

Part 5:

Effect of a wind farm proposal on a Country Community

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Community Division in Smeaton and Kooroocheang area

Introduction

In March, 2007, the wider Smeaton and Kooroocheang community in Victoria learned of a proposal to erect turbines – the Tuki wind farm - on the Stony Rises site eight kilometres north of the Smeaton township, on a dramatic rolling hillside, part of which was protected from inappropriate development by a Significant Landscape Overlay. They noticed a huge wind speed testing tower going up on the Tuki site, and wondered what it was - they soon found out.

Wind Power Pty Ltd (now defunct) gave the community seven days' notice of a public meeting about the proposed wind farm, in the Smeaton bowling club - after secret negotiations had already been going on for almost a year with four landowners at the site – two of whom did not live there.

I was there at the meeting, which was charged with division and anger. Country residents shouted at each other from opposite sides of the room. The meeting was so divisive, the company called the meeting off early, and the company's representatives left in a hurry.

A group that opposed the turbines was later formed – the Spa Country Landscape Guardians, of which I am a member. 96% of residents surrounding the proposed wind farm site opposed the turbine proposal.

The wind companies always say if enough of the people do not want the proposal, it will not go ahead. ‘If there’s an overwhelming majority of people who don’t want it then it will not go proceed...’¹said Mr Newbold of Wind Power Pty Ltd. That is not what happens. At Lal Lal and Elaine, 1300 people signed a petition against the wind farm proposal there, to be tabled in parliament, yet it was still given the go-ahead in planning.

Wind energy companies follow a pattern of ‘brokering the land,’ of secret negotiations signing landowners up, of offering money to local social groups and then setting up ‘Community Reference Groups’ to ‘consult’ with the locals after the deal is already done – groups that are later used to distribute the money. But opposition is denigrated by the companies, and by some government representatives, and usually ignored, even at tribunals and planning panels. Wind farm proposals are fast-tracked and can avoid the usual controls that large industrial concerns have to face. It disempowers country people.

It destroys the trust and unity that country residents have built up, often between families working together over four or five generations, and pitching in with others to build schools, churches, bowling clubs, sporting pavilions and community halls. The town identity becomes meaningless – and disjointed into divergent groups.

Misleading ‘assurances’

Wind companies have a stock-in-trade litany of ‘feel-good’ comments about their community ‘consultation,’ yet people’s opposition is side-stepped by them and by the government.

Vague meaningless comments like the following abound: “‘It’s fair to say we need to listen to all members of the community for and against,’”² and “‘The area is being consulted and it’s an area of possibility and an area of interest. It will be something that we’re responding to the community on...But we have got to honour the consultation process.’”³

While quietly buying out one affected property after another at Waubra, in the media, Acciona continued to deny any health problems.

1 The Courier, May 17, 2007, ‘Wind debate’

2 The Courier, May 17, 2007, ‘Wind debate’

3 The Courier May 25, 2007 ‘More turbines possible’

And despite all the vague feel-good comments about consultation, Andrew Newbold of Wind Power Pty Ltd dismissed the whole group of protesters at Smeaton as a: “noisy minority,” but then still maintained that ‘community feedback was a key ingredient in Wind Power’s decision whether to apply for a planning application.’⁴

That ‘noisy minority’ – the Spa Country Landscape Guardians – is a group made up of people from all walks of life, such as: town planners, solicitors, farming families, teachers, engineers, function organisers, advertising executives, administrative officers, marketing managers, agricultural scientists, journalists and financial analysts. More than just a ‘noisy minority.’

A major issue with huge impact on the environment

The development at stake in this case was not someone’s large shed on a neighbouring property. This is about industrialising landscape and rural retreats with enormous structures that will never be dismantled, and that emit noise that makes you ill, and that decimates wild life - the effect on bats alone, world wide, is becoming ‘significant.’

The National Academies’ National Research Council (NRC) released a report in May 18, 2007, on the environmental impacts of wind energy projects. It makes the point that ‘...while wildlife mortality research at wind energy facilities is limited and not standardized, the report concludes the potential for impacts on bat populations in the eastern U.S. appears significant.’⁵

When research uses that word, it’s not a good prospect for a species.

“Take the most conservative estimates of mortality and multiply them out by the number of turbines planned and you get very large, probably unsustainable kill rates,” said Merlin D. Tuttle, president and founder of Bat Conservation International...

“One year from now we could have a gigantic problem.”⁶

‘Bats serve an important role in nature, and their populations are believed to be in decline, scientists said. The bats getting killed in Appalachia devour insects that pose grave threats to crops such as corn and cotton. They also feed on insects that can spread disease, such as mosquitoes.’⁷

The wind associations dismiss claims that turbines destroy wildlife: ‘The impact of wind turbines on birds and bats is insignificant compared to the impact of domestic animals and loss of habitat...’ says the Fact Sheet 8 of the Australian Wind Energy Association, ‘Wind Farms & Bird and Bat Impacts.’⁸

4 The Advocate June 6, 2007, ‘Wind debate’

5 National Academies’ National Research Council (NRC) report, May 18, 2007, http://www.vawind.org/Assets/NRC/NRC_Wind.htm, accessed September 26, 2007

6 Washington Post, January 1, 2005, Justin Blum, ‘Researchers Alarmed by Bat Deaths from Wind Turbines’

7 ibid.

8 Australian Wind Energy Association, Fact Sheet 8, ‘Wind Farms & Bird & Bat Impacts’

That is why the lack of control over the building of wind turbines is so alarming.

Rural residents not protected from invasive industrial developments

Despite the buy-outs of properties already going on at Toora and Waubra of residents ill from the turbine noise, the then Victorian Minister for Planning, Justin Madden, fast-tracked many wind farm proposals in the state towards the end of 2010, wiping away the need for an in-depth analysis of environmental effects even of the huge proposal at Stockyard Hill, that was rigorously opposed by many in that area.

He accepted the wind industry's opinion of the impact of the proposal. So what democratic rights are left to country people, deluded into believing that a majority opposition is even counted? It hasn't worked anywhere. Politicians ridicule their well-researched concerns for the environment, both as it affects people and wildlife.

At the Lexton proposal, people involved pointed out to me that you couldn't even plough through protected native grassland at their site, but that the wind company, aided by the government, can do anything, and does.

In one case, it was alleged that the landowner got rid of native grassland that may have stalled the proposal, by ploughing up the hilltop, so that there would be nothing for the flora and fauna study to find.

'The environmentally significant Mt Pollock has been vandalised in an attempt to pave the way for the installation of a 14 turbine community wind farm. That's the claim being made by Kathy Russell of the Barrabool Hills Landscape Guardians.'⁹

The DSE had informed the wind company in question, Future Energy, of the existence of significant vegetation on the proposed site "all of which are considered endangered in the Victorian volcanic plains bio-region."¹⁰

Kathy Russell claimed that, "The area has been boom sprayed with round-up and overgrazed. A huge amount of earth works has taken place on the site and there is a huge stockpile of rocks on the southern part of the volcanic cone. All the vegetation has been removed," she said.¹¹

That kind of subterfuge does nothing to promote community respect and faith in each other.

⁹ The Surf Coast Times, Mark Farrugia, 'Endangered plants removed for wind turbines – claim'

¹⁰ The Surf Coast Times, Mark Farrugia, 'Endangered plants removed for wind turbines – claim'

¹¹ *ibid.*

Premeditated Division of the community

When various community and sporting bodies in Smeaton learnt of the money they would get if the wind project went ahead, they supported it, and sided with the landowners that had signed up. Divisions were building up in the area.

Most did not live near the site, and did not question the effect that 100-metre towers, the noise from 80-metre spinning blades, permanent huge concrete bases, overhead power lines to connect to the grid, red flashing lights on the towers all night and wide access roads across the hills would have on the vista of hills across the northern horizon

Wind companies know how to divide and conquer. The lure of the money was enough for people to turn their backs on other community members with whom they'd worked for years to raise money for their clubs, and for community projects, like the Smeaton Community Hall.

Working together

A few years ago, I was secretary for the fund-raising committee for the Smeaton Community Hall. The members of Smeaton, Kooroocheang, and all of the surrounding area for miles, worked together for years for the hall.

We had open days of the then privately owned famous Smeaton Mill (that now has an annual opening day in April), with stalls and other attractions. I used to send pamphlets out asking for all kinds of contributions for those mill days. I could rely on everyone - young and old - pitching in and working together, manning stalls, cooking, baking, showing people around. One of the locals got the huge water wheel going. It was a hive of unified and harmonious activity, towards a communal goal.

We catered for lunches at the bowling club, had a fun day at 'Horizons,' for which we trooped around Ballarat shops for hours asking for donations of goods we could sell on that day, and did other fund-raising activities, like sitting outside a supermarket, selling raffle tickets for a painting donated by a local artist.

I wouldn't even attempt it now; the feeling is gone; I don't think anyone would work like that again; I don't think people will ever forget how the community split into the 'money from wind' and 'let's preserve the environment.'

Community break down at Waubra

In this connection regarding community functions, I was staggered by a letter from Marsha Gallagher from Waubra, to *The Courier*, complaining about lack of local funding for a 'wind farm' festival proposed there for October, 2009, and asking for financial help, as she says: 'A lot of business owners and managers have now withdrawn promised funding out of fear, if they are found to have supported our family fun day they will lose customers.'¹²

This letter raises a number of issues:

¹² The Courier, August 11, 2009, 'Waubra festival to showcase wind farm'

- First of all – this scenario would never have happened in a united country township before the advent of the wind farm there – as I said above, everyone pitched in for local events.
- Secondly, she blames ‘misinformation’ in the media about turbines, for the lack of funding from businesses there. How does she determine it is ‘misinformation?’ It is now emerging that noise standards were not complied with by the wind company at Waubra.
- Thirdly, the Gallagher family in Waubra has about 40 turbines on their land, and would receive at least \$7 000 a year for each one; there are other ‘host’ landowners in that area with turbines on their land, yet she says: ‘a lot of country people can no longer afford to attend local agricultural shows.’
- If the festival is in celebration of the wind company, Acciona, wouldn’t the company be rather free with their money for a cause like that? Especially as they apparently have the funds to buy out landowners suffering from the effects of the turbines.
- At least seven landowners there (probably more), unable to put up with the effects from the turbines, have been bought out by Acciona – and driven off their land. Trish Godfrey invested her life-savings in her property, and could not live there.
- The have had to buy a house in Ballarat in order to get a good night’s rest, away from the turbines – the family has had to leave their lovely country home at Waubra. Is offering them ‘free bus tours of the wind farm’¹³ appropriate?

Sometimes one can’t have it both ways; you can’t destroy the landscape for the money it brings, drive people off their properties, and then expect the community to put their hands in their pockets for a community ‘wind farm’ festival.

Smeaton: isolating and disenfranchising ‘dissenters’

The Smeaton primary school disseminated wind company information and propaganda in its regular newsletter to its students.

My friend was shouted down by the people in the Smeaton pub one day, because she disagreed with them on this issue and didn’t want the turbines. She was deeply shocked, because for years she’d been able to exchange opinions without this kind of animosity. I believe it affected her very much for a long time.

One farmer had protest signs pulled off his fence and taken from his property again and again, by the very person living close by who used to borrow farm machinery from them. The resulting legal action did not get financial compensation for over 40 professionally made signs.

¹³ The Courier, August 11, 2009, ‘Waubra festival to showcase wind farm’

A protest mock turbine was pushed over in the paddock; the people concerned had to trespass on to another's person property to do so.

As a result, a man was chased down the main street of the town after he'd tried to stop the bus load of the neighbouring town's football teams from pushing over the mock turbine, and was bashed, in front of his young son, who was in the car.

Mail boxes belonging to protesters were run over again and again. In front of a house that had five small children in it, cars were revved up loudly in the middle of the night.

People who had worked together for years no longer did business with each other, nor waved to each other in passing.

I was deeply affected by the division, and no longer knew who my friends were, who I could wave to, who I could talk to, after living peaceably for 36 years in the district. This had such a devastating effect on me, I came close to a nervous breakdown, and saw a psychologist to deal with the stress.

The media, especially *The Courier* (Ballarat), undermined our concerns constantly. Despite all the community division, and the signs being pulled down, *The Courier* ran a double page feature saying there was no division in the town - they'd interviewed the people in the pub one night.

When protest signs were repeatedly pulled down, it made page three of the newspaper, with added comments about the benefits of turbines.

When a letter from the Spa Country Landscape Guardians was sent to the landowners wanting turbines on their land, advising them that legal steps would be taken against them if a planning application was lodged by the proponent, it made the front page along the lines of: 'wind farm fight turns dirty.'

I used to love coming home from wherever I'd been; when this division in the Smeaton and Kooroocheang townships started, and I thought of the effect turbines would have on the beauty of the rural setting, I felt sick to my stomach every time I came home.

It's still not the same since then, even though Origin (who took over Wind Power Pty Ltd) decided not to go ahead with the Tuki wind farm, 'due to lack of wind.'

I've been here since 1972; I brought up my three children here and loved where I lived, but I've lost faith - it could happen again; the echoes of the intense division still seem to reverberate.

What I can remember of the huge eruption of animosity and division, is only the tip of the iceberg; I have spoken to other members of the Spa Country Landscape Guardians, and

the deep division arising from wind companies industrialising rural land with huge and noisy steel towers for some people's profits at the expense of the natural environment and anyone else's wishes, has driven a wedge even into families.

Close members of a family living in this area are no longer on speaking terms because some of them wanted the turbines and resented any opposition from neighbours.

That is no mean feat in a family that has been on the same farm for five generations. What fires and floods could not do, a wind company did in a few weeks.

It's never the same again

One of the things mentioned in their letter to the Victorian Planning Panel in 2001 in opposition against the Yambuk wind farm proposal, by the people at Codrington who had eight turbines on their land (I have used this letter in reference to other issues elsewhere), was:

'Finally, we should briefly mention that the conflict that wind farm proposals cause between neighbours and in the community does not disappear after they start operating.'¹⁴

The same effect was felt both by me, and by Lorraine Sewell, another member of the Spa Country Landscape Guardian.

With Lorraine Sewell's permission, I submit her letter to me, on the way this turbine proposal, even though it did not go ahead, affected her.

'I have lived in the Smeaton area for forty years, and during that time was involved in the school, church, playgroup, sporting clubs, and a large circle of friends.

When the proposal to build turbines on a neighbour's property was announced, those people not directly affected by the siting, were not supportive of our concerns and dismayed that we actually decided to fight the proposal. I believe the company bribe town people, offering money to sporting groups etc, and inviting people to be involved in what they call a Community Reference Group. The only power this group has is to say where they want to spend the money.

We ran a very informed, intelligent and reasonable protest for three long years, and in that time the cold-hearted, lack of empathy was completely opposite to what I was expecting. All this led to me suffering anxiety, sleeplessness, out of character behaviour, and lack of well-being. My G.P. referred me, (under a Mental Health Plan) to a psychologist, which was helpful.

The old friendships, respect for neighbours/Council/Companies etc. and involvement in any community group will never return to what it was like before the announcement of the Turbines here, and in fact, my family and I wish to leave the area as soon as possible. I believe we are not unique! Everywhere Wind Turbines are proposed results in community divide.

¹⁴ of 'Doonbar' Princes Highway, Codrington Vic 3285, November 25, 2001, in their letter to: Planning Panels Victoria, Department of Infrastructure GPO Box 2797Y, Melbourne Vic 3001

Waubra

I have also talked with people from Waubra, where the division caused by the wind farm there has been catastrophic, as people have been getting sick and leaving their farm to live in Ballarat, or have been bought out by Acciona, the Spanish Company that runs the wind farm there.

Waubra landowners were signed up by Acciona in 2007 – a drought year, when we had received no spring rains so that the grass could grow for hay, and at a time when farmers there were desperate and vulnerable to offers of money.

Hence about 29 landowners signed up for turbines. That steamrolled people who did not want the turbines, or did not know enough about the impact of turbines to protest.

Since then, at least 7 properties there have been bought out by the wind company. It's likely to be more. who has had to buy a house in Ballarat because they get sick from the noise of turbines, and also suffer from sleep deprivation due to the noise, says that at least 11 houses are standing empty.

On February 4, 2011, I spoke with a person from Waubra, who mentioned a number of things that have happened to the Waubra community since the wind company signed up people there, and the effect on those who are not happy with the turbines.

I have specifically not used his name, but he is making his own submission, and will therefore verify what I have said here.

One of the things that shocked me in what he said, is the way that a private Spanish-based company – Acciona – which has so divided the town and driven people out of their homes, is able to come into the Waubra Primary School, which is a state-run institution, and brainwash the children, disseminating propaganda with pro-wind power flyers, models of turbines, have a 'world wind' day, fly kites to spread the 'wind' idea, and have some children going home to berate their parents for opposing wind turbines. It is sad that something as enjoyable for children as kite-flying, has become a part of a wind power company's propaganda machine.

It is something that is straight out of Nazi Germany, where children were encouraged to dob in their parents for having anti-Hitler sentiments, and whereby any child not in the Hitler Youth was bullied and harassed. Or a war zone, where propaganda leaflets are let loose over the enemy country. This insidious brain washing of young children by a private company in a state-run school has no place in a democracy, which I thought we were. It is unacceptable. Money talks but what happened to ethics?

I taught at Ballarat High School, which is a Specialist Sport School; their basketball team was sponsored by McDonalds, and wore their logo on their uniforms. Even then no one from the company ever came into the school room to disseminate small 'Mack Burgers'

and disseminate propaganda on how nutritious their 'Big Macks' were. I don't believe that it ever made the home economic lesson!

What the person from Waubra pointed out to me more than once, is the feeling of isolation he feels from the community, as various social clubs are antagonistic to anyone opposing the turbines. The money that the wind company hands out to local bodies, and which is administered by a Community Reference Group allied to the company, has effectively cut off from those groups any dissenters to wind farms in that community. If you still want to belong to some of those sporting groups, maybe because of your children, you have to stay silent about your stance on turbines.

In Waubra, when a 'dissenter' goes to a community social function, wisecracks about anti-wind objectors can be bandied about. After that treatment, you don't go back. Dominant families are quick to 'quell rebellion.'

In a community where the Country Fire Brigade is run by local volunteers on whom country lives depend in the event of a bushfire, and in particular – who have to be able to work together cohesively – this is a breakdown of community cohesion of monumental importance.

He said that 'dissidents' are ridiculed and vilified at all levels – Shire, State, Federal.

I agree with him totally about being sold out at all levels of government.

Objectors to wind turbines railroaded

Our Hepburn Shire Council mayor of a few years ago used his casting vote to allow the Leonards Hill turbines to go ahead.

Our local political representatives like Joe Helper and Geoff Howard were totally biased towards wind farms, and ridiculed in the media any of the genuine concerns that people had against turbines.

Despite globally reported health effects from turbine noise, they insisted there was no problem, and the division caused in rural communities was arrogantly dismissed by Geoff Howard in the media as:

“In regard to so-called divisive issues, it's individuals in the community that make them divisive.”¹⁵ and: 'it is not appropriate to blame the issue for causing social damage.'¹⁶

Bribing social groups to get them on your side, and industrialising the western part of Victoria with huge noisy steel structures is an issue of enormous impact that results in community breakdown.

¹⁵ The Courier, November 13, 2010, Brendan Gullifer, 'Windfarm issue can divide a community'

¹⁶ The Courier, July 3, 2007

Adding insult to injury, he suggested that there could be: ‘...a correlation between those who don’t receive financial benefit from wind farms and health problems.’¹⁷

He says: ‘We are fortunate to live in a democracy in which groups and individuals have every right to speak out against or protest any issue.’¹⁸

Where is democracy if wind proposals are opposed by 1300 signatures tabled in parliament, as in the Lal Lal and Elaine case, but still go ahead,? That petition was also handed in to Geoff Howard, on October 25, 2007.

In that case he said: ‘I also have to listen to people who are supportive of the proposal so it’s not appropriate for me to take a view.’¹⁹

But he had no trouble taking an anti-protester view in the previous article about health effects at Waubra, and community division caused by wind farm proposals.

The misinformation handed out by politicians on this issue was staggering. In the article mentioned above, Geoff Howard said that: ‘...only **two** [families] having moved out due to the wind farm.’²⁰

That was on November 13, 2010.

On November 16, 2010, noise testing by Acciona at Waubra showed: ‘...the report reveals noise levels are too loud at some of the 23 properties tested.’²¹ [Yet they **hadn’t** tested properties at the centre of previous noise complaints.]

On November 18, 2010, ‘Waubra wind farm operator Acciona has confirmed it has now bought out **seven** property owners.’²²

Are we really expected to believe that in the time from Geoff Howard’s comment on the 13th November, up until the 18th November, Acciona bought out five properties? In five days?

Our Landscape Guardian Group received no help from Catherine King, our Federal Representative, though we specially stood outside her travelling caravan in Smeaton on a freezing day, waiting to talk to her.

17 The Courier, November 13, 2010, Brendan Gullifer, ‘Windfarm issue can divide a community’

18 *ibid.*,

19 The Courier, October 25, 2007, Shelley O’Brien, ‘Windfarm petition to table’

20 The Courier, November 13, 2010, Brendan Gullifer, ‘Windfarm issue can divide a community’

21 ABC Newsy, November 16, 2010, ‘Wind farm noise report reveals planning breaches: Mayor’

22 The Courier, November 18, 2010, ‘Waubra wind farm buys out more properties’

Wind farms help to get the ‘green’ votes and we were disenfranchised.

So much for democracy.

Changing the rules to suit wind companies

It is frightening to see the way governments all over the world are throwing out the rule book to suit wind companies, and to disregard local communities’ protests.

I’d like to look at a few to show the disturbing trend by governments to by-pass democracy:

- **In England:** ‘The Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, Chris Huhne, has recently expressed a wish to see an acceleration in the deployment of onshore wind turbines in this country. This can only be achieved by forcing them through the planning system against ever-growing opposition, with the help of the ROC (Renewables Obligation Certificate) subsidy system, which gives the financial advantage to developers. This is now apparently to be aided by the right of local authorities to retain business rates, as an inducement to them to allow more planning

applications.’²³ Lord Reay, of the House of Lords, who made this comment, laments that a group designed to protect the landscape – the CPRE – has done nothing.

- **In Australia,** back in 2004, a well respected journalist, John van Tiggelen, did an in-depth article, on the proliferation of wind turbines in Victoria with a disturbing lack of rules; on the contrary:

‘Delahunty [the then Planning Minister] handed down her wind farm policy two years ago. Under the guidelines, which were drafted by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Victoria with considerable input from wind power lobbyists, a number of obstacles to development were removed, including, most significantly, the right of local councils to veto large wind farms. Shortly afterwards, the Minister removed another significant check on development when she announced that applications would no longer be subject to the usual Environmental Effects statement (EES), a process which provides for community input via a panel hearing, as long as the wind farm passed a “preliminary assessment”.

“We’re putting landscape values now front and centre,” Delahunty declared. John van Tiggelen makes the point: ‘But landscape values are notoriously slippery.’²⁴

23 Country Life, November 17, 2010, ‘Turbines: for and against’

As for rules, Steve Buckle from Wind Power Pty Ltd said to John van Tiggelen:
“Look, we’re playing this game with no rules. The government is making up rules as we go.”³⁰²⁵

John van Tiggelen did not get to talk to Mary Delahunty:

‘Even though the Government’s own policy clearly states that “the Minister for Planning will be the responsible authority for all [large] wind energy proposals”, Mary Delahunty refused to talk to Good Weekend and her office deflected all queries, including those specific to planning, to the Minister for Energy.’²⁶

She refused to see people from Toora about their concerns regarding the wind farm: ‘Letters and invitations have gone unanswered. As a last resort, the shire sent a posse to Melbourne, requesting a meeting. Delahunty declined. “We’re not in the loop,” says Bligh [from Toora]. “They are not listening to us.”’²⁷

Given Joe Helper, Geoff Howard and Catherine King’s reactions to the various Landscape Guardian Groups of Western Victoria, nothing has changed. It is now 2011. I feel it is time to have a clear look at what wind farms are doing to the landscape, to people, and to wildlife, and to have an objective, scientific look at the

actual greenhouse gas abatements that are so widely claimed by the wind companies and by government bodies. Given the enormity of the structures and their actual use of power to run them and their aviation lights, the greenhouse gases emitted in making them, transporting them, making the enormous concrete bases, the digging out of roads all over the countryside, and the constant replacement of motors to turn the blades into the wind, it is time to objectively assess any greenhouse gases abatement over the life of the turbine. I’ve gone to Waubra a number of times in the last few months, and every time from 10 to 40 turbines that I could see, were not working.

Recently the advertising bodies of Australia advised energy companies to change wide-sweeping claims about renewables that they could not substantiate:

‘Electricity companies have been told to change the language they use to sell renewable energy because of concerns it may mislead customers... The edict has come from GreenPower, the government accreditation program which oversees the various green energy technologies which claim to emit less carbon... Environment and consumer groups say consumers are wasting their money.’²⁸

‘GreenPower has sent an email to the companies telling them to water down their claims after consultations with the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission

24 Sydney Morning Herald, Good Weekend, September 4, 2004, John van Tiggelen, ‘An ill wind blows’ (ACC).

25 *ibid.*,

26 *ibid.*,

27 *ibid.*

28 ABC News, August 5, 2009, David Mark, ‘Power companies told to clarify green claims’

29 *ibid.*,

30 *ibid.*,

- **In Denmark**, in 2007, the opposition party wanted the Liberal environmental minister, Connie Hedegaard, to: ‘...bypass the meetings [with 22 cities] and use her authority to dictate where the wind turbines should be placed, putting up as many of the new 150-metre giant turbines as necessary to meet the country’s targets for reducing carbon dioxide emissions.’³¹

Denmark’s emissions have gone up, as it still needs to use the older coal-fired power stations on days of low wind, so subsidising even more of the turbines is a pointless waste of taxpayers’ money.

- **In Sweden** ‘Swedish Environment Minister Andreas Carlgren has announced that he wants to remove the municipal vetoes against wind power farms that are currently in place:
“Here, we must change so that local authorities are not just listening to opinions and saying no without even trying to resolve conflicts. If it does not work, it may be necessary to remove the municipality’s veto power,” Carlgren told newspaper Svenska Dagbladet’s (SvD) website on Thursday.’³²

He says renewable energy must take precedence over the autonomy of local governments, ‘citing security issues.’³³

It’s stretching the point a bit, to insist that wind farm control is a ‘security risk.’ Asserting that ‘opinions’ put forward should not be listened to assumes that these opinions are not thoroughly researched.

Opponents to turbines have to be well informed and need to have done a lot of research. They need to substantiate their claims at council level and at forums that decide these issues, like VCAT. They do not just bandy ‘opinions.’

The loss of any controls on the wind energy industry is a dangerous precedent. This is an industry so invasive, in Europe it has been called the biggest destruction of land since the second world war.

Governments often change their mind on an issue, yet the rights removed by legislation, as in the Swedish case, may not be reinstated. The way the wind companies are privileged is reminiscent of war time, where certain rules are imposed. But this is just another money making scheme, and results are not proven, ever. Any company can make wide-sweeping claims about powering so many houses, and never have to prove anything, let alone discuss what happens when the wind doesn’t blow.

31 The Copenhagen Post, July 30, 2007, ‘Residents may get windmill compensation,’ <http://www.cphpost.dk/get/102872.html> accessed 19.10.2007

32 The Local, www.thelocal.se, February 4, 2011, ‘Scrap wind power veto: environment minister’

33 The Local, www.thelocal.se, February 4, 2011, ‘Scrap wind power veto: environment minister’

- **In Victoria**, ‘...plans to build a high-voltage power line through the middle of Cargarie, a small Victorian town about 25 km south of Ballarat, and past the front of her house as part of the Mt Mercer wind farm project’ has outraged Pam Spencer, and she is worried about the ‘...hum and crackle of high-voltage lines and having our children’s health put at risk from prolonged exposure to electro-magnetic radiation.’³⁴

Because of a 10 metre easement either side of the power line, she would lose her whole front garden, including ‘‘a large 60-year-old tree with our children’s playhouse in it,’’³⁵ Another four houses in Cargarie would also be affected, losing shelter beds and Landcare trees, Ms Spencer said.

’She said the companies involved, Mt Mercer Wind Farms and Powercor, had ignored the town’s concerns and the availability of an alternative route for the power lines through a Crown land easement between paddocks outside the town which was shorter, more environmentally friendly and would have no impact on homes and residents’³⁶

In another part of my submission, I mentioned this power line in connection with fire risks. To join the Mt Mercer wind farm to the grid, the power line would need to go

through 52 properties. Huge power lines are notorious for making a property hard to sell, yet the wind company said they could go through all these properties without question:

‘Land can be taken for grid’

‘Westwind energy says it can compulsorily acquire land for powerlines to connect Mt Mercer wind farm to the grid.’³⁷

Even right through a town, if it feels like it.

Legislation to override community concerns, refusal to meet with concerned citizens, power lines straight through a town and through 52 properties – this denies people their democratic rights to have their objections taken seriously, and disenfranchises a whole bracket of the community - for a source of power that only works when the wind is just right!

This is a heavy handed, short-sighted, and nonsensical approach to power generation that gags debate on the efficiency of this source of power.

Community break down

The following is a look at comments arising from other wind farm proposals, and their effect on the community.

The Sisters wind farm proposal: In May, 2010, the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal upheld Moyne Shire Council’s refusal of a planning permit for the multi-million dollar project.

³⁴ Weekly Times, January 29, 2010, David McKenzie, ‘Power line threat to home’

‘In its findings sent to the council and residents by email on Wednesday VCAT’s presiding member J.A.Bennett and member S.Mainwaring said that they were concerned by the “obvious social disruption”.’³⁵

“Social division has been caused in this small community by the wind farm proposal,” they said.

“We feel that whatever our decision, the damage has already been done and that relationships within the community may never be the same again.”

‘The tribunal concluded: “Clause 11 of the Moyne planning scheme requires us to balance conflicting objectives in favour of net community benefit and sustainable development.

“In this case we are not convinced the net community benefit is such that it outweighs the negative impacts.”’³⁶

They were also concerned about the noise impacts, and the fact that the company’s expert advice did not use a 2010 noise standards criteria, but a 1998 one, in assessing the cumulative impact of the two wind farms.

At **Waubra**, Donald Thomas states: “Our farms have basically been devalued, our health gone, the community is gone... We are now so divided it will take a generation to die for this divide to heal.”³⁷

Also at Waubra, Andrew Reid states: “This is the most divisive thing that has happened in this district. It’s split the community right down the middle,” he said. “People say, ‘why didn’t you object at the start?’ but they told us there would not be much noise, not many lights and it was green energy, so we thought it was good. Now it’s like Luna Park out there at night, and the roar that comes over the hill, it’s like a helicopter taking off.”

“We have been conned and the people who got them have been conned.

“You don’t appreciate what you have got until it’s gone.”’³⁸

At **Stockyard Hill**, Cassie Franzose of the Western Plains Landscape Guardians Association, says: ‘...friendships have broken down and public meetings have descended into threats of violence.’³⁹

John van Tiggelen, in his article quoted earlier, also looks at community division:

35 The Standard, May 7, 2010, Peter Collins, ‘The Sisters wind farm blow’

36 The Standard, May 7, 2010, Peter Collins, ‘The Sisters wind farm blow’

37 ABC Local Radio South West Victoria: Ballarat, April 30, 2010, Liam McAleer, ‘Moorabool residents unite against wind farms’

38 The Courier, November 2, 2009,

39 The Age, October 18, 2008, Adam Morton, ‘Winds of change stir up a rift in rural community’

At Bald Hills:

‘But then, some will have to live with the turbines. Like Marriott’s neighbours, many of whom now give him the cold shoulder.’

‘He no longer drinks at the local pub, dinner invitations have dried up, and scores of angry yellow anti-turbine signs hang from trees and gates en route to his farm.’⁴⁰

At **Welshpool**, a township on Corner Inlet, Trixy Allott is fighting a wind farm proposal. She says: “It gets back to the way rural communities function. In Welshpool we’ve got 400 people and 35 volunteer organisations, and we band together whenever we can. To suddenly find out that the neighbours who were your friends will sell you out – it’s heartbreaking. The carpetbaggers have ripped the soul out of our community.”⁴¹

Near Foster in the same area, wind farms were planned in all directions. More than 50 landowners are believed to have signed an initial deed of agreement.

‘When word got out, people couldn’t believe it. In a region where farmers traditionally share machinery, bale each other’s hay and drop in for morning tea, somehow neighbours had been kept in the dark about the 120-tonne turbine soon to tower over their back fence.’⁴²

At **Toora**, two homes are located amid the cluster of 12 turbines. ‘One home ... comes without a turbine and belongs to Stephen Garito. Signs on his fence say “Not Happy Stanwell” [the wind company] and “Megawatts, Mega noise”. Relations with his once-friendly neighbours have deteriorated to slanging matches across the fence. Unable to sleep for the throbbing of the turbines, he now lives in town.’⁴³

Dodgy business practices do not help rural friendships

John van Tiggelen talks of dodgy and dishonest business practices, pitting neighbour against neighbour, and business not-so-ethical ethics, that are designed to ‘divide and conquer.’

‘Reports started emerging in the rural press of farmers being lured with improbable sums of money. Many developers employed what are known within the industry as “land breakers”, prospectors with local knowledge who knew how to “play” the farmers.

‘The basic strategy was to sign up as many landowners in a targeted area as possible for a confidential “Stage One” agreement, committing them to providing access for wind monitoring for at least two years, in exchange for a modest rent...’

‘All negotiations were confidential. Even farmers involved in the same wind farm were urged to sign individually...’

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

41 *ibid.*,

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

43 *ibid.*,

‘Tales of dubious corporate ethics abound. Grenfell’s partner, Peter Whelan, owns a slice of land integral to the proposed Welshpool wind farm. When he refused to sign, the land breaker told Whelan’s consenting neighbours (in a letter sighted by Good Weekend) that they would receive less rent than initially promised because Whelan refused to play ball. “Talk about pressure,” says Grenfell. “That’s how these companies operate: divide and conquer.”

‘Heinz Abels, whose land was integral to a different wind farm, remembers a land breaker turning up with a cheque for \$6000 stapled to a consent form. He was also told that his neighbour, the barrister Ross Macaw, supported the proposal, which wasn’t true. Says another farmer, who did not want to be named: “It was like something straight out of Texas, with these prospectors crawling all over the joint...”⁴⁴

Macaw says: “Companies like Meridian pretend they engage in community consultation, when it’s actually just a futile exercise that they go through after they have enough people signed up.”⁴⁵

‘Once the dust settled, something else became clear as well. Neighbours had stopped talking to each other. Lifelong friends were at loggerheads. Businesses were being boycotted. On Victorian’s south-west coast, an environmental panel noted that the wind farms planned for the Portland region’s three headlands had split the community. In South Gippsland, the mayor described the developments as the most divisive issue in a generation.’⁴⁶

And still our politicians tell us it’s not the ‘issue’ that’s divisive.

Conclusion

Protest signs ripped down, people bashed, neighbourhood friendships destroyed forever, community trust broken down, people ostracized for being a ‘protester,’ families divided, children brainwashed in schools, landowners signed up in secret, noise from turbines driving many residents out of country areas, dodgy business tactics employed to sign up landowners, and ‘sweeteners’ offered to rural social and sporting groups.

For a source of power that has been called ‘an irrelevant side-show’ to energy production.

I don’t believe it’s worth it. There has to be a better way.

‘The more things change, the more they stay the same.’ This is not about saving the planet; this is still about making a mega-buck. If we really cared about the ravages done to the land, we’d plant trees and reforest what we’ve denuded so far – instead of planting

44 *ibid*

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

46 *ibid.*,

Re: Senate Community Affairs Committee: 20 of 19
Senate Inquiry into: The Social and Economic Impact of Rural Wind Farms
Part 5: Effect of a wind farm proposal on a Country Community
steel towers on it.

It is time to stop believing the wind companies' own propaganda as gospel truth.

It is time to commission truly unbiased engineers' reports and find out the real truth behind claims of greenhouse gas savings by turbines –

– before we waste any more tax-payers money, before we kill more wildlife, before we leave huge concrete blocks on every slope and hillside, before our agricultural land is depopulated, and bought out by overseas wind companies. We need our farmers to be able to work their land without getting sick from the noise of turbines. Or do we really want to import all our food from other countries – like China, where we've abnegated all quality control?