

**THE SENATE ECONOMICS LEGISLATION COMMITTEE****PETROL PRICING****SUBMISSION****TENDERER**

*Alan Philip MAY*

**OVERVIEW OF REFERENCE AREA**  
**WYLAHRA GROVE**

Wylahra Grove commences at the Sporting Shooters Association of Australia Captains Mountain complex approximately twenty three kilometres from the township of Millmerran and straddles the Gore Highway for a little over ten kilometres towards Goondiwindi.

Within this area is found 530 x 8 hectare ( 20 acres ) blocks surrounded by numerous larger blocks ranging from 250 hectares to large commercial farming blocks of several thousand hectares.

This mass represents approximately 25% of all rateable blocks of the Millmerran Shire

The only public amenities permitted by Council within this area is a public hall, now under the control of the Shire Council, that was built by the residents utilising a grant from the Gaming Machine (Jupiter's Casino) Fund , and two Rural Fire Brigade sheds of which only one is fully equipped .

There have been two public bores created by Council. Both bores are contaminated, non potable and labelled " Not suitable for human consumption."

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PROLOGUE

I am tendering this submission not so much as an individual but on behalf of the residents of this area. I have observed the unprecedented cost increase of fuel and associated products, e.g. LP gas, which is essential for our lifestyle, create problems and dangers among a vulnerable society that has no recourse to succour.

I qualify myself for tendering this submission on behalf of the general area on the basis of my many years of community service in every organisation that has existed for the promotion and betterment of the area and its residents.

As your terms of reference appear to focus on technical matters relating to the fuel pricing structure and concepts to combat same, the only term of reference left open to me to present the human face of this impost along with the problems and possible future complications is the "also ran" tail of (e) any other related matters.

Within this submission this shall be my only focus.

RESIDENTS and EMPLOYMENT

The residents of Wylahra Grove follow the usual pattern of remote\_rural residential dwellers. When first developed a lot of residents came here in order to "disappear" from visible society for some reason or other. However, those bad old days have all but gone and the area has witnessed the influx of highly respectable citizens constructing houses that are the equivalent of any found in any suburban street.

Like all semi-remote residential areas today the residents fall into roughly four socio-economic groups:-

1. Rural workers employed, either full time or on part time manual piece work such as cotton chipping, or
2. Retirees and pensioners, as well as,
3. Unemployed persons on Centrelink benefits and finally,
4. A minute number are self employed, growing olives etc.

Irrespective of which group residents fall into, it must be realised that the most affluent must be the working people, however rural wages being what they are, and the drought affecting the number of category 4, it is recognised that all within the area are living in penury compared to the remuneration, costs and amenities enjoyed by city dwellers.

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I would hate to see a situation where the inclusion of this fuel would adversely effect the engines and leave stranded those who could least afford it.

A further query is what will Ethanol do to small engines, a great majority of residents of Wylahra Grove depend upon home generation for their power supply, will it effect them? what will it do to chainsaws or pump motors? Is E10 compatible with two stroke oil? We are all operating in the dark.

It is interesting to note that in some parts of N.S.W. "E" blend fuel bowsers carry a warning sticker advising customers to carefully check before using "E" blend fuel in small engines. I have never seen such a sticker in Queensland, it appears that the vested interests promoting ethanol production are deliberately maintaining an information blackout.

It makes one wonder what it is they don't want us to know.

To demonstrate the preceding statements, Within the Wylahra Grove area as stated previously, home power generation is the norm, permit me to quote from my Honda (the most common small engine) handbook.

*"Gasoline's containing alcohol"*

*If you decide to use a gasoline containing alcohol (gasohol) be sure its' octane rating is at least as high as that recommended by Honda. There are two types of "gasohol" one containing ethanol and the other containing methanol. DO NOT use gasohol that contains more than 10% ethanol. DO NOT use gasoline containing methanol (methyl or wood alcohol) that does not also contain cosolvents and corrosion inhibitors for methanol. Never use gasoline containing more than 5% methanol even if it has cosolvents and inhibitors*

*NOTE*

*Fuel system damage or engine performance problems resulting from the use of fuels containing alcohol's' IS NOT COVERED UNDER THE WARRANTY. Honda cannot endorse the use of fuels containing alcohol since evidence of their suitability is as yet incomplete.*

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*Before buying fuel from an unfamiliar station try to find out if the fuel contains alcohol, if it does confirm the type and percentage of alcohol used. If you notice any undesirable operating symptoms whilst using a fuel that contains alcohol, or one that you suspect contains alcohol, switch to a fuel that you know does not contain alcohol.*

end of quote.

How can we be sure that the percentage rate of ethanol cited is accurate? As ethanol is cheaper than petrol how can we be sure the fuel agent is not "padding" for more profit?

SOME HUMAN COSTS

The figures stated in the Overview segment will indicate that the residents of Wylahra Grove have a minimum of 46 kilometres round trip (if they were on the boundary, in my case it is 63 kilometres and many have much further than that) to the township of Millmerran.

This means that they are faced with this distance if they require

- (a) Medical treatment
- (b) hospital treatment
- (c) post a letter or purchase a stamp
- (d) attend a specific denomination church
- (e) make an enquiry pertaining to Centrelink via the representative at the Community Support Centre, or comply with the "Job Search" regulations or
- (f) even the basics such as purchase a simple loaf of bread.

This situation has been brought about by the refusal of our Shire Council to allow a shop or a House of Worship to be constructed within the boundaries of Wylahra Grove.

What is not apparent to a lot of city or large town residents is that some rural Councils can be dominated by commercial operators who realise the potential loss if a more convenient outlet for goods and services is made available.

For local residents of Wylahra Grove that require Dental treatment the consequences are even more oppressive, for this service we have to travel to Toowoomba, a round trip distance of up to 250 kilometres in some cases.

This is what chapter 4, section 197 of the Legislative Assembly of Queensland report into petrol pricing dated April 2006 had to say on the subject:-

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*"The committee heard that residents are postponing visits to medical and dental services to restrict costs, sometimes with the potential to cause serious health problems."*

To further reinforce the claim, same Parliamentary finding, section 219 :-

*"Discretionary travel for social activities and shopping is most affected, but the committee also heard that pensioners are reducing their travel to essential medical care."*

Permit me to quote from a Queensland Health document in relation to the area in focus:- *"The Wylahra Grove community endure no public transport, no postal service, the only water available is supplied by two bores located near the community (more on these bores shortly).*

*It is the most socio-economically disadvantaged area within the Millmerran Health Services catchment and suffers social isolation along with many other inherent problems associated with this type of community."*

Now, a little more on the afore mentioned bores that are cited as the only public water source for the area, both bores are polluted. Water analysis on the flow have proven both NOT SUITABLE FOR HUMAN CONSUMPTION, The Shire Council considers its duty done to the community by placing a sign upon the fixtures stating this fact, but in the worst drought for a century, and the price of fuel prohibiting the cost of travelling to town with a water cart when domestic tanks get low, people are drinking it.

There are many rumours pertaining to how to purify it, and as an ex-engineer I attempt to discredit these methods, but people will believe what they can afford.

These claims can, and have been verified both by the Millmerran Health Service professionals and Medical Superintendent (written testimonials can be supplied if required) and I have been in touch with the people conducting the Community Water Grants Round 2 funding in an attempt to prevent a possible health crisis by obtaining a grant for providing correctional facilities to amend the public bore flow to potable standard, but I have encountered two problems, 1. to correct the bore flow would prove too expensive for the funding levels and 2. to subsidise individual reverse osmosis units for the residents is claimed to be "outside the guidelines" even though it would be of public benefit. I have been promised these individual units at a very low price if we can place 30 units.

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It should be noted that the State Enquiry requested suggestions pertaining to suggestions as to steps residents could take to reduce their fuel usage. I include my response to that section for your consideration.

The reduction of fuel usage and dependence is a moot point, several things must be taken into consideration :-

(a) These people are rural dwellers that, in a lot of cases require vehicles with sufficient power to pull laden trailers etc.

It must be realised that we do not have services to our door like urban dwellers, for example even our garbage must be transported to "collection sites" for disposal, it is not economical to perform this task daily with one bag of garbage, so it is collected until a trailer load can be transported, likewise

(b) Water is essential for so many jobs, when it is not laid on this very heavy necessity must be transported from the public bores or, if potable water is required, from the township to residence, personally I have a special tank and system set up to service my septic toilet, and use the bore water in that system. This type of utilisation is essential in this drought condition to conserve the collected and known potable water for use within the household.

All of this explanation is to demonstrate that vehicles of a suitable power to weight ratio must be utilised, reducing petrol bills is extremely difficult.

Car pooling is practised when possible, however again we are in a unique position where we reside so far from amenities, and fuel prices are so high that shopping trips are, of economic necessity, made as infrequently as possible. This victualling is now commonly stretched to once a month, which makes it impossible to combine the trip, for several peoples monthly groceries cannot all fit into one vehicle. Everything required must be purchased, for as previously stated, we are not in a position to saunter to the local store.

Another moot point is the suggestion that the fuel efficiency information of new vehicles is insufficient for people to make the correct informed choice when purchasing a new car.

In this context please refer to the "overview" and consider the financial basis of the vast majority of Wylahra Grove residents, These people are not Primary Producers who can factor in new vehicles with all of their rebate entitlements or lease vehicles with regular updates that are tax deductible, these citizens are mostly stuck with what they possess for a long time.

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What I would like the Members of this Senate Committee to understand is that there are valid multiple reasons for this continued usage of older vehicles other than the cost of their replacement, even though they may be more expensive to run than the computer controlled newer vehicles.  
The reasons are as follows :-

(a) When one lives so far from town it is useless to own a vehicle that, upon developing a flaw, can cost many hundreds of dollars in towing charges alone in order to reach a repair agency that has the appropriate computer equipment to diagnose and discover what piece of electrical equipment to throw away and replace.

(b) We live on a very busy interstate highway, what responsible father would chance his wife and children driving a vehicle that would leave them stranded in an emergency? Who can predict the character and manner of person travelling this very busy arterial interstate highway who could be attracted to a situation of helpless people seeking assistance in a useless vehicle? Many women have been taught, and often do, repair older cars in an emergency situation and so can avoid a possibly dangerous confrontation.

I sincerely hope that you, the leaders who make the decisions and recommendations accept this submission in the spirit from which I forwarded it.

Fuel prices are exacting a very heavy toll on the lifestyle of rural residents, it is very disconcerting to realise the number of people who are forced to virtually dump the assets and lifestyle they have worked so long to build and flee to the city.

This is not just an idle statement, I look like having to be one of them

To put it in a nutshell IT IS COMING TO PASS THAT WE, THE RESIDENTS OF RURAL RESIDENTIAL ESTATES SIMPLY CANNOT AFFORD TO CONTINUE WITH WHAT HAS BECOME A HAND TO MOUTH EXISTANCE AWAY FROM THE COASTAL CITIES UNLESS THERE IS SOME METHOD TO ALLEVIATE THE CRUSHING TYRRANY OF FUEL PRICES THAT IS DESTROYING OUR LIFESTYLE EVERY DAY AND IN EVERY WAY.

Thank you,

Alan P. May  
J.P. (qual)