

Federal Parliament Senate Inquiry

The Social and Economic Impact of Wind Farms in Rural Areas

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Submitted by Andrew Gabb

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Introduction:

As a family we are 5th generation farmers who will now be most directly affected by the approved Stockyard Hill Wind Farm[SYHWF]. I have been following the debate and directly involved in the process opposing its development, having spent the last four years being actively involved and researching the issues to do with wind farms. Both my wife and I presented to the Panel as individuals and as members of the Western Plains Landscape Guardians. The panel was appointed to hear all submissions and we spent every day over a six week period attending the panel hearing with many others, who will now be directly affected by the SYHWF being approved.

I believe that as a result of much reading listening and researching I am now a well informed community member who can state what I believe to be some of the issues that effect local communities, the people and landscapes of the area. I don't intend to try and be an expert on the many subjects that are being presented, I leave that to those with their particular expertise. However I do intend to give what I perceive as a balanced lay persons perspective as to what actually happens to people and communities when a wind farm developer moves in to a community.

The Process and the Community: Community:

Contrary to what the developers of wind farms tell politicians, write in the press and advise communities with their letter box drops what they have done, there has NEVER EVER been any community consultation process with any of the wind farms either built, approved or on the drawing board in Australia. The so called process is the most secretive and devious i have ever witnessed. Stakeholders are signed up in secrecy and good neighbours pitted against each other who are convinced by the industry not to divulge that they have become a stakeholder as it will compromise the future of the project. As a result when a stakeholder becomes committed and promised large amounts of money, as a financial incentive, communities become deeply divided. Those with a financial interest accuse those who oppose development of wind farms as being jealous and interfering and having no rights to affect them the

stakeholders future incomes. We personally have received abusive phone calls by a neighbour and his wife in an absolute rage when all we had been doing was following the due process in stating our case against development of the SYHWF.

On the other hand if as a community we were all informed and educated about the pros and cons of wind energy then we could all be part of making a better and well informed decision. Education within the community as I see it is the most important part of the process. If the wind industry has nothing to hide or fear then they should have no issues to having and presenting to us all the facts. Instead they hide behind a veil of secrecy because they know that exposure is not good for their image and that the most likely outcome will be negative.

I note that the mining industry have to advertise in the press prior to obtaining a licence to investigate the possibility of developing a mine. Why is the wind industry not compelled to do the same.

In summary there is:

No community consultation.

No personal or community education[including or counsellors].

No public open forums where cases can be put and questions asked.

Stakeholders are signed in secrecy.

Neighbours are never considered, consulted or rewarded.

Process:

In Victoria under the Brumby Labour Government the process worked as follows:

In a simplified format a developer of a wind farm is presented with a list of planning processes which they have to comply with and follow. These cover such things as Landscape and Visual Assessment, Flora and Fauna, Site Planning, Noise etc. The developer then APPOINTS and PAYS his experts to do the compliance testing. As a result this first process is already flawed as the experts are not independant, and as we proved at the SYHWF, their reports are strongly biased towards the developer, after all they are paying them. There is no clearly defined, distanced independence demonstrated here for government of the day to be able to make soundly based decisions on. The facts become distorted and biased towards the developer.

Likewise the process of the panel system is also flawed. Panels are appointed to be the independent judge and to make recommendations to the Minister of the day as to whether or not a proposed wind farm should go ahead. They are supposedly set up to be independent. I ask, how can a panel be independent

and make a clearly defined independent decision, when it is appointed by the Minister himself, whose government has a clearly defined agenda to roll out wind farms all in the name of so called green votes. Panels should be clearly independent of all political persuasions, should be appointed by an independent ombudsman, and consists of experts, suitably qualified to deliberate on such matters. A panel can never give an unqualified opinion or recommendation when it is appointed from within.

Adverse Health Affects:

The wind industry lives in denial.

I cannot believe that of all the experts reports a developer has to comply with or study, there is no requirement to take into account human health and the detrimental, or possible adverse effects a wind energy facility could have on peoples personal health. This I thought would and should be the very first issue that should be taken into account, and yet it doesn't get a mention. WHY?

It is now, and has been for some years, well documented and researched by scientists and the medical profession around the world that some people do become ill when living within the confines and surrounding areas of developed wind farms. It is no coincidence that people living in France, U.K., Germany, Denmark, U.S.A., New Zealand, Japan and now Australia do become ill when subjected to these turbines operating. They also all report the same or similar symptoms. Why is nothing done about protecting these people who are used as political collateral in the name of money making ventures and who have no say and are not listened to. We are now quite clearly prepared to sacrifice peoples health in the name of an industry which is driven by profits for shareholders and no net gains in reducing our emissions. This needs to be addressed urgently as we appear to be going down the path of once again blatantly ignoring the medical facts, which we know, and setting a path for massive health costs and legal issues in the future.

I have personally taken a very keen interest in the health issues and I know that others medically and scientifically qualified will be presenting to this inquiry. However it is important to recognise and acknowledge that locally we already have many people suffering with ill health as a result of their personal exposure to operating turbines at the Acciona Wind Farm at Waubra north west of Ballarat. This is constantly denied by the company, yet this very same

company continues to buy out and gag landholders who become ill and complain of their personal health issues. WHY? There are now some 15 vacant homes in the Waubra area as a result since this wind farm commenced operation. I put it very simply that people don't just up and leave their homes and farms after generations of living in this area for no reason at all. They have all reported unwell as a result of this wind farm operating.

As part of my research I have read two books. "Wind Turbine Syndrome" by Dr. Nina Pierpont and "The Wind Farm Scam" by John Etherington. Both publications should be read and fully understood by this inquiry. I point this inquiry to both Dr. Pierpont's book to do with health and her study, and also to a survey [attached] done by Dr. David Iser from Toora/ Foster in Gippsland Victoria. Of great interest is the fact that Dr. Iser a Medical Practitioner in Foster, a small town near the then newly built Toora Wind Farm, recognised in 2004 that he had patients reporting as unwell and all lived within close proximity of the newly commissioned Toora Wind Farm. In 2004 Dr. Iser did his own private research study on the health effects of turbines on people's health within his community. I urge the Senate Inquiry to take fully into account Dr. Iser's results. Of note it is interesting that his survey results tie in with Dr. Pierpont's results and also with the health issues that are now being exposed at Waubra. I personally asked Dr. Iser why he had not continued his research and his reply was that all the patients he was seeing had either moved away or had been bought out by the wind farm owner. The concerning thing to me and I am sure to many others is that no one is taking these Medical Professionals seriously. The wind industry writes these doctors serious concerns about human health off, as not peer reviewed, and state that it's all in the mind. We have bodies such as "The Clean Energy Council" [a body funded by the wind industry, so biased in favour of wind] commenting about health in the newspapers when they are not even qualified to do so. It is a medical practitioners responsibility to comment about health.

The Waubra Foundation set up to do independent research into people's health in Australia is a major step forward in the process to prove or disprove the issues to do with human health. I firmly believe that such an independent foundation needs to be given the time and resources to complete its research and until such research is completed a moratorium on all wind farms should be put in place. With my hard copy of this submission I enclose a DVD of Waubra District Residences Testimonies to do with their personal health issues. Please review this Dvd.

Impact on Property Values:

Once again the wind industry lives in denial as to what the actual reality is with the impact that industrial wind turbines have on land values in rural Australia. It is now recorded and documented by rural real estate land specialist and market outcomes, that we are seeing a significant decrease in rural land values. This not only applies to land when a wind farm is built, but also to when a wind farm is being proposed in a specific area. I give the following as examples.

: who live near the proposed Chepstowe wind farm west of Ballarat have been trying to sell their property for the past 10 months to retire. They have accepted 3 offers but all 3 have fallen through when they have disclosed that there is a wind farm proposed for the area. The proposed nearest turbine would be 2.5 km from their home and the Stockyard Hill Wind Farm is 7.5 km away. One local realtor who was quoted in the paper stated that if you lived within visual and it was in your face then you could expect the turbines to have an effect on the price of your property. The same applies to high voltage power lines and mobile towers. His opinion stated that the price was usually discounted by 10 to 15 percent.

e has been trying to sell his farming property which adjoins the approved Mt Mercer wind farm which is located between Ballarat and Geelong. Once again over the past 18 months Mr McKenzie has had interested parties wanting to buy but once he declares the wind farm as being on the boundary they have all walked away. The property has now been heavily discounted and still fails to attract a buyer.

Properties in the Waubra district which are now vacant, as a result of people walking away from them because of health reasons, have all failed to sell.

In 2009 I had a discussion with my bank, one of the big four lenders to agriculture, as to what they thought the impact would be of industrial wind turbines on the value of our farming land. The bank stated that it was their observation that when managed investment schemes such as blue gum plantations were introduced into a district that land values fell by as much as 20 percent. They saw no reason not to conclude that a similar scenario would occur with wind farms, and thus we would see further eroding of our farms value. This has quite clearly been demonstrated by the attached letter from

Mr. National Sales Manager for Elders Rural Services Australia Limited, where he states that land values fall significantly with some experts putting the loss as in excess of 30% and sometimes up to half. If

this were the case we would see many farming enterprises in breach of their banking covenants. Such outcomes could be disastrous for those operations financially.

A farmers real wealth is in his land. Many farming families survive on modest incomes by todays standard and rely on the land values to support and grow their business. Many see the land value as being their ability to retire gracefully.If we see such devastation to land values many people will be seriously affected.

Impact on Flora and Fauna:

I refer the Senate Inquiry to Mr. Tony Edneys submission on behalf of The Western Plains Landscape Guardians.

Landscape and Visual Assessment:

Unlike Europe we are now seeing enormously large clusters of turbines grouped closely together and turbines of significantly greater height.The modern turbine is now capable of being up to 200 meters high. The Stock Yard Hill Turbines are proposed at 137meters high with 104 meter diameter fans. There will be 155 of them, the biggest wind farm in Australia. The visual impact of these and all other industrial turbines is nothing short of overwhelming and totally imposing on our landscape. As residents of rural Australia we appreciate what our landscape offers, it is a beauty and vista we treasure and is one of the many reasons why we chose to live in such an environment. Many properties homes have been positioned to take in specific vistas and it is completely wrong of the proponents experts to brush off these vistas and their surrounding beauty as being insignificant, and for them to suggest that mitigation by planting trees will solve the problem. It doesn't.

The panel hearing at the SYHWF recognised such issues as these and set a precedent by removing the turbines that imposed on the vista of an historical property.

I enclose with my hard copy photographs which demonstrate the impact that turbines have on the visual landscape and private homes.The turbines are at Waubra and are 120 meters high.

Also refer to Mr. Tony Edneys submission on behalf of The Western Plains Landscape Guardians.

Secondary Consent:

Under the planning guidelines in Victoria a developer is allowed to change a variety of conditions within the wind farm under secondary consent. The ability to be able to do this makes a complete mockery of the planning and panel process. As an example night lights which are red and flash were added to the Waubra wind farm after approval was granted. There was no further community consultation. We can view these flashing lights 40 km away from our property. Residents living within the Waubra wind farm environs can't escape the flashing and brightness which disturbs the evening amenity. This has become a major issue with the people of Waubra. Other examples are that a developer can change the mega watt capacity of the turbine and the tower height. In such a situation as this it throws all the modelling of the noise effects on community and private homes out the window and also takes no account of the visual amenity now completely changed. In many cases approval to develop a wind farm rests strongly on noise and sound monitoring data. I question then as to why a secondary consent should be granted in such cases when the original modelling is the determinant and is then overridden, with no further consultation or modelling required. This is clearly a great advantage to a pro wind farm developer with no opportunity for the public to comment in the future. It makes a mockery of the reporting system and our democratic process.

As another example the Stockyard Hill Wind Farm was approved with 137 meter high towers and 2 mega watt generators. Under secondary consent Origin Energy may chose to increase the capacity of these turbines to 3 meg watts. This would nearly overcome the generating shortfall from the original plan now that 87 turbines have been removed, yet would completely negate all the modelling that was presented to the panel. Our home which is under serious threat now from turbine noise could well become uninhabitable.

It is my strongest view that secondary consent should not ever be permitted to any wind farm developer.

Interface between Commonwealth, State and Local Govt:

Since the Federal Government signed the Kyoto Agreement we have seen an explosion of wind farms developed across our nation. They have been developed to so called meet the greenhouse gas targets of 20/20. The reality is that they have been developed for the wrong reasons. They have not been developed to reduce green house gas emissions[as they can't] but rather to make the developing companies large returns on their shareholders

investments. This tragically has been the driving force and not the environment as it should have been.

As a result of poor planning, or no planning as the case may be, between commonwealth, state and local councils, developers have seen the opportunity to exploit an industry and the people so badly affected by it. There have been no strong and clearly defined guidelines set up by the federal government for all states and local councils to follow. There have been no defined studies presented and accepted by all parties to work with. As a result a massive industry has developed, backed by huge amounts of capital, which has been able to cleverly override the public who object to the desecration of our environment caused by wind farms, and to sway the metro greens that wind energy is cheap clean and green. Nothing can be further from the truth.

It has become imperative that all levels of government need to sit down and agree to well defined and proven guidelines for the future of any further development of wind farms. Industry and other interested parties all need to be part of the consultative process and their concerns listened to and taken into account.

As an example of a wind farm which was/is to be developed. The Sisters Wind Farm in south western Victoria, under 30 mw in capacity, was rejected by its local shire on the evidence provided. The developer then took the case to The Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal[VCAT] to further push its case to override the local shires decision. The developer lost at VCAT. The developer is now taking its case to the Victorian Supreme Court. When is "no" a positive and finite "no". This case only exemplifies my point that wind energy is driven by making money, that big money finally wins as opponents can't continue the fight unless they have massive amounts of money. It highlights the issue that the community consultation process does not exist and that the developers don't care about rural communities.

At a local council level our councils have been seriously compromised by not being fully educated as to the detrimental effects wind energy facilities will have on their communities and possible rate structure. In many cases the councillors have had to bear the brunt of dissatisfied ratepayers. In one case a developer jumped the councils decision making process and went straight to VCAT to try and get a rushed approval.

The issues go on but the point I am emphasising is that when we have no guidelines from above to work with people are exploited and suffer.

Cost and the Environment:

I know that other expert submissions will be tabled to do with this subject, however it would be remiss of me not to list in point form some of the facts.

Wind Power is not Cheap:

Wind power is second only to solar as the most expensive way to produce electricity.

The CEO of Origin Energy is on the public record stating the cost of wind power is \$110 to \$120 MW/h. This comment shows that wind power is double the cost of gas and triple the cost of coal fired electricity.

The capital cost of establishing a wind farm over a natural gas turbine is 165% more and the cost to produce the actual power from a wind turbine over a natural gas turbine is 150% more per MW/h.

Wind Power is Clean:

Wind power production over 5% of the grid capacity requires back up via gas turbines to maintain grid stability and to overcome the erratic nature of wind energy.

Natural gas turbines operate continuously in spinning mode to back wind when it stops blowing. Gas turbines in spinning mode produce green house gas emissions directly attributable to wind power.

Wind turbines do not produce power for 70 -90% of the time because of the erratic nature of wind. During these non producing times turbines draw power from the grid to operate causing further greenhouse gas emissions.

Our greenhouse gas emissions can be reduced immediately by 40% through installing all new electricity production via natural gas turbines.

Wind Power is Good for the Environment:

Why are wind turbines banned from national parks?

Why is there not specific regulations protecting people and communities from the adverse health effects, such as national parks and heritage sites receive?

Why do wind farm companies buy out nearby homes to a wind farm and then leave them vacant?

Why do some landholders vacate their family farmhouses that are located too close to a wind farm?

Why do communities around the world report similar and consistent adverse health effects from wind turbines?

Wind farms make some people sick.

Wind farms can cause major fires and here in Western Victoria we live in the most fire prone state in the world.

Summary:

There has to be a better solution for all Australians than to go on producing expensive power, resulting in sick people, falling land values, deeply divided communities, desecration to our landscape and environment and the use of people as political collateral.

The wind industry has not proved to the community that it is a clean, green cheap option. They use tactics which show them to be green and use personalities well known to communities to promote their cause. They have never been able to clearly demonstrate the facts. The opponents to wind energy have proved that when presenting well documented fact that we have a case which the wind industry can't refute.

We can solve the energy problem and go on to lead the world with clean, cheap renewable energy. It is time that we as a country took up the debate and seriously discuss the use of nuclear energy. Many countries now use nuclear as an energy source. Australia is in a wonderful position to capitalise on our natural assets and to be able to provide energy which is sustainable, clean green and cheap. We could quickly swing to natural gas[and get immediate reductions in greenhouse gas emissions] and take time to bring the nuclear on stream.

It is not a matter of not having the debate, it is a matter of when. The sooner the better for our country.

I call on the Parliament of Australia to place a moratorium on all wind farm developments, approved or not, until all of the issues as addressed throughout the Senate Inquiry, and in particular peoples health, are fully and clearly resolved. We cannot afford to do otherwise.

Andrew Gabb
14/2/2011

Attachments

With my hard copy submission I have enclosed the following for the Senate Inquiry to review.

- 1 Testimonials from Waubra District Residence to do with personal health.[Dvd]
- 2 Social comment made in anti wind farm advertising campaign[DVD]
- 3 Hard copy photographs showing impact of turbines on housing, the environment and road shadow and flicker. Comments on reverse side.
- 4 Collaby Hill Wind Farm Action Group Background Documentation.[DVD]
- 5 Adverse Health Effects of Wind Turbines[DVD]
- 6 Copy of Letter re Land Values
- 7 Copy of Dr. David Iser Health Survey