

SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE SELECT COMMITTEE ON WIND TURBINES

“THEFT OF SOCIAL JUSTICE, PROPERTY EQUITY AND HEALTH FROM RURAL RESIDENTS LIVING IN THE VICINITY OF WIND FARMS”

Terms of Reference

1. The application of regulatory governance and economic impact of wind turbines, with particular reference to:
 - a. the effect on household power prices, particularly households which receive no benefit from rooftop solar panels, and the merits of consumer subsidies for operators;
 - b. how effective the Clean Energy Regulator is in performing its legislative responsibilities and whether there is a need to broaden those responsibilities;
 - c. the role and capacity of the National Health and Medical Research Council in providing guidance to state and territory authorities;
 - d. the implementation of planning processes in relation to wind farms, including the level of information available to prospective wind farm hosts;
 - e. the adequacy of monitoring and compliance governance of wind farms;
 - f. the application and integrity of national wind farm guidelines;
 - g. the effect that wind towers have on fauna and aerial operations around turbines, including firefighting and crop management;
 - h. the energy and emission input and output equations from whole-of-life operation of wind turbines; and
 - i. any related matter.

Summary –

A reflection based on my personal experience of living in close proximity to the Gullen Range Wind Farm.

This is also an expression of my concern (based on private research) regarding the faulty economics of the wind industry and lack of governance by the political powers supposedly regulating the wind industry; who, first of all, should know better and, second, exhibit a breathtaking indifference to the affected citizenry.

This deadly combination that has led to a portion of Australian citizens becoming virtual refugees on their own properties – criticised in the media, scorned by a hypocritical environmental movement and ignored by governments at State and Federal level. This social injustice must be addressed by this committee in the spirit of fairness and equity.

I think I can speak with some authority on matters of Social Justice. I have spent my entire career as a public servant serving in portfolios (Federal Departments of Health, Social Services the Attorney General’s Department) with a particular emphasis on social justice.

In my private life I also served as a Director of the ACT Schizophrenia Fellowship (Mental Health Council).

Recommendation –

The Senate Inquiry call for a Royal Commission into the wind farm industry in Australia.

“Social Justice is about equality and fairness between human beings. It works on the universal principles that guide people in knowing what is right and what is wrong.” FSG Australia

Social justice means that the rights of **all** people in our community are considered in a fair and equitable manner. Mick Dodson, Social Justice Commissioner 1993.

There is nothing fair, equitable or right in having industrial wind farms imposed upon you and, as a result, having your health impaired and your property devalued. It is clearly **wrong**.

It is clear that the wind industry and State and Federal Governments do not understand the meaning of ‘WHAT IS FAIR AND WHAT IS RIGHT’. And they clearly don’t care about being ‘UNFAIR AND WRONG’.

I and countless others spend many precious hours preparing and presenting our views to public meetings such as the NSW Planning and Assessment Commission (PAC) and other forums, including Inquiries such as this. To date it feels like many hours wasted. It is quite obvious that people adversely affected by living within, adjacent to, or within the vicinity of wind farms are not being heard. In fact, they are being blatantly ignored by those in power who could help them.

On 5 September 2014 a PAC hearing was held at the Crookwell Services Club regarding a retrospective development application for the modification of the development application for the Gullen Range Wind Farm. In the course of the construction of the wind farm, 69 of the 73 turbines had been built in the wrong locations. Deliberately. It was no accident. The proponent did this in violation of the Development Application (DA) approval and in defiance of a

Land and Environment Court ruling that specifically forbade the construction of the turbines in any other location other than that specified in the DA.

The PAC Determination was published on 2 October 2014 and the retrospective modification was refused.

Despite the proponent publicly stating that the PAC Determination would be “final” and would be adhered to by the proponent, a statement was immediately issued that the proponent had followed the DA and nothing had changed. So, now they planned on defying the PAC Determination.

The NSW State Government (the Govt.) also ignored the Determination and stated that only nine of the 69 turbines represented a problem. The selection of these nine turbines seemed to local residents completely arbitrary and *ad hoc* and also seemed to be selected for the proponent’s convenience.

There was a Class Four legal action instituted in the Land and Environment Court challenging the “legality” (the Govt. bureaucrat’s term) of the Determination.

It is my understanding that some accommodation has been reached between the proponent and the Govt. and some type of tokenistic action will be taken against the proponent due to “changed circumstances”.

What has changed? The turbines haven’t moved and the PAC determination should be enforced by the Govt. But, I live in the real world, it won’t and my prediction is that nothing will be done. No turbines will be moved and the Govt. will release a North Korean like statement that justice has been served, and everybody, except the affected residents, should live happily ever after.

I live within the Gullen Range Wind Farm.

The substation is less than 500 m from my property boundary and I live surrounded by turbines in an industrial estate.

The once pristine Bannister landscape, a blend of farms and beautiful wild bush situated on the top of the Great Dividing Range is essentially gone. Replaced by a factory of 73 thumping, grinding

money-making monstrosities that funnel great wads of cash to a multinational.

That is the reality. And the process by which the landscape has been transformed is one of environmental altruism, political expediency, incompetent planning, bureaucratic bumbling and media hypocrisy. But I live with the result. And the result is horrendous.

We, the residents of Bannister, Parkesbourne, Mummel, Kialla and Gurrundah didn't want this. It was imposed on us. Eleven landowners and a developer conspired and their conniving has devastated a community under the guise of saving the planet.

Our property represents an investment of years, time, sweat, precise planning, over a million dollars in capital and love. And the value of that investment has been undermined and corrupted by the wind farm.

Most real estate agents speak in a language of euphemisms and sunny half truths.

"There will be buyers who won't mind the wind farm." But not yet.

"A reduced pool of potential clients". We know.

I actually liked what one agent said, "I can't sell it and please don't ask me to list it. I'll only be wasting my time and yours." I didn't like the news. I liked his honesty.

Some real estate agents have declined to visit in order to appraise our farm. If they came they would see the beauty we have created completely marred by an overwhelming panorama on 270 degrees of the compass (North, South and East) of industrial wind turbines and a massive switch/sub station factory close to our Eastern boundary fence.

To sell, we would have to accept a fraction of the property's worth.

A fifth generation farmer who expected to live his whole life on his property stated that recently a real estate valuer had given him two valuations: one pre-wind farm and one current. There was over a 30% difference and this story is repeated over hundreds of

properties in the district. The property on which he intended to die, he wants to leave. He's had enough.

We want to leave. We do not want to live within an industrial complex. But we are doomed to stay until our tired bodies give out.

The looming presence of turbines and a substation means that the property simply cannot be sold unless it's for a bargain basement, fire sale price. The fairness of that? There is none.

In 2008, the World Health Organization (WHO) stated:

“ensure that economic and social policy responses to climate change and other environmental degradation take into account health equity while addressing the exclusionary policies and processes that lead to rural poverty, landlessness, and displacement of people from their homes.” 1

Wind farm development is creating a new social class of wind farm refugees: middle-aged residents, many of them either hovering at the edge of retirement age or beyond it, who are becoming trapped on their properties, unable to sell unless they are willing to accept a plunge into poverty.

What happens when these residents are too old to work their properties? Environmental degradation of their land and the erosion of the worth of their assets.

What happens when they become too old to drive?
How do they live, shop and integrate into society?

What happens when they cannot collect the old age pension because of the perceived worth of their asset when the actual worth is next to nothing?

What indeed happens to their lives while wind turbines turn merrily on their doorsteps, the money pours into the proponent's coffers and the residents live in despair and grinding poverty?

None of the issues in the admonition of the WHO are being addressed by wind farm development policy here in Australia.

There has been a rush to build these developments in a panic of Al Gore inspired doom.

The economics of the industry are dodgy and based on a consumer subsidy. The industry is completely uneconomic without huge sums of government largesse in a ratio that shocks the average man in the street when he realises what he is paying. And most of the populace is unaware of the scope and ratios of the subsidies.

There are health effects from these machines and compliant legislators have allowed these developments to take place without invoking proper precautions to safeguard the well-being of the citizenry.

The psychological and physical stresses placed on residents are enormous.

We can no longer work in our back paddock due to the noise. We either wait for a calm day or get it done in an hour and get out. We just can't stand it.

It's awful.

Leave rural residents in peace to farm and pursue their lives in harmony with neighbours, with the environment and with their families.

The social discord that a wind farm brings to a community is devastating in and of itself.

I would respectfully ask the Senate Inquiry to call for a Royal Commission into the wind industry in Australia.

1 Closing the Gap in a Generation: Health Equity Through Action on the Social Determinants of Health. Final Report of the Commission on Social Determinants of Health, Geneva: World Health Organization, 2008:

See -
http://www.who.int/social_determinants/thecommission/finalreport/en/

Ms Rosemary Howe

19 March 2015