

The Senate Committee
Social and Economic Impact of Rural Wind Farms
Canberra ACT

10th February 2011

This submission is prompted by the approval of the application to erect wind turbines on ridges overlooking the town of Scone NSW.

The agricultural sector has been fundamentally changing around Scone and similar towns around Australia over many years. Poor returns in traditional rural enterprises and the demise of the “family farm” have meant subdivisions and subsequent sales of smaller rural holdings for lifestyle occupation. I am sure the motivation for a large landholder to sell rights to erect wind turbines on his property is a manifestation of these forces. There is little doubt that this new land use is financially lucrative, but the impact on neighbours is unconscionable. The windfarm issue polarises communities and strongly held positions on both sides of the argument generate unhealthy friction.

Councils in Scone and similar regions have had to regulate subdivisions to prevent wholesale fragmentation of parcels of productive agricultural land because there is a large and growing market for smaller properties in attractive areas within a few hours of cities and major urban centres. This lifestyle, or “tree change” market is driven by the same forces on society for environmental sustainability that windfarm proponents identify as reasons to generate cleaner power.

City originating tree changers are an engine of rural growth and at something under a million dollars a household, these new residents generate significant business in rural towns. The erection of massive industrial power generating structures fundamentally changes the nature of the areas to which people are attracted and repels the inflow of “tree change” capital. To attempt to make the case that windfarms are economically good for rural areas ignores this impact.

Windfarm proponents contend that turbines have little impact on property prices. Where the turbines are on large rural holdings and where the only nearby residents are sheep, cattle and the odd wombat I would not argue. It is also logical that values in urban areas, where the ambient noise levels reflect the population density, and horizons consist primarily of surrounding buildings, could be unaffected. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to understand that fringe urban or small rural holdings are affected differently. Where the resident population has sought areas of natural beauty, assiduously minimising views containing man-made structures, Wind turbines trample all over the ambiance and definitely WILL effect property value.

My wife and I moved to the Scone area three years ago from Sydney. We purchased a small block of 150 acres with the express purpose of building for ourselves an environmentally sustainable lifestyle. We had every intention of engaging in a small rural business, living out our days and disposing of our capital in the area. We are within four kilometres of the proposed wind farm and our tree lined horizon could be cut by up to twelve of the proposed power generators. Naturally our plans have stalled. Hundreds of thousands of dollars slated for building and improvements have not been spent. Selling up and moving again is a difficult option – who would buy the land at anything like it's pre-wind farm price? I can sustain the argument that the wind farm has already cost us significant amounts of money as well as at least a year of aggravation. No-one could accuse us of being anti-environment, but just because the proposed structures are clean power generators does not mean they are appropriate for the area.

I recognise that in a society we must make personal compromises for the greater good, but we need to be able to identify the good and we need to understand the compromises. After some years of monitoring the debate it seems to me that windfarm developers gain the benefit - society gains comparatively little. Local residents make the compromises exclusively.

I ask that the committee moves to redress this significant imbalance.

Alan Wood