

Submission by Dr K.M.Old to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Industry and Resources: Inquiry into the development of the non-fossil fuel energy industry in Australia: Case study into selected renewable energy sectors

11/6/2007

My submission relates to the need for a consistent and transparent National Code of Practice for the location of wind farms, as proposed by Senator Ian Campbell in a letter that he sent to all State Environment Ministers in 2005.

He proposed that a key component of such a code would be an agreement that a "truly inclusive and consultative local planning process" should be carried out and that these highly intrusive power generating plants "should not be constructed against the wishes of the local community that will be most affected".

Since 2003 I have been actively opposing the proposal by EHN Oceania (now Acciona) to construct a 60 turbine wind farm on the Molonglo Ridge, close to the ACT border with NSW. Each turbine would be 125m tall (including the rotor blades) extending along the ridge line to the east of the Googong reservoir and foreshore reserve. The turbines would be visible from parts of Canberra and much of the surrounding area and some 400 nearby residential properties in Queanbeyan City and Palerang Shire would be exposed to varying levels of adverse environmental and amenity impacts.

Despite the claims by the developers that the ridges are largely devoid of tree cover, the most westerly ridge, on which EHN planned to site 7 turbines, with a further 9 turbines on a similar ridge further south, are occupied by open eucalypt woodland. These ridges overlook the Queanbeyan river and Googong Reservoir catchment protection zone, London Bridge Homestead heritage area, Tin Hut Creek picnic area and the headwaters of the Googong reservoir, including a small dam which limits sedimentation from the Tin Hut Creek. The amenity features of this dam, the picnic areas and homestead have been much improved by an earlier National Heritage Trust grant to a local environmental group. The Burra valley is an area of great natural beauty and has a large, and expanding, number of small hobby and retirement properties for people who value rural life style and the natural environment.

The southern end of the Molonglo ridge, especially on the west facing slopes is tree covered and little disturbed and plays an important role in catchment protection for the Googong reservoir, Canberra and Queanbeyan's main water supply. The reservoir is likely to be even more important in future. One proposal is to pipe water directly from the Murrumbidgee River to augment the supply to the reservoir from the Queanbeyan River catchment. I find it astonishing that an industrial development with scores of electricity-generating turbines would be planned on ridges directly above such a critically important water catchment.

The proposal to erect these massive turbines along ridgelines was strongly opposed by Burra residents at a "Future Vision" workshop conducted by Palerang Council in 2006 and by members of the Molonglo Ridge Guardians. It was also opposed by Queanbeyan City Council, by the Palerang Shire Council, and by our local State and Federal Parliamentary Representatives.

Before the Molonglo Ridge proposal was temporarily shelved, EHN (Acciona) claimed to have consulted widely with residents. In fact there was one meeting in the Burra valley, namely a "show and tell" exercise in which comments and questions were purported to be taken on board by the Company. There was no feed back on any of the issues raised by residents and a promised "field day" planned by EHN initially for Feb 2005 as part of the consultation process did not materialize. When the project was shelved the only notification of residents was by hearsay, following a brief radio interview with an Acciona representative and the Company did not see fit to communicate directly with residents.

At a Palerang Council meeting the term "wind-rush" was used to characterize the *ad hoc* free-for-all conducted by wind power generating companies in signing up land owners for potential future location of turbines. This encapsulates very well the apparent lack of planning that has gone on at the State level and the way in which this has been exploited by the Wind-Power Companies.

The proposed Molonglo Ridge development is an extreme example of what can go wrong in a planning vacuum, with the wishes of local communities being ignored. There is a need for a National Strategy for the incorporation of wind energy as one of the renewable means of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. As advocated by Senator Campbell, impacts on local communities, their wishes, life styles and property values deserve a high priority in such a strategy. It is encouraging that the House of Reps Standing Committee is to include all current means of renewable energy generation in their Case Study. Once the benefits of Wind Power have been weighed against other alternatives a National Code of Practice for location of wind power generation facilities would be a logical development.

Thank you for your attention,

Sincerely yours

Dr Kenneth M. Old,