

The Chairman and committee members  
the Senate Community Affairs Committee Parliament House

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**Re: Senate Enquiry into the Social and Economic Impact of Rural Wind Farms**

**Terms of Reference: -**

The social and economic impacts of rural wind farms, and in particular:

- (a) Any adverse health effects for people living in close proximity to wind farms;
- (b) Concerns over the excessive noise and vibrations emitted by wind farms, which are in close proximity to people's homes;
- (c) The impact of rural wind farms on property values, employment opportunities and farm income;
- (d) The interface between Commonwealth, state and local planning laws as they pertain to wind farms; and
- (e) Any other relevant matters.

I would like to congratulate the Committee for instituting this enquiry. I appreciate the contentious nature of this issue and hope your deliberations assist in resolving some of the conflict that exists.

I am a family farmer near Crookwell, 100 kms north of here and have been involved in this debate from the beginning. I live next to the Crookwell 1 windfarm, and have been working for the past ten years to build a windfarm on my property. This new windfarm is known as Crookwell 2, and was probably the first windfarm to be embroiled in the controversy that currently exists.

While I have very serious concerns about climate change and most particularly the impact it may have on agricultural land, my primary motivation for building a windfarm is to drought proof my property. If I can establish a passive income stream that is not dependant on rainfall, then I am in a position to run an economically and therefore an environmentally sustainable farm. I also am establishing a viable superannuation scheme for my wife and myself, which will allow the farm to be passed on to future generations, either my children or a purchaser, intact as a long-term sustainable farming operation. I believe farming as a stand-alone business in Australia is currently economically and therefore environmentally unsustainable in the long term. Farmers everywhere are looking for off-farm income to "subsidise" their farming business. It seems farmers are not going to be paid to sustain their land in the near future, so I see the offer from windfarm developers for a long-term secure lease payment as a way to achieve this diversification of my income stream.

You may see this as selfish and a devil-may-care attitude, but I have empathy with all my neighbours and the local community, and the vast majority of them have the same empathy with me. I would also point out to you that, like most family farmers, the vast majority of my spending is in the local community. The only real exception to this is the interest payments I make to the multi-national banking industry, which are considerable and have been rising over

the last few years, due mainly to the extended dry period we have experienced. This flow-on effect of windfarm lease payments into the local economy has not been mentioned by any of the anti-windfarm lobbyists.

I have been actively involved with the Upper Lachlan Shire Council, being a sitting Councillor for the first four years of its existence. I wasn't re-elected at the last council elections. As a Councillor I was intimately involved in the preparation of our new Local Environmental Plan. Through this process it became abundantly apparent that this area's capacity for food/fibre production was strategically critical to the NSW State Government's vision for its future. If the NSW Government is serious about this vision then it needs to acknowledge the long-term sustainability of the current farming systems is critically endangered and not economically or environmentally sustainable. With the synergies of traditional farming, particularly grazing systems (food/fibre production) and windfarms there is a natural and compelling reason to support the development of windfarms in agricultural areas. I'm sure you are all aware of the forecasts of a critical shortage of food production in the near future. Anything this country can do to assist our food production systems should be considered with this scenario in mind. In light of this, any discussion about rezoning land with wind turbines on it as industrial land should be dismissed out of hand. Such rezoning would nearly certainly make it unviable for agriculture due to the massive increase in local council rates that would result.

While I dismiss most of the arguments presented by the anti-windfarm lobbyists as pure scare-mongering, I believe there is a better way to manage windfarm developments in this relatively sparsely populated area. I presented a proposal to the Upper Lachlan Shire Council only recently that I believe would solve most of the problems the windfarm issue has created in this and any other area. Very briefly, my proposition is that windfarm lease payments should be shared differentially amongst people affected by a development and not only paid to the hosts of the turbines. Because windfarms actually do work, and are commercially attractive businesses, there is scope for these extra payments to be achieved. Unfortunately the Council didn't see the merit in my proposal and it may not proceed any further. For your information I will attach a copy of the presentation I made to Council to this submission.

I believe the vast majority of representations made to you, and to the general community, by the anti-windfarm lobby groups are without foundation. They are mostly backed up by information obtained from the Internet, substantially based on outdated information and on submissions/studies from overseas that have little or no relevance to this issue in Australia. The only points made by these groups that have any relevance to the debate in this country are the issue of possible devaluation of property values adjacent to windfarm developments (which is totally unsubstantiated), and the visual aspect of wind turbines (which is totally subjective).

As you deliberate the representations to this committee, there are number of other issues I suggest are important: -

- In conjunction with the last local council elections an overwhelmingly significant 70% of the ratepayers of the Upper Lachlan Shire responded to a referendum on further windfarm

developments in this Shire in the affirmative. This was despite massive negative campaigns from the anti-windfarm lobby and the lodgment of the Development Application for the Gullen Range Windfarm shortly before the election. This 70% is the silent majority who generally don't make submissions to enquiries such as this, but I believe agree with most of the points I have made to you today.

- There has been some discussion in the community on the 2 kilometre setback distance for wind turbines in the Upper Lachlan Shire Council Development Control Plan (DCP). You need to be aware that this 2 kilometre setback distance is based on visual aspects alone. I don't believe there is any scientific justification for this exclusion zone, and it would not stand up to a serious challenge in any legal forum. There is a range of set-back distances applied in other jurisdictions that could be obtained by this committee as it deliberates on this matter. Other issues, such as noise, are addressed in further clauses in the DCP.
- The contentious issue of safety lighting on the turbines needs to be addressed by this committee. There needs to be some justification of them being installed under CASA recommendations.

I would welcome the opportunity to appear before the committee to speak to this submission and answer any questions Senators may have.

Charlie Prell

(10 February 2011)

# Presentation to Upper Lachlan Shire Council

18th June 2009

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from Charlie Prell

I outlined the thoughts behind this presentation in a letter to Council dated 17th May, 2009. I would like to make this presentation in two parts:

Firstly: The creation of a Community Foundation to manage funds donated to Council for the benefit of the Upper Lachlan Shire community from windfarm developers, or any other source, and

Secondly: Further consideration by Council of the ideas previously presented to Council by Christiaan Durrant in November 2007.

## 1. The Creation of a Community Foundation

I have taken the time to research the concept and believe Council would be best served by creating a Community Foundation to manage any future funds donated to Council for community purposes.

I know that Council has created a Voluntary Planning Agreement to encourage windfarm developers to contribute in line with the Windfarm Development Control Plan. This is a good initiative from Council to attract the funding, but doesn't address the issue of how the funding will be spent in the community. A Community Foundation does.

There are many existing Community Foundations in Australia (and around the world) and you can view these at this link.

<http://communityfoundations.philanthropy.org.au/> There is an existing Community Foundation in our area called The Capital Region Community Foundation. The link to this organisation is [www.greatergood.org.au](http://www.greatergood.org.au) . **I encourage Councillors to access these links prior to the Council meeting.**

The benefits in establishing a Community Foundation in the Upper Lachlan Shire include: -

- The absolute separation of the funds in the Foundation from Council's finances. This is important to allow the whole community to "own" the funds, and very importantly to also totally negate any argument from higher tiers of Government that the Council has access to these funds.
- A Community Foundation would encourage any philanthropic donors within or outside the Shire that their funds would be appropriately managed.
- A Community Foundation could accept donations (voluntary contributions) from any persons or organisations, and would not be limited to windfarm developers' contributions.

- The absolute surety from the community that the expenditure of funds would be above and beyond any political motivations, and would not be able to be subverted by any special interest groups.
- There is an existing network of Community Foundations that can be of assistance in forming a Community Foundation in this Shire, with ongoing networking opportunities, and online support.
- The Community Foundation has to have clearly defined areas to be served by the Foundation and a legally binding management structure.

The Council has a Grants Officer who I am sure would be able to assist in investigating this option.

*I ask Councillors to recommend the Grants Officer be asked to assess the need for a Community Foundation in the Upper Lachlan Shire.*

## 2. Community involvement in the further development of windfarms in the Upper Lachlan Shire

The basis of my support for windfarms in this area, including the windfarm I am building on my property, is that windfarms support farmers by allowing them to “drought-proof” their farms by relieving the pressure on the environmental management of their farms. You all know the financial pressure our farmers have been under for the past ten years or so. The acceptance of approaches from windfarm developers has not been a “grab for cash”. In the overwhelming majority of cases it has been a “last gasp life-line”.

Add the obvious benefits of extended employment opportunities, local suppliers and businesses increasing turnover, accommodation and catering of construction workers and all the spin-offs from this increased economic activity. These benefits are real. Just spend ten minutes asking some of the businesses in Goulburn that have been involved with the construction of the Capital Hill and Cullerin windfarms. These benefits by far outweigh any arguments against windfarm developments.

The Upper Lachlan Shire Council has grappled with the windfarm issue since its creation and as a former Councillor I have contributed to these discussions.

I believe the result of the referendum held last year, when 70% of ratepayers responded “yes”, and that approximately 70% of your rates income comes from rural lands empowers, if not obliges, this Council to represent these landholders and become more supportive of them on this issue.

I know this prospect will not please the “anti-windfarm” lobby groups. However, I believe the further progression of windfarm developments in this Shire is inevitable for

the simple reason that there is an excellent wind resource within most of this Shire and we are close to major population centres (customers).

During the campaign for the election of this Council I proposed that the ideas presented by Christiaan Durrant should be further considered. This idea met general acceptance at the forums I spoke to and I believe still needs addressing.

The presentation from Christiaan Durrant identified the way forward by asking for consideration of people who live in close proximity to wind farm developments to be included in lease rental payments from developments. The easy way for this excellent idea to be implemented is to adjust the Windfarm DCP to include such a condition in Clause 8(f). This clause is one of the most erroneously quoted clauses in the DCP. It clearly refers to visual aspects of wind turbines alone. All other aspects of wind turbines are covered by other clauses in the DCP. This clause can justifiably be used as the basis for seeking remuneration for landholders in close proximity to proposed turbines.

Amending the DCP in this way will create the incentive for local landholders to form an incorporated Association to represent their interests in negotiations with windfarm developers. There are immense benefits to our landholders (70% of your ratepayers!) in this type of collective bargaining, and I believe the Council should at the very least be supportive of the formation of this Association. Ideally the Council could facilitate this formation, possibly through the ULEAD committee.

**As I said in my previous letter to you:**

There are numerous reasons why this Shire can actively present itself to the nation and the planet as a clean/green Shire, and this would preferably involve renewable energy production being an important part of a sustainable farming-based community that is truly sustainable. Remember, we have about 5 million people living within a 2½ hour drive of our boundaries. These people are all potential visitors to our Shire.

I also believe that, in conjunction with the new Goulburn/Mulwaree Council, we should be actively canvassing and encouraging the windfarm construction industry to locate manufacturing facilities within our Shires. Under the current economic environment this may not be as far-fetched as it first sounds, and would provide desperately needed skilled employment opportunities for young people in these Shires.

Councillors, I thank you for your time. From experience, I know how valuable it is.