

11 February 2011

**The Chair,
Senate Community Affairs Committee
Enquiry into social and economic impacts of rural wind farms**

Submission by Alan Howard, Collector.

This submission will argue that the process for approving wind turbine developments in rural areas disenfranchise local residents by bypassing local councils and giving the state Minister for Planning sole approval authority.

First, let me say I can see twelve wind turbine towers from my house. They are nine kilometres away and have minimal impact on our visual amenity however the health effects have not been fully investigated. The Transfield proposal is for eighty turbines, one hundred and fifty metres high and some sited three kilometres away on an eighty metre high escarpment.

This is an overdevelopment and close to the small village of Collector. Deleting the towers from the escarpment would make a huge improvement to the impact on the village and adjacent properties.

From other completed wind farms at Cullarin and Tarago in NSW and Waubra in Victoria the local community structure has been decimated. Families who were friends are now fighting each other over the wind farm towers. There is a country ethos of helping neighbours in difficult times – helping in times of flood, fire, weed control and vermin eradication. This community spirit is now breaking down and is disastrous for the future especially as times are tough for rural communities.

Neighbours are angered by the secrecy of gagging the landholders by confidentially agreements. The cohesiveness of the communities is deteriorating.

I have lived in Collector for about twenty years but there are a number of people have moved here recently but now find out that a wind farm is proposed for this area. Naturally they are concerned about the value of their properties. This in turn will effect the borrowing arrangement with lending institutions leading to financial stress. Anybody who says the wind farm will not have a negative on property prices is dreaming. A close neighbour is selling their house to move to Sydney for employment is already experiencing negative comments from potential buyers enquiring about the towers. South Australia is experiencing people walking away from their small rural holdings as they can not sell.

The government must be "up front" about the future locations of wind farms.

The income derived from wind turbines certainly helps farmers who have had such a bad time during the last drought however for one person to have such a windfall and the neighbour who has to put up with the visual impact, noise and perhaps future health issues to receive no compensation is extremely unfair and not the Australian way. This strategy will further divide communities.

In Collector the largest landholder upon whose property the towers will be built is an absentee landlord spending most or all his time running restaurants in Sydney's eastern suburbs.

All residents whose amenity is adversely affected by the wind farms must be adequately

compensated. This compensation should be equal to the rent paid to the landholders.

The Collector wind farm is a \$400M development generating approximately four 4.5% profit at commissioning with future growth tied to the carbon price. The REC, renewable energy certificate, is guaranteed to rise with the carbon price as will the profit from the wind farm. If the landholders are paid \$15,000 per turbine the residents should receive the same in compensation ie \$1.2M per annum over the life of the turbines.

These funds should be paid into a trust and run by a reputable financial institution. Local Government Councils whose financial management record is woeful should not be involved in the management of the trust.

The issue of the removal of the turbines at the end of their life is extremely important. Funds must be put aside by way of cash or bank guarantee to provide for the dismantling of the towers and the remediation of the land. The reason for the funds up front is that the whole project will probably be sold on and may end up in two dollar company with no way of paying for removal and remediation.

Solar energy is obviously the future for renewable energy generation. Research is gaining momentum and although large areas of land are required for photovoltaic panels to compete with wind turbines solar will take over.

At present government policy stimulates the high profits from the construction of wind farms and ramming these projects through the approval process is meant to show the world that Australia is meeting its target of twenty percent of energy is generated from renewable energy sources. This is achieved at a price and the taxpayer has to carry the load. Some rural taxpayers will also have to put up with lower property prices, possible future health issues and the intrusive visual impact in a beautiful Australian landscape. City people wonder what all the fuss is about but it would be interesting to see their response to a proposed eighty turbine wind farm three kilometres off the east coast from Sydney's South Head to Cronulla.

If Australia is to have wind farms the process of approval must be more consultative and less secretive. The government must be more transparent in its dealings with rural residents to ensure all Australians are treated fairly and equally.