

The Social and Economic Impact of Rural Wind Farms

We moved to Racecourse Bay, SA in late September 2010, we are approximately 30km from Mt Gambier and 4.5 from Turbines proposed between Allendale East and Eight Mile Creek.

We are located on the coast and have a clear uninterrupted view of the area where the Turbines will be installed.

While we asked Grant District Council (GDC) prior to purchasing our new home whether there was anything planned for the area which would impact on our property, we were told no.

After finding out about the Wind 'Farm' earlier this year we then attended a meeting at Allendale East. From what we heard at that meeting and what we have learnt since through research we are appalled at the process both Acciona and GDC went through to inform the community of the proposal.

It seems that the process, or lack of it, is standard for Wind 'Farm' companies, and they are assisted in misrepresenting the facts by local councils. We learnt letters GDC say they sent to 76 people appear not to have been received by all but one. GDC placed an advertisement in the local paper, which most people do not read, giving people 10 days to respond if they did not agree to the Wind 'Farm'. Acciona apparently sent out 6 newsletters from 2008. The first with a form for people to fill in if they wanted the Wind 'Farm', again few people remember receiving it and subsequent Newsletters, which Acciona call informative, but which are actually Self-serving Newsletters with little information provided. Acciona also conducted an 'information' day which again was a self-serving occurrence, only a few people attending, with kindy children taken there for an outing. Those who did attend were unsure of what questions to ask as Acciona staff were the only ones available to answer questions. This was the sum total of the consultation process.

Acciona commissioned a telephone survey to gauge public feelings, more than half of the 150 people called lived between 18 and 35 km away from the site, 11 were called from Allendale East and 1 from Eight Mile Creek.

While GDC say they have done everything they could, what they did is completely inadequate. An 'independent' committee were brought in to assess Acciona's application using the council's Development Plan to judge it. While this plan does not allow large scale building works in Primary Production Land Acciona were given permission to build 47, now 46 Turbines 141m high in Primary Production Land, this type and size of construction can only be termed a Factory it is not a farm.

Council try to justify their actions, or lack of, them by saying only one family objected. Without information being provided by council in advance of the process being used, and without council ensuring a balanced consideration of the ramifications of the project were given to the community, how could they know when or what to do to have objections registered in advance of it being agreed to.

The local community feel completely disadvantaged and disenfranchised by the process.

The district is a large very productive dairy area, there is the growing town of Allendale East with a School, Port MacDonnell a Cray fishing centre is only 7km away, the population is

scattered throughout the district, which results in a number of people having homes within 1km of Turbines and the school less than 2km from them.

The spread of Turbines throughout South Australia over recent years has been extensive. While the earlier ones were placed away from communities, the more recent ones are encroaching on country residential areas and where farms are smaller and in closer proximity to one another.

The Turbines at Allendale East will be 141m high; the tallest place in the district is Mt Schank approximately 10km away, which is 100m high. The area where the Turbines are to be placed is slightly undulating with small hillocks on which the Turbines will be placed. These hillocks give way to a plain that reaches to the coast. This will result in an unrestricted view of the Turbines from the coast, and almost always uninterrupted views from the coastal side of Mt Gambier.

Farms in the area are generally Dairy farms which produce high quality milk. Most of the farms are irrigated to provide grass for dairy cows. Turbines will adversely affect the ability of farmers to irrigate at an adequate level as it is known that Turbines disturb the air sufficiently to dry moisture from the ground. Farmers are shortly to have their water allowance cut by around 30%, it may not be practical for them to continue farming. As a result their properties will lose value and we will lose a quality industry.

Some farmers who do not want to 'host' turbines will have them placed on their boundaries, making them participants even if they don't want to be. This will devalue their properties as they may not be able to utilise areas where turbines are located as they wish. If they cannot use their property effectively why stay.

People who have Turbines close to their homes will find their homes lose value.

There are also Health issues to consider. If only one person in a family becomes so ill from proximity to these Turbines the whole family is affected, especially if they have to move out of the district. Dairy farmers already have difficulty finding help, how much more difficult is it going to be if people don't want to work in areas where Turbines are installed?

What should be remembered is this is not like homes next to an airport, here people move to knowing the airport is there, the community was here first.

The environment is also at risk, the area was created by volcanoes with Mt Schank being classed as Dormant not Extinct. Consequently there are a lot of 'sink holes' in the area, some known some not until exposed. Infrasound which can travel 10+k through the ground and walls, could be devastating on the population of Bent Wing bats in the district who live in subterranean caves as it echoes through their caverns, underground streams that feed the renowned Picaninnie and Ewen Ponds if disturbed by vibrating sound or even by the drilling of deep holes to cement in Turbines could become polluted. A bat survey was never completed and I do not know if any research has been done on effects on the underground streams that supply the ponds.

Infrasound travelling 10+k could also have consequences to the Cray fisheries as the coastline is a prominent Cray Fisheries area. How will it affect Dairy Cattle?

There are so many areas where no research has been conducted, yet these Wind 'Farms' are being allowed to infest our communities. At what cost now and in the future is not known, but could be extensive.

The way Acciona and other Wind 'Farm' companies appear to be working is in a fashion that can only be described as a Cartel. There are a number of companies operational in Australia, yet they do not seem to compete to install plants in the same areas. That there is no Tender process when a site is deemed suitable seems strange. Governments are allowing this Cartel to make the decisions without any controls.

When they decide on a place they 'sneak' around charming farmers with money to sign up, without them being able to discuss with friends and neighbours before signing. Once they have signed the contract they are 'gagged', unable to speak openly about anything other than how good the companies and Turbines are.

The way these companies behave is very manipulative, they try to control every aspect of the media, Councils and Government, they are very good at it and very well practiced, people's concerns have been voiced for almost 20 years throughout the world yet they have never been halted so issues can be researched in a scientific unbiased way.

I hope Australia is going to be the country that has the will to do this.

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