

The Social and Economic Impact of Rural Wind Farms

Submission to the Parliament of Australia Senate Inquiry

Introduction

Our family has owned and operated a dairy enterprise in Eight Mile Creek, South Australia since 1984. We farm approximately 1800 acres which is made up of a number of blocks in the area known as Eight Mile Creek. We have 700 dairy cows which are milked on three separate dairy farms all within a few kilometres of each other. We also have several hundred other cattle consisting of calves, yearling dairy and beef heifers, yearling steers, bullocks and beef cows and calves. Annually we produce 4 million litres of milk and sell approximately 500 head of cattle through the local Mt Gambier sale yards.

Our home is located on one of the blocks on the north side of the Eight Mile Creek road which runs along the coast to the fishing village of Port Macdonnell. That block is bordered to the east by the Eight Mile Creek which starts its journey at Ewens Ponds, a magnificent natural spring fed water hole, and ends where the mouth of the creek spills out into the southern ocean. It is a beautiful tranquil part of the world and attracts a myriad of birdlife and fish, including the endangered pygmy perch, freshwater crayfish and eels. Many tourists visit the area to enjoy Ewens Ponds, the Conservation Park, the Eight Mile Creek and the beach.

From our backyard there are commanding views to the north of Mt Schanck, Australia's only dormant volcano, and the undulating rich farming land which is typical of this area. To the east and north east we can see the Eight Mile Creek and the Conservation Park, respectively. All of our farm blocks are in the unique situation in that they are located between Mt Schanck to the north and the sea to the south. Tom's father, Richard, also lives on the farm. His house is located on a rise on the main dairy block 5 kilometres (km) inland from the mouth of the Eight Mile Creek. From his house there are 360 degree views of Mount Schanck and Mt Gambier to the north and the ocean to south, Port Macdonnell to the south west and Greenpoint and Cape Bridgewater to the south east.

Being farmers we spend much of the day outdoors and we are fortunate that not only can we enjoy the spectacular views from our actual houses but also while we work; whether we are bringing the cows in for milking, setting up pasture breaks in the paddocks, moving stock, baling hay or feeding calves. We are constantly aware of the beauty of the landscape that surrounds us and feel very fortunate to have the opportunity to live and work in such a beautiful place. We are also very aware of the tranquility of our special part of the world. At night as we sleep we can hear the wonderful sound of the waves lapping at the beach and during the day we are able to hear the songs of the birds as they flutter about.

Our family has been in this area for nearly 30 years and over that time we have constantly grown our farming enterprise by investing in more land, increasing herd size and currently, installing a robotic dairy on the main dairy farm. Our intention is for our family to still be here in another 30 years and beyond.

Proposed Allendale Wind Farm

In 2009 we became aware of a proposal to construct a wind farm in the area, the Allendale Wind Farm, so called by the company, Acciona Energy Oceania Pty Ltd, which was planning to build it. The proposal included 47 wind turbines each with towers up to 100 m tall and blades up to 41 m in length plus ancillary infrastructure such as overhead and underground electrical cabling, access tracks and electricity substations. The towers would be spread across a number of properties in an easterly direction from the township of Allendale East through to Eight Mile Creek.

A noise monitoring box was placed out the front of Richard's house so he thought he had better inform himself about the proposed nature of the wind farm. He was alarmed to find out that three of the proposed 47 turbines were to be placed within 1 km of his house and several more within 2 km of our farm. He began investigating the ramifications of having large scale wind turbines within close proximity to his house and farm. His research led him far and wide and to speak with a number of people in both South Australia and Victoria who had either had a wind farm built next to them or there was a proposal to build one. As his research progressed he became increasingly concerned about the impact the wind farm would have on our family and the Eight Mile Creek area. He passed on his concerns to us and we also began to inform ourselves of the impact of living next door to a wind farm.

The Application Process

In late October 2009 we received a letter from the District Council of Grant informing us as adjoining landholders that they had received an application for review by the Development and Assessment Panel, from Acciona Energy to construct a wind farm in the Allendale East/Eight Mile Creek area. The letter also invited submission from affected or concerned people to make representation on the matter. We sent back a written objection to the proposal and asked to represent ourselves at the Development and Assessment Panel meeting where the application was to be presented.

Our Objections

As adjoining landholders and residents of Eight Mile Creek we strongly and emphatically objected to the proposed wind farm development and conveyed those objections to the Council in the appropriate form. We believed that it was a grossly inappropriate development for the area and had a number of very grave concerns:-

Visual Impact

The proposed towers at a total height of up to 141 m tall would be a gross and visual blight on the landscape. Being so tall, their impact on the amenity of the landscape cannot be underestimated. The whole landscape would be permanently altered and the current views described above destroyed. Several of the turbines are to be within a short distance of our farm, particularly our dairy and workshop, and Richard's house, so the visual impact on us would be even greater.

Noise

We are very concerned about the noise that wind turbines make. People living nearby to turbines have reported that the sound they make is unnatural, incessant and annoying. It can prevent people from sleeping at night resulting in chronic sleep deprivation.

Shadow Flicker

Several of the turbines are situated to the west of our farm and directly west of our dairy and workshop. We are concerned that the huge blades will cast enormous flickering shadows over the farm at certain times of the day. We envisage this to have an enormous impact on our cows wanting to enter the dairy as they do not like shadows.

Adverse health effects

There is now a plethora of anecdotal evidence of effects on human health emerging from areas where wind farms have been operating for some time. These include headaches, tinnitus, elevated blood pressure, vertigo, nausea and anxiety. These have been collectively described as "wind turbine syndrome." We are not prepared to have our family or staff members potentially put at risk. And to date there does not appear to have been enough thorough research to investigate these observations further.

Effects on dairy cows

If turbines can cause problems for humans then what could be the effect on high producing dairy cows? Dairy cows are very sensitive to energies, electric fields, shadows and stress. They are our core business and if they don't produce or cannot conceive where will this leave our

dairy business? We have invested a substantial amount of money in our new dairy and are very concerned that the wind farm will negatively impact on it because of the close proximity.

Effects on land values

We have grave concerns that our property values will decline if a wind farm is built next to our farm. We find it hard to imagine anyone wanting to buy property overshadowed by 141 m wind towers. This concern has been voiced by many others in similar situations.

Effects on wildlife especially birds

The Eight Mile Creek area is home to a number of beautiful birds, most recently the highly endangered magpie goose. It has been reported that where wind farms are built bird life suffers either because they fly into the blades and are killed or disappear from the area altogether.

Risks – fires, explosions, blades coming off

The close proximity of the proposed turbines to Richard's house, our workshop and our dairy gives us great cause for concern if there should be a fire, explosion or some other mechanical malfunction. How will we protect ourselves, our property and our staff from such a potential hazard? If something adverse were to happen, such as a fire starting and spreading to our property, who pays for the potential damage?

Development and Assessment Panel (DAP) Meeting

The DAP attached to the District Council (DC) of Grant met on 10th March 2010 to decide on the wind farm application. Only four written objections were received by the DC of Grant, three of which came from our family. We attended in person and were given only 5 minutes each to make representation and voice our objections. The representative from Acciona was given a much longer time to speak for their application than us. The DAP panel members deliberated in private for only about 45 min before they came back with their decision to approve the application with the removal of one turbine, that being the one closest to Richard's house.

We were completely dumbfounded that the DAP could make a decision on such a huge matter with such potential far reaching effects on the community in such a short space of time. Tom even said to them in his submission that if they approve the application it proves that they "did not do their homework." In her statement Louise asked the DAP to "not let our community suffer as others are now suffering."

We are of the opinion that the DAP members were too ill informed to make such a major decision. We do not believe they went and did their own research into the negative impact it could have on the community. From where we stand it looks like the DAP have bought the wind

farm spiel hook, line and sinker. We feel very let down and disappointed that the DC of Grant and the DAP have overlooked the concerns of law abiding, **RATE PAYING** local citizens in favour of the back pocket of a foreign owned company. We feel our beautiful part of the world has been sold out and prostituted by our local government and the giant green juggernaut that is “renewable energy at any cost”.

The Appeal

We took the next legal and appropriate channel available to us and that was to appeal the decision in the Environment, Resources and Development Court. A mediation meeting was held in Mt Gambier at the Council Chambers between us, our solicitor, and representatives from the DC of Grant and Acciona. We asked them to remove every turbine within 2 km of our farm but they refused, thus rendering the mediation meeting fruitless.

We engaged a solicitor to help prepare our case for court which involved also engaging a number of expert witnesses to give evidence in support of our contention. On October 25th the court case started in Mt Gambier with a tour of the potential site and continued in the ERD Court in Adelaide for the following week. It was then adjourned until January 13th when it reconvened for another four days. The case will wrap up on the 24th and 25th of February with a judgment expected in May.

The Social and Economic Impact on US

Ironically, the wind farm is not even built and we as a family already feel like we have “Wind Turbine Syndrome”. For the last two years we have been actively battling against this gross and unwanted intrusion into our peaceful lives here in Eight Mile Creek. The economic cost has been enormous as we have had to fund the legal appeal out of our own back pocket. Our dairy cows have been milking their udders off to pay legal fees and court costs. As a consequence money that we might have otherwise used to pay farm accounts has had to be channeled into fighting the wind farm and that figure is getting upward of \$100,000. We are a small business and we cannot swallow that kind of cost. Every cent that our dairy business earns goes straight back into our local community through the small businesses that we engage for products and services and to the people that we employ to work on our farm. If we cannot operate our business because of the wind farm, a very large sum of money will be taken out of the local community, and all our staff will be unemployed.

We feel that the DC Council of Grant doesn’t care about or hasn’t given scant thought to any of these potential implications. We feel as though we are being punished, yet we have done nothing wrong. And the DC of Grant maintains that now that the issue is in the hands of the ERD court they can’t do anything about it. Richard feels as if he has lost his retirement to the fight and we are all battle weary, so to speak. We will not, however; give in as we passionately

believe that the wind farm is grossly inappropriate for this area and the whole process that has been the proposal and application for the development is repugnant.

Since December 2010 more and more people in the Eight Mile Creek/ Allendale area have become aware of the proposal to build a wind farm and there are many that are extremely angry about it. One of the main points of anger is that so many people were not aware of the proposal and therefore did not have the opportunity to object. At several recent community meetings local residents have voiced their concerns and subsequently presented their concerns to the DC of Grant. It is literally tearing this community apart. And ours is not the only community to feel this way – one only has to read the papers and look at the internet to find out many other rural communities are in exactly the same situation. We have neighbours in tears because their plans for the future of their homes are now shattered because a wind turbine could potentially be built 750 m from their house. For the record, more than 60 homes and one school will be within 2 km of a wind turbine if this development is allowed to proceed.

Wind farm companies trot out the same old spiel – combat global warming and climate change, good for the environment etc, etc, BUT at a meeting between Acciona representatives and our family on 4th March 2010, they could not give us one positive, **NOT ONE** positive for having a wind farm built next to our property. In fact one of them even said that “most Australians would not want to see a wind farm on the coast because it’s not nice.” Eight Mile Creek is a mere 5 km from the beach.

So in terms of what are the potential social and economic impacts of wind farms in rural Australia - they are and will be enormous. The social fabric of small communities is being pulled apart as neighbour is pitted against neighbour. There are already people in other wind farm areas that are unable to live in their houses because they cannot bear the noise and vibrations emitted from nearby turbines. That is just plain **UNAUSTRIAN**. We are gravely concerned that this may happen to our community here in Eight Mile Creek and Allendale East and that would be just devastating. There is much emotion expressed by people being overshadowed by wind turbines because these are people’s homes, people’s farms, people’s livelihoods and people’s communities. And that should be worth more than the economic interest of a foreign owned wind farm company.

The rampant approval of wind farms in inappropriate locations must be stopped now or rural Australia will become a graveyard of wind turbines all testament to the unrelenting pursuit by politicians of so-called green energy and the green vote.

The senate committee has a responsibility to all Australians to protect our landscape and our communities from the vested interests of foreign owned companies. As we have maintained the whole way through this extremely stressful and costly process – as free citizens of this

nation we have the right to live and work without being negatively impacted upon by someone else's business.

Members of the Senate committee please be aware that we as a family and now as a community will not rest until sanity prevails and the Allendale Wind Farm is put on the scrap heap where it belongs.

Tom and Louise Paltridge

Eight Mile Creek, SA