

Part 3: Impact on lifestyles and wildlife:

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Introduction

Turbines destroy the very thing that people in the country have built up over many years.

Wind farms have a devastating effect on the integrity and beauty of the natural countryside, and also its wildlife. This is contrary to everything we value in the country and impacts adversely on the efforts that have been made both by farmers, and owners of life-style properties, who have worked hard to improve the habitat and the preservation of historic properties.

Wind ‘farms’ (there’s nothing farm-like about them) threaten to increase the annihilation of many of our birds, and forever destroy the natural hills and escarpments, and the peace for which people leave the cities in droves at every chance they get.

Magazines like the RACV continually portray rugged and natural landscape as a desirable venue for a visit; the same can be seen in the booklets on ‘Travel’ included in weekend newspapers. I have yet to see an ad that says: ‘Come and stay overnight under

Impoverishing the very beauty and richness of what we cherish in our rural- and bush land with industrial turbines that are threatening to invade every corner of Australia, is counterproductive to a thriving tourist industry that provides a living for so many country residents.

The much-promised increase in tourism that the Toora residents were lured with by Stanwell, the wind company, did not eventuate, but the rural residents themselves were driven out by the noise from the turbines.

‘But predictions of a boost to “Toora-ism” have not come to pass, says Heather Bligh, who runs the caravan park, co-owns the pub and is the mayor of South Gippsland. “There have been people who have been seriously disadvantaged by the turbines,” she says.’¹

We do not owe this rapacious industry our peace, our wildlife, our tourist destinations, our rolling hills and rocky escarpments. We do not owe them anything; they have already taken enough of our tax dollars in subsidies.

It is still not too late to reclaim control over our land. But the time to reassess what is being done to the countryside in the form of invasive wind energy is running out.

Reforestation of the land

Farmers have not always had good press when it comes to wildlife. But in the last twenty to thirty years, more than anyone else, farmers have gone out of their way to reforest parts of their land and have planted many thousands of trees with the help of Landcare.

It was ironic that at Smeaton, the very people that wanted the turbines on their land had not been involved in the large-scale tree planting in which their neighbours had invested time and money.

So after spending twenty years improving the landscape and ‘doing their bit’ for the environment, those same farmers then had to spend again their time, effort, money and emotional wear and tear, defending that countryside against the wind companies that were luring their neighbours with ‘easy-seeming’ dollars and signing them up for the next twenty years to host a wind farm on their place.

First the government supports farmers in improving the land, then it destroys it with

¹ Sydney Morning Herald, Good Weekend, September 4, 2004, John van Tiggelen, ‘An ill wind blowing’

In this area, from Smeaton, to Kooroocheang and to Clunes, there are at least seven landowners of large acreages that have spent the last twenty or so years planting permanent plantations to aid wildlife and the environment. I will look later at the impact that turbines have on wildlife and why it is enormously discouraging to see their efforts threatened by wind farms.

, who had to buy a house in Ballarat to be able to get a night's sleep away from the turbines, have a 4 000 acre farm at Waubra. Part of their land, in the slope of a beautifully undulating valley, is a bush land area that was put aside for wildlife – fenced in to keep out stock. The turbines threaten the peace that wildlife needs to be able to nest there.

Restoring historic homesteads

Close to the proposed turbine site at Stony Rises and Tuki, was a run-down homestead that had been abandoned because it had been gutted by fire a few years ago.

A couple spent years restoring it, and investing time, money, effort, and thoughtful care, in bringing the homestead back to its former beauty.

I interviewed them in 2007, and together we compiled a letter to send to The Courier, that expressed their views on this subject. I have deleted their names, but the original letter can be sighted, if need be.

‘15.05, 2007

Letters to the Editor
The Courier
letters@thecourier.com.au

Allowing the invasion of industrial wind plants on land previously zoned for rural and agricultural purposes is a total sell out of the people there – not just of the farmers who have worked the land, but of newcomers to the country areas that have often made an enormous financial and emotional investment in a lifestyle change. How can Hepburn Shire Council on the one hand promote the beautiful landscape as a tourist attraction and a place to move to for peace and tranquility, and on the other hand allow the annihilation of the very attractions they advertise, ignoring their own guidelines!

We thought we'd found the beautiful 'peace and tranquility', and now we find ourselves near a proposed site for wind turbines on Stony Rises, in the Smeaton / Kooroocheang area.

When we bought this house, it was a burnt out shell of thick stone walls, with piles of sheep manure and dead sheep inside the house, and piles of burnt rubbish strewn outside. But we felt the peace of its setting and we loved its sense of history. One of its rooms was built in 1860 and still has a bark roof, overlaid with wooden shingles.

The house has a heritage overlay. To restore it took an enormous amount of physical effort and care, working in close consultation with the architectural heritage advisor of the Shire Council in our repairs. We thought it was worthwhile restoring a building of historical significance to this area.

Other property owners have put a similar effort into their newly purchased properties, investing heavily in the quality of a rural lifestyle. None of us would have come here had we known that we could not rely on the shire to protect its residents from industrial development in country areas.

Kooroocheang'

The point that they never would have invested that kind of effort in a country property if they'd known of proposed turbines in the area emerges again and again from prospective buyers of country land, who lose all interest in a place when they find out that turbines are nearby, or are proposed for the area. I have discussed this in another part of this submission.

The same sentiments were expressed recently by Tony Hodgson (who co-founded the insolvency specialist Ferrier Hodgson), while objecting to the proposed wind farm at Collector, NSW (and 'Collector' is a good name for it, considering that one of the landowners who wants the turbines is an absentee landlord, a Double Bay café owner).

Tony Hodgson says: "My position would be if I knew there was going to be a wind farm here I would not have bought it five years ago. I could have gone anywhere."²

'The Collector protests reflect widespread concern in rural communities where wind farms are being proposed...Community opposition to wind farms is a global issue.'³

In Smeaton, on the road to Clunes, is an amazing restoration of a historic double-storey stone homestead - 'Vale Hill' that was gutted by fire in 1977. The shed has been restored as well, and the garden planted out with a grove of lemon trees and many others. The house has a wide vista of the surrounding countryside in three directions. They also keep rare cattle to preserve their species.

To the west is now the distant view of the red flashing lights of Waubra at night. So far it is only distant. But any closer turbines would have defeated the whole point of spending so much money, time, care and love to restore a historic rural home. The whole community benefits from the efforts they've made.

² The Australian, January 22, 2011, Graham Lloyd, 'Tycoon Tony Hodgson's tilt at march of turbines'
³ *ibid.*

Owners invest both financially and emotionally in these stunning properties. It is unacceptable that huge industrial noisy machines can be built in rural areas with barely a whimper of dissent from the government.

Promise of peace

In *The Age* of April 9, 2007, Louise Le Nay, wrote a long article: ‘Forget the simple life, enjoy the silence’ to explain why they invested in a “tree change.”

She talks of the peace, of becoming a part of the social life of the community, and of the natural environment there:

‘On our farm, which is not a farm at all by our neighbour’s standards, there are spotted gums and messmates and spikey xanthorrea. Our “stock” is wallabies. We have three dams, and spoonbills wade in them, solemn and stately and absurd.

She also talks of the enormous effort of cleaning up the old property to restore it:

‘By day we work. We collect up discarded snarls of wire and twine, wooden pallets, polystyrene boxes, feed bags. In one of the machinery sheds we find an old chandelier hanging from the ceiling. We leave it there.’⁴

Why would you invest all this effort, only to have it destroyed by a wind farm nearby?

Advertising scuttled by the editorial

The unquestioning ‘obedience’ to the wind farm plague – without even finding out whether they live up the claims that the industry makes of it, has led to ludicrous situations like the booklet ‘Secrets of Central Victoria,’ that in its Issue 16 - Winter edition of 2008, used both the visual impact of the front page (of the Waubra wind farm – how ironic, considering that noise is driving people out of there) and a double inner page of an editorial, to support wind farms.

The booklet is designed to advertise many tourist attractions in the area, including the well-known Lavandula near Daylesford. It’s a lovely place. I’ve been there twice. Trees and orchards with rare species of apple trees, herb gardens, shaded nooks and crannies and a restored old house, a café for lunches, geese at a dam nearby – lovely – making a mint from tourism.

Try putting the Waubra wind farm next door and see how that will add to the attraction.

⁴ The Age, April 9, 2007, Louise Le Nay, ‘Forget the simple life, enjoy the silence’

The irony became more evident when I noticed that one of the staunch supporters of the Spa Country Landscape Guardians that fought the Tuki wind farm had an advertisement in the same book, with a lovely photo of the historic Smeaton Homestead as a backdrop to her catering business.

What are we thinking of?

Danger to wildlife

Louise La Ney describes that part of the beauty of her move to the country includes the sight of wild birds on her dam. On my small property in the country, I see almost on a daily basis some form of bird of prey – hawks or eagles (that come and go). There are rosellas, New Holland honeyeaters, crested native pigeons, egrets overhead, ducks that sit in the old pine tree or on the chimney pots, more rarely spoonbills, kookaburras on occasional visits, galahs, magpies that I love, flocks of tiny birds with a flash of yellow under their wings as they take off – the birds make up an integral part of the beauty and delight of living in the country.

I have put aside a quarter of my place for a bush block, planted out in 2003, that survived remarkably well the dry years, and is lapping up the recent rains! There is a dam in the middle of it for birdlife.

People coming to the country, especially in the last twenty / thirty years, have gone out of their way to make land attractive to wildlife.

The advent of the turbines – aided by legislative changes in their favour, by tax subsidies and mandatory power purchases from electricity companies, and having absolutely no controls imposed on them to force them to actually prove the truth of their claims – are fast making terrible inroads on wildlife and on the peace of the country that makes it so

attractive to lifestyle investments and to tourism. It is fostering world-wide despair amongst those who care for land and its preservation.

Destruction of wildlife

The following is a look at the effect that turbines have on wildlife, and in particular birds, despite the wind industries' claims that there are no problems.

Threat to bird life from power cable constructions

Wind farms cover a large area of land and they need many kilometres of extra overhead power lines to join the turbines to the grid. This in itself already poses an added danger to birdlife, especially to the larger birds. Turbines add more damage, as they are deadly to migratory birds, birds of prey, and large birds like the Brolgas in the Southwest of Victoria – a species already endangered in that area. Wild ducks and geese are also killed by power lines.

In the Mt Mercer wind farm case, the power lines are proposed to go through 52

properties, which belies the comment by the Australian Wind Energy Association:
‘...wind farms are often located close to where the electricity is actually used. This means that the losses usually associated with the transmission of electricity over long distances (up to 10%) can be significantly reduced.’⁵

More power lines to take the electricity from turbines to the grid add a greater risk factor to bird mortality from wind farms.

An article by ‘Partners in Flight,’ an American organisation for bird conservation, makes the following point:

‘Why do birds crash into power lines?’

‘It is generally believed that birds collide with power lines because the lines are invisible to them, or because they do not see the line before it is too late to avoid it. Birds’ limited ability to judge distance makes power lines especially difficult to see, even as they are flying closer to them. Large birds are especially vulnerable because they are not always quick enough to change their direction before it is too late. Poor weather conditions, such as fog, rain or snow, as well as darkness may make the lines even more difficult to see.

‘What happens when birds collide with power lines?’

Birds can either be killed outright by the impact, or be injured by contact with electrical lines, resulting in crippling which is likely fatal. Electrocutions can also start wildfires and cause power outages. An estimated 5-15 percent of all power outages can be attributed to bird collisions with power lines.’⁶

It is therefore not surprising that ‘Navigators property owners have vowed to fight any move to create a new powerline easement through bushland to connect the proposed Mt Mercer wind farm to the electricity grid.’⁷

I mentioned the Mt Mercer power line risk in my chapter on fire risks from turbines; running a line through bushland, as mentioned above, would endanger not only the bird and bat life in that area, it would disturb the social network needed for koala breeding habits.

The threat from turbines on bats is becoming increasingly disturbing world wide. Bats are vital for controlling pests and also mosquitoes, and their loss will have wide-reaching effects on humans as well as on animals. In the US, the bat mortality from turbines has been called significant.

The comments from Marie Anne Mackenzie, a landowner who has turbines on her land at the Challicum Hills wind farm, is instructive about the invasive nature of wind farms:

5 Australian Wind Energy Association, ‘Wind Farm Basics’, Fact Sheet 3 ‘Wind Farming & the Environment’

6 Partners in Flight, ‘A Fine Line for Birds, A Guide to Bird Collisions at Power Lines,’ April 2005, <http://www.fws.gov/birds/documents/powerlines/pdf> [U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, sponsor of Partners in Flight Outreach Program]

7 *The Courier*, July 18, 2009

“I got into it for green reasons, but I was naïve. Our farm is now an industrial site, with a substantial road running through it, as well as power lines, less trees, workpads pressed into the hills, an ugly substation and a passing parade of workers.” Her experience has changed her view of wind energy. “The business imperatives overrule the environmental ones. If we just put wind towers everywhere so we can use energy with impunity, then we haven’t made any progress at all. The problem with the focus on renewable energy is that it has lessened the impetus to conserve and clean up the energy we already do use.”⁸

LOOK BEFORE YOU LEAP: We need full and objective studies on effects of wind turbines on flora and fauna BEFORE they are approved

What happens if you don’t?

The following is a look at a few of the wind farms that have had devastating effects on wildlife, and the fact that nothing is ever done that averts the downward spiral into unacceptable destruction of the little we have left. Both governments and wind companies make polite noises, and the destruction goes on, and often worsens.

Altamont Pass

One of the worst mortality rates are quoted regularly from Altamont Pass, in California. Attempts to shut it down, or have some changes put in place, have failed.

It was built across a well-known migratory bird path, and raptor habitat, and has been called by the Audubon Bird Society: “probably the worst site ever chosen for a wind energy project.”⁹

Yet nothing has worked to stop it. Empty words and rhetoric, and court challenges for the wind company to do something about it, are getting nowhere. Research into bird deaths there has had no results to stop the slaughter.

Once a wind farm is up, it’s there to stay.

In California, where turbines were abandoned and are no longer feeding power into the grid, there is: ‘Spinning, post-industrial junk which generates nothing but bird kills.’¹⁰ [at Altamont Pass, Tehachapi, and San Geronio – only at San Geronio was a law in place that forced the company to remove the derelict turbines, but the concrete bases stay.]

2005:

‘Wind companies like FPL Energy, wildlife groups and the US Fish and Wildlife Service

⁸ *Sydney Morning Herald Good Weekend*, September 4, 2004, John van Tiggelen, ‘An ill wind blowing’

⁹ *American Thinker*, February 15, 2010, Andrew Walden, ‘Wind Energy’s Ghosts’

¹⁰ *ibid.*,

are trying to agree on ways to lower the risk for birds flying into big spinning turbine blades at the 584-megawatt Altamont Pass wind center in rolling hills about 50 miles east of San Francisco. Altamont Pass is along a migratory path for raptors and near a nesting area for golden eagles.

‘The yearly death toll includes more than 100 golden eagles plus red-tailed hawks, burrowing owls, kestrels, and meadowlarks, according to the Audubon Society.

‘The Alameda County Board of Supervisors will hold a meeting June 2 [2005] on renewal of operating permits for Altamont Pass developers.’¹¹

‘Wildlife and Environmental groups like the Audubon Society and the Sierra Club are challenging the permits and want an environmental review of Altamont Pass and the wind industry to take steps to reduce the bird kills.’¹²

The groups wanted the deadliest turbines removed and wind generation to be shut down for the four winter months during the main migratory period.

2006

‘The ageing installation at Altamont Pass in California is often cited when it comes to showing the dangers turbines can pose to birds. Each year turbines there kill between 800 and 1300 birds of prey, including 75 golden eagles and several hundred red-tailed hawks, according to research carried out by the California Energy Commission.

Hard evidence is thin on the ground: ‘Mark Avery from the UK’s Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) says it is large birds – eagles, vultures, storks and the like – that seem to be the most vulnerable. “Large birds are not that nippy, and they can struggle to get out of the way of turbines, particularly in bad weather, or the dark, or if they’re tired,” he says. “We need to explore all this in more detail.”

‘After re-analysing previous studies last year, researchers at the University of Birmingham, UK, concluded: “Available evidence suggests that wind farms reduce the abundance of many bird species at the wind farm site.” But the most striking aspect of their report was how little evidence is available. The researchers found just 15 articles drawing on 19 datasets, of which only nine were complete. Lead author Gavin Stewart says that many studies are kept secret, sometimes for commercial reasons, with statistics on bird kills being kept from bird conservationists.’¹³

2009

It’s not getting any better at Altamont Pass:

‘A recent report shows the number of birds killed by Altamont wind turbines is increasing, prompting a grassroots group to go to court to stop it.

11 *Planet Ark*, daily news story, May 16, 2005, Leonard Anderson, ‘Big California Wind Farm Wrestles with Bird Deaths’

12 *ibid.*

13 *New Scientist Environment*, July 8, 2006, Ed Douglas, ‘The hidden cost of wind turbines’

‘Four years ago, environmental groups filed suit after the Alameda County Board of Supervisors effectively allowed the farm’s several owners to keep killing bird despite evidence that the deaths could be greatly lessened. A resulting legal settlement was supposed to cut in half the number of annual deaths. But according to a recent scientific report, Altamont wind turbines are shredding raptors at an increasing rate. The total number of birds killed each year may now top 5, 000.

‘The report, authored by Shawn Smallwood, a respected scientist who has been studying bird deaths east of Livermore since the late 1990s, shows that the number of overall bird deaths in 2005 to 2007 jumped 23 percent compared to the last major study, which looked at bird mortality from 1998 to 2003.

The groups that sued the company and the county, are going back to court.

‘Californians for Renewable Energy ...is asking a judge to order the wind farm to close on October 1. The request also asks that it remain shuttered until the county completes an environmental impact report and the wind companies start abiding by the previous settlement. “They didn’t remove the old derelict turbines, the lethal turbines,” said Michael Boyd, president of the group...’¹⁴

Jeff Miller from the Center for Biological Diversity had opposed the earlier settlement because ‘...the settlement included no mechanism to make the wind companies replace

the old turbines with new ones, and so a 50 percent reduction in deaths would likely never be reached.’¹⁵

And they were right. And Boyd argues that the ‘...problem wouldn’t be so bad now if the wind companies and the county had lived up to the agreement. “The lesson here is settlements don’t always work out,” he said.’¹⁶

2010

And so it goes on:

‘Now, under a new agreement with the state, the company responsible for the largest bank of turbines in the Altamont Pass will replace the structures with models that are more bird-friendly.

‘They’ll also contribute millions towards habitat restoration for threatened avian species.’

¹⁷

¹⁴ *National Wind Watch*, October 28, 2009, from Robert Gammon, *East Bay Express*, www.eastbayexpress.com, September 29, 2009 ‘Altamont bird slaughter worsens’

¹⁵ *National Wind Watch*, October 28, 2009, from Robert Gammon, *East Bay Express*, www.eastbayexpress.com, September 29, 2009 ‘Altamont bird slaughter worsens’

¹⁶ *ibid.*,

¹⁷ *NBC Bay Area*, December 7, 2010, Matt Baume, ‘Wind Towers Slaying Birds’ NBC Local Media, first published, Dec 7 2010

But will they? And their track record is not good, neither is the track record of the Alameda County.

‘Many of the turbines date back to the 1980s, and were installed without consideration for birds’ flight paths...

‘The Altamont Pass is a crucial point in the state’s wind-powered energy industry. It’s a narrow cut in the hills between the ocean and central valley, where winds reach high speeds.’¹⁸

It is obvious that a wind farm should never have been put there in the first place, in the 1980s.

The point is this: it is now 2010, and they’re still there, and up till now no effort made has stopped the enormous inroad the turbines are making on the bird population there.

No species can maintain that kind of annual destruction. The time to say ‘no’ is before the turbines are built.

And from the government bodies there, and from the wind companies, continual resistance to really do anything at all about the slaughter of birds at Altamont Pass emerges. The companies involved did not comply with the legal settlement to remove

older high-risk turbines; old turbines were not replaced by new ones; ‘a representative from one of the companies declined to be interviewed... Smallwood had recommended a four-month shutdown, but the companies resisted.’¹⁹

And: ‘Historically, the wind companies have contended that Smallwood and his research team overestimate the missed-bird factor [which allows for dead birds missed due to scavengers, like foxes, etc., taking them away], even though his method has been accepted by peer-reviewed scientific journals and the California Energy Commission.’²⁰

The point is this - replacing old turbines with newer ones is not a panacea to bird deaths at wind farms:

The newer ones are even bigger, the blade diameter much greater, and the speed at the blade tip much faster. The so-called ‘new and improved’ turbines are killing 1000-2000 soaring Griffon Vultures and tens of thousands of other birds each year in Spain.

Elsewhere

I have spent some time going through what is happening at Altamont Pass [I’m sorry!] to show no matter how horrific bird mortality rates at a wind farm are – the wind farm is there to stay, even killing birds when the turbine is no longer connected to the grid – a

¹⁸ *NBC Bay Area*, December 7, 2010, Matt Baume, ‘Wind Towers Slaying Birds’ NBC Local Media, first published, Dec 7 2010

¹⁹ *National Wind Watch*, October 28, 2009, from Robert Gammon, *East Bay Express*, www.eastbayexpress.com, September 29, 2009 ‘Altamont bird slaughter worsens’

²⁰ *ibid.*,

Wolfe Island: the struggle to stop the damage goes on elsewhere.

At Canada's Wolfe Island Eco-Power Centre² wind farm the '...third study (of the farm's first eight months of operation) uncovered 1,962 bird and bat deaths, for a daily average of eight a day. Thirty-three different bird species were included in the fatality report.'²¹

'Bird, bat deaths prompt call for St. Lawrence Valley wind moratorium'

The 'Save the River' group want a three-year delay in development of more wind power along the St. Lawrence River because: '...recently released data indicating the 86-turbine wind farm on Wolfe Island, a Canadian Island near Kingston, Ontario, show a higher than usual mortality among birds and bats.'²²

The group's assistant director Stephanie Weiss, says '...a moratorium would give them time to find out why avian mortality rates are so high on Wolfe Island. It's the only wind

farm on the St. Lawrence River, and it's six months into a three-year study on bird and bat deaths caused by turbines.'

She says: "There are a lot of reasons why this could happen. Wolfe Island itself is an important area, designated by Nature Canada. It's part of a fly way, which is really important. We know there's some really essential grassland habitat here. We know it's an incredibly important over-wintering raptor area."²³

I ask: if it's a Nature Canada designated important area, what are the turbines doing there? It's not the 1980s, it's the 21st Century, and bird and bat slaughter at wind farms is still going ahead. If Altamont Pass is anything to go by, I don't like the group's chances.

An earlier article pointed out that wind companies are benefitting from a double standard, and that little political pressure is applied to them. '...Imagine the public outcry if Chevron [an American energy company] was slaughtering more than 5,000 birds a year, including nearly 500 federally protected golden eagles.'²⁴ [at Altamont]

Smøla: Government ignores warnings at Smøla, near Norway

In 1989, Birdlife International made Smøla, a set of islands near Norway, an Important Bird Area because it had one of the highest densities of white-tailed eagles [also called Sea Eagles] in the world.

²¹ *National Wind Watch*, Ontario August 7, 2010. Noel Brinkerhoff, David Wallechinsky, www.allgov.com 6 August 2010, 'Canadian wind turbine kills 10 birds and bats a day'

²² *North Country Public Radio*, www.northcountrypublicradio.org 6 August 2010 'Bird, bat deaths prompt call for St. Lawrence Valley wind moratorium' viewed on: www.wind-watch.org/news/2010/08/07

²³ *North Country Public Radio*, www.northcountrypublicradio.org 6 August 2010 'Bird, bat deaths prompt call for St. Lawrence Valley wind moratorium' viewed on: www.wind-watch.org/news/2010/08/07

²⁴ *National Wind Watch*, October 28, 2009, from Robert Gammon, *East Bay Express*, www.eastbayexpress.com, September 29, 2009 'Altamont bird slaughter worsens'

2006

‘Conservationists fear the effect on eagles and other soaring birds of the 234-turbine windfarm proposed for Lewis in the Western Isles. Sea eagles, driven to extinction in Britain nearly a century ago, are beginning to thrive in the Western Isles, thanks to a 30-year reintroduction project. Also known as the white-tailed eagle, it is Europe’s largest eagle and breeds in significant numbers on Smola.

‘The Smola farm [windfarm] was built between 2001 and 2005, and the RSPB [Royal Society for the Protection of Birds] said **Norway’s government had ignored warnings of the danger to sea eagles.** [my emphasis]

‘Two of the dead birds had been sliced in two. Much of the wind farm is rarely visited and it is possible other deaths had not been detected, the RSPB said.’²⁵

Will Weber from Hawk Watchers notes of Smøla: ‘The poorly sited project all but eradicated the resident population of white-tailed eagles, killing nine eagles in 10 months, including all the region’ first-year birds, and apparently causing the decline of breeding

pairs in the vicinity from 19 to one pair.’²⁶ [Similar problems are arising out of the Woolnorth wind farm in Tasmania – more information later.]

Migratory birds may be missed in poorly constructed, or of short duration, pre-construction surveys: ‘...deficient pre-construction studies at the wrong time of year or day or in the wrong weather may not detect migrating birds in the area at all. Experienced migration observers will tell you that more than 50 percent of the total seasonal passage of some species may occur in just a few days or even hours and it would be at these times of high density migration when deaths would most likely occur. These few hours of migration are an easy window to miss for poorly designed or executed preconstruction studies.’²⁷

In the case of the wind farm proposed for Chepstowe and the Brolgas endangered there: ‘Due to lack of data, the cumulative impacts of wind farm development on Brolgas in South West Victoria can not be determined with confidence,’²⁸ says the Department of Sustainability and Environment.

One can but wonder who did the flora and fauna study for the Smøla wind farm in Norway.

Just as one would wonder who gave the Woolnorth Wind Farm in Tasmania the go-ahead, and who did the flora and fauna study there.

²⁵ The Independent, January 28, 2006, Michael McCarthy, Environmental Editor, ‘RSPB warning as wind turbines kill sea eagles’

²⁶ <http://www.windaction.org/news/11446>, Will Weber, August 1, 2007, ‘Wind Turbines Spin a Web of Worries for Hawk Watchers’

²⁷ *ibid.*,

²⁸ Submission on behalf of The Department of Sustainability and Environment, Panel Hearing 5th December 2007, Royal Mail Hotel, Dunkeld

Tasmania: Woolnorth wind farm

Misleading information from the Australian Wind Energy Association for Woolnorth

In its Fact Sheets of ‘Wind Farm Basics’ the Australian Wind Energy Association [AusWEA] states:

‘Monitoring of the Codrington, Woolnorth and King Island wind farms has found bird deaths to be below levels predicted and accepted during the wind farm approval process. The rate of bird mortality on those sites ranged from between 0.23 to 2.7 birds per year, none of which was a rare, threatened or endangered species.’²⁹

The above statements made by the association are just not true.

- a) At **Codrington**, the people themselves (who had turbines on their land, wrote in a letter to the Planning Panels Victoria: ‘We have also learnt from experience that wind turbines are not “bird friendly”’.

“Doonbar” is located between the Eumeralla River and the Southern Ocean. These water bodies attract sea birds, water birds, falcons etc. and we have always enjoyed the presence of birds. It was therefore very upsetting to find dead birds under the wind turbines, particularly during the first few months of operation. These were mostly falcons (about one a week for the first two months).³⁰

The above comment about Codrington’s birds is reinforced in John van Tiggelen’s lengthy article on wind farms in the Good Weekend, 2004:

‘Several wedge-tailed eagles have been killed by turbines in South Australia and Tasmania. Thursday Island’s two turbines, in the Torres Strait, have reportedly killed an osprey each, and the Codrington wind farm in Western Victoria has wiped out numerous falcons – “about one a week for the first two months”, according to the farmer whose land supported eight of the 14 turbines.’³¹

Given that AusWea said that bird fatalities were 0.23 to 2.7 birds per year, they are under-reporting bird fatalities considerably. Just from that one sentence from , they already found 8 dead falcons in two months. **All bird fatality studies add a margin for birds missed due to scavengers, like foxes.** It is therefore definite that the actual number of bird deaths is higher than even the said.

29 AusWEA Fact Sheet 3, Wind Farming and the Environment, ‘How do Wind Turbines impact Birds’

30 Letter from , November 25, 2001, to the Planning Panels Victoria, Department of Infrastructure GPO Box 2797Y, Melbourne Vic 3001

31 *Sydney Morning Herald, Good Weekend*, September 4, 2004, John van Tiggelen, ‘An ill wind blowing’

- b) **Woolworth:** They said that no *threatened* birds had been killed at the Woolnorth wind farm.

There have been numerous deaths of the Wedge-tailed Eagle at Woolnorth.

Tasmania's Wedge-tailed Eagle is a threatened sub-species

That eagle is a **threatened** sub-species of the mainland wedge-tailed eagle. Tasmania's eagle is bigger, and it has been severely decimated by the Woolnorth wind farm, as following headlines will show.

'Larger than its mainland cousin at a 2.2-metre wingspan, its head often encircled with a regal golden feather ruff, the Tasmania wedge-tailed numbers fewer than 1000 birds.'³²

The birds remaining of this eagle are actually less. Reported in another article I will mention later, the number is quoted at 440, but I spoke with Simon John Kennedy, a bio-scientist specialising in Australian fauna; when I said there were only 1000 Tasmanian eagles left, he said: 'Try 300.' Ongoing reports show him to be much closer to the truth.

The headlines tell the same story as at Altamont Pass. Continued deaths of birds – in this case, a mighty symbol of our rural land and endangered in Tasmania – despite some efforts made by the wind company to at times shut down some of the turbines.

But the windfarms stay. It is too late, and the loss of wildlife goes on, often worse.

Headlines for Woolnorth tell the same story as elsewhere.

2006

'Minister claims eagle death in veto push'

'...it emerged yesterday that the rare eagle died after colliding with wind turbines at the Woolnorth Wind Farm in Tasmania's northwest in wind gusts of 140km/h.

'According to a report before the federal environment department, it appears the eagle's wings were severed and the bird was decapitated by the turbines.'³³

2007

'Fears for wedge-tailed eagles at Woolnorth wind farm'

'It's claimed that the number of wedge-tailed eagles dying at the Woolnorth wind farm in Tasmania's far north-west is continuing to rise.

'Over the past month, two of the endangered birds have been killed after flying into turbines.

³² National Times, Andrew Darby, December 14, 2010, 'Where climate and conservation collide' <http://www.nationaltimes.com.au/action>

³³ Townsville Bulletin, April 28, 2006, Ewin Hannan, 'Minister claims eagle death in veto push'

‘The wind power company, Roaring 40s, says ten eagles have been killed at the wind farm over the past four years.

[In his interview with Stateline Tasmania, Mark Kelleher blustered over the numbers when asked by the interviewer, Airlie Ward: ““Birds Tasmania says there have been 14 deaths since Woolnorth has been in operation. Are those numbers right?”

– ‘ “Look, our numbers suggest...confirm 10 since the operation of the wind farm commenced in 2003, four years ago....It’s possible that there could be additional ones to that so I’m not going to dispute their numbers.”’]

‘But Dr Eric Woehler from Birds Tasmania believes the figure is higher and is calling for action.

“Clearly it’s unacceptable, I mean, you can’t just keep on killing an endangered species.”³⁴

But it seems that you can.

2008 January

‘Green power is black hole for rare eagles’

It is in the nature of things, as one animal deserts its territory, another one comes to take its place. Nature abhors a vacuum. And so it is at the Woolnorth wind farm for the eagles.

‘Australia’s biggest wind farm in north-west Tasmania has become a “black hole” for endangered wedge-tailed eagles.’³⁵

Again, the wind company understates numbers:

‘Woolnorth’s owners say 11 of the birds have died, but Dr Woehler said Birds Tasmania believed that up to 18 may have been fatally injured by the rotors, which are at their most dangerous in specific north-west conditions.

‘Despite their acute vision, the eagles are failing to pick out turbine blades with tips that can rotate at 300 kmh, according to Eric Woehler, chairman of Birds Tasmania.

“‘It’s killing eagles that were resident and drawing more in from the surrounding areas, so it will continue to be a black hole for these birds,” Dr Woehler said.’³⁶

³⁴ ABC News, Friday September 21, 2007, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2007/09/21/2040323.htm>

³⁵ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, January 3, 2008, Andrew Darby, (accessed on National Wind Watch, 7/01/2008, <http://www.wind-watch.org/news/2008/01/02/green-power-is-black-hole-for-rare-eagle>

³⁶ *ibid.*

2008 August

'Toll rises as wedge-tailed eagles fall prey to turbines'

'The toll of endangered wedge-tailed eagles is climbing at the southern hemisphere's largest wind farm, in north-west Tasmania.

'A breeding pair died at the 62-turbine Woolnorth Wind farm earlier this month, its owner, Roaring 40s, confirmed yesterday.

'The Chinese-Australian company said this took to 16 the total of wedge-tailed eagle collisions since 2002, but Greens Leader Bob Brown said more had died and been taken away by carrion eaters such as Tasmanian Devils.

“When they become locked onto their prey they are oblivious of things like rotating blades, and this has been known for years.”

'The latest pair are understood to have been cut down in flight several days apart.

'The second died despite the presence of eagle monitors on the ground, and a decision to shut down some of the turbines.

'The Tasmanian sub-species was assessed as endangered by the Federal Environment Department, which said in 2000 that the bird was declining in numbers **from around 440 adults.**'³⁷ [my emphasis – the following article states there are only 130 successful breeding pairs]

2010 - yet again

'Deaths of rare eagles rise'

'The number of eagles killed by turbine blades at one of Australia's largest wind farms is climbing, with a rare juvenile wedge-tailed eagle the 22nd to die at Woolnorth in Tasmania's north-west.

'The farm is killing two protected species at the rate of about 3.2 eagles a year, according to a count by the operator, Roaring 40s.

'The endangered Tasmanian sub-species of the wedge-tailed eagle is estimated by the state's National Parks and Wildlife Service to number only 130 successful breeding pairs.'³⁸

In another article, 'Braddon MHA Paul O'Halloran says it was the north-west's region only successful fledgling for the entire breeding season...He called on the Environment Minister David O'Byrne to take action...Mr O'Byrne has promised to investigate...He

³⁷ *The Age*, Friday August 29, 2008, Andrew Darby, 'Toll rises as wedge-tailed eagles fall prey to turbines'

³⁸ *The Age*, November 17, 2010, Andrew Darby, 'Deaths of rare eagles rise'

said the incident is concerning, given the low number of breeding pairs left.³⁹

The wind company's avian ecologist Cindy Hull said that their efforts to minimise bird fatalities were not working: "The frustration for us is that the rate is staying constant despite our mitigation efforts,"⁴⁰

[The company's efforts have included shutting down some of the turbines when birds are sighted and even using bird scaring devices – the '...audibly painful long range acoustic device (LRAD) that Japanese whalers use against anti-whaling activists.'⁴¹

But companies are cagey. In an overview of the Woolnorth problems with the eagles, Andrew Darby says that the windfarm operator, Roaring 40s, '...refused access to pictures of the Woolnorth fatalities.'⁴²

I have gone to considerable trouble to show how:

- The Australian Wind Association drastically understated the trouble of bird fatalities at wind farms and lied about the threatened nature of the eagles killed at Woolnorth,
- that wind companies understate the number of birds killed and
- that mitigating measures to stop or reduce bird fatalities often don't work, or in the case of Altamont Pass, that settlements are not followed by the wind company; the county (US) does not supervise them, and it is up to the concerned individual or conservation group, to take them back to court once again.

Wind companies continue to mislead

In 2005 the Yaloak Wind Farm proposal near Ballan was rejected by the Victorian Planning Department because of concerns about the wedge-tailed eagles nearby.

In 2010 the same company, 'Pacific Hydro' was back with another proposal at Yaloak – and despite being aware of the reason of its being rejected last time, you hear this:

'West Wind and Pacific Hydro have both moved to allay residents fears about their proposed windfarms, saying they will have minimal impact on the surrounding environment and homes.'⁴³

How much do we protect our wildlife here?

Our government's track record in making sure that the surveys done before a wind farm application is approved are thorough, is not good.

39 ABC News, November 16, 2010, 'Greens demand action over eagle's death,'
<http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2010/11/16/3068104.htm>

40 *The Age*, November 17, 2010, Andrew Darby, 'Deaths of rare eagles rise'

41 National Times, December 14, 2010, Andrew Darby, 'Where climate and conservation collide'
<http://www.nationaltimes.com.au/action/> (accessed 15.01.2011)

42 National Times, December 14, 2010, Andrew Darby, 'Where climate and conservation collide'
<http://www.nationaltimes.com.au/action/> (accessed 15.01.2011)

43 Geelong Advertiser, May 7, 2010, Kerri-Ann Hobbs, 'Protest over Moorabool energy farms'

Again and again, a proposal is fast tracked, and even if the wind farm is a large one, such as the one for Stockyard Hill, no Environment Effects Statement is asked for by the Government.

‘The Victorian Government has ruled that a large wind farm at Stockyard Hill, west of Ballarat, will not need an environmental effects statement (EES).’⁴⁴

The above proposal at the time was for almost 300 turbines – an enormous number that would impact on wildlife for miles around. Justin Madden decided that he would accept the wind company’s studies.

This was despite the fact that the ‘...Department of Sustainability and Environment have commissioned a study into the cumulative impact of wind farms on the broilga, that study is a multi-year study, it’s only just begun,’” Cassie Franzose from the Western Plains Landscape Guardians pointed out.⁴⁵

When the Moorabool Shire Council recently rejected the Yaloak proposal mentioned above, the then Victorian Planning Minister, Justin Madden, ‘called in’ the wind farm proposal, taking it out of the Shire Council’s hands. (Brisbane Ranges Landscape Guardians Press Release to the Ballan News, May 20, 20100)

Justin Madden ruled that: ‘...a 14-turbine wind farm near Ballan will not need an environmental effects statement...In his reasoning, Mr Madden says the project may result in the deaths of some wedge-tailed eagles but is unlikely to have much effect on flora or visual amenity.’⁴⁶

And this is despite the fact that the Parwan Valley ‘...has been nominated as being of State significance. The classification states that the Parwan Valley is significant for aesthetic, historical, social and scientific/technical issues and should be protected.’⁴⁷

Flora and Fauna reports paid for by the wind company are not likely to be as stringent as objective and unbiased assessments.

Who did the flora and fauna study for the Woolnorth Wind Farm that has killed so many eagles, including the only surviving fledgling from that area?

Who did the flora and fauna study for Altamont Pass in America? How did a wind farm in the middle of a prime migration corridor get the go-ahead?

44 ABC News, October 14, 2008,

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/10/14/2390383.htm?site=news>, accessed 29/07/2009

45 ABC News, October 14, 2008,

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/10/14/2390383.htm?site=news>, accessed 29/07/2009

46 ABC Ballarat, www.abc.net.au 16 April 2010

47 (Ballan News, May 20, 20100, Brisbane Ranges Landscape Guardians Press Release)

Flora and fauna report for the proposed turbine site at Stony Rises, in Victoria

I have studied Brett Lane's flora and fauna report for the proposal for a wind farm on the site of the Tuki Trout Farm, near Smeaton, that did not go ahead for lack of wind (according to Origin Energy). He points out numerous drawbacks of the report, yet still ends his report with:

'In conclusion, the effects of the proposed wind farm are not expected to be of significant conservation concern.'⁴⁸

And this:

- despite acknowledging the lack of night studies for owls, and that more research was needed (a neighbour has photos of a tawny frog-mouth owl at Stony Rises, and has owls in his barn),
- despite acknowledging that mammal trapping was not done '...due to time limitations...'⁴⁹
- despite acknowledging that the studies were done in a drought year (2007): 'late stage of the growing season and effects of the drought...may have further reduced plant growth and reproduction...'⁵⁰
- despite acknowledging the limitations of the report due to the seasonal absence of some species, and:
- despite acknowledging the likelihood of the presence of the endangered striped legless lizard - the report suggested that the striped legless lizards at the proposed turbine site could be found, moved to another site, and told to stay there, while industrial mayhem reigned on the turbine site and on access roads being dug out; common sense seems to have gone out the window in this report.

The report ignored the presence of Wedge-tailed Eagle nests close by - it said the odd visiting eagle may appear, yet there are nests about 500 metres away and neighbouring farmers affirm constant sightings of eagles.

The report was significantly misleading about the nature of the surrounding landscape; it says that the surrounding countryside is similar to the Stony Rises site, yet it is nothing like as bare as the rest of Stony Rises at Tuki. There are large dams across the road. Huge old gum trees ideal for nests grow in paddocks to the left and right side of the road continuing past Tuki to the east. Neighbouring farmers have planted thousands of native trees in the last twenty years, and the view to the south and east has a much more verdant and lush appearance than Tuki. I saw an eagle carrying a stick in its mouth flying from

48 Brett Lane & Associates Pty Ltd, Report No. 6119 (1.3), March 2007, 'Proposed Tuki Wind Farm, Bird Utilisation Survey', p.44

49 *ibid.*, p.8

50 *ibid.*, p.9

the Tuki site across the road to land opposite – obviously out to build a nest, or repair an old one. Eagles often use the same nest for years.

A kilometre down the road to the north, there are large tracts of bush interspersed with paddocks – again very different from the Tuki site, and not mentioned in his report.

The report takes its interim risk assessment standard from the Australian **Wind Energy Association**.⁵¹

Conclusion

People come to the country and invest heavily in properties, often restoring them with great effort, and tourism sites rely on the beauty of nature and the serenity that it offers. Their livelihood depends on maintaining the rural nature of the surrounds.

Part of the landscape's attraction is the wildlife and abundance of birds it offers. We have already lost many due to loss of habitat and dangers posed by overhead power lines and cars, amongst others.

Turbines add an insurmountable burden to this wildlife, and endanger everything that people come to the country and to tourist retreats for.

Both Australian and overseas studies show that once a wind farm is up, it is impossible to stop wildlife destruction, because attempts to mitigate deaths fail, and wind companies and governments do not stop the turbines, even when unacceptable bird and bat fatalities are recorded at the sites.

Wind organisations and wind companies grossly understate wildlife deaths at wind farms, and mislead the public. Flora and fauna reports are paid for by the wind companies, and can be significantly misleading.

Independent studies of the impact of a proposed wind farm on surrounding flora and fauna are not done, as governments fast-track wind farms, and do not call for an Environmental Effects Statement.

Wind farms need many kilometres of overhead power lines to join up with the grid, and this adds an extra danger to birds. Large birds like the brolga – one of only two cranes in Australia – cannot move quickly enough to avoid the wires.

Given the seriousness of the impact of wind farms on wildlife, we need to instigate a moratorium on more wind farms, before it is too late, and to take time out to reassess the reality of what is going on in country Australia.

⁵¹ Brett Lane & Associates Pty Ltd, Report No. 6119 (1.3), March 2007, 'Proposed Tuki Wind Farm, Bird Utilisation Survey', p.42

Re: Senate Community Affairs Committee 23 of 22

Senate Inquiry into: The Social and Economic Impact of Rural Farms

Part 3: Impact on lifestyles and wildlife: Impoverishing the beauty of the land

To blindly go on offering up our rural land, its wildlife, its serenity, its attraction to tourism and to 'tree change' lifestyle investments, is absurd.

Particularly so when the wind companies are never asked to prove their assertions of greenhouse gas abatements and powering 'so many homes.' It makes no sense.

It is also an insult to the farming families that have spent years 'greening' Australia.