

## **Introduction:**

I live and work from a home-studio in Evansford, which is north of the 128, 1.5MW turbines that make up the Waubra Wind Farm (WWF). The turbines have a tower height of approximately 80 metres, blade diameter of approximately 80 metres and a combined height of around 120 metres. The closest turbines are approximately 3.3 kilometres to the south/south-west. 30 turbines straddle Mt Mitchell, Maiden Hill and Gordon Hill, and the valley and hills beyond in close proximity.

I did not oppose the building of the Waubra Wind Farm when I first heard of the proposal in 2003/2004. Like so many, I believed what I was told from the Wind Energy developer and government agencies - it would be beneficial to farmers, locals, the community and the environment, and that the impact and noise from the wind turbines on local residents would be minimal to non-existent.

I supported and continue to support the need to identify and use sustainable energy resources. I have for over thirty years been attentive to the needs of, and threats to the environment. As such, a great deal of care has been dedicated to the design and construction of my home, utilizing environmentally sustainable, philosophies, techniques and materials. I have over that time, done all I can to minimize my 'footprint' on the planet.

Over thirty years I have personally designed and constructed this home, studio and environment. ie laid every timber, stone and brick. I chose to build in this slightly out of the way place because it provides me with space and serenity, bush and panoramic views, a slower pace of life, that I require to sustain my arts practice and chosen lifestyle. These are essential for my sense of well-being and quality of life.

I now find myself in a situation that I had never envisaged. My experience of living with the Waubra Wind Farm which has been in full operation for nearly two years, has led me to question vigorously everything I have been told about wind farms. I believe that not only have the wind energy companies and governments omitted information, but they have deceived people about the actuality of the situation. I feel betrayed by the

authorities who did not establish the appropriate planning and monitoring guidelines to ensure that people are protected in their own homes.

Since the Waubra Wind Farm has become fully operational I now have to live with an Industrial Plant – noise, vibration, flashing red lights and have begun to experience adverse health effects. The noise emitted from the WWF has a particular quality that I cannot become accustomed to, the regular swooshing/whooping is extremely disconcerting. It is not a pleasant sound, it is alarming and very fatiguing: certainly not the sound of a 'refrigerator', 'no louder than a conversation in a library', or, 'the seaside' as the wind developers claim. The noise emitted from these wind turbines is loud and it travels a long way.

My health, sense of well being and quality of life have been negatively impacted by the construction and operation of this wind farm.

### **Adverse Health Effects (AHE)**

These adverse health effects are not experienced all the time. I experience them only when the turbines are operating and the weather conditions and wind direction are aligned. I do not experience these AHE if I am out of the area. Although I have noted that it now takes longer for the AHE to disperse once I have left the area.

- [Ears: Tinnitus, ear ache/pressure, impaired hearing](#)
- This condition began shortly after the full operation of the WWF. I have never previously had these conditions. I find these conditions disturbing. It interferes with my ability to think clearly and creatively. I have also noticed that my hearing has deteriorated. When I am in a room where several conversations are occurring, I can find it difficult to hear what the person I am speaking to is saying and other times to distinguish words.
- [Elevated blood pressure](#) Since September 2010 I have developed hypertension. I have had a documented medical history of B/P in the range of 120's/70's for the last 25 years with same GP, my life style has changed little through that time. In October 2010, I purchased a blood pressure monitor and record my B/P several times a day. My blood pressure has spiked to dangerously high levels. I am currently on medication to lower my B/P, but it continues to be high, especially

some mornings. I also now suffer chest tightness and chest pains. I have consulted with my GP and cardiologist regarding this problem. I undertook a Stress Exercise Test, Echocardiograph, and wore a holter monitor for six hours, the results were normal.

When I leave this area to visit friends in Melbourne and stay overnight(s), I take the blood pressure monitor and record my B/P levels. The results are quite astounding, my B/P drops dramatically, then on returning home my B/P spikes back to the high levels I am now experiencing. Yet, I have been told that there is no correlation between wind farms and B/P levels, and the same has been said to my neighbours who are experiencing similarly high B/P levels. If there was an out break of swine flu or foot and mouth disease in an area, would not the health/agriculture departments act swiftly to counter the spread of those diseases? Why is the health of people living close to wind farms being ignored, will it take an epidemic before authorities raise their heads and investigate the causes? There is a 'duty of care' issue at stake here, who will take responsibility when the ill health effects are proven to be true? Given that all these AHE are global where ever there are wind farms, it will be only a matter of time before these health issues are proven genuine. Govt(s) have a responsibility to investigate these issues without fear or favour.

- [Headaches](#), depending on wind direction/ turbine noise; these are a common occurrence currently. The nature of the headaches: one is like having your head in a vice. ie intense temple pressure, and another has the sensation of a 'prickly head' – multiple intense pressure points on the skull. I have suffered very few headaches in the past and none of them like this. Concentration is difficult to when these headaches occur.
- [Cognitive functions](#) have been impaired since operation of WWF. These problems include: vagueness, memory lapses, difficulty in focusing, maintaining attention and a loss of communication skills. I have never had these problems in the past. Previously I ran my own construction business, and also project managed multi- million dollar construction projects, both these activities requiring acute focus, concentration, communication skills, and attention to detail over long hours to succeed.

- [Sleep disruption](#), Many nights I have difficulty in getting to sleep due to turbine noise, and other nights I am woken regularly around 3-4am and find it difficult to get back to sleep, because of the noise and/or vibration from the WWF. Feeling tired, exhausted and washed out is no doubt having an effect on my ability to work, and lead a normal life.
- [Emotional well being](#) is now severely disrupted as a result of the WWF.
- Over thirty years I have created my home from what was a bare 60 acre bush property, - a house, studio, sheds, several acres of landscaped garden, outdoor entertainment areas, orchard, dams. I have chosen not to live in a city because I need a peaceful environment, one that sustains my creativity, for my emotional well being. The Wind Farm has taken that away.
- [Anxiety](#) I now experience anxiety attacks, which prior to the WWF never occurred.

## **Economic Impact**

### Property Values.

Evansford has no shop, pub, cafe, school or postbox. The only public transport is the school bus run. This picturesque area with scenic views is a mix of farmland, remnant bushland, state forests and Reservoirs. The local properties are farms (mostly owned by old families); lifestyle properties and weekenders. Mostly people who want to live here are looking for a quiet, rural atmosphere. For many people, 120 metre high wind turbines with flashing red lights and a noise that can sound like a diesel truck rumbling outside your window, does not fit with the image of rural retreat that they are seeking. We have heard from a local real estate agent that if you can see the turbines you will have greater difficulty in selling the property. Our local knowledge confirms this. Whilst some local properties, with no views of the current wind farm have sold quite quickly, we know of another property where the view from the home is dominated by wind turbines, has been on the market for over a year.

As for many locally, this property is our main financial asset. It is a lifestyle property. We have invested an enormous amount of time, energy and resources into creating an environment where we both live and work. Although our views are not dominated by the wind farm, we know that its' proximity will impact on resale value. What hope have we to

recoup this investment? We do not want to relocate, but if we had to, eg if our health continues to deteriorate, what would it cost to replace what we have, and how much would we get for our home, 30 – 50% less as some real estate agents are suggesting?

## **Social Impact**

As Chair of the Evansford Community Centre Committee of Management, I have seen a serious split in the local community between people that suffer ill health effects and are critical of the Waubra Wind Farm, and those people that gain financially or ideologically support the WWF.

The divide in the wider community is quite fraught, antagonistic, and even on occasions violent. There have been: death threats; assaults; verbal abuse; physical harassment; property damage. People who have been friends from childhood no longer speak; families divided, people who have contributed enormously to the local community over many years ostracized, verbally harassed. People who have spoken out because of the problems they have experienced are mostly harassed by some of the WWF supporters, rather than the other way around. The division may take generations to heal, if ever.

Whilst some people in the community actively divide, there is an attempt by other people in the local community (from both sides of the divide, so to speak) to not let this destroy social relationships. During the recent floods, many a vehicle was bogged and people helped each other, no matter what 'side' you were on. After all the landowners hosting turbines did not know what they were letting themselves in for either. They too were deceived.

Locally some of the landowners who host turbines have been heard to make comments such as: ["haven't had a good night's sleep in the last two years"](#). We have also heard that some landowners are experiencing ill health effects but they are constrained legally from saying anything (due to their Contractual Gag Clause), possibly also, they would not, for other personal, family or social reasons. How many landowners are suffering in silence, how many regret their decisions to host turbines? Lets remove the legal constraints and have some transparency here, what is there to hide?

Perhaps more than the actual wind farm dividing the community, it would appear that the company Acciona has fostered community division, a 'divide and conquer' mentality. This attitude is maintained by the consistent public statements made by Acciona that some people opposed to wind farms are spreading misinformation and alarming local communities.

I refer to Proposed Waubra North Wind Farm Community Information Bulletin, January 2010, a comment by Genevieve Bowyer, Acciona's Community Relations Coordinator '.....it is of great disappointment to the project team that considerable misinformation has been circulated amongst the community regarding the proposed wind farm. The team work diligently to maintain transparency and openness.....'

Members of the local community raised legitimate concerns, asked questions and demanded rigorous answers. They had observed that much of what was being published by Acciona was large on self congratulation and limited on factual detail.

These statements by Acciona do not encourage logical community debate on the subject.

## **Processes**

### Community Consultation

#### *Community Reference Group.*

Acciona proposed in 2009 and continue to propose, an extension to the Waubra Wind Farm, which would be known as the Waubra North Wind Farm. There has never been a Waubra North or a North Waubra in the district. This extension to the northern section of the wind farm would be located close to Mt Beckworth and Evansford. Acciona asked for people to nominate to be part of the Community Reference Group (CRG) for this development. I applied and was accepted along with several other local residents who were interested in providing local perspectives.

At the first meeting of the CRG, the assembled locals were informed they probably would not understand all the words that the Acciona staff were about to use. The 'meeting' proceeded, but it was more of an information session, where Acciona staff were telling the CRG what Acciona was about to do. I had thought that a Community Reference Group would be a process where community consultation and engagement would occur. eg asked to provide input and feedback, consulted on local opinions, values, perspectives. [What occurred at that 'meeting' was patronizing, condescending and a sham. We considered the comment by the Acciona staff 'we will use words that you may not understand' offensive and deliberately antagonistic.](#) There were a total of five university degrees held by some members of the CRG at that meeting.

At the following meeting, we waited for the minutes of the previous meeting to be read and voted upon, as 'a true and accurate record' of the previous meeting. The meeting began and the Acciona staff did not follow this normal procedure. When asked to, they asked 'why?' I stated because they are not a fair and accurate account. We then spent the bulk of that meeting reviewing and correcting the previous minutes. [The then resulting amended minutes provided later by Acciona were still considered 'not true and accurate' by the CRG members.](#)

Acciona broke their own terms of reference for the CRG by not providing minutes that accurately reflected what had occurred in the meeting. The assumption that whatever minutes they had recorded did not require scrutiny or a vote of acceptance, this is a breach of due process, and their own terms of reference. It also demonstrates a remarkable lack of respect for members of the local community, who have volunteered their time. [Three sets of minutes presented by Acciona were deemed not true and accurate by the members of the CRG.](#) (Minutes, corrections and amendments are available on request)

Acciona disbanded the CRG after three meetings (one specifically dealing with bird/bat monitoring) citing the postponement of the Waubra North Wind Farm extension as the reason. The CRG members were disappointed by this, as they saw this as an opportunity to engage in detailed community consultation. It was unfortunate that Acciona did not see it as such.

My experience in this process suggests that Acciona were not interested in genuine community consultation. The CRG meeting minutes that Acciona's staff had recorded, were at the most generous, indicative of people who were not listening, and at one's most skeptical, obvious distortions of a community's legitimate concerns.

This was not a reference group. It was a token group established so that they could tick the box on community consultation.

#### Information.

Comprehensive information from the initial developer - Wind Power Australia P/L, was sent directly to us in the early planning stages of the Waubra Wind Farm. When Acciona Energy took over the Waubra Wind Farm project, information was no longer sent to us. We now know that it was available in the general store in Waubra, but that information was not provided to us directly.

During the short period the CRG was operational, I received newsletters and other information directly from Acciona, but since the CRG was disbanded, this information has become intermittent to non existent.

I refer to Waubra Wind Farm Newsletter edition ten, April 2010 '.....It's our intention to continue to find ways to keep our local communities informed with emphasis on your preferred means: newsletter, letter and local press.'

Acciona has my postal and email address and after repeated requests for newsletters/information to be forwarded to me, this has failed to occur. This is not in the spirit of Community Consultation Acciona so publicly claims to engage in.

#### Acciona publications - fact or fiction?

In the "Waubra North Update" (Waubra Wind Farm Newsletter. Edition 8. June 2009), it states "Thank-you to everyone who filled in feedback forms to assist with the planning for a wind farm at Waubra North. Information gathered to date indicates a high level of support for the project and has contributed to our planning work"



We asked people locally, the people who will be most impacted by the Waubra North development, if they had received or completed such a form. One person thought that maybe they had received something in the mail, but they were not certain. They certainly had not responded. No other person had been surveyed or contacted by Acciona or their 'independent consultants'. We certainly had not received any correspondence, forms or visits from Acciona. We wondered who they had actually surveyed and what they had asked them. Perhaps they asked the people in the office in South Melbourne. Certainly the people who would be most impacted by this development were not. **In a CRG meeting (September 15, 2009, Evansford Community Centre), the two Acciona staff, Angela Jones and Genevieve Bowyer, admitted that no such survey had been conducted.**

#### Landscape Values Survey

As part of the planning process for the "Waubra North Extension" Acciona commissioned, and disseminated a Landscape Values Survey. When the Landscape Values Survey from Acciona was discussed, people were very angry. They felt that the images of localities used were deceptive, flattening out landscapes and significant features, such as Mt Beckworth. The colours of the land, even for the height of summer were drained of any life, rendering the landscape flat and dull.

For those of us who live in this land, and know its subtle, changing beauty, the images created by independent consultants paid by Acciona, were not a true representation. One has to ask how any photographer could take such inaccurate photos, unless of course they have been 'photoshopped'. Since the wind turbines and Mt Beckworth's 'lollypop' tree are not to be seen (from View A) then, it would seem that this must have been the case. To people unfamiliar with that landscape, the images presented by the landscape survey would suggest it is a landscape of little interest or importance, thus not 'polluted' or spoilt if a wind farm is built there.

No where in the Survey were there any images of, or from, the area most likely to be affected by the proposed Waubra North Extension, and that is Evansford itself. The Talbot Reservoir (in Clunes Road Evansford) has been a popular local fishing and recreational area since the late 1860's, there are no images of, or from, this area or any other significant locations in Evansford. All the images presented in the survey are miles

from where the proposed Waubra North Extension is to be located. This is not true to Acciona's supposed transparency, community engagement and consultation.

We are also concerned that the maps in the Landscape Survey are not dated, nor do they have a legend, as is the convention. On the Landscape Survey maps there are dots, which conventionally indicate the presence of houses/buildings. If this convention has been followed then there are numerous houses that are not indicated – on for instance, Browns Road, Stud Farm Road and Clunes Road. Hasties Lane does not even exist, and neither do the homes there. What year is this map? Why does Acciona use a map that does not provide a true representation of the buildings in the area? There are also serious omissions in the OEMP, Appendix G, 'Housing within close proximity to the turbines' map. Some of the houses omitted on these maps have been there for more than thirty years, are these omissions to mislead the planning authorities that the area is a low housing density area and therefore suitable for a wind farm?. Acciona's mapping person has been very careless here.

### [Complaint Procedure](#)

In the first few months we did not register complaints. We then began to register our concerns with:

- The Pyrenees Shire. Letters and emails, meetings with CEO, councillors
- Acciona Energy - phone calls and emails. There is no dedicated Complaints line, nor complaints procedure, as should be re: the planning permit conditions.
- EPA phone calls and letter to CEO
- Work Safe. phone calls.
- Department of Health: Dr Carnie. Ms Fran Thorn
- Department for Planning and Community. Jason Taylor. Bart Gane.
- Various politicians including: Minister for Health. Daniel Andrews. Tim Holding. Peter Kavanagh, Senator Fielding, and Federal and State Senators

### [Acciona's Complaint Procedure](#)

Acciona's complaint procedure is entirely unsatisfactory. When we and our neighbours began making complaints, no Incident Report Reference Number was provided.

Initially we made phone complaints but when we realized that Incident Report Numbers were not being issued, we proceeded to complain via email so to have an official record of our complaint. My partner requested an outline of the complaints procedure and was told there was no complaints procedure - only to respond within 48 hours. Yet in the Operational (stage 2) Environmental Management Plan (OEMP) Version 1.1 February 2008 of their Permit, there is a Complaint Procedure outlined. It was not until I requested and continued to request that an Incident Report Number be provided that it was. Even now it is not provided consistently. We know of people locally where Acciona was asked to provide the record of their complaints and when this was finally done, Acciona had only 16 complaints documented although the people concerned had been complaining regularly for 14 months, sometimes every day for a week.

We did not start our complaints to Acciona until May 2010, because prior to that, we were still waiting for a dedicated complaints procedure with a phone line/email address which Acciona assured us would be established. This to date is still not established and complaints continue to be registered through the general information phone line, or the general information email address.

Even when a Complaint is registered, nothing is done. Acciona say "we will look into that for you" or "It has been given to ...."

I refer to Waubra Wind Farm Newsletter edition nine, October 2009 where Brett Thomas, Acciona's CEO, stated '.....there has been extensive reporting in the local media recently alleging adverse health effects as a result of low frequency noise and infrasound said to be emitted by the Waubra Wind Farm. Acciona Energy acknowledges that there is some concern in the community regarding this issue but please be assured that we give serious consideration to any health related concern about the Company's operations anywhere.'

Also, Waubra Wind Farm Newsletter edition ten April 2010 re: Waubra Community Perceptions Survey ".....Acciona Energy continues to take steps to better understand the health effects noted by seeking ongoing dialogue with the people concerned.'

At no stage has Acciona made any attempt to site visit our property to evaluate, monitor for noise or discuss health concerns. The only response we have had are two letters from Brett Wickham, Director – Generation Acciona Energy (letters available on request), stating that they are operating within the permit conditions and that the location of our property falls outside of the 1.5 km monitoring area and therefore not considered a relevant location, that they are confused as to whether we are complaining about audible or inaudible noise, then going on to quote the NHMRC review. Then suggesting we consult a health professional for further advice should our concerns persist. Acciona is negligent in dealing with complaints.

I fail to understand what Acciona means by our property falling outside of a 'relevant' location. There is no mention of 'relevant', or for that matter, irrelevant locations in it's OEMP, but there is an obligation on Acciona's part in the complaint procedures, to 'investigate the cause and potential factors that may have contributed to the area of concern'. The noise and infrasound does not suddenly stop at 1.5km as Brett Wickham is suggesting, nor does the problem go away at that point.

Acciona is in violation of its OEMP, sections 3.4.3 & 4.4, in not assessing complaints.

We have complained to Acciona a total of 28 times to date, with less than satisfactory responses to each of these complaints. Basically, after Acciona issues an Incident Report Reference Number, the matter is then ignored and forgotten by them.

It is obvious that this Complaints Procedure is a farce. There is an obvious conflict of interest, in registering complaints with the Company that you are complaining about. Especially when those complaints could demonstrate that the Company is in breach of its Planning Permit. There has not been an independent arbitrator - with only a few exceptions, no level of government has been interested in hearing that there may be problems. Who is monitoring and regulating this industry? There needs to be a complaint procedure, independent of the Wind Developer.

## **Conclusion**

As people who are living with an operating wind farm, we believe that our experience, and the resulting knowledge is necessary and vital, for this Inquiry to consider.

## **Recommendations**

1. An independent and comprehensive investigation into the adverse health effects experienced by people living in proximity to wind farms
2. That there is far more rigorous regulation in planning and monitoring.
3. That planning guidelines heed the health and well being of people living locally. Therefore setbacks of at least 5 kilometres are requested.
4. That there is greater transparency and accountability in the processes of all stakeholders.
5. A moratorium on any further wind farm development until planning, regulations and health issues have been investigated and revised.
6. That the wind developer provide a bond for the cost of removing the turbines once they are de-commissioned. At the WWF, contracts between Acciona and the land holders state it is the responsibility of Acciona to remove the turbines within six months of de-commissioning, after that time period the responsibility of removal reverts to the land owners. This is not good enough, there is no clear removal procedure here. Is the landscape of the future to be littered with 1000's of rusting wind turbines? As these then rusting wind turbines would continue to be an aviation hazard, could we expect the sea of flashing red lights at night to continue forever?