

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

AGL congratulate themselves on their comprehensive community consultation. Throughout all of their reports, we continually read of the large area they covered with their consultation and the large number of homes they visited within the district. Mrs. Officer, proponent, in her submission letter in support claims, and I quote, "Sn.Hydro's efforts to ensure that ourselves and our neighbours are happy with the project has been, in my mind, above the call of duty". We, as adjoining neighbours feel the concentrated effort on consultation has been in the wrong areas. Introductory letters were sent in late 2004 to residents of Hamilton, more than 35 kms north of the wind farm site, at least TWO weeks before adjoining neighbours. Residents of Hamilton will not even be able to see the turbines from their homes, let alone be affected in any way by the development. That showed total lack of respect for the immediate neighbours, the parties to be impacted upon directly by this development.

AGL claim that the Gardners as neighbours, notified this company that they did not wish to meet with them earlier in the year. After the two consultation sessions we held with this company, we decided we just couldn't afford the time spent discussing issues in the middle of our extremely busy day, for which we are not paid. From that time, I decided it was more time efficient to correspond by mail, which I was able to do late at night, when I do my office work. This form of communication proved to be most unsuccessful, as on most occasions I had to write two or three letters requesting acknowledgement of my letters. Eventually I received a reply, but on many occasions many, many weeks later. The latest example was a letter from AGL received on 16th February, written on 2nd February, in reply to two of my letters in November and December, once again telling us how good AGL were with their community consultation. This was in response to repeated requests to answers to questions asked earlier. Incidentally Peter Swiggs received the same letter around the same day, with just the conclusion slightly different.

AGL targeted Macarthur as their main focus town, a very small, vulnerable community which is still trying to shake off the detrimental effect of being voted the most boring town in Victoria, many years ago. For over twelve months now, the townspeople have been swayed with most generous donations for sponsorship of many community activities, as have many residents of the surrounding towns of Hawkesdale and Penshurst also. Last weekend's generous sponsorship of the campdraft in Macarthur is part of an ongoing attempt to "buy" the community. How can anyone, with no resources, compete with these methods of buying support within a community? I wonder if by some chance this project does not go ahead, will this company and Moyne Falls for that matter, be sponsoring this event next year? As Kevin Ramholdt said in his presentation, if you throw money at the local footy club, they'll all support you!!!

Prior to the closing date for submissions to Planning Panels Victoria, AGL began a most concentrated "submission drive". Perhaps this was as a result of 1500 submissions opposing their Dollar wind farm proposal in South Gippsland. Maybe they thought it a good idea to canvas and obtain as many signatures as possible, no matter how, in order that the Minister would believe their claim of overwhelming community support.

Since 10 October, submission closing date, this company have attempted to gain considerable mileage in the local media, and more recently this Panel hearing, claiming that of the approximate 1200 submissions received, around 90% were in favour of their proposal. I am in receipt of all copies of written and proforma submissions to Planning Panels Victoria, and through intensive analysis, have discovered the deceptive manner in which these were obtained. In addition to this, I have discovered also that on around 38 occasions people had submitted two forms, in fact on several occasions some people signed three supporting submission forms, or at least their names appeared twice and sometimes three times on the list. Even Mr. and Mrs. Officer's names appear twice, obviously having signed proformas and also written letters. This whole muck-up is possibly due to the apparent disarray within Planning Panels Victoria around the 10th October, when submissions were due, when it appeared that a key staff member in the department had just left. Around this time, many objectors were not contacted by PPV. I did alert the previous Chairman to this problem, but several I know of, still haven't been contacted. However these double ups added to the supposed great number of the community supporting the project.

Over the following weeks, it became apparent just how this huge number of supporting submissions had been gathered. Firstly, the mother of one of the proponents held a concentrated submission drive, and obtained around 127 signatures around Hamilton from employees of business houses, in addition to members of the community at "Eventide" where she is employed. A large proportion of the staff at Landmark, the company in Hamilton where her daughter, Debbie Uebergang is employed, signed the submissions. Many of the Uebergang and Spillman family members and friends signed supporting submissions. Secondly, around 85 supporting submissions were received on Friday 9th September, 2005 when AGL very generously invited locals for Free Finger Food during Happy Hour at the Macarthur Hotel, to sign a submission in support of the wind farm, and if they came early, they'd receive a free submission gift. A copy of this invitation is enclosed. This "buying" of support has now been taking place throughout the district in the small towns of Hawkesdale, Macarthur and Penshurst for well over twelve months now, where the people have successfully been sucked in by the hollow promises of hundreds of local jobs, increased tourism and of course the significant reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. I wonder if they'd been sitting in this Panel, as we have for the past four weeks, hearing the gross overestimation of CO2 reduction, in addition to so many assumptions of the benefits of windpower which will be produced by the Macarthur wind farm, would they still be so supportive? It would be interesting to do an approval survey say two years after construction, and see how many people still support the project.

On Monday 26th September, 2005 Moyne Shire Council held a Community Council meeting whereby the public were invited to make a presentation regarding the wind farm, and relay their concerns to the council. Of all the 238 submissions supporting the project, only two made oral presentations, apart from the developers. Amazingly, these were two of the proponent farmers. Once again "overwhelming support" for their project after the Port Fairy hearing, and this was reported widely in local media.

After this, Mrs. Officer took over. She also carried out a comprehensive “submission drive”, leaving forms on counters in shops in Hamilton. She also wrote to many friends, several whom I know well, but who live away from this district. They told me they had received letters requesting their support for the project, but had in fact declined to do so.

Of the written submissions received supporting this windfarm, I am able to recognise approximately 50% from the proponents themselves, and their families, ie. parents, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles and children. Surely this is a conflict of interest as these people do not comprise the community, merely the proponents families. As I know the main proponent family extremely well, and the adjoining neighbouring proponent family quite well, I have also been able to observe that at least 50% of the supporting proforma submissions, in addition to many of the written ones, have been signed by their friends. These families are friendly with a very close member of our family, and I am most familiar with their circle of friends, in particular those who live outside this immediate district, who have very little knowledge of the project and its effects, and will not be impacted upon in any way. As the two main proponents own beach homes at Port Fairy, a number of their retired friends have signed submissions supporting, in addition to friends with whom they play golf, away from this district. I ask the Panel, why should friends of the proponents, many of whom live a long distance from this district, have a say in a project which will affect our lives and businesses?

Both the Robertson and Officer families, being such large landholders have employed many staff over the years. A number of their ex employees were contacted and asked to sign submission forms supporting the project also. I happen to know well, some of the ex employees, who now live in another district hundreds of kilometres away.

Of the people who wrote supporting letters and the supposed around 1100 who signed supporting proformas, at least 95% live outside the 9 km consultation zone. Very few of the supposed 90% of “overwhelming” support submitters live anywhere near the site. On a quick count yesterday morning, I notice that a minimum of 232 submissions are signed by people living way out of the Western District, with several overseas.

I ask, how can the following supporting submitters know anything about the complexities of this project, our district and the resulting effect on the neighbours lives and livelihoods?

Mrs. Elizabeth Kavanaugh who lives in Malvern, Victoria.
Matthew Hall who lives at Terrey Hills NSW.
“Very Impressive” who lives in North Melbourne, Victoria.
Shaun Cornelius who lives in Wellington, New Zealand.
Scot Day who lives at Malak in the Northern Territory.
Alan Tinkler who lives at Bollon in Queensland.

Also, the people living in Dream Place, Melton South in Victoria have a great interest in this project. Perhaps it is because Mrs. Uebergang (nee Spillman)’s relative, Mr. Dean

Spillman, most likely her brother, though I can't be sure, lives there and has obviously taken proformas along the street for everyone to sign. We have supporting proformas from the families at No. 2, No. 4, No 5, No 6, No.8 and No. 11 Dream Place, Melton South. How can these people be counted as the so-called "community"?

As neighbouring landholders objecting to this project, we have not literally opened our address books for our friends support, nor have we asked our relations to sign submissions objecting to the project. We don't employ staff to help us, so certainly haven't asked our employees or past employees and their families to sign submissions in support, as the proponents have. We haven't walked the streets of Hamilton or any other towns, haven't left forms on shop counters for anyone and everyone to sign. We printed a simple proforma objection form for those people who genuinely objected to this proposal, and who knew the district well. As you are aware, several people from Gippsland submitted objections, as they know only too well the impact of wind farms within a community, having been involved in objection to several in their district for several years.

If this project supposedly has so much support from the community, where have all these people been for the past four weeks this Panel has been sitting? If the community is so supportive of this wind farm, why has this gallery not been filled with at least some members of the community, daily showing their continued support for the wind farm? Maybe it was due to the fact that on the proforma submission AGL had all the supporters sign, they had already ticked the box which said "I would not like to make an oral presentation at the Panel Hearing".

Throughout the consultation period, Sn. Hydro claimed that only a small number of neighbours objected to the project. This claim was widely used during media interviews, reported in the newspapers, and we supposed few objecting neighbours were described throughout the community as "crackpots", and described as jealous that we were not receiving the huge amounts of money. In one supporting submission letter written by a friend of one of the proponents, we were likened to Don Quixote who was "always tilting at windmills and was mostly mad." We have been accused by the proponents of giving incorrect information to the community and trying to sabotage the project as much as we can. We have endured this criticism, ignorant of the fact that many more neighbours were totally opposed to the project. Only upon receiving copies of submissions have we realised that at least 50% of the adjoining neighbours have objected to this project. Of course there have been several neighbours who have been intimidated by this whole affair, and haven't had the nerve to oppose it publicly. Some were opposing it, along with the neighbours who have been present at the panel, but found the pressure too great, and dropped off along the way. As a result of this, they didn't send objection letters, as they had literally "gone to ground", and were of the opinion it was a fait accompli. An example is one adjoining neighbour, who, unbeknown to me, wrote to the Chairman post the Directions Hearing, and nominated me to speak on his behalf.

As this is such a large area, we do not know all the neighbours, and many are absentee. To our surprise, all of the absentee owners have objected, one threatening to sue for

damages. Our group of Hawkesdale/Macarthur Landscape Guardians has diminished, as several have dropped off, unable to handle the ongoing pressure. Once again, I refer to health issues dealt with previously, and in particular depression amongst rural men. In this district, the year 2005 was drier than the drought in 1982, and this itself caused enormous stress to farmers, particularly the smaller farmers who do not have flexibility with such small acreages. There are two neighbours who have been intimidated from the beginning, and fear their outspoken objection would jeopardise their business and employment. Another adjoining neighbour complained to me that her husband was so upset by the prospect of this enormous development and its impact on his farming business, that he threw every piece of correspondence from Sn. Hydro in the rubbish bin before she was able to read it. She did manage to write an objection letter to Planning Panels Victoria, but unfortunately did not ever receive a reply, and didn't have the confidence to follow through.. She to this day, still hasn't had her objection acknowledged by PPV. This was in fact, Mrs. Penny Fraser, who Mrs. Officer claimed during her oral presentation had not opposed it as they were friends. Mrs. Fraser spoke to me quite some time after, concerned she hadn't heard a reply, but once again, could be categorised as one of those who felt it was a fait accompli. She happens to be a good friend of ours also. Since Christmas, I have run into several near neighbours in the supermarket, whom I haven't seen for two years, and who gave me their total support, offering to help in any way they could. Another near neighbour, once again intimidated by this whole situation, rang to offer help feeding our shedded sheep while we are at the Panel Hearing, as they do not have the confidence to object personally, nor appear at the hearing.

I refer to the document SUBMISSIONS IN REPLY ON BEHALF OF THE PROPONENT in the Matter of the Dollar Wind Farm Planning Panel. This submission is written by Mr. Mark Dwyer of Freehills, dated 6th May, 2005.

On Page 28, Section 5.14 under the heading PLANNING IS NOT A POPULARITY CONTEST, it is written that the Mayor of South Gippsland, Heather Bligh ...argues that "While a majority in the area might favour wind farms, those most affected should have the most say and should receive compensation.

In Section 5.16, Mr. Dwyer quotes "Ultimately, however, the extent or otherwise of people's opinions is irrelevant to the task before the panel. For example, the Planning Appeals Board has held that "The number of objectors to a proposal is not relevant. One objector with one soundly based objection is sufficient. The Board must have regard, not to the quantum, but to the substance of the objection raised". I hope he still stands by his comments made less than 12 months ago.

So, Mr. Chairman, you will note that there has indeed been a majority of objection from adjoining neighbours, who will be the most affected by this project. Of the 20 or so adjoining neighbours, only five, maybe six have in fact supported the project, mainly by proformas. Ten adjoining neighbours have submitted written objections and one signed a proforma. There are three existing adjoining neighbours objecting, in addition to one former, all of whom didn't formally object due to intimidation. One property further

out, ie. not immediately adjacent who are objecting, but who didn't formally submit, are four more neighbours. Attached is a list of the names of these objectors. This picture paints a different story to the Panel, who must realise that though AGL were able to procure such a large number of signed pieces of paper from all over Australia, friends and families of the proponents, plus ex employees and business colleagues, it is the neighbours within the 3 kilometre radius who should really be considered. At least 50% of the immediate neighbours have written objections to this project and at least 19 neighbours within a 2 kilometre radius.

I WOULD LIKE TO REQUEST THAT ONLY WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS, AND NOT PROFORMAS BE CONSIDERED FOR THIS WINDFARM PROPOSAL.

As adjoining neighbours, and therefore those most likely to be impacted upon by this development, we feel we have not been given anywhere near the respectful consideration we deserve. Listening to Kevin Ramholdt's presentation yesterday afternoon, I would have to agree with his claims that all windpower developers go about their consultation in totally the wrong manner, and still don't learn. Very early, they successfully manage to get neighbours offside, with their lack of sensitivity and lack of consultation skills. If AGL and our neighbours had truly consulted with us, not consulted at us, and certainly not waited for several years to do so, we wouldn't all be sitting here today as hostile neighbours.

Yesterday Mr. Peter Wingett read a letter to Senator Ian Campbell requesting that wind farms only be developed where the community truly wanted them. I would like the Panel to consider that, though AGL ran an extremely successful submission drive and obtained such a large number of signatures supporting this project, the majority of these people are NOT the local community. This is a most unusual situation as it is so far away from towns, and one may say it is only a majority of the neighbours opposing the development, and nobody else. As I said before, it's amazing who one speaks to who doesn't support the project. Chris Jelbart, speaking to nurses and doctors at Hamilton Hospital these last two days, is surprised at the comments made by staff who are totally opposed to this project, but haven't done anything about it, as it's not in their backyard. The neighbours, in this case, ARE THE LOCAL COMMUNITY, and the friends and family of the proponents, along with those who have been bought off with what money will buy ARE NOT.

Surely it is we neighbours who should be considered foremost, as we are the ones upon whom the impact will be the greatest, remembering that the Minister for Planning, in Jason Taylor's submission regarded the amenity of the surrounding residents as one of the most significant issues for consideration.