

Commonwealth Senate Enquiry

The social and economic impacts of rural wind farms, and in particular:

- a) Any adverse health effects for people living in close proximity to wind farms;*
- b) Concerns over the excessive noise and vibrations emitted by wind farms, which are in close proximity to people's homes*
- c) The impact of rural wind farms on property values, employment opportunities and farm income,*
- d) The interface between Commonwealth, state and local planning laws as they pertain to wind farms; and*
- e) Any other relevant matters.*

With reference to the above enquiry, I wish to make the following submission.

I live in Breadalbane NSW, within 5 km of a proposed 80 turbine wind farm at Collector, currently being considered by Transfield, and an existing 15 turbine wind farm at Cullerin. These wind farms have had a dramatic impact on our rural community.

I have lived in Breadalbane all my life, as has my Father, Grandfather and Great-Grandfather before me. I look out my front door to see the view that my Grandfather looked at, and what I hope my grand children will look at. This is probably not going to occur as there is a 80 wind turbine development proposed for across the road.

In our community, families live next door to each other for generations. This can be difficult to imagine when you come from a city where you might not know the name of your neighbour. As a result of the Cullerin Wind Farm development, we now have families in our community who do not talk to each other. It is very hard to avoid people when you live in a small rural community. This destroys the community when you only have a small pool of people from which to draw volunteers for the rural fire brigade, and community and social groups.

When you live in a small community and a large, multinational company arrives with a divide and conquer attitude, it destroys our way of life. Here's my experience:

- Agreements signed with landholders on the quiet and sometimes with confidentiality agreements so they cannot be discussed.
- No public communication about the development until just before they submit their proposal to the State Government
- Significant amounts of money offered per turbine per annum for a few landholders, however, the proposal affects everyone
- Our community and region is now divided into those for wind farms and those against wind farms.
- Companies meet with people on a one-to-one basis, refusing to hold a general question and answer session. This "ticks the box" for community consultation required in planning laws, but really does not consult the community. All they do is talk – there is no listening
- No comprehension of what makes up a rural community. The company is only interested in profit.
- I went to an "information session" where the noise of a turbine was documented as "more than quiet countryside and less than a quiet suburban area" and that was more than acceptable. We live in quiet countryside. There is no measurement of infrasound emitted by the turbines. Currently no planning laws or guidelines require such a measurement to take place before the project is commissioned.
- A council, removed from the approval process and therefore does not want to get involved with agreeing to or opposing any development, but wants the money promised by the developers for community enhancement. Our council is currently proposing to use this money for capital projects within 20-30 km of the effected community.

- If you are not for the wind farm development, you are branded a “NIMBY” or jealous or against alternative energy generation. There is no voice for a reasonable debate on whether or not wind is the right energy generation to invest in. I feel there is no representation of what is a growing population of people who are worried about not only the social impact, but the ongoing environmental impact and health issues arising from these wind farm developments. We cannot be guinea pigs to a State Government’s lack of planning in the generation of electricity.

There is a feeling of being “used” by the state government to build these “green energy” monstrosities, with no studies into the health impacts, no real idea of the impact on the communities and in most cases, no visit to see outside of a document, what the development looks like. These wind towers are 150m tall. If I wanted to build a building on my property that tall, I could not as it is zoned rural. However, the state government can override these planning laws under the guise of a “project of state significance”. This would not happen in Sydney. The Blue Mountains are just as windy as our area, however, there are no wind turbines going up there.

There have been no real cost benefit analysis done on these projects. They are heavily subsidized by the State Government, which requires Electricity Retailers to purchase the energy produced, and by the Federal Government through the RECs scheme. This additional cost is then passed onto all consumers in electricity price rises.

The company’s always advertise the millions of dollars in stimulation to the local community (Transfield are advertising \$400 million). This is not our experience. Workers arrive on a contract basis. The workers are rarely locals, as those who live locally are either retired or employed already. There are few opportunities for living locally, so they live in Goulburn or Canberra and commute. Travel time is too long, so they pack their own lunch and bring it with them most days. Included in these millions of dollars is the actual cost of the development. What we do experience is damaged local roads which are rarely returned to their original state, increased traffic on narrow sealed and unsealed roads by inexperienced city drivers, a construction zone for the time it takes the development to be built and signs advising us how great the whole project is. Condescension is an understatement.

There have been no real studies on the impact of land prices. However, an improved block adjacent to ours, sold last year after over 18 months on the market and a significant price reduction. This property has views over the proposed Collector and existing Cullerin Range wind farms. There is currently no requirement from developers to return the landscape to the state it was in prior to the wind farm being constructed. Who owns the decommissioned towers? Who is liable should they cause damage as they break down? There should be a trust set up or a bond system so that funds are available to decommission the project at the end of its life.

There have been no studies in the adverse health affects of wind farms. They do exist. Legal proceedings have been settled out of court so that developers do not have to claim liability for the ill health caused by wind farms. Research needs to be done before planning approval.

Wind towers are a very visual reminder that the State Government is trying to do something for the environment. There are other more efficient means of generating clean energy than through wind. Wind is an unreliable generation source. We live in an area which has some of the highest days of sunshine in Australia. I believe solar is a much better option for our area. It is a much more efficient generation source, it has a lower community and environmental impact than wind and land holders can still benefit by having these developments on their properties. When given the option between a 10kW wind turbine or a 10kW solar array, I went with the solar option and have generated much more electricity in the same time frame than my neighbour who went with the wind turbine option.

Frank Hannan