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23 December 2009

Naomi Bleeser  
Secretary  
Senate Select Committee on Fuel and Energy  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600  
Australia

**Sent via email to [fuelenergy.sen@aph.gov.au](mailto:fuelenergy.sen@aph.gov.au)**

Dear Ms Bleeser,

I refer to your email received on 8 December 2009 and the question on notice taken by Infigen Energy at the Committee's public hearing in Sydney on 12 November 2009 in relation to providing an update on the resolution of noise complaints from neighbouring residences surrounding the Capital Wind farm, located near Bungendore in New South Wales.

A copy of the transcript is contained in the attached appendix for reference, with the relevant question highlighted.

As noted at the hearing, Infigen Energy takes its relationship with the local community very seriously. The development and operation of wind farms in Australia that have strong community support is a fundamental driver and critical success factor for our business.

The Capital Wind Farm has been designed to, and it is required to comply with relevant noise criteria specified in the Minister's Project Approval Conditions. In general, NSW has adopted the South Australian EPA Environmental Noise Guideline which is amongst the most stringent in the world.

The construction of the Capital Wind Farm commenced in early 2008 and involved the installation of 67 wind turbines, with the wind farm reaching operational status at the end of October 2009. During the construction phase of the wind farm, a Construction Environmental Management Plan was agreed with the Department of Planning (DoP) and Infigen Energy complied with its requirements.

Then once in operation, the Operational Environmental Management Plan (OEMP) becomes the key environmental management requirement for the wind farm. As part of the OEMP, Infigen Energy has submitted a Noise Compliance Assessment Plan to the DoP. It is expected that the Noise Compliance Assessment will commence in January 2010.

In addition to fulfilling these mandatory requirements, Infigen Energy has supplied additional reports to the DoP in relation to the analysis of noise complaints made by a number of neighbouring residences. Each complaint has been taken very seriously, with appropriate monitoring devices being deployed at the relevant sites.

These complaints have been subject to additional review with the completion of further detailed noise monitoring, visits by the DoP and project personnel to experience/evaluate the noise impacts



at specific locations. In addition, a comprehensive analysis of noise monitoring results against the data logs of turbine performance and wind characteristics has also been undertaken.

Our compliance testing at Capital Wind Farm remains ongoing in accordance with the OEMP. We remain committed to ensuring that the wind farm is in full compliance with its OEMP and that all noise complaints have been appropriately addressed.

If you have any further queries in regard to Infigen's management and response to noise complaints at the Capital Wind Farm, I would be of course be happy to discuss this matter further with you or any member of the Senate Select Committee on Fuel and Energy.

Yours sincerely,

Miles George  
Managing Director

c.c Geoff Dutailis  
Chief Operating Officer

## **Appendix: Senate Select Committee on Fuel & Energy: Sydney, 12 November 2009.**

### **Senator Farrell:**

I was lucky enough to go along to the Capital Wind Farm and found it absolutely fascinating. One of the issues that were raised out there was the issue of the noise and complaints from nearby residents, whether real or imagined, that noise is being generated at unacceptable levels. I must admit that when you got close up to the turbine there was a bit of noise but you would not think it would have translated to any of the nearby homes. What is the company doing on that issue and how is it dealing with issues at the community level where there is—rightly or wrongly—this perception that wind farms are noisy and interfering with the environment?

### **Mr George:**

We take very seriously our relationship with the local community at all of the wind farms where we operate. As part of the design process, we undertake extensive noise analysis and modelling to determine what the noise impacts will be on any relevant surrounding houses or other relevant receivers of noise. Australia has some of the toughest standards in the world in terms of wind farm noise and those standards are targeted at and met by our existing wind farms. The standard was originally developed in South Australia. It is a standard that noise at any residence should not be greater than 35 decibels or five decibels above the ambient noise in any place. We are required to satisfy that requirement. Where landowners have a concern that they think that noise from the wind farm might exceed what has been approved in terms of the planning application, we take those inquiries very seriously as well. We undertake wind monitoring in some cases, to see whether our original modelling has been in error. We also are certainly willing to have discussions with anybody who says that the noise is affecting them in some way that is not measurable. But the fact is that our wind farms are designed, and do comply, with all of the relevant technical standards. In the event that a wind farm—I am not talking about our wind farms—

### **Senator Farrell:**

I was thinking more in practical terms of that particular wind farm, there obviously were some issues there. Are they continuing issues, or have they now been resolved or is there some process for the resolution of them?

### **Mr George:**

There is process for the resolution of them; they are not yet resolved. So we have had some issues raised about noise from the wind farm from some people who live in reasonable proximity to the wind farm to some people who live a long distance from the wind farm, and they have argued that some sort of inaudible noise is affecting them. The process is that we are undertaking analysis ourselves—

### **Senator Farrell:**

What sort of inaudible noise?

### **Mr George:**

Frequencies below the threshold of hearing.

### **Chair:**

So it is counterintuitive, isn't it?



**Mr George:** Yes, it is counterintuitive. We do have a process for resolving those things, as I said, by testing. That is the process that we will be going through in relation to the concerns that have been raised at Capital regarding noise.

**Senator Farrell:**

Do you think you can resolve those issues? The impression I got from some of the people out at the farm was that there was almost nothing you could do for some people to keep them happy. They would just continue to complain about the noise, even if all of the scientific evidence tended to suggest there really was not a problem there.

**Mr George:**

As I said, we do seek out science where we expect to obtain broad community acceptance of the wind farm. We have certainly got that at Capital. Where you have somebody who opposes the wind farm for some reason—whether it is noise or some other reason—given the scale of the projects, it is inevitable that at some of our sites there will be somebody who does not like it for some reason, whether that is because they perceive there is a noise issue or they do not like the look of the wind farm or they have some other concern. It is sometimes hard to tell whether the issue that is raised about the wind farm as a concern is the underlying issue that that person has. You would be aware that landowners who have turbines on their property receive rent for having those turbines on it. We have had arguments from other neighbouring properties, saying, 'Well, we have to look at the wind farm so we should be paid rent too'—those sorts of arguments. In some cases, I guess I am suggesting that there may be unstated reasons why somebody would complain about the noise of the wind farm. Obviously there are also genuine concerns about noise. What we try to do is to deal with any genuine concerns as best we can.

**Senator Farrell:**

Are you able to keep us updated on how those issues are being dealt with?

**Mr George:**

Yes, we can certainly do that.