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**Submission to
The House of Representatives Standing
Committee on Industry and Resources**

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Regarding

**Development of the non-fossil fuel
energy industry in Australia**

by

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Wind Energy Development in Victoria - A Guide to No Sense Planning

The development of the non-fossil fuel energy industry in Australia will be an achievement I am sure many Australians will be proud of. However the development of one element of this industry leaves much to be desired.

At the early entrance of wind energy into Victoria (and probably the rest of Australia) it became obvious that the complete lack of planning guidelines for wind energy development has resulted in

- the division of communities,
- inappropriate placement of wind facilities,
- the development of an antagonistic view toward a valuable renewable energy,
- scepticism about its viability,
- establishment of substantial government subsidy schemes and
- broken hearts and broken lives.

There is still a string of consequences yet to be realised with the cumulative impact of windfarm developments e.g.

- diminished house/land values,
- noise pollution impacts,
- flicker impacts,
- bird strikes and
- landscape value diminishment.

The social and environmental impact of long term impacts of windfarms has never been studied. Windfarms are now growing in size to contain up to 120 wind turbines and these turbines themselves are ranging in height from 120m to 150m high. Compared to roof top solar power windfarms have bigger planning problems and there is a growing need for research to ensure this renewable energy is socially and environmentally acceptable and economically viable.

Compared to other forms of renewable energy wind farms are currently the most socially destructive development due to lack of planning guidelines and social research by Government and Statutory authorities.

A Personal Story Regarding Wind Farms

For 7 years I made submissions to VCAT and EES State Government hearings to protect a piece of coastal headland from major wind farm developments. This area is rated, by the Victorian Coastal Council, as second in values (environmental, social and economical) to the 12 Apostles on The Great Ocean Road.

But unfortunately this piece of coast did not have the iconic status of the 12 Apostles and although I and others battled through two windfarm development hearings the area is now being transformed into an industrial site with OH&S signs, large power poles, limestone roads cutting through the once serene hills (which had recognised scenic values), a sand batching plant, safety fencing, barricades and industrial vehicles with industrial workers in hard hats and tough boots. A far cry from the serene rolling hills and idyllic coastal environment that was once Cape Bridgewater.

I am fifth generation descendant of this area and it was a heart breaking tragedy for me to experience the might and power of the early windfarm developers who came to our shores.

A Planning Disgrace

My years of heartache began at a time when I purchased a piece of land near the place that was loved by family and my forefathers and foremothers.

Around the same time Jeff Kennet (Victorian State Premier) decided to rehash the planning schemes of Victoria. I submitted to the Planning Panel hearing a case to retain the protections that Cape Bridgewater had in the original planning scheme.

The Panel agreed wholeheartedly with my submission and made several strong recommendations including that the Glenelg Shire Council impose a Scenic Landscape Protection Overlay and a Development Overlay onto the area.

However the Council never did anything about the recommendations blaming a lack of funds which laid it bare for all kinds of inappropriate development.

At that time (unbeknown to the community) Glenelg Shire CEO was building relationships with windfarm developers to put windfarms at Cape Bridgewater. I guess if Cape Bridgewater had a significant landscape overlay as recommended by the Panel then this would have been a big hurdle for such plans.

Industrial development was the aim of the Council and with their Shire borders now increased to include Cape Bridgewater they finally had their hands on something to offer up to the windfarm Gods.

This approach was in stark contrast to the previous planning administrators who required that in order to get a planning permit for a house at Cape Bridgewater a person would have to submit house design, house colours, prove your house wasn't going to protrude the skyline and show that they were following all other National Trust planning guidelines.

A lot of people who had houses at Cape Bridgewater can vividly remember the planning battles they had just to get a house permit! It is now easy to pick which houses at Cape Bridgewater were developed in the pre Kennett era and which are post Kennett.

Unfortunately all the good planning guidelines went out the window with the Glenelg Shire Council even though I constantly battled with Council and argued that all controls should have come across with the new planning scheme in the first place.

In hindsight I can also now see that the scene was set - a Town Planner who has since been proven to act with disregard for proper planning processes, a CEO who was trying to attract windfarms to Portland and a Council who had strong influences from the local engineering company. Interestingly this company now has an employee who is the current Mayor of Portland and they have won contracts to build wind towers. Also the then CEO of Glenelg Shire Council resigned and now works with a wind farm company.

Since then town planner of the day has been the recipient of a scathing attack by Victoria's Ombudsman who delved deeply into the workings of the Glenelg Shire Council and whose investigation did involve an amount of police assistance.

Windfarms at Cape Bridgewater - Round One

With the undermining of values regarding Cape Bridgewater a windfarm company, Energy Equity lodges a planning permit application to build a windfarm at the Cape.

I and a handful of others battled it out for 12 months to stop the development. It cost \$25,000 and hundreds of hours of volunteer time, effort, angst and energy. Luckily Mathew Townsend (Barrister) did pro bono to help us with the submission. For me personally it was very difficult as my husband was posted to a job in Dubai and I was torn to fight for Cape Bridgewater or to go and live in the Middle East and start a new life.

A L Hislop and Others vs Energy Equity, VCAT Hearing.
We won this battle and were very elated that finally some sensible people understood what was being protected here.

Energy Equity had everyone believing that windfarms could only go on the coast and that Cape Bridgewater was the only place that could have one. We know now that this is so untrue but back then no one had the knowledge about where developers would potentially develop even though there was enough information to sink a battleship if people cared to look it up on the internet.

I did look it up on the internet and I was swamped with information. But not one agency would come and bat for us at the VCAT hearing. National Trust turned their back, Victorian Coastal Council refused to participate, Dept. Natural Resources and Environment etc. etc. It was left up to me and a handful of people to build the case regarding this fledgling windfarm industry that was trying to wreak havoc on our beautiful shores.

Our small group of five were up against a company who had \$5 million dollars to spend on their case. They had the Glenelg Shire Council, Sustainability Victoria, Australian Windpower Association and a swag of other agencies and experts to help them.

Suffice to say that we were out on a limb in a small country town - it divided the town. Members of my family were upset with the divisions being caused and people didn't know whether to sell or stay and arguments were happening between friends and family.

The local paper backed the windfarm company and for a time they could have asked for anything as the support was tremendous. This development was seen as good for economical growth but to me two other important elements were not being considered - i.e. the social and environmental impacts that would be imposed on the small community of Cape Bridgewater.

Anyhow we won this VCAT case but after all the effort there wasn't much to celebrate as it should never have happened in the first place if proper planning for such developments had been in place.

Windfarms at Cape Bridgewater - Round Two

I thought the battle over but there was not letting up. Just a few months later another windfarm developer decided to come into town waving a 2000 page Environmental Effects Statement that said they could easily put a windfarm at Cape Bridgewater, Cape Nelson and Cape Grant - in fact not only all the Capes of Portland but throw in Yambuk Lake as well!

The company had done their homework and they came to woo the town and sweet talk the locals into sacrificing not just one cape but all three to their industrial developments - the largest windfarm in the southern hemisphere! The Council washed their hands and called in the Minister to adjudicate over this planning decision. The Planning Minister sent down her top three Panel members to hear the case which was the longest ever running Planning Panel case to be heard in Victoria. Oh by the way one of the members was barred as it was found out he had business dealings with the developer. We thought the

previous windfarm developer was big but these guys really had the big bucks and we knew we were really up against it this time.

A small team of us went to task - led by me. We set about raising \$80,000 (from peoples hard earned savings) to take on this giant company.

Unfortunately this battle took years and wrecked marriages and displaced community people for ever. I cannot enter into the details on this case as it drained me so much I have moved away myself to keep my life together. Suffice to say that this new industry had the ears of government (both state and federal) and to me the hearing was a set up and all the big guns new it was a walk up start for the windfarm developer. How could anyone argue against wind energy when Steve Brack's wanted green votes and everyone thought it as pure as mother's milk?

Our team had seen the light and had pulled off the green wool from over our eyes and realised windfarms can go just about anywhere if the conditions are right or the tower is high enough - they do not need to be in fragile, precious and valuable coastal environments.

Shame on Governments

Shame on the government for not putting in place the appropriate planning guidelines before opening up our precious coast land to these international developers. The windfarm developers know how to nobble the objectors - they've had years of practice in England, Scotland, Spain, America and other places for many, many years before landing on the virgin windfarm country of Australia.

There was no community planning in place for windfarms but they got planning approval without it.

I cannot begin to tell you all the atrocities and mistruths I witnessed in order for the windfarm developer to get what they wanted. Promise of many, many jobs - never happened, promises of them buying local product - little of this happened and on it goes. Can you believe the manager of the company at the time visited people, who were to be impacted by the

windfarm, in their homes and said to them "What are you doing about saving the planet from greenhouse gas emissions?"

This is where it hurts. How can one windfarm on one precious piece of coast save the planet. They had most of the town believing it will make a difference and that this was the only place it could go.

Ironically a major shift in community sentiment has occurred since then with many people now wishing it wasn't going ahead at Cape Bridgewater. For example a peak local tourism association who heavily backed the windfarm proposal have recently asked Council not to let the development go ahead at Cape Bridgewater. How naive they are in thinking this is how planning works.

My Conclusions

Planning for renewable energy will be the most important aspect in its development. There is a significant way to go for all the Shire council planning schemes to be ready for such developments. Here are some examples of potential renewable energy developments where planning guidelines are not in place:

- solar farms that spread over 40 acres?
- solar towers 1km high,
- wind towers that are 150m high
- off shore windfarms
- wave energy generators
- tidal energy generators
- wind farms near schools, cemeteries or other public place

but to name a few!

The social conscious of global developers of wind energy is small in comparison to the consciousness they have for shareholders and investors into their company. Please stop the planning failures being instigated on masse across Victoria until a full investigation has realised the cumulative impact of such large and imposing structures on the social fabric of small rural communities.

At Cape Bridgewater several families left the area and the Bridgewater Bay Coast Action Group no longer exists due to members moving away from the area as a result of the windfarm. Friends are no longer talking to each other and the social cohesion that used to exist is damaged. But where are the managers and public relations people of Pacific Hydro - they left the company after getting the approvals they needed with big payouts and a life far away from the windfarms they are developing in an area that was once a valuable environment for the local community.