong view, backed by each of the councils here at the table, that we lack the technical skills and resources needed to take on this role. Pyrenees council is basically a single-planner council plus an administrative officer as well as some strategic back-up. We would need one or two staff nearly full time to be dealing with this, not to mention the legal burden we would have to take on. If we were to take on a major wind farm company at VCAT, if we wanted background noise testing done we would need to order the shutdown of turbines to get that data. To run a case at VCAT we would be looking at well over \$100,000. Just to get the noise reports done would be well over \$50,000, \$60,000, \$70,000 before we even entered VCAT action. We would be exposed legally if we were found to be wrong in any of our case arguments. It is really something that is way beyond the capacity of local government. You just need to look at the example of the coal fired power stations in the Latrobe Valley. They are not administered by the local council. They are dealt with by the state government, which has the technical resources and the abilities to deal with a significant development of that scale.

I will touch on amendment VC78 which the Baillieu government just introduced this month. Local government is now responsible for assessing all wind farm applications regardless of capacity. Again, that will create huge challenges for the local government sector, given our limited ability to find technically qualified staff to do the job. It was disappointing that this action was undertaken without any formal consultation with the sector. While it was released as a policy position pre the election, there was no actual formal discussion and engagement with local government on how this was going to work practically before it was announced and implemented in legislation.

With respect to post-commissioning noise compliance monitoring of developments, under the condition requirements of many permits, there has not been a requirement for testing data to be provided until 12 months after the commissioning of the last turbine. That is resulting in 20-plus month delays in the data being made available to the public and obviously in the department being able to investigate any breaches, such as in the Waubra situation. We had to wait over 14 months before we could find out some of the issues that have arisen there. I have not been privy to that data, but the verbal advice that was given to me by the officers who have looked at it is that properties are in non-compliance with the 98 standard, and they are being investigated at the moment as to the appropriate action to be taken to rectify the situation.

Senator BOYCE—Who has that information? You say you have not been provided with the information?

Mr Hall—I have been provided with the information verbally from a representative of the department. There is currently a need for DSE to review and formally adopt for use in Victoria the draft guidelines for the assessment on the potential impacts on broilgas. Any standard adopted we say should include an absolute minimum setback from identified nesting sites; that should be non-negotiable. There was a lot of debate and variation at a recent hearing I was involved in where the setback specified in the draft standard was actually significantly eroded. A DSE officer put forward evidence contrary to what was stated in the draft guideline and supported a setback of 750 metres when the guidelines talk about a three-kilometre setback. So I think there needs to

be further work around solidifying that document and formally adopting it for use so that industry and the community have a solid position on the matter.

I will sum up by saying that we strongly support the need to adopt a nationally consistent approach along a range of key issues. Noise would be one of them. Noise is not sufficiently covered in the national standard that has been released. It is put back on the state government to adopt appropriate standards, but it is our strong view that a nationally consistent standard should be adopted and that a panel of acoustic experts in the industry should be appointed to investigate all the standards currently in use within Australia with a view to adopting the standard that will provide the best amenity protection for all nearby residents. For example, the current South Australian EPA noise guidelines recommend a level of 35 dB(A) in all rural areas. Evidence presented at the recent New South Wales Legislative Council rural wind farm inquiry adopted and supported this standard as providing adequate protection for the amenity of nearby dwellings. That level is five dB(A) lower than the limit allowed for in the New Zealand standard. I am not saying that is necessarily the standard that should be adopted, but that is an example of one of the other standards currently in use which I think should be looked at.

CHAIR—I am a bit concerned that we are going to run out of time for questions. We are running on a really tight time frame. Could you wrap it up?

Mr Hall—Yes, I have just a couple of more lines. We have received a number of complaints with respect to health effects, and we would strongly support an investigation by the federal government into health effects. If it is possible, we could adopt a standard that can properly assess subaudible noise across the full range of the noise spectrums. The current New Zealand standard does not provide for the assessment of subaudible noise outside of the dB(A) range. We believe that a full investigation by a Senate inquiry in conjunction with the EPA and other relevant government authorities would be appropriate in that regard.

One other thing to look at would be financial contribution options for abutting landowners. At the moment in Victoria it is only the benefiting landowner who receives the financial contribution. We believe that that potentially should be extended to landowners within two kilometres of wind farms. I believe that has been done in other countries such as Canada. Do not quote me on that, but I have heard that that is the case. It has been looked at by DPCD in Victoria as well. That is just one option to put on the table that may alleviate some of the concerns of adjoining residents. I will leave it there.

Senator FIELDING—The local planning authority is in a very tricky spot. I served on a council for a year, and it is a very tricky thing but you have a lot of power. This is a very important committee. I know that the rest of Australia probably does not think so, but I can tell you that this is the chance to actually have a lot of these issues looked at and to have a reasonable approach to them. I understand that maybe one council benefits from a lot of the workforce, so it is a bit different in that one, but the other two that are left grappling with a lot of community concerns would be finding it difficult. I really appreciate your councils allowing you to put a submission in and to present here. Mr Hall, I really appreciated your comments in detail. They show that you have really thought this thing through, and I really appreciate it. It is very easy to state problems without coming up with some possible ways of addressing them. I really appreciate that. It takes a lot of courage, so thank you.

Mr Guest, in your submission, page 3 states:

Experience is showing that the current approvals process defaults to accepting a lot of expert evidence on face value and deferring the hard decisions to a secondary consent phase of endorsing management plans.

It is a bit of a leading question, so I have to be careful with this, but how difficult is that for local councils? Does that mean that the councils are more likely to approve wind farm projects or wind turbines because they do not have the resources to determine whether or not the community concerns about projects are genuine?

Mr Guest—I will answer the second part first. No, my council will not approve anything if it does not believe that it has the appropriate information to make a judgment. That is one of its major concerns with the entire process. Secondary consents are the biggest bugbear of the actual thing. I will give one very succinct example. We are having Macarthur wind farm built at the moment. It is big. It is 140 turbines. The proponents have given the development rights to Leighton construction, who have to build it. Of course, they were not involved in anything until six months ago, so they have had to learn from zero what is going on. One of the issues is school bus routes. The traffic management plan and the permit issued basically say that you will not operate your trucks bringing material to the site when the school bus is operating.

The actual wording of the management plan, ‘as approved by the state government’, does not quite go that far. It allows people to take measures or consider what they are going to do if school buses are operating. This means that if their truck sees a school bus, it will stop. To some extent, the council cannot do anything about it because the plans are signed and approved by the state government. The community is outraged. The council and the proponents are having meetings next week with the community about this. We have had quite a lot of meetings. To be fair, it is a moving feast because four years ago when the permit was issued, it could have been 10 kids picked up in the area—at the moment there are none; next year there could be two. It depends on circumstances. What we do know at the moment is that we believe there are no school buses that pick up anywhere near the access routes inside the area of the wind farm, but a couple drive through it. So what do you do? That is one of the minor issues.

The biggest secondary consent issue is that the permits provide that the minister to date will consult council on traffic management, that it will consult the DSE on this. My concerns—and I think those of Department of Sustainability and Environment in Victoria are the same—are that if they provide advice that this should not happen, that this is a rare and threatened species and needs further work then the minimum we expect is that is done. At the moment nothing happens, and we are almost at the stage of taking out enforcement orders on the state government planning authority to get them to comply with their own permits.

Senator FIELDING—That leads me into the second question. On page 9 of your submission, it says that a number of projects fail the noise requirements of their permits. How do you know that, and are there any repercussions of it at all?

Mr Guest—How do we know? We believe that the state government, or those parts of it that are trying very hard to assess the issues appropriately—and there are people that are doing that—have actually measured the noise issues and had them assessed. Waubra was the first one. We believe that so far of the four or five they have done, none of them totally comply. The

problem with that is: how do you expect someone to spend \$10 million to build a tower and then measure the noise and, when they find out it does not work, volunteer to remove the \$10 million tower? It is too late. If you are going to have noise assessment criteria, it should be before they are built, not after they are built. That has been the problem. If you had a little wind farm pointing out into the countryside and that was it, you could possibly deal with that by saying you will have setbacks. But we have wind farms that are two kilometres from the border with 80 towers, and another wind farm is proposed with 100 towers pointing the other way. The people in the middle are outside the normal setbacks, but they are stuffed. There is nowhere to go.

Senator ADAMS—I was just looking at the problem with your 500 kV line. Who will be responsible for building a bigger line, and where is the money coming from for that?

Mr Guest—The lines are owned by SP AusNet and AEMO, the Australian Energy Management Operator. They operate the market and the grid. My understanding, given that we have just had the Mortlake power station connect to it, which is a gas-fired power station in the Moyne shire about to commission, is that it costs about \$50 to \$70 million to get onto the grid. It is not a small exercise.

We have two further comments on that. That line at the moment is the only line in south-west Victoria that has enough capacity to put a decent sized farm on, but it does not have enough capacity to put the proposals on all of the ones in Moyne, let alone all of the others. If then you are going to spend another \$2 or \$3 billion to try to make the system work, God knows where the money is coming from.

We are actually having discussions for the first time on Thursday morning with SP AusNet, AEMO and others about the concept that they have gone public with, which is hubs. These would reinforce the western Victorian power situation to cope with all of these additional facilities by having hubs at the site of the three gas-fired power stations, all of which are in Moyne. If you have a hub built here at the gas-fired power station and you have half-a-dozen wind farms within 50 kilometres, you have to run them all to there. That has its own issues: in as much as it was news to the people that built it, it is news to all of the neighbours and it is news to the council. But how else you do it, I do not know. We have had a couple of tiddler wind farms of 20 towers in the north of the shire, where there was not even objection to one of them, that have spent five years trying to negotiate to get onto what is the Powercor grid, which is the smaller stuff. Powercor's view is: you can get onto our grid. You build the substation, you build the connection, you upgrade the grid, and when you have done that, you give it to us. That just is not working.

Senator ADAMS—No. Where will these power lines go?

Mr Guest—We do not know.

Senator ADAMS—Are the additional power lines going through neighbours' places?

Mr Guest—There is a huge easement for the Portland power line through there. I do not know if they can hang another wire off and not go outside the current easement. I do not know if they need current easements. At the moment one of the problems with wind farm applications is that, in Victoria, the application is basically the site where the towers are. Where you connect to

the grid could be 20 or 30 kilometres away. The distance in between could be covered with rare and threatened species, native vegetation, you name it, but it is not considered part of the application. The guidelines that were released two weeks ago state that you should be able to come up with the route you will use to get to the grid, how you get to the grid, and all of that, but to date, it has not been included.

Going back to Senator Fielding's question about the consent: three years after you have issued the permit, six months before you start building it, we are still issuing native vegetation permits to get to the grid. We are still having discussions on Thursday with the proponents at Macarthur as to the actual design of the substation et cetera under the grid where they are connecting to it. They have been told by SP AusNet that they need an eight-hectare site to allow for further expansion, not two—that is another six hectares of native vegetation that will be offset. All those are the permits that council deals with, not the state government. It is an interesting question.

Our point of view is different from some of the other councils. We are not saying that Moyne shire says yes or no to wind farms as a general theory. We have to deal with the cumulative impacts of the two belts—we have two belts 70 kilometres long and 20 kilometres wide with 400 or 500 towers in each. They all have to go somewhere if they build. If 50 per cent of them are not built, that is 50 per cent of the money, the grief, everything that is just being wasted on something that will not happen. In that case, first in, best dressed is not good enough. The best in should get up, and there has to be a better way of sorting that out. That answers the question: we have no idea how the grid is going to work.

CHAIR—In Western Australia, when you put in a development proposal—for example, for a mine—you put the development proposal for the mine and a power source. There is a famous one in the south-west where there was a big fight over it cutting through a forest. But it was done at the same time as the application went in for the mining. Is that not the case for other developments here?

Mr Guest—In Victoria, the policy that was issued I think was to facilitate the development of the wind energy facility, not to assess it. It excluded consideration of the offsite effects. In fact, Macarthur is almost unique in that the proponents volunteered to tell us how they were getting onto the grid. We have the same size wind farms where we have no idea once it is getting off the site how they intend getting onto the grid or where. It is ridiculous.

Mr Clark—The law in Victoria does not require a planning permit for a connection to the power grid. Effectively that is legislated by the state, but they do need permits for the vegetation that they remove. In our three approved projects, only one of those has an approved line. With the other two, we have a wind farm but we do not know where the cables are going.

Senator ADAMS—The way that these wind farms are expanding, and with the planning issues that are arising, especially with that power—and in Western Australia we have a similar problem—a lot of communities feel that they are being imposed upon by these developers. As shires, do you feel that your communities are being imposed upon? Your councils are elected by the people; how do you feel? I would like a comment from each council.

Mr Guest—Our shire has, to date, managed to get a refusal for a wind farm through VCAT and it is being challenged. Our shire also has supported wind farms, and some of them have been

built. If you were being realistic and honest with the community—Moyne tries to and it has a lot of community engagement—they are nearly unstoppable. With the resources involved, it is not a level playing field. People were sitting here earlier saying they had spent 15 days at a panel and, believe me, that is an experience you can do without. You are up against QCs and multiple consultants. You have no capacity to challenge it. One of the things that I find heartening about this is our local community has not buckled. There are people on either side of the argument that get on with life and deal with it.

With respect to the brologas, I can remember someone sitting there for the entire process up to the hearing not mentioning a word, but when the hearing started and they had their chance to say something, they said, 'I have a biological science degree from Melbourne University. In the 1970s and 1980s, the Victorian government had a brologa recovery group. I was the president of that.' She had just been listening to the consultant for the proponents basically calling her an ignorant twit. If that is the attitude which should be stopped, that is why you need expertise. But yes, they are imposed upon. I have been doing planning for 30 years and Sid has too, but we barely understand everything of the ins and outs of all this and can follow it. The average citizen has Buckleys of following what is going on. What is the difference between an EES being done and not being done, this being done and that not being done—they have no capacity to understand it. If they try very hard, they will build it up, but why should they?

Ms Kelsey—Certainly people from the community will come at a perspective on wind farms based on their particular interaction with the wind farm—whether it be on a residential basis or in an employment arrangement. For Glenelg shire, as I mentioned earlier, often there are competing interests. Certainly from a council perspective and from the feedback that the community has provided council, they do support wind farms. As I said, the main issue is that yes, we certainly have manufacturing and employment interests, and that is a significant interest in relation to our community, and the run-on financial benefits. Notwithstanding that, as I have mentioned, council does grapple with the complaints. We have had only five, but certainly they do provide compelling circumstances that council is mindful of. It is trying to balance a range of interests. To some extent, local government is between a rock and a hard place.

Mr Deam—Before the government handed back the powers to local government, there should have been some strategic work done. There has been a wind farm atlas produced that looks at where the prospective winds are. The Victorian government should have looked at where the areas are that can be developed. It should have worked better with the community to prepare that plan that gives us direction when we receive applications. We have all just heard that we are under-resourced. It would have certainly assisted us in determining applications.

Mr Clark—These are a legitimate land use and so they should. I try to characterise it when I am dealing with people and say, 'Let's talk about it as if it is a chicken farm' or something to try to get away from the heat of the argument. The reality is that the community relies on us to interpret the rules and the guidelines. If you get poor guidelines and poor rules—and in this case it is our view that we have a special set of rules, especially for an industry, that are designed to aid an industry to go forward, and we have talked about the weaknesses—you will get a poor result. It is very much beholden on us as the policy people to have the rules right to provide protection to the community. That is really what it comes back to.

Senator BOYCE—We have had a number of people talk about the potential for property to be devalued by wind farms nearby. Can any of the councillors give evidence either way on that topic?

Mr Guest—Theoretically, value is a property and not a planning consideration, which is all well to say so, but we have heard the arguments in all directions. We do not have an answer.

Senator BOYCE—Have any of you changed the rateable value of any property apropos of wind farms?

Mr Guest—No, we have not, because we have not had enough of them built. There is also another issue. The people who participate in the wind farm lease it to the company. The companies do not buy them. They are buying out objectors, but normally all of our wind farms are lease agreements with 20, 30, 40 landowners. Those landowners count the cash.

Senator BOYCE—Well, they have an income stream, but we are talking about the near neighbours and the like?

Mr Guest—The near neighbours are out of it. We have no idea whether that is impacting totally or not because the two we have had built are right down on the coast. There are not many property sales down there, which is when we find out. It is very hard to say because these things are 10 kilometres long and eight kilometres wide; you will sell some that are still viable and some that are not. If you were doing a gas power station, you have a little corner to square and you can cope with it.

Ms Kelsey—We have no evidence in relation to a change in rateable value.

Mr Clark—We did a revaluation in early 2010, so six months after Waubra wind farm was operating. We did not see an effect on commercial agricultural land. It had moved up and our belief is there were other factors driving the price of that. We did not see an effect on the nearby township of Waubra. Prices again had moved up in the case of that township, which is about 1.2 to 1.5 kilometres away.

Members of the audience interjecting—

Mr Clark—I can only give you what our valuer told us. Where we have seen an impact—and there appears there is an impact in the very, very isolated properties—is where properties are in the middle of the wind farm where the house has been cut off on 10 acres and the rest of the land has been sold to the adjoining farmer. So properties actually in the wind farm proper, as opposed to those on the outsides, are certainly where we have seen impacts on values.

Senator FIELDING—A very quick follow-up question, because I know how the valuations work. If you just valued those properties within four or five kilometres of a wind farm, I think you would find a change, but if you average them over the whole area, or even subsections, you would not find the result.

CHAIR—Maybe you could take that on notice to see if you are able to provide us any further information on that.

Senator BOYCE—A bit more detail. Some submitters, including the Country Fire Authority, have suggested that there are bushfire hazards posed by wind turbines. Can I have a comment from each of the councils on that?

Mr Guest—Half of the Moyne shire's wind farms are on what is known as 'lava flow country', which is the consequence of volcanoes heading down to the sea. If there were a fire in the area, and there was one a couple of years ago and plenty before, the CFA do not put people on the ground in that country because you cannot see what is happening. It is bumpy and rough, and you could be standing here and two metres away there is a two-metre tall lava flow and you cannot see anything on the other side of it. If they fight it, they either wait until it comes out on to the highway or they water bomb it. The issue that we understand, and we have heard arguments by proponents, by opposition, by the agriculture industry people as well, is whether you can actually use or not use helicopters on those things.

We have enough issues with putting them on lava flows. The fire safety issue on a lava flow is a quantum jump from open paddocks where, if nothing else, there are 90 kilometres of better tracks than there were before. Those tracks are not safe when you have geographic visibility problems. That is my understanding of where we are at.

Ms Kelsey—Given that I mentioned before that we have fewer than 100 turbines actually completed within our council area, we have no evidence in relation to an increase of bushfire risk.

Mr Clark—The CFA has raised no issue with us. My personal view is there would be standard risk in a rural area. There is a whole range of risks in that area that they are commensurate with.

Mr Hall—There would be very minor risk of a turbine fire potentially starting a fire. It is extremely low risk, and we have no evidence of any such event occurring at all within our shire. All of our turbines are on open alluvial land within the Waubra region, and the same with Stockyard Hill and most of the other developments. The chance of it triggering a fire event would be very minimal.

CHAIR—Thank you very much for coming in and giving us evidence. There is a little bit of extra documentation that you said you would provide. If you could provide that to the secretariat at some stage, that would be much appreciated. Thank you.

[5.02 pm]

BERNARD, Mr Per, Private capacity

BREW, Mrs Robyn Anne, Private capacity

BRIDDY, Mr Tony, Private capacity

BRUTY, Mrs Jenny, Leader, Rural Zone Landowners Group, Member, Chepstowe Wind Farm Action Group

COLEMAN, Mr Stephen, Private capacity

DEAN, Mrs Suzanne, Private capacity

ELSWORTH, Mr James William, Private capacity

ELSWORTH, Mr William James, Private capacity

EVANS, Mr Richard Leigh, Private capacity

JONES, Ms Karen, Private capacity

KEARNS, Mrs Angela, Private capacity

KEATING, Mrs Cathy, Private capacity

KEATING, Mr Graeme, Private capacity

KELLY, Mr Richard F.B., Private capacity

KEHOE, Mrs Tanya Maree, Private capacity

KERMOND, Mr Brian Frederick, Private capacity

MACKAY, Dr David Randal, Private capacity

McLAUGHLIN, Mr Peter, Private capacity

McMAHON, Mrs Heather, Private capacity

McMAHON, Mr John, Private capacity

METZGER, Mrs Renate, Private capacity

ROBERTSON, Ms Melanie, Private capacity

SCHAFER, Mr Allan, Private capacity

SCHAFER, Mrs Anne, Private capacity

SELIGMAN, Mr Peter, Private capacity

SHIELD, Mr Martin, Private capacity

THOMAS, Mr Donald Robert, Private capacity

WEBB, Ms Alicia, Private capacity

CHAIR—Welcome.. We have a list of 28 names so that will take a little while to move through that list. I suggest that we call you up to the table in bunches of five in the order that your name appears on the list, which was done purely from the order that you handed in your form so that we actually can hear what you say and have it recorded. That way we can guarantee it, rather than having a hassle with the remote microphone. I now call up to the table Mrs Renate Metzger, Mr Allan Schafer, Mrs Robyn Brew, Mr Stephen Coleman, and Mr John and Mrs Heather McMahon. We have approximately three minutes for each speaker.

Mrs McMahon—I live at Yendon, about four kilometres or so from the proposed Lal Lal wind farm. I wanted to agree completely with the lady from the Grampians landscape group. I could not have expressed any better the same experiences that we have gone through. I find it quite astonishing that we are people separated by vast distances and we are all having exactly the same experiences. The only thing I would like to add to her comments was about the family concept. Here we all are, a room full of people, and most of us have got kids. Where are they? This has been going for us for three or four years, with our kids saying, ‘Mum, when is this wind farm stuff going to finish?’ It takes up so much personal time of the people who work so hard to try to learn about all of this to start with, and then have to carry through.

We are in a situation where the Lal Lal wind farm is approved but not yet built. I would really like to know what is going to happen with those wind farms. We are not the only ones by a long shot. If it were approved tomorrow, it would have that two-kilometre setback or where the people have the option to have their say. We do not have that opportunity. After hearing the people from Waubra this morning, some residents have turbines 700 metres from their homes. One particular guy has 20 turbines surrounding him on three sides. He has a 90-degree outlook without turbines. What is going to happen to those people? Under the current laws, this wind farm can still go ahead. If the Waubra people have had that effect from assumedly not being surrounded by them, what is this poor old guy who lives by himself going to have happen to him? I would really like to find out where we stand. I believe that no more wind farms should be built until all of the questions that have been raised today have been answered.

You keep asking questions about the devaluation. I cannot provide any evidence, but our neighbour had his property valued at something like \$440,000. He was about five kilometres from the wind farm. Then he went through a marriage separation and had to have the property revalued four months later, and it was \$380,000. When he rung up the guy and said, ‘What are

you talking about?’ he said, ‘You’ve got a wind farm proposed to be built near you.’ It was not even approved. That is just something I wanted to tell you. Thank you.

Mr McMahon—I live in the same location. It is interesting that the Lal Lal project has not been mentioned today. Of all the projects mentioned so far, we are another one. We live about seven or eight minutes from here. The project that has been approved near us has 72 turbines up to 130 metres high, so that is the 40-storey turbine. We have calculated that between us or around our distance of four point something kilometres from the project, there are around 2,000 people as close as or closer than us to these turbines. Mr Russell-Clark, who spoke before, was famous for a line, ‘Where’s the cheese?’ We think the relevant question here is: where is the planning? No one in their right mind would plan on such a project with so many people affected, with so many questions regarding the effects.

The process has been completely ad hoc to date, and it is just a process whereby a wind company happens to contact the farmer or vice versa. There is no planning in that. It is inevitable that this would result in turbine locations which are offensive to people. If there is perceived to be some public good in these things—and many people here would not agree that there is—and if people believe that there is, it is probably inevitable that some people will be offended much the same as a new freeway will offend people or a railway line or what have you. What government must be about is minimising the pain for the gain. If we want to achieve a certain amount of gain in terms of output, a certain base level output or a certain overall output, whatever it is—and base level output is a big issue with regard to wind projects—there are millions of hectares to choose from in Australia, or even Victoria. Surely with planning we can offend far fewer people for the same perceived gain, minimising the overall community pain.

We believe that we need a moratorium on turbine construction within a certain distance of turbines. Two kilometres probably is not enough. Maybe three is not enough, but at least something needs to be put in place very quickly before more of these huge turbines are built. That is just talking about houses where there is a human or health effect. Hopefully as soon as possible, there needs to be consideration also for all wildlife and geography. But we need some basis quickly before more problems occur. We then need time to properly evaluate the health and other issues.

Improved guidelines need to be established. Very importantly, the councils talked about the resources. There will need to be enormous resources to police the audible and non-audible noise levels on a day and night basis. Unless there is dramatic and quick change, the risk from the developers’ point of view is that many millions of dollars will be spent on these turbines which will be shown later on to have a great effect and which will need to be pulled down. Better planning guidelines, and quickly, will benefit developers as well as the community. Thank you.

Mr Coleman—I am from Quoin Hill Vineyard, which is right in the middle of the Waubra wind farm. I will read what I have here. I have resided at Quoin Hill for almost 28 years after moving from Melbourne to start life in the country with our young family. We have built up a small family business there. From the very beginning, we were a supporter of the Waubra wind farm and were quite excited about the proposed benefits to the Waubra and local community. When we were approached we made it quite clear that our only concern was noise. However, time and time again we were told there was no way that we would hear them. Even after the preliminary noise tests were taken we were advised that a proposed turbine some 400 metres

away from our house would only be one decibel over the limit and we would still not hear it. Since they have been commissioned, this is a completely different story.

The closest turbine to our house is some 600 metres away. We have five turbines located within one kilometre of our house, 13 turbines within 1.5 kilometres of our house and 30 turbines within two kilometres of our house. The turbines 1.5 to two kilometres away on Big Hill to the north of us also have an effect on the noise, depending on which way the wind is blowing.

The types of noises that we experience depend on wind direction. The noises range from a doof-doof noise, like you would hear from a subwoofer at a party down the street, to a constant jet rumble. We can also hear the generator noise, like a fridge when it fires up—that electrical sound—and at times a whooshing noise, like a stick being swung through the air quickly. These noises are not just for a minute or two but can go on all night, not to mention the day. On average, we would say that we have interrupted sleep at least three to four nights a week and on some occasions up to five. As stated before, this has been since they have been commissioned. I have tried to escape from the continuous noise by relocating to one of the four bedrooms in the house, only to be awakened by the noise from other turbines. My wife actually goes to sleep with ear plugs in. This continuous interruption to and lack of sleep has enormous impact on our lives, our business and our future. Last week the noise could be heard over the television inside the house.

We met with Acciona in April 2010 to raise our concerns, only to be advised that the noise levels were compliant. We have been monitoring the noise levels with our own monitor, which is an industrial one that was given to me by my brother-in-law who owned a factory down in Melbourne. I have found the readings at times to be far in excess of permit conditions. In fact, they range between 42 to 50 decibels at night.

We had a meeting with somebody from the shire who also stated that our valuation on our property has decreased, and this year when we received our rate notice we could see quite drastically how it had.

CHAIR—That is the first hard evidence that we have had in terms of rate notices. You do not have to provide us all of the details but could you perhaps provide us with a copy of your rate notices, just to compare the two, to show us? You can say that it is confidential, just so we can see that. We have not seen that before. We had the shires here earlier saying that they have not decreased.

Mr Coleman—David did say that the ones inside the wind farm, which we are—we are right in the middle of it—were decreased.

CHAIR—Okay, thanks.

Mrs Brew—Thank you for the Senate inquiry. I live at Evansford, which is on the northern end of the Waubra wind farm, approximately two kilometres from three turbines and a little further from another group of turbines. I find it hard to sleep on the audible noise nights, and body vibrations, vibrating lips and heart palpitations are the things that often wake me up in the middle of the night, which is the low frequency noise.

Something I would like the committee to look at is the low frequency noise. I have complained to Acciona about noise in general and vibrations, and when I rang one time on the phone—which is something you asked, about noting down complaints—they told me over the phone that they had no-one to answer complaints. So I emailed them. In that case they had a hard copy and they had to record that. They did not start recording numbers until they were asked to by another resident. Twelve months later the first complaint number was issued, so there would be a lot of complaints that have not been registered. The body vibrations are something that I have noticed, and I believe it also affects our animals, but that is another issue.

The Australian wind industry is fairly new and policies have not been clearly defined. Overseas, the United States of America have town planners that have very strict rules. They monitor low frequency noise. They realise that low frequency noise is a problem. They ask for tests to be done; they are asked for independently and they are paid for by the wind industry. They are not expected to be paid for by our council or our government. Also, when they monitor the noise, if it is found to cause body vibrations, which they have accepted that it will in some cases, those turbines are shut down.

The low frequency noise is an issue for a lot of people in the area where I live. There are a lot of people that get vibrations. Sometimes it feels as if you have a mobile phone in your chest that is vibrating. Often it is just your heart that palpitates. The recognition of it overseas needs to be looked at so that it is recognised here, because we do not want to live like that—and not all of us can leave our homes. Thank you.

Mrs Metzger—Thank you for the opportunity to speak. I got involved in this when there was a wind proposal for Tuki, near Smeaton, and I have been researching this for four years, looking into efficiency, environmental effects and other effects on people and other issues such as fire risks from power lines related to wind turbines. The four years of research, which is in my Senate submission, has caused me to be extremely concerned that, in the driest continent on earth that has been called a solar hot spot of the earth, we are destroying the little arable land that we have with huge wind turbines that wreck the land, the wildlife—like our birds and bats, and the bats is a problem that has recently been coming out globally and is a really big concern—and our native vegetation.

The other problem is that defunct turbines are usually not dismantled, for example, as in California and Hawaii. They are left to rust and the concrete bases, no matter where, are left forever. For example, the 128, 600-tonne, concrete bases at Waubra are there forever. You cannot plant trees there. This destruction is for a power that always needs another one on standby ready to take over 100 per cent of all energy needs at any minute.

It concerns me deeply also that the wind companies do not have to prove anything they claim, yet we continue to give them planning approval. I was at the recent informal meeting with the Victorian planning department regarding another turbine—I do not know if I am allowed to mention names—but Future Energy had not even put up a wind speed testing tower. I did not realise they had not done that and I asked them what was their wind speed data. I swear my jaw dropped when they said, ‘We didn’t put up a tower.’ Yet in their report they claimed that the turbine would offset about, I think, 20,000 tonnes of greenhouse gases—I do not have my sheet here.

They made a claim with no wind speed data. What also worries me is that the wind companies can consistently deny health problems over and over again, both here and overseas, yet Acciona bought out at least seven properties at Waubra, and I wondered whether this was counted in the appraisal of land values. Is the fact that the wind company buys up these properties, at least seven properties in Waubra and more elsewhere in America, for example, counted in the land valuation?

In the newspapers, Acciona constantly denied any health problems, yet the c, recently criticised Acciona for inadequate noise testing at Waubra. They did say there was a problem. Elsewhere in Australia, noise from turbines, as was mentioned earlier, could be heard 10 kilometres away, like the low thumping from music that an inconsiderate neighbour next door will not turn off. Despite the many people who experienced health problems at Waubra and were forced to move away, the wind company wants to extend the wind farm there by a further 60 turbines.

What also worries me greatly is that flora and fauna experts recommend scenarios of 'offsetting'—and I do not quite know what they mean—that are ridiculous and not doable. For example, and I have seen this twice, the pre-turbine construction finding of any endangered striped legless lizard under every rock, moving them to another part of the property and telling them to stay there. You read this and you think, 'What?' And we are meant to take this seriously. Or they talk of offsetting potentially destroyed native vegetation—and again I have seen this twice—from turbine construction, when there is only 0.01 per cent left in Australia.

CHAIR—You have gone way over three minutes, I am sorry. If you have any additional information to give us which you have not covered in your submission, you are more than welcome to give us any further information.

Mrs Metzger—Can I mention my conclusion?

CHAIR—If you are very quick.

Mrs Metzger—I am asking for a moratorium on the wind industry in Australia to allow time for objective research into its relevance to Australia as a whole, its efficiency and whether it lives up to its claims, to the health effects of turbine noise on nearby residents and their quality of life, to the overall effect it has on all jobs in Australia, not just jobs in concrete and particularly into the effect that the industry is having on wildlife. Thank you very much.

CHAIR—Thank you. Mr Schafer.

Mr Schafer—Thank you, Senators, especially Senator Fielding. Thank you, thank you, thank you. I live at Berrybank. We are sitting next to where 99 turbines potentially will be built, we are told by the proposer, as soon as possible. It has been approved. We have been to a panel process. We have been through torture. Anne and I are living a nightmare through this. I am going to be quick and you are going to have to stop me, because I am just going to keep going.

Let me read out what happens and I think we probably all understand it. The state government sets up a response from the proposer and this response—and these are the words from the referral form—'should honestly reflect the potential for adverse environmental effects. A referral

will only be accepted for processing once DPCD is satisfied that it has been completed appropriately.' Just keep that statement at the back of your mind for a little while. We bought this property in 2007. We are surrounded on 270 degrees by turbines, on the north-east, north, north-west, west, south-west, south and south-east. Around our house, not our property but our house, are 16 turbines within two kilometres of us. There are 57 within 3.5 kilometres. We are told by the company, Union Finosa, that this will not be a problem. They are conforming to the government guidelines. Remember what I said earlier about the reference. I am going to race through this, so I do apologise for it, humbly.

CHAIR—We are keeping up.

Mr Schafer—Brett Lane did the flora and fauna study. Brett Lane, in our area, did a two-day study, and we found out at the panel—I am progressing a little bit—from a car with a pair of binoculars. Our country, approximately 5,300 hectares, is predominately raised bed country. This is going to confuse a few people, but let me quickly make it simple. There is a rut approximately 40 centimetres deep; there is a bed and then another rut. This aids in growing crops. It keeps the water off the roots. In its submission, the CFA stated that they would not like to send trucks or personnel onto this country. I do not believe that Union Finosa, when approached by these two major landholders who proposed this proposal to Union Finosa—very scientific I must admit—knew that these raised beds were there.

We talk about fire problems. The council employee previously said that they live in a volcanic area and the fire trucks cannot really travel over volcanic land. The CFA stated that they cannot travel over raised bed country. You cannot use aeroplanes to control a fire like we do in the rest of the state for grasslands. You cannot control fires on this property. I am not saying that turbines start fires, although we have had three in South Australia where the EPA has told people to keep one kilometre away because there is a chance that a blade might fly off and hit you. People cannot control these fires. They cannot be controlled by aerial. My house is the frontier of this fire, whether it starts on the property or comes through the property. I hope you understand that.

CHAIR—Mr Schafer, that is a bit over three minutes.

Mr Schafer—Can I go for a little bit longer, please?

CHAIR—Thirty seconds.

Mr Schafer—Okay, 30 seconds, I will be quick. Brett Lane has run through this. There are no ground hares, no feral cats, no brush-tailed possums, no eastern kangaroos, no koalas, no lesser bats, no foxes, no echidnas and no water rats. That is the submission that was sent to Minister Madden.

The next one regards visual impact. The impact at the corner of Foxhow Road and Hamilton Highway—I am reading from this, and you can have this; it was done by Environmental Resource Management Australia—the impact one kilometre away from the turbines—which is a lie—is landscape sensitivity, low; overall visual impact, low. Let me put this into perspective. This is like standing on the steps of the Opera House and looking at the Sydney Harbour Bridge, and in that one kilometre around that area are 25 turbines. This is the information that has been given to Minister Madden and he has decided, with this information—and I cannot criticise him

for that—that there is no need for an environmental effects study. He has been given false information.

CHAIR—By the company?

Mr Schafer—By the company, by the expert witnesses to this company. One expert witness goes up to Waubra because Anne and I complain about the bright lights which flash at night, and reflect off the fog if it is there. We are concerned about that. We do not want our grandkids to be affected by these strobing lights. The bloke who goes up there, an expert witness, goes up there and leaves before sunset. He leaves before sunset; can you believe that? This man is getting paid for that. I have all this documented, and I have much, much more. The Department of Sustainability and Environment Victoria says that Brett Lane should re-do the figures. There are broлга sites in there; there are people taking photos of broargas. There are families who are witnessing broargas being on their properties, and there is no recognition of it by Brett Lane. This is a disgrace. I am disgusted to live in Australia and to listen to this.

CHAIR—Mr Schafer, if you want to table any of that information—

Mr Schafer—You can have whatever you like.

CHAIR—That would be really useful. I do not know all of the details that you have.

Mr Schafer—I have put in a submission, and I have gone over that, but I could not explain it in a letter unless I wrote you an Encyclopaedia Britannica.

CHAIR—Those actual documents with the environmental information I think is a good example of what they do and what they say.

Mr Schafer—For these wind farm companies from Spain and all over the world to get up and say that there are no effects on health, these people must be hiding under a bloody rock.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Mr Briddy—Thank you, senators. I am a farmer from Lexton. Our people have been in Lexton since settlement and they worked hard over the years to get to where we are today. Major Mitchell came through when he first mapped out a path through Victoria, and he went to one of our hills, called the Leasland Hill, and he wrote in his diary: ‘This is a valley of the finest description.’ Not anymore, because there are 19 wind towers proposed at Lexton.

Our homestead is 5.5 kilometres from the Waubra wind farm, or Glenbrae, as we call it. Our farm is on the north side of the divide but the towers are, of course, on the south side. We have an unusual problem: we have sound coming from the wind towers at Waubra and following the valley from the actual Great Divide down to our homestead. We have big problems there. Ever since they were built, we have had the problem of this vibration noise that people have been talking about tonight. We have had trouble sleeping and all those sorts of things. It is a fair dinkum fact. I have put in submissions and so have the people around as well as my family.

With the 19 towers that have not been erected, although the permits have been issued, I see big problems ahead. Most of them are about one kilometre and up to two kilometres away. We have a valley coming from what we call Granite Hill down towards Lexton township, and there is a beautiful little creek that follows that area, and that is the situation. I have talked to a professor and he asked if there were any creeks or streams around that area, and I said, 'Yes, there is.' He said, 'The sound waves will be following the water.' That was his explanation of how we are getting this sound from Glenbrae to the north side of the Great Divide and our farm.

You mentioned something about property values. Our neighbour's place was sold just the other day. I know it is hearsay, and I do not have any figures in front of me, but I can guarantee you that the people who sold it certainly lost more than a third in value. The other situation about Waubra is that most of the properties that have been sold around the wind towers at Waubra have been purchased by Acciona, and they then made the people sign confidentiality clauses, so we do not know the prices of those properties.

With respect to the fire risk, these 19 towers that are going into the Lexton area are in an absolutely highly fireprone area and right next to a state forest, called the Pyrenees Ranges. I think there are about 140,000 hectares of bush, and it is right in the middle of it. If a bushfire occurs we will have an inferno on our hands. Thanks very much.

Mrs Kearns—I am submitter No. 136 with my husband, Frank. I wanted to raise half a dozen points. We live on a 16-hectare property in close proximity to the approved Moorabool wind energy facility. There is a perception in the community that all of those who speak out about the disadvantages and viability or otherwise of wind farm power as a source of renewable energy are climate change sceptics. This is wrong. We are not. We fully support development of renewable energy, but WestWind Energy plans to place 150-metre high turbines just one kilometre from our dwelling.

At the panel hearing for the Moorabool wind energy facility last May and June 2010, the chair of the panel, Mr Chris Bannon, who incidentally was also on the panel of the Waubra development, was heard to remark, 'We don't want another Waubra.' We all heard it. There are 107 turbines in the combined Moorabool facility. I am a health professional, as a registered nurse, so health is my main concern. I consider it an insult to be told that the reason some people are ill with wind turbine syndrome is because they do not stand to gain financially and host landholders do. Even the panel report suggested that claims of ill health be further investigated.

My brief anecdotal evidence re health effects is as follows: on 4 January this year, my husband and I decided to visit Waubra to view the wind farm. It was a cool, rather overcast day, not too windy. We spent over one hour and then went home. At 2 o'clock the next morning, I woke with severe chest pain. I had enough sense to take my blood pressure reading. I have no history of hypertension. I am very healthy normally. My blood pressure was 211 over 103, so health professionals know that that is far too high. I should have stroked out. I called the ambulance and I was transported to hospital and admitted to ICU for 24 hours. Further tests disproved any cardiac condition, so the diagnosis was probably stress, just from the worry.

Since May 2009, when we first knew about the proposed development, our lives have been turned upside down. We have not been able to make any permanent plans for retirement. One major worry we have is that, in our family, over half of our members have a genetic heart

condition called Long QT syndrome. It is a major cause of sudden death, especially in young people. Any one of our grandchildren, my husband and half of my children at some stage may need to be fitted with a defibrillator or pacemaker as the condition affects the electrical activity of the heart. Two of our grandchildren take a defibrillator to school. We are concerned about possible ill effects from electromagnetic interference. At Cape Bridgewater in Portland, Victoria, there is a sign on the doors at the base of the turbines that people with pacemakers should not enter the towers.

CHAIR—Mrs Kearns, we have reached three minutes.

Mrs Kearns—That is all right. I was only going to talk about fire risks, because we are close to the CFA, but someone else touched on that.

Mrs Dean—I actually live next door to Angela and Frank Kearns. We are affected by the Moorabool wind energy facility. My main concerns are about the horrendous treatment that you receive at the hands of the proponents and their legal counsel at the hearings. The panel hearings are portrayed as being independent, which is not the case. The actual panel members are paid for by the proponents, including all of their costs, wages and everything. That is really where people start to become ill and sick, when you talk about wind farms. It is the whole process that you go through, from the day that they drop the letter on your front doorstep.

At the panel, one of the panel members actually said to us that we would not be affected overly by the blade shadow flicker because we could go out into our backyard and still enjoy our garden. He said he would ensure that the setback would be taken from the perimeter of our house property, which is not the case. There are a couple of properties that have been assessed for the wind facility where they actually do exceed the limit of 30 hours per annum, but the wind energy company has said that it is okay because there are trees that will screen those properties. Those trees that they are relying on for screening those properties actually do not belong to those landowners; they belong to their next-door neighbours. If the next-door neighbour cuts the trees down, then those houses will be exposed above and beyond the allowable limit, and we will be subjected to shadow and blade flicker whilst we are out gardening or enjoying our backyard.

We have also been told by the senior counsel for the wind farm company with respect to our visual amenity: ‘You don’t own the view. Because you live in rural zoned properties, you are not entitled to the same considerations as someone who is zoned residential.’ That means that we are subjected to these turbines overshadowing our property 24 hours a day.

Their own reports for landscape have said that they could not mitigate our circumstances; however, they would plant trees on our property. They would do shelter ballots and things like that. We will be dead before those trees grow high enough to block anything out. That is a constant reminder. Yes, we are stressed; yes, we are anxious; and yes, we are still trying to come to terms with what our lot in life will be.

I want to refer to the inaccurate noise assessments that were conducted. The permit states that they have to re-do them all. However, if the assessments were honest, accurate and truly reflected the circumstances that people would be facing, you would not have the situation you have at Waubra. People would not be complaining of the health issues. I ask that the

assessments, whether they are landscape, noise, whatever, be done by independent people instead of by the wind farm companies, who have their own agendas.

As to the fire risk, CFA fire fighters cannot go within one kilometre of a turbine fire. However, our property extends from the back of our house to the nearest turbine, a distance of one kilometre. Does that mean that our land is devalued and our asset does not mean anything, figuratively speaking by the wind farm company, because we cannot defend our property between us and the turbines? It is unsafe. The CFA has actually—

CHAIR—I am going to have to ask you to finish, sorry. I have let you go over a little bit. We will follow up the point about the CFA around the zone that you have just mentioned.

Mrs Webb—I have come as an employee of the wind industry, specifically in the community wind sector which is a not-for-profit, but I am speaking today as an individual. I work as a wind engineer.

CHAIR—For whom?

Mrs Webb—I used to work for a commercial independent consultant. Now I am in a not-for-profit sector helping communities build renewable energy infrastructure. I am also a member of Hepburn Wind, which is Australia's first community-owned wind farm. I would like to tell quite a different story today, hopefully a good news story, and I will be very brief.

Firstly, I grew up in Perth and I studied engineering. In Perth, in engineering, there is a lot of money to be made, and it is seen as a very good future. From a young age, I knew that I wanted to work in the wind industry. Because there was nothing going on in WA at the time, many years ago I moved to Melbourne and took a job in the wind industry. Over the past 6½ years I have worked for a turbine manufacturer, as an independent technical consultant and now in the community sector.

I wanted to work in wind because I think it is a good idea and it is a new idea. I think it is a clean idea for the future. I know a lot of young people who feel the same way. I teach a series of three guest lectures at Melbourne University called *Introduction to Wind Engineering*, and there are an awful lot of young people who think that this is a fantastic industry.

I also want to talk about Hepburn Wind. It is owned by 1,600 community members. There are two turbines, and everybody benefits from the turbines. They have overwhelming community support. It is quite a different situation from what we have heard here. I think that is because it has a very different ownership model. It has a really different project scale, in that it is appropriately sized for the community. It has a very different approach to community consultation.

I was lucky enough to attend the turbine raising last weekend when the two turbines went up. It was a day of joy and community inclusion. There were tiny children running around; there were older people sitting to watch this crane build the wind farm, and there were people my age enjoying this feeling of community spirit. The SES held a sausage sizzle; there was music; it was absolutely fantastic. I want everyone to know that you can really go about this differently and wind energy can be a joyous and progressive thing. It is cleaner and if we accept that we need

our energy to be sourced from cleaner technologies and if we accept the economics, which is that wind farms are by far the most affordable way to do this, then we need to think really carefully about ways to create more examples of people feeling excited instead of afraid and angry. Thank you.

Mr Bernard—Good afternoon. I am one of the founders of Hepburn Wind in Daylesford. I grew up in Denmark and watched the development of the wind industry from tiny, very noisy machines to what they are today. My family participated in a small-scale, community-owned wind farm on our farming property. I have lived in Australia now for 20 years and have been watching the development of renewable energy and wind energy in your country. I have been slightly puzzled, until a few years ago when some of us from Daylesford attended the first community engagement meeting by one of the wind farm companies, where the entire community turned out in total opposition. What I thought I witnessed was a community that felt they were not being asked if they wanted a wind farm, a community that felt they had no say. I was not surprised at all. I was very disturbed by the engagement process. Driving home from that meeting that evening, we discussed in the car and later, that if the wind industry is going to have any potential, any hope in this country, the communities have to be engaged. They have to be part of it. That was the reason why we started developing Hepburn Wind.

Our intention was to have a very transparent process and a very independent process. For example, our flora and fauna studies were done by the Ballarat university, et cetera. We are still developing further policies of how we can be transparent in publicly stating on a very regular basis all of our findings, whether it is noise, bird kill, bat kill, et cetera.

One of the main issues that I found we were not able to deal with, which I am still disappointed with, was how we deal with people in the community who do not want to participate in the process. The majority of the community were very much for the project, but there were a few who were not. My personal proposal to the committee is to somehow suggest an engagement process that incorporates communities and companies. I am not sure of the mix, but I think it is crucial that the communities become involved in part ownership and have much more say in the process. Thank you.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Mrs Schafer—Thanks for the opportunity to speak here. I live at Berrybank. My husband, Allan, was the quite vocal one earlier.

CHAIR—We figured that you might have been together. I do apologise; I did not look down the list earlier and see that you should have been together.

Mrs Schafer—Perhaps I should not apologise really for the emotion that comes across with a lot of us here today. I hope it is coming across to you, too, because this is what we have been living with for years. Heaven help the poor people at Waubra. I just really hope that something can be done for them. I think it is an absolute disgrace that people in Victoria have been allowed to suffer as they have been. It is shameful; it is really shameful, and I hope that you can really bring something very soon to bear to help them.

As far as we are concerned, we have a lifestyle property, which is a bit of a joke now. We have 100 acres, a pretty house that we are hoping to do up in order to live self-sufficiently. It was our retirement dream. As the lady said earlier, you get the little notice on your doorstep and then that is it; your life is upside down. You are really living a nightmare. It must sound melodramatic, but that is really what it is like. It occupies all of your waking thoughts, just about. If you have a day that you do not mention wind farms, it is a bonus. You are concerned for your family, your future; you cannot plan for anything. Even going to the nursery; I would like to put that plant in, but no, that is a waste of money. We have been told by expert witnesses that we will not be able to live in our house. As Allan said before, we will have 16 towers within two kilometres.

That is another issue that I would like to cover. You obviously want—and I can understand why—property valuation issues. It is hard to prove this, and the wind farm companies will certainly not let anything happen to make it look as though values have dropped, but common sense in itself says that if you are living on a lifestyle property next to 100 turbines surrounding you on three sides, for goodness sake, it is worth nothing. You are out there for the ambience, for the lifestyle, and you have an industrial complex next to you. Of course all of these properties are going to be devalued. It is just sheer common sense. You are living in the country, in a rural environment, you are there for the peace and quiet for your lifestyle and farming, and you have an industrial complex next to you. Of course it is going to devalue your property. I do not know what further proof is needed than just sheer common sense. That is the way it is. Thank you for the opportunity. I really hope that something can be done. A moratorium I think is essential.

Ms Robertson—I come here representing myself today, but I do work as a wind engineer. I am a mother of two young children, and another one on the way, and I am certainly proud to be associated with the renewable energy industry in Australia. I have worked throughout the world, in both the wind industry and in solar. I have a medical science background and an engineering background as well and 18 years experience.

I believe that Australia has a necessity or a need to transform its energy industry. I have lived and breathed rural Victoria, rural Tasmania and rural New South Wales all of my life, and have lived on property. I completely respect the communities in which I work, and I certainly remain true to my values in everything I do. I do not go out representing the wind farm company; I go out representing myself and my values. I think there are enormous opportunities to look at the planning sector of the wind industry, but I also think there are enormous opportunities for rural areas.

With respect to the supply of energy in Australia, nothing has zero impact. I look at the coal industry and I look at the extraction industries. I look at the health impacts in the Latrobe Valley and I go to work every day for a better future for my children. The wind industry throughout the world is seen as the cleanest form of energy generation. It is the most efficient and economic proven technology of renewable energy. It is harnessing a resource. I look forward to a future where renewable energy can be within our landscape. I look forward to a level playing field for all industries involved in energy and I look forward to consistent guidelines throughout Australia, and that would be extremely useful to us as well. Thank you.

Dr Mackay—I represent my farming, tourism and lifestyle business. I must say my neighbour on my right works for the company who is the proponent. I heard the Shire of Glenelg talk about the economic benefits, and no doubt they are for her shire. It reminded me of the tobacco

industry, and I am sure they could also promote economic benefits from their employment of people. Would we want to promote the benefits of the tobacco outputs as did the Glenelg shire in terms of the impacts that wind energy is having, particularly the health impacts?

My business of farming, tourism and lifestyle, including aviation is directly affected, as I have mentioned. I have an airfield directly in line with two of the turbines. WestWind Energy was told about this in the beginning and they totally ignored it. I asked at the panel hearing that the two turbines be removed because they were directly in the flight path. If you did a direct approach, you would go through both turbines. They refused. The panel basically ignored it and said they could not consider it even though the state government planning requirements provide that they must be consulted for any aviation activity within 30 kilometres of the wind farm. They just ignored it.

It was interesting that a senior Civil Aviation Safety Authority official told me about two years ago that he had just been to a conference in Canada where they have one to two aircraft crashes into turbines every year. My proposed business development that they were told about has now been put on hold because of the two turbines. No one will want to be part of that development, living so close to them. An estate agent told me that I had probably lost about half a million dollars on my property—

Senator BOYCE—What percentage would that be?

Dr Mackay—About a third. Recently a prospective buyer offered me a price that I would have taken for my property. He then withdrew the offer entirely when he learned of the proposed wind farm. That was only a couple of months ago. I also have actual evidence of before and after valuations from a neighbour who has had his property valued by a sworn valuer and then he placed it on the market to be offered close to 50 per cent less.

It is interesting that one person who presented earlier talked about compensation. I do not think that has actually been mentioned very much. Compensation could perhaps be in the form of a rebate of stamp duty or loss of value. This could also be included in the cost of providing the electricity to the grid. In other words, it is done through the normal market price of electricity from renewable energy. This market is not taking into account the cost and impact on other people. That needs to be taken into account. It can easily be done through the market mechanism.

Finally, I believe that the panel hearings are flawed, as someone else mentioned. It is all about compliance. They do not take into account the loss of amenity and economic loss and appropriate compensation. If everyone is so much in favour of the turbines next to them, why not have them in Canberra? Why not have them in Melbourne and Brisbane and Sydney? Let us put them on the bays, because they fulfil the criteria, that is, they are close to population centres and they are close to wind. Let everyone share these benefits; not just the rural communities. Thank you.

Mr Seligman—I am a retired biomedical engineer. I worked for four years in the department of Otolaryngology at the University of Melbourne on the bionic ear project, and then I subsequently worked for 26 years for Cochlear, the company that developed and manufactures the bionic ear. My comments relate to the potential health effects of sound which one cannot

hear. They are not to do with the distance over which wind turbines can be heard nor to any noise that might be caused. I am talking about sounds that people cannot hear and whether this can affect health, or whether it is likely that it could affect health. I want to allay the fears of those who think that sound which they cannot hear can affect their health.

One of the first things that you notice about infrasound, or very low frequency sound, is that there is an awful lot of it around, to the point that if you have a sound level meter and you set that sound level meter to a flat setting, that is, not to mimic human hearing but to measure sound pressure alone, you would find that there is an awful lot of infrasound around from natural causes and from manmade sources. For example, waves and wind produce a lot of infrasound as do trucks, trains, aeroplanes and so on. The human auditory system has evolved to reject infrasound because if you actually could hear all of that low frequency sound, you would not even be able to communicate with anybody, it would be so overwhelmingly loud.

It has been argued that people are affected by infrasound because it is picked up by the body and not by the ears. In actual fact, the mechanics of the situation is that airborne sound is picked up very inefficiently by the body. When people worry that low frequency sound is actually vibrating their body and making them sick, there are very little grounds for that on the basis that we are flooded all the time with infrasound from our own bodies. For example, when you walk, you generate infrasound in your own body that is about 10 times as loud as anything you can pick up from the outside.

I was directly affected by this interesting phenomenon through a totally implantable microphone which we were developing for the bionic ear. We had a lot of trouble with this microphone because of the noise which was being picked up from the body, specifically at two hertz, which is the frequency that is often talked about in connection with wind farms. Wind farms are said to produce low frequency sound at around two hertz or up to four hertz. This is exactly the same frequency that your body is subjected to when you walk. That sound in your body is very much louder than any sound that you could possibly pick up from the air. Thank you.

Mr Keating—I am a farmer from Berrybank. I am on the south side of the Berrybank proposed wind farm of 5,400 hectares. We went through a panel hearing in Camperdown in February 2010. During that hearing a lot of different things were brought up. It is mainly very prime cropping land, very subject to fires. My family has been burnt out twice. I have experienced it once when we were totally burnt out. If they put wind farms on the north side of me, on totally 5,400 hectares—swish, she'll be gone in a flash; it'd be down to the lake.

At the panel hearing the CFA stood up and said there could be no aerial fighting in wind farms, so that does away with the main firefighting straight away. You cannot do anything about it. I am a former fire captain down there. It is virtually all on raised beds. For all of the time I was captain, at every group meeting we went to we were told: 'If you take a crew to a fire and there are raised beds, get out of it. Don't send them in.' Now they are asking us to just stand back and let 5,400 hectares go swish. It will be murder, I can assure you.

There will be no spraying—I will not be allowed to do any spraying on my farm because the planes cannot turn because the wind farm will have towers within 900 to 1,000 metres from

where we live. I was never approached by Union Finosa about it. All I found out was in the local paper.

With regard to land values, approximately 1,200 hectares of this wind farm area, which is all raised beds, was put up for lease, and they got rid of about 20 per cent of it. They still have another 80 per cent. Nobody wanted it. That says so much for wind farms.

That is about all I have to say. Use your common sense. I do have a son who is an ag scientist. If a wind farm goes there, I would not ask him to come home with this crap hanging over the fence.

CHAIR—Thank you. Mr Seligman, do you have documentation that you could send us on what you have just been saying?

Mr Seligman—Yes, I could put something together. No document has been written specifically on this issue, apart from my submission.

CHAIR—If you would like to put in a submission, that would be useful.

Mr Seligman—A submission has been put along these lines.

CHAIR—Okay, thank you. Thank you very much for your comments; they are much appreciated.

Mr McLaughlin—My wife and I farm land in Nulla Vale, which is part of the Tooborac district. I come from the same area as Mr Russell-Clarke. I want to confine my comments to the land valuation question. I am pleased to see that you are searching desperately for evidence. I will comment on that in a moment.

The proposition as I see it for a landholder who will not have turbines but will be affected by them, which is coming down from the renewable energy target scheme down through the state planning systems, is that there is a public good being effected here—that is, the reduction of emissions. People argue about that, but let us assume that this is true. As a consequence, some people will be asked to bear economic damage through the devaluation of their land, not to mention health effects and various other effects. If that is the case, and if you find that the weight of evidence as it exists today does suggest that there is damage to land values, short of putting wind farms in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and so forth as has been suggested, which is not a bad idea, it seems to me that the Commonwealth policy response lies in what I think was the Prime Minister's promise before the election last August that there would be \$1 billion available for the building of new reticulation for electricity. I think the hit was that a lot of that would be to deliver electricity from wind farms into the grid. If that is true and if the promise is still on the table, that seems to me to be something that the committee could look at.

What is the scale of the problem? I think it is very large, relative to other industries. You can build a 1,600 megawatt coal fired or gas fired power station on 1,000 hectares. For the Tooborac farm, which is now off the agenda, the output was going to be about 30 megawatts. It was going to cover an area, in dots on the top of the Great Dividing Range amongst granite boulders, that was 20 kilometres long and 10 kilometres wide, which is about 20,000 hectares. So you have

500 hectares versus 20,000 hectares for something like 12 per cent of the output of a conventional power station. There would have been hundreds of properties affected—dozens affected because they were next door to these things and then hundreds more whose land value would have been affected.

What is the evidence on land values? As you know, there are no convincing studies one way or the other. There is a stand-off: there are studies that say that land is affected and there are studies that say they are not. So this committee has to place weight on other evidence, it seems to me. You have to trust common sense, as someone said a moment ago. I was involved in the commissioning of the Access Economics study that Mr Russell-Clarke referred to. They showed quite clearly that there will be a direct correlation between the impact on land values and the degree to which the land value has amenity value in it. So where there are a lot of people living there will be impacts. The Elders gentleman whose evidence was referred to previously, which is also included in my submission, has come to the same conclusion as Access Economics, which is that if you come at it from an economic point of view, fewer buyers will force the price down, or if you come at it from his experience—and I will give you some examples—the fall in land values will be between 30 and 50 per cent where there is a high amenity value.

Most of the people sitting here live in areas where there was amenity value built into the land value, over and above the rural value of it. So if the wind industry wants to build towers where people live they are guaranteeing that they will have a bad effect on land values. In my area, there is a lump of land next to me that I will not buy because it is too expensive. There were three properties put to auction before the election in Victoria last year. All failed to attract a bid, even though they were good properties. Lastly, one of the landholders who put his hand up for turbines, who decided they were going to happen, sold his existing house and some of the land associated with that to move away from where the turbines were going to go. He offered it for \$700,000-odd, but in the end he had to take \$400,000. Thank you for the opportunity to speak.

Mr W Elsworth—I am from Daylesford-Clunes Road, Smeaton. I have dotted down a few points. First, does the Senate committee take seriously the issues that have been raised? Why is the onus on the public and not the government? How will the committee protect innocent families? Through my experience with this issue, wind companies prey on landholders suffering financial hardship, and they also prey on communities that do not have the time or money to fight proposals. People have to work and pay their bills, send their kids to school.

Local government in general does not care. It needs the revenue from the wind farms. There is a prime example in central Victoria with the situation with our local governments and their balance sheets. Is it fair and the Australian way to sacrifice a few at the expense others? Expert data is paid for by the wind companies for their own needs and for their own means. Why is there not some form of independent authority to provide the data or oversee the data? There need to be bonds from wind companies to safeguard projects falling over. If Acciona, which is a shelf company, falls over, who will clean up the mess? There have been examples of this overseas.

There also need to be property guarantees. In America it is starting to happen where local authorities are making wind companies provide a property guarantee for people who neighbour wind farms to protect those people.

After going through the submissions, it is disappointing that submissions for wind turbines are from people or companies that seek financial benefit. As you would be aware when you go through the submissions, with respect to the people who are pro-wind, there is usually a monetary gain. Those people also do not live near where the wind turbines are proposed.

Finally, I am sure everyone in this room is concerned about the environment and global warming, if it is or is not the case, but if political parties were serious about global warming or doing something about the environment, would it not be far easier to mandate solar panels on all homes, say, between 30 and 50 per cent, which would have a far greater benefit for all, and we would not have the issues that wind energy appears to have and does have overseas. That is all I would like to say.

Mr Thomas—I would like to thank the senators for this inquiry. There has been so much said, and I do not know really where to start. I am from Waubra and north of Waubra. I was for the turbines. If someone had come to me a few years ago and said, ‘We would like to build some turbines on the hill,’ I had no worries, go for it. That was our attitude with Waubra. We did not do any research. A lot of people here now have the information, but we did not feel it was necessary to research. We believed that these things were good.

Once they started going and people started having problems, we put up our hand and said, ‘What is going on?’ From that point on, we were climate sceptics, we were anti-windmill, we were all sorts of things. That is all part of the cruel, sadistic way wind farm companies work. I think if they had the power to do so, they would just shoot all of the locals and then put up their turbines. It is a cruel, sadistic way in which they operate.

They know that we all have a problem at Waubra. There are many of us. They could do the tests, or other people could do the tests. It is just so easy. Seven turbines did not go for almost a fortnight a couple of weeks back. Some of us had problems with that because we were all in quite a big area and just about everybody is on blood pressure medication, including me, and our blood pressure fell dangerously low. You should not be on the medication, because you do not have a problem outside of the wind farm.

People will say that we were jealous, that it is about money, it is about things. I went to school with most of the people who have turbines. I know them; they are friends. I also know that they have problems but they cannot talk about it. There is no jealousy. We live in a valley. We knew that we were not getting any turbines, so it was never an issue. It was only when people started to experience symptoms of ill health. Again, you start by thinking that it is only you who has something wrong, but then you find out that everyone else is having problems. My father is 80 and my mother is in her mid-seventies, and they are going through hell. We live in a valley, and if you look up, there are turbines there and there are turbines there. You do not look across at the turbines. There is a whole row of turbines. We have another 60 proposed behind us, again, in a fire danger area, close to the Caralulup State Forest and Mount Beckworth, right bang in the middle. If you ring up Field Air for an aeroplane to spray a crop, they ask: ‘Where are you from? Waubra—oh, forget it, mate.’

In 2006 we had a fire come through. We had helicopters and aeroplanes; they are the greatest things around hills we have ever seen. What would happen now? The turbines do not have to start a fire to have a fire problem with turbines; they just have to be there.

I really hope something will come of this because basically every wind farm that has been approved, rubber-stamped by Mr Madden, should be torn up because it is faulty by design. Waubra is so faulty. The position that they have put these turbines is so inappropriate. I know it is up and running, but basically every wind farm in Australia should be halted immediately.

We have to find out why these problems exist. A lot of people here will go away, miles and miles away but I have to go home and live under the bloody things. Many of my neighbours leave home. They live in the country, a beautiful quiet place. I could not image anywhere else in the world where you would want to be. Why would you have to come to Ballarat to get a guaranteed night's sleep? Two of my neighbours have been known to get in their car and drive miles away so they can get a good night's sleep because they have to work. A lady just up the road had a heart attack. She is only a year or two older than me. All of us have no history of heart problems. In fact, some of us have a history of having low blood pressure. Why do we now have high blood pressure? This is where the industry itself can easily do the studies. We found it when they turned seven of them off. We have it all written down. Thanks to Sarah Laurie and the Waubra Foundation, we are now keeping records daily of our blood pressure. Why? We live out in the country; we are all healthy. I have absolutely nothing wrong with me but I have to take blood pressure pills because I live at a wind farm. It is just not right. I could go on forever.

CHAIR—How long ago were the turbines turned off?

Mr Thomas—It was about three weeks ago.

CHAIR—Would you be able to send in that additional information when you are happy with it? You can take out the names and things; we do not need to know names, just the information.

Mr Thomas—I would not have other people's records, but Sarah Laurie could probably do that for you.

CHAIR—We will be hearing from her tomorrow, so we will follow that up tomorrow. Thank you.

Ms Jones—I am from Brunswick. I have come out here today to make a brief statement. I made a submission, and basically my point of view is that climate change is something that really concerns me. I really feel that stalling or I guess not taking action that I feel needs to happen for me and the next generations is not good, that wind energy is the way forward. It is one of the methods of generating clean energy. In my submission, I made a point of mentioning a visit to Codrington wind farm with my mum, and we actually stood underneath a wind turbine and had no health effects. In terms of the sounds, I did not notice anything that was uncomfortable at all. When we compare these health effects with coal fired power stations, I know that in terms of the health effects and the pollution that comes out of these things, wind turbines are definitely much cleaner than coal fired power stations. Thank you.

Mr Shield—I grew up outside of Bendigo and I have lived and worked in Bendigo and Melbourne. I am now studying in Melbourne. I am part of a community group in Melbourne called Climate Action Moreland. Moreland is a local government area in the north of Melbourne. The group was formed in 2008 by a group of local residents who were concerned about the issues of climate change and the lack of government action to deal with that.

I wanted to say something about the importance of wind energy in a carbon constrained world. The role of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases in climate change is well established. In order to prevent large shifts in our world climate system, we need international efforts to reduce our emissions, and eventually to start drawing down carbon dioxide from the atmosphere until we reach safe levels at below 300 parts per million of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. A recent study has been released by the University of Melbourne and a group called Beyond Zero Emissions who have demonstrated that all of Australia's electricity can be generated from renewable energy. Those academics found that wind energy could play a larger role in that, up to 40 per cent of the electricity generated. I think there is obviously a necessary role from wind.

One of the issues around electricity is that wherever it is produced, there are some impacts. The EPA is currently considering a proposal for a new coal fired power station in the Latrobe Valley. The company HRL is proposing to build that, and I went down to the consultation that was held by the EPA in Morwell for that. The thing that amazed me was that there was only one person there who stood up and spoke in favour of the power station. He was standing as the candidate for the Climate Sceptics Party in the election that was coming up. Other than that, all of the locals there opposed it. They are aware of the health impacts on them of the power stations that they have already, and they do not want to increase the load of particulates and other poisons in the atmosphere in their area. Eighty-five per cent of Victoria's electricity is currently from brown coal. All brown coal fired power stations are in regional and rural communities. As well as the carbon emissions, they release a range of poisonous chemicals such as arsenic, mercury, fluorine, cadmium, lead, selenium and zinc, and all of these have health impacts on the local community.

CHAIR—Mr Shield, your time is up. I know it goes very quickly.

Mr Shield—Okay.

CHAIR—If you wanted to give us anything else from your statement, there is no problem tabling the document.

Mr Shield—Sure, thanks for that.

Mr J Elsworth—Thank you for having me, senators, and Senator Fielding, thank you for initiating this. I live at Smeaton, and my remarks will be rather brief. We have actually stopped a wind tower proposal at our town. It is quite interesting how we did it; that is another story in itself. These big organisations really do not want to fight local communities. They want to work behind their back, manipulate councils and politicians, and go ahead. But, when the community decides that it does not want this to happen, they are not really up for a good belly fight. We were prepared to fight to the end, and they were not up to it. Grant King of Origin Energy was a lightweight when it came to a good fight.

My remarks are about how it has destroyed our community and it has wrecked our school. The school used to have 30 pupils. It is down now to 17. I think it will soon close. People we have dealt with and have been friends with all of our lives no longer have any business dealings with us. We are polite to them, but that is about it. The community's fire brigade has been decimated. The whole community has been divided by some thinking they were going to get turbines and it was going to be unopposed, and others who were not aware of what was happening until the last

moment. The council thought it was going to get revenue, but what it was really going to do was drop land values and put extra burden on the other ratepayers because they would be subsidising by lower rates coming from those surrounded by turbines and their land dropping in value. The other members of the shire would have to pay higher rates to get the same revenue. So it was a no-win for the shire. Our shire was so stupid—I am a former councillor there—to not be able to understand those basic principles of business.

My question to you is: are you senators braver than Senator Christine Milne? We have her on record saying she would not like a wind turbine by her home. Senator Milne might say things in Canberra, but she was generous enough to admit on Ballarat radio that she would not like a wind turbine by her own home. If she does not want one by her own home, why should people like Donald Thomas and all those people have to have one by their home? We are all Australians. We all supposedly want a fair go and want to treat everyone else with due respect, which my family and, I believe, most people try to do all their lives. To have this imposed by foreigners and snake oil salesmen really undermines our community. It has caused a lot of harm to our district. It has caused a lot of harm to Ballarat. It is just not right. If this is allowed to go on, it will not be the Australia that I believe we all want.

They want to put turbines here, but no-one mentions the network of wires that will cover Victoria to feed this into the grid with irregular power. I went to a meeting at Beaufort. Beaufort is a town on the Western Highway, a moderate sized town. It is a nice little town. I suggested: 'If this wind power is so good, why do you not put Beaufort on wind power so they would have wind power all the time, so the people in that nice little country town can get used to having cold water and hot beer, because their power would be irregular. They would have no regular power.' This is what is going on. It is just all rubbish, and it is really hurting our community.

I look to you senators to go away and think: would you like a turbine beside your home? Would you like a friend of yours to be placed in that invidious position? It is really serious. Mr Madden and his cohorts did not have the ability or the guts to come up and face up publicly. They work behind the scenes, and they are really just dogs. Thank you for listening to me. Dogs.

CHAIR—If people can resist calling people names, that would be appreciated.

Mr Evans—Good evening, senators. I am from Smeaton, just north of Ballarat. I do not want to rattle on about the health effects. I think a lot of that has been said. My complaints are to do with the government, the developers, the spin and the lies and the BS that is put forward by the wind industry on a constant basis, which is basically trickery to the public. I think the public as a whole is sick of the green mantra being pushed, not so much the green mantra but the green rubbish being pushed by these companies who are using it to make money for something that basically does not work.

To start with, the developers that came out to Smeaton were obviously being funded by the state government behind the scenes, as we have information. None of them was qualified to do this job. Basically, we are putting in people who are supposed developers to power our nation. We had a nursing home operator and a lawyer, and they were going to run a wind farm. What sort of a joke is this? They had no clue about anything. They had no idea about planning. My brother, who is a town planner in Melbourne at the moment, said to them when they held a

public meeting, 'There is a significant landscape overlay here.' They did not even know what it was. You cannot build a wind turbine there.

Three years went by, and this company, obviously just to annoy the locals, kept the project in the background, so to speak, and then they went bust. Origin Energy took them over and within about a month, that was it, bang, it was all finished. It was just a farce, a total farce, from the word go, the way it was planned. The planning was an absolute and utter disgrace, and a total indictment on the state government for allowing it to go ahead. The local members should be ashamed at letting this go ahead like it did; not just in our area but for other people. There is just no planning. The planning system was utter rubbish, to put it nicely.

We heard from a lady earlier from the council down at Portland. I can see their point of view down there, but I think it is a very selfish one. They are getting money basically funded by subsidies paid for by everybody in this room for higher prices for electricity coming out of the MRET scheme. The MRET scheme might have good intentions, but it is forcing up the price of electricity. Where is the money going? It is going basically to wind companies such as Acciona or Pacific Hydro. A lot of it is going offshore. It is pushing up the cost. What will happen to Australian businesses? We can already see the amount of business going out in manufacturing into China and into Asian countries and India. You just cannot afford to manufacture here anymore. It is making it very difficult. That is one of the major things: the cost of electricity is rising. We have to be able to control this. We have to be able to compete, otherwise it will be tough.

I believe that we have people mostly from city regions that are basically fan clubs for green energy. Fair enough, they are allowed to have their opinion, but they are getting paid money by wind energy companies, sponsorships, and they are coming out in support of them in the local media or whatever. None of them are from the areas affected. We just heard from people from Melbourne. They are allowed their opinion, that is fine, but they are coming here and trying to impose their views on our way of life in the country. We do not want this rubbish put up next to our homes. None of us does. They are telling us: 'Hey, you should have this here. This is good for the environment.' But it is not. It is a farce, it is a fraud and it is a scam. We want something that works. We want baseload power. We want electricity on demand. We do not want power devised by luck, and the luck is the wind. If the wind is not blowing, the power is not flowing. It is as simple as that. Thank you.

Mrs Bruty—I am here from Chepstowe. My main concern is: will the panel make recommendations to the minister, Matthew Guy, that the shires must put into place all of the ESOs, the environmental significant overlays, to protect native vegetation and brolgas? I know for a fact that Ballarat university were paid by a wind company, and their study was flawed, along with DSE. I am very concerned that DSE is not acting on behalf of the community as they should be. I have evidence to prove this. Thank you.

CHAIR—Have you provided that evidence to the committee?

Mrs Bruty—Some of it. We are getting more evidence that DSE is putting money into wind turbines and taking bird overlays off it to actually build the towers.

CHAIR—If you can provide more information that would be appreciated. I just want to make clear that we do not make recommendations to state ministers. We table a report in the Senate with a whole series of recommendations to which the federal government responds. Obviously the states look at the reports, but we have to be careful about making recommendations to the states per se. Our report is to the Senate, but we do make recommendations. I want to be clear that it is to the Senate, and the federal government responds. There is no onus on the state governments to respond, although often they do respond.

Mrs Bruty—Or the shires.

CHAIR—Exactly.

Mrs Bruty—Thank you.

Mrs Kehoe—I am from right beside the Stockyard Hill wind turbine project that has been proposed and approved. I am a PhD student in holistic education and have taught for about 10 years. One point I really want to stress, and I think I speak on behalf of a number of people, or most people here, is that we are definitely not against renewable energy or sustainability; it is the way it is approached, the guidelines that are put in place, and the right sort of energy that we choose to put up. My husband and I have two little children and another one on the way at the moment, and we will have 27 turbines right beside our home. My one-year-old already has heart problems that we are getting investigated at the moment. I suffer from migraines, travel sickness and have had a number of inner ear operations. I do know that we have had a science professional say that perhaps the infrasound will not affect everyone, but we all know we are entirely different individuals, and the way our bodies respond to different aspects in our environment does affect us no matter where we live, whether it is near turbines or in other areas. I think that cannot be dismissed just because of evidence that may not have been proved. To dismiss people's individual evidence and individual circumstances is appalling. We really need to address those.

On property devaluation, we have an 80-acre property, so therefore it is lifestyle. We could not afford just to work off that and live somewhere else. We had it valued originally at \$380,000 to \$400,000, and the last offer we received was \$230,000. That is a loss of \$150,000, and for people that have just reached the age of 30, that is a massive, massive loss and a big drawback for us and our young family.

When I approached Origin Energy and asked them a number of questions, as we have already heard, there were not answers for a lot of the questions, whether they were to do with the technology or health effects, community effects and a number of other areas. Again, as has been mentioned today, these really need to be addressed. Thank you.

CHAIR—If you have those valuations in writing, could you provide them to us, because it is very useful for us to have that sort of information.

Mrs Kehoe—Absolutely. Thank you very much, I will.

Mr Kermond—I am from the south-west corner of Victoria, near Portland, living out at Cape Bridgewater. My wife and I have spent 22 years living there. We renovated our home and now we have a wind farm within 1.5 kilometres of our home.

Numerous things have been said today which I believe is the same story over and over again. There are many symptoms. One thing that does differ, maybe to some, is that my medical outcome is irreversible. This evidence is given by a well-known doctor. I am battling on, trying to live with that outcome. My eldest son, at 17, was doing HSC last year, and he had to come to us and disclose that he was unable to study due to these factors in our area. It is very hard to converse on such an issue, especially with a 17-year-old. He was able to get through his mid-year exams, but unfortunately he did not continue so he missed out on his VCE, which was very important to him. Two years previous to that, he was dux in his class for two years running.

We have been away from our home for approximately 8½ months. I have had to approach my father, who is in his nineties, to land on his doorstep with my wife and two children and try to explain to him that we have many issues in relation to the wind farm which he cannot understand, given his age. Luckily he accepted us into his home, and that is where we are now.

I would like to outline a few points in conjunction with airborne noise. We have seismic trouble. We live in an old stone home. The wind farm is built on a plateau of rock therefore the sounds are transmitted seismically. That is something that is a little bit different from what the other people have said. Another strong issue is that we have catchment off our farmhouse roof. With the commencement of operation of the wind farm, there have been two meltdowns with power, and three gearboxes that have been replaced due to self-destruction. Two of those gearboxes have been repaired. One was totally irreparable. Due to that self-destructing gearbox, oil from the gearbox was delivered into the atmosphere and without our knowing, it had actually attached itself to the moisture. Living on the coast as we do, it has gone into our freshwater supply, therefore we cannot use our drinking water.

In the early stages of living with this noise impact, we did not know what was going on with respect to the character of our family pet dog, who was only four years of age. After taking him to veterinary clinic after veterinary clinic, we resorted to taking him to the RMIT at Werribee in Melbourne where a veterinary doctor who has been practising for 30 years had never seen a dog with so many symptoms. His conclusion was that he was not happy in his environment and yet, he was never chained up, et cetera. He was a very well-loved dog. Eventually he died throughout that course.

There have been many levels of frustration. We have approached the council, the shire, with no response. The actual company is totally ignorant of our complaints. Therefore, it was important for me to speak today just to outline a couple of other issues that we have been living and breathing. Some of the people that might think that low frequency is a myth with wind farms, I invite anyone who has that understanding to come and stay for six months in my house, free of charge, whatever, to witness what we have witnessed in the past two years. Thank you.

CHAIR—If you felt you could, would you provide us with some more written information about your condition, if you feel comfortable with that?

Mr Kermond—To whom should I address this information? I have had several encounters with government authorities, with no response.

CHAIR—Send it to the Chair of the Community Affairs References Committee. Sophie is just giving you the contact details.

Mr Kermond—Right, thank you.

CHAIR—Thank you very much, everybody. I am sure you all know that we are having a public hearing in Melbourne tomorrow, so we will reconvene there tomorrow.

Committee adjourned at 6.46 pm