

**Sent:** Friday, 15 June 2007 12:00 AM

**To:** Committee, ISR (REPS)

**Subject:** Inquiry into the development of non fossil fuel energy industry in Australia

I would like to hereby submit some of my experiences of the wind industry to your above inquiry. Mid 2003 our community learned of Pacific Hydro,s intent to build a windfarm at Yaloak near Ballan in Victoria. We were not advised by the company rather a benefactor landowner. We subsequently learned that the proposal had already passed through the EPBC process some 6 months earlier obviously with no one having the opportunity to comment as very few knew of the proposals existence. We decided to contact the company to arrange a meeting to have a simple discussion in an attempt to open communication lines with a desire to reach a compromise to hopefully suit all parties. Pacific Hydro did agree to meet with us but at that meeting refused to have any further discussion about their proposal and basically left with a see you at the hearing attitude. The state government then allowed the proposal to proceed without any formal environmental impact assessment which caused great concern in the wider community, landcare groups and the shire. Over the ensuing months Pacific Hydro had press releases and newsletter type updates which contained blatant and breathtaking mistruths, even to the extent of conducting a community attitude survey at Southland Shopping Centre which is situated on the opposite side of the state and presented those results at the hearing. Their proposal was substantially altered upon lodging for approval which I believe is common practice by developers. As a result very few people had the opportunity to view the amended layout. The proposal contained very little relevant detail and many inaccuracies which I found very disturbing as I was attempting to gain a sound understanding of what impacts the proposal may or may not have. This is especially true of the stated greenhouse gas benefits. To date I have never been able to access real statistics about the amount of electricity produced, the displacement of fossil fuels and the greenhouse gas savings from any wind energy company or the state government. These statistics would be readily available from Pacific Hydro who have operating windfarms. This obviously leads to a degree of scepticism of the benefits and the motivation of the state government in promoting these facilities.

The planning panel hearings for these facilities are intimidating,overwhelming and a huge time (cost) burden for members of the community who cannot afford representation. I personally had to use my annual leave to attend the hearing forgoing family holidays which we hold very dear. All expert witnesses are provided by the company so independent information is virtually non existent unless the community can afford their own consultants. It is clear that the onus is on the opponents to disprove the proponents claims no matter how extravagant they are rather than the proponent supporting their claims with solid evidence and research. It is now evident, having attended other panel hearings, that the same "independent expert" witnesses are used by most companies for the majority of proposals despite their work being questioned in many panel reports. One consultant in particular has been found to have been dishonest at 2 separate hearings that I have attended by the planning panel themselves yet no mention of this has ever appeared in their report and his evidence has been accepted over opposing views forwarded by more experienced experts and clearly more honest ones. I found this lack of response by the planning panels most disturbing and I felt that the entire process had been undermined and in my view was clearly not an attempt to have a fair and impartial hearing into something that would have a profound affect on the community. I attempted to raise this issue amongst others with Panels Victoria but was informed that once a panel had completed their duties there would be no further comments or explanations. This response was contradicted at a later hearing where the Chair (Mr Rynd Smith) stated that a panel is obliged to explain its conclusions. Shortly thereafter Mr Smith was removed as chair of that particular panel and subsequently left the employ of Panels Victoria.

In summing up I have found the entire process disturbing and exhausting with no support available from any agency which can place huge financial burdens on individuals or communities.

The industry is certainly not interested in engaging with communities despite their claims.

The industry is frequently deceitful and willing to spread misinformation especially through the media.

Panel hearings appear to be a means for claims of a thorough "independent" assessment which is clearly not the case.

I must add that the then minister for planning rejected Pacific Hydro,s proposal for Yaloak wind farm but now that Victoria has a new planning minister Pacific Hydro have indicated that they will resubmit their proposal so our communities fight enters its fifth year.

I have kept records and copies of correspondence to verify my submission and would be happy to provide any further information if you require it. Thank you for having this enquiry as I believe it is vital to get some truth into this debate.