

From: Graeme & Catherine Keating

To : Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

Dear Sir

Re: The Social and Economic Impact of Rural Wind Farms

On August 24th 2010 Premier of Victoria Mr. John Brumby granted a Conditional Permit to enable Union Fenosa (Spanish Wind Energy Company) to erect 99 Turbines at Berrybank in South West Victoria.

In submitting this submission to the Senate, we ask the Inquiry to be mind full of the disruptive impact felt by family members and local divided community at Berrybank, since Union Fenosa announced its plans to build a Wind Energy Facility.

We base this submission around the following areas:

Consultation:-

This consultation took place in November 2008 in the form of a Community Information Day held over a 4 hour period.

We noted the following:-

- There were no representatives from Union Fenosa at this meeting.
- Limited notice given to local community members.
- Only limited information given in handout form.
- Saturday is generally a day of local involvement in Team sports in the local towns, thus many community minded people were unable to attend.
- Those who attended were given the “done deal” talk, by the Experts.
- There was no indication that there would be any “negative impact” on the neighbors adjoining the Wind Energy Facility.

Consultation - One to one meeting February 2009

We were given the opportunity to make an appointment with Union Fenosa Representatives to discuss the Proposal:

- This is the only face to face discussion with their representatives.
- At **our instigation** there had been phone discussions with Union Fenosa
- We kept a record of that discussion.

- The Union Fenosa representative took notes **and agreed to send a copy of them to us to confirm his understanding of our discussion.**
- **We received this copy early in August 2009 – 6 Months after the consultation.**
- **Several areas of discussion were omitted – including our Planning rights under current laws in the State of Victoria.**
- **We pointed out to them that we had intention of taking up the “as of right” to build on a parcel of land adjoining the Wind Farm”.**
- **This is part of our Family Farm Plan for the future of our Farming Business.**

It would appear that this was only a token gesture as even though this was a “consultative meeting”; our views were never taken into consideration by Union Fenosa.

Poor consultation with the Berrybank Community.

History now shows that representatives from Union Fenosa had been in the “area”, canvassing local farmers since early 2000.

Many people, including ourselves knew nothing about this, even though plans were being drawn up for us to live 1000 meters directly south of 100 Wind Turbines.

We **now** know that Union Fenosa and local landowners had entered into a:-

- Licence Agreement on 11th September 2006.
- Deed of Assignment on 4th July 2008.

The Confidentiality clause prohibited those landowners from speaking about these contracts to their adjoining neighbors.

This has caused untold damage to the many relationships formed over generations of living and working to-gether in a farming community.

Farming communities need to be strong and united, in order to continue to contribute to the well-being of Regional Victoria. The social disruption caused by lack of consultation and consideration for those considered to be non-stakeholders, will only divide and disrupt viable and functioning farming communities in Country Victoria.

Agriculture in Berrybank:-

Berrybank is considered to be part of the green triangle, with close proximity to major trading centers of Ballarat, Geelong & Colac and only 2 hours from the centre of Melbourne.

This farming area already makes a considerable contribution to the working economy of Victoria.

Berrybank is now a major centre for:

- Grain, including wheat, barley and canola production, with high and reliable yields.
- Significant receival centre for grain from surrounding areas
- Quality Hay Production
- Prime Lambs & Wool production.

The above farming practices cause no interference to their neighbors, and has never caused the obvious disruption to the community that the Proposed “Wind Farm” has.

Living next to a wind farm:

It can now be proven, with reasonable certainty, that significant health problems, both physical and mental are occurring due to the affects of living in close proximity to wind farms.

- In Victoria many people have been forced to vacate their homes, particularly at Waubra, Toora and Cape Bridgewater.
- Families living in close proximity to Wind Turbines are experiencing unexplained harm to their health:-
 - Sleep disturbance
 - Loss of quality of life
 - Stress or psychological distress
 - Inner ear symptoms
 - Headaches
 - Excessive tiredness
 - Palpitations
 - High Blood Pressure
- Confidentiality clauses (affected landowners hosting WEF's) ensure that the true extent of these effects is not revealed.
 - Confidentiality agreements are signed at the time of sale to "protect both parties".
- What /Who are they protecting?
- Through and independent research is imperative.
- Noise monitoring at sufferers homes is essential and must be undertaken by independent, peer reviewed acousticians.
- Our concerns regarding the noise impact on our home have been ignored by all – including the Panel, employed by the Victorian Government.

Fire Concerns.

This conditional permit to erect 99 turbines over 5,034 hectares at Berrybank seriously puts at risk the safety of families who live within and around the turbine project.

A large percentage of these 5,034 hectares is farmed using the "Raised Bed" Farming technique.

In the event of fire, raised bed farming creates hazards and severe restrictions for CFA appliances. CFA Captains, as a matter of practice, do not allow appliances into areas being cropped with raised beds as these areas cannot be negotiated safely. This is due to issues of crew safety and protecting the integrity of the appliances.

The only practical way of fighting major grass/stubble fires is by "aerial water bombing" the area. The introduction of the towers and turbines will create insurmountable difficulties for firefighting from the air – particularly in the event of fire and smoke cover.

Union Fenosa has conceded that aerial firefighting capabilities will be lost by the presence of the Turbines.

To remove a key element from fire-fighting in this situation is reprehensible. With more and more air assistance in fire-fighting being encouraged as an invaluable tool, how could anybody suggest that it is of little significance in this absolutely fire prone area?

The Keating family, like many other families in the area has felt the consequences of a fire ravaging the district on two occasions – 1944 & 1977.

Many lives were lost and property destroyed. The impact on the community was far reaching.

At the Panel hearing for the Berrybank Wind Farm at Camperdown 25th February 2010, Mr. Bob Smith - CFA Fire Safety Officer Barwon/Corangamite Area stated that the current position of the CFA on wind farms on raised beds was:

“There were no wind farms to be built on areas of raised beds”

The CFA preference is that they be built **on open grassed paddocks, suitable for grazing sheep and cattle.**

We are seeking clarity and leadership on this matter.

Who will take responsibility for such an obvious decision?

We feel that Wind Farms and Raised beds are a recipe for a disaster.

Land Values

There is now a very strong concern that the value of neighboring properties will be devalued by the presence of Turbines on adjoining properties.

- In many cases the “Family Farm” is the only asset owned by the affected land owner, and it needs to be protected.
- Clearly there needs to be a significant distance between the boundary of the neighbor and the turbines on the hosting property.
- Negative impacts of the Turbines need to be contained on the hosting property.
- Prior to the wind farm becoming operational – values need to be assessed on adjoining properties not in agreement – **at the cost of the Wind Energy Company.**
- Compensation arrangements need to be addressed.

Why are we submitting to this enquiry?

The answer is simple – we have had enough of Wind Energy Companies sneaking around unsuspecting country communities.

The Confidentiality clause is - to put it simply – quite ridiculous.

What do the Wind Energy companies have to hide – if nothing - visit the neighboring properties and inform them about their proposed activities.

Personal cost

As I hastily prepare this submission there are several things that come to mind:

- I should be preparing the evening meal.
- I will be going to work to-morrow.
- I should be attending to the farming business.
- I have family responsibilities that are being put aside.
- I am also aware of the high personal cost on members of my family who have farmed this property and lived and contributed to this community over many years.
- I have dedicated many “Lost hours” to this cause over the last 2 years.
- On many occasions our health has suffered, because of the stress involved.
- Preparing and presenting our submissions to the Panel Hearing was a very difficult time, and required excessive hours in preparation.
- The suggestion by authorities is to “go through the process” – OK for them they are in full time employment and have the facilities/ staff to support this notion.
- Submitters need to be supported by staff from the DPDC – information needs to be readily available.
- What if we did not have the skills or the time to prepare and present??
- Is this what the Government wants – to deny people of their democratic rights?
- This process exhausts and absorbs lives – wears people down.

There are many other areas of concern regarding this proposal; however time does not permit me to present them to this inquiry.

We are very supportive of the work done by the “Landscape Guardians”, and support their submission. They are a tireless band of dedicated people who have given their time freely, to assist those less able to present their concerns in the Public domain.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit, and we await your favorable response.

Yours Sincerely

Graeme and Catherine Keating.