

To: Department of the Senate,
Parliament House,
Canberra. ACT. 2600

For: Senate Enquiry into the Social & Economic impact of rural Wind Farms.

We are making this submission to the Senate Community Affairs Committee as we have been severely impacted by the Oaklands Hill Wind Farm which is being built on two of the boundaries of our rural home and farming property, 'Wiltshire' at 99 Vanrenens Lane, Glenthompson in western Victoria, just near the foot of the Grampians National Park.

Oaklands Hill is due to be finished later in 2011 and we are currently living with ongoing and invasive construction noise from trucks and heavy machinery which starts at 6.30 am and goes till 6 pm 6 days a week.

Since this Oaklands Hill Wind Farm was first proposed in 2005 we have undergone an immense amount of emotional and financial stress related to this project.

Much of this stress has been due to :

1. **A lack of information supplied to us by the developers** along the way. There was only one community consultation which we weren't able to attend.
2. **A lack of understanding on our part** (as lay people involved in private enterprise), of the Government Legislation and process involved in this whole process
3. The **developer wanting to put turbines on our place and constantly harassing us** by ringing after hours to pressure me/us to sign a leasehold agreement with him, despite me/us advising we needed to investigate further. I initially thought these turbines would be a good idea, until I carried out my own independent investigation and discovered that there were significant downsides and we would be unable to run our farming land as we wished and there would be significant impact on our neighbours, which was very unfair to them. I was also concerned about the health, noise, erosion, salinity and visual impacts.
4. **Our neighbours** who had signed contracts with the developers not being willing to discuss the matter with us as they **had signed confidentiality agreements**. This has led to immense mistrust of these people in our community and we as neighbours feel unwilling to co-operate on community matters which are of vital importance to everyone.
5. Many of our neighbours were our friends and our children played together. Due to the **mistrust caused by their signing of the contracts and refusal to discuss with us, we no longer count them as friends, which is really sad.**
6. **Mistrust in our local community** towards ourselves for speaking out against a project we felt wasn't appropriate for the location. We encouraged people to ask more questions, but because the developer had promised money to the community if the permit was approved,

then some members of the community became protective of this proposed money and indicated that we and others who were against this project were jeopardising this. Some community members even suggested we should pay the money ourselves as we were objecting! Consequently, this mistrust led to irrational behaviour on the part of some community members and drove a wedge between us.

7. **Difficulties in employing staff and farm manager** as we require a full time live on property manager. As talk of the wind farm going ahead continued, our Farm Manager of 9 years decided to leave and we had immense difficulty attracting another Farm Manager, especially when they discovered the presence of the wind turbines so close to where they would be living. We eventually managed to attract another farm manager, who has just resigned after working for us for only 14 months to work on a property that won't be surrounded by wind turbines in the future.
8. **If we can't attract good employees who can assist in making our farm profitable, we will have trouble running our rural property and producing much needed food.**
9. **Developers talk about how many people they will employ but most of these are very short term jobs. We on neighbouring farms have all been employing rural people for generations.** I just hope we can continue to do this still in the future.
10. **Cost of employing solicitors and expert witnesses** to speak on our behalf at the 15 day Panel Hearing relating to this matter. As this was held in the country, we also had to pay all their travel costs, which was extremely expensive.
11. **Enormous number of hours spent just trying to understand and learn about wind turbines, their effects (good and bad) and preparing submissions** meant that we were neglecting our existing businesses which resulted in losses in these during this period.
12. Our farming property has been set up with great capital expenditure so my husband and I can retire there and eventually sell for our superannuation to help finance our late age retirement. We have since learnt from a letter by National Sales Manager of Elders that **our property will have been devalued by at least 30% – 50% and we may not ever find a buyer.** How unfair does this make the whole process.
13. When all this started we had a building permit for a new house for our son on the property. Due to the closeness of these turbines, we have been reluctant to continue with the building process and unable to build his home. **8 turbines are within 2kms of this proposed residence.**
14. The Oaklands Hill Wind Energy Facility is currently being built and 5 turbines are within 2kms of our residences and 10 are within 1 km of our boundary. Under the new Victorian Coalition Guidelines about to be introduced, this Wind Energy Facility would not have been approved due to noise and infrasound. We urge this committee to examine situations like this and make some recommendations to mitigate the losses for neighbours such as ourselves.
15. Our property is home to the Wiltshire Garden and Judy's global garden touring company, Botanica World Discoveries. Visitors are attracted from around Australia and the world to western Victoria to visit the Wiltshire Garden. **Visitors over the years have expressed great**

disappointment at the inappropriate location of the turbines at Oaklands Hill Wind Energy Facility, mainly due to their visual impact so close to the Grampians National Park.

- 16.** From our Wiltshire Lookout, we have a stunning, 180 degree view of the whole of the Southern Grampians. Pictures of this feature in magazines and newspapers. **To have turbines less than 500 metres from this Wiltshire Lookout is inappropriate.**
- 17.** There is also a **public Robson's Hill Lookout with views of the Grampians featuring on all the local tourism publications. Turbines will now obscure part of this view.**
- 18. Increased Fire Risk** from these turbines is a major concern for us and our farming enterprise. Having 32, 124 metre turbines so close to our boundaries, plus multiple new above ground power lines and an electrical sub station within 20 metres of our boundary, is placing us at greatly increased risk of fire. We understand that eventually our insurers will increase our premiums on this basis. Is this fair when we receive no benefit?
- 19. Constantly living with the impact of these turbines is extremely wearing.** As more knowledge of the fall out from the turbines becomes public, it is particularly upsetting for those of us who now understand how difficult it will be to live along side them. Our main concern is for our health and the health of our employees.
- 20.** We now have **serious doubts about whether we can live full time on our beautiful property** which was to be our retirement home.

Judy's family are 4th generation farmers in this area and she has never seen an issue like this have so much impact on neighbours and rural farming communities. It has put a wedge between people when, due to the challenges of living in rural areas, social issues should bring people closer to together.

When you live in a city it is easy to be anonymous, but not so in a small rural community, that is why the impact of these turbines and the process surrounding their development has caused so much angst amongst neighbours. Many rural people have to volunteer for everything and consequently want to get on together. If divisions are caused by large issues such as wind turbines, then much of this volunteer work will disappear and have to be funded from local government resources. I.e. Fire Brigade, Hall & Cemetery Trusts, Landcare, Pest Eradication, Kindergarten, School and Football Club committees. At the moment, the same rural community members sit on most of these committees. This doesn't happen in the cities!

The impact on tourism and the potential economic losses from turbines should be examined. Judy has been a global tourism operator for over 30 years and firmly believes that the negative impacts on tourism from the large scale turbine developments will result in economic losses for communities and small rural businesses. Europeans often say, how nice it is to travel in the Australian countryside and not see it dotted with turbines like they have back home. We need to preserve our rural uniqueness if we wish to compete in the global tourism market.

If people like ourselves have to be subjected to wind turbines and their impacts, there must be fair compensation for our substantially changed economic and social circumstances.

We sincerely hope this committee will make recommendations that allow future governments to be fair to all parties and not to favour a few people who make substantial financial gains at the cost of others.