

Ian & Trixy Allott

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

8th February 2011

Dear Sir or Madam

The Social and Economic Impact of Rural Wind Farms

We wish to make a submission to the abovementioned enquiry.

I'm sure there will be many submissions covering the technical deficiencies, environmental and landscape impacts of wind power stations. Therefore our submission will talk about the impacts on rural communities and individual lives of those people and communities unfortunate enough to have a wind power station forced upon them.

Since the introduction of government subsidies and incentives wind power companies have been targeting rural locations for large scale wind power stations. All these companies want is the resource, they have no regard at all for the communities affected by their proposals. A wind farm company representative actually said to me once when I asked about the effect of the proposal on the area "the company is not concerned about towns affected or neighbours they just want to get the turbines in the ground".

The survival and existence of rural communities relies on trust, co-operation and friendship. Almost without exception when a wind energy company targets an area for a power station these are the very values that are absolutely destroyed and the fabric of these communities is torn apart by mistrust and division.

Our rural communities are an important part of Australia's heritage and division is something these communities can ill afford at a time when they are trying to get back on their feet after many changes and upheavals. We see neighbour pitted against neighbour and even family members against family members. In our community there were arguments on the street and within volunteer groups. It is going to take a generation to heal some of the rifts that have occurred.

The problem begins with the companies cherry picking sights and signing property owners to agreements that contain confidentiality clauses. When their neighbours and the rest of the surrounding community find out what is proposed and object these landowners get very angry at the objectors. The objectors are angry with their neighbours for not considering the negative effect the proposals will have on the area and are prepared to sell out friendships for a few dollars.

To fight a wind power station rural communities have to raise tens of thousands of dollars. This is money that is diverted away from things like rural schools, local charities and sporting groups. There is only so much spare cash to go around in these communities.

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The fight to try to stop a development is long and drawn out. It is expensive and exhausting. People who have no experience or knowledge of the planning system or objection process find themselves having to deal with many levels of bureaucracy. Some of the people such as many farmers whose families have been in an area for over 100 years, are finding they have to fight these companies in court and are up against the likes of QC's and landscape experts. The local people have never had to justify before why they love the landscape or way of life in a rural community. Now they are expected to put into words why these things are special to them. Not everyone is articulate enough to effectively put their feelings into words to match these experts. This can be a frustrating and emotional experience, how do you explain to a panel of suit clad outsiders why the landscape and way of life that is part of you is worth preserving.

To the locals the landscape is special and beautiful, the landscape experts say it is modified and has little value. The evidence of the experts is given more weight than the locals who have lived in the area for generations. Many become frustrated or angry at this process which in turn causes them a lot of stress. This then starts to show in families, friendships, the schoolyard and community groups. Simply because they happen live in an area where a wind energy company has decided they want to build a power station.

No one would choose to live next to a wind power station. Friends of ours who had turbines erected on adjoining properties found the noise incessant, 24/7. They couldn't sleep, they felt sick most of the time. Complaints to the company went unanswered. The noise levels had exceeded the allowable level that was stipulated under the planning permit, however the local council didn't have the financial capacity to enforce the permit conditions and fight the company in court. The Bracks State Government didn't want to know about it because they were pushing for more windfarms. Eventually our friends had to abandon their house and rent another property just to get some sleep and peace. This was a financial burden that they should not have had to bear.

The whole struggle to fight a wind power station is reminiscent of the movie 'The Castle', talk about life imitating art!

Wind power stations are destructive on so many levels. They kills birds, they destroy landscapes and vistas, they destroy previously harmonious communities and friendships, they have torn apart families, they consume financial and human capital which rural communities can ill afford but is necessary to fight proposals.

However the most destructive effect of wind power stations is they destroy the human spirit of those who find themselves having to fight these proposals.

The real hurt is, the companies don't care.

Yours sincerely,

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