

REPORT

2nd December, 2004

Ms Diane Michetti
Administrative Support Officer
Planning Panels Victoria
Department of Sustainability and Environment
P.O.Box 500
MELBOURNE VIC 3002

In respect of: Dollar Wind Farm

Reference Numbers TRA/04/001
2004/510

Submission made by: The Victorian Nationals
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This submission represents the view of The Victorian Nationals.

The Nationals have maintained a keen interest in the development of windfarms in Victoria. We have been very much to the forefront of debate, both in the Victorian Parliament and the general community. With the Leader of The Nationals, Peter Ryan, representing the electorate of Gippsland South and Upper House Leader, Peter Hall, representing Gippsland Province, we feel we have a sound knowledge of the views and aspirations of those who will be impacted by the proposed Dollar Wind Farm. We have listened to many people's views on this proposal, attended information sessions held by Meridian Energy and visited the location of the proposed turbines.

We have reached the conclusion that this proposal will have extremely adverse social, economic and environmental impacts on the South Gippsland community and we thus register our objection to the proposal in the strongest possible terms.

The Nationals have been very critical of the planning process in respect to wind farm development. We believe the current planning guidelines are grossly deficient in the following ways:-

- Local Government's have been stripped of all planning powers for projects exceeding 30MW of nominal capacity
- With the Minister assuming control of the planning process, and the Victorian Government's plan to have 1000MW of capacity in place by 2006, the views of local communities have been rendered virtually worthless.

- The guidelines do not require an EES process for each proposed wind farm and in particular the Dollar proposal will not be subjected to an EES.
- The guidelines lack rigid detail on how the impact on landscape values are assessed.
- There are no standards for defining minimum distances between turbines and public and private property boundaries or residential buildings.
- There is no provision for paying compensation to those who have been materially affected by wind turbines.

The Dollar Wind Farm Proposal

Social impact

The Dollar Windfarm is located on land owned by 15 separate landowners.

121 properties adjoin the turbine locations and more than 110 homes are within a 2.5km radius. The angst towards windfarms has spread far beyond those will be directly impacted by the Dollar proposal. Windfarms have already been built or approved at Toora, Bald Hills and Wonthaggi.

But as well, just about every other knoll in South Gippsland has been seriously considered for potential wind farm development. Many hundreds of landowners have been approached by development companies. In South Gippsland there is understandably great anxiety about where and when the next proposal will occur. There is no plan, no zones that define where wind farms may or may not be constructed. There is no consideration of the cumulative effect wind turbines are likely to have. There is no limit on the number of turbines that may be constructed in the South Gippsland region. Real estate sales in the hills of the region have stagnated. There is real evidence that property prices have been devalued. All of these factors cumulatively have been very unsettling and divisive within the South Gippsland community. Landowners are not sure whether to "trust" their neighbours when it comes to potential wind farm developments. Once you lose trust, the whole well being of the community is tragically diminished. We say without fear of exaggeration that the social fabric at South Gippsland has been severely damaged. Wind farms have and continue to have a very negative social impact on the local community.

This social divide has been exacerbated by the clandestine tactics of Meridian and other developers. Negotiations with landowners have been done in secret, information misleadingly conveyed and details omitted. For example after learning of 20 towers soon to occupy her front room vista, one resident was shocked to learn only in the last few days that her house was to be directly overlooked by a public viewing platform!! No one from Meridian mentioned it to her, it was found by accident when she was viewing the planning application!

The claimed social benefit of increased employment opportunities is in The Nationals view nothing but a smokescreen. Short-term construction jobs are likely to be filled by an other than local work force, there is no component manufacturing plant planned for Gippsland and the Toora experience has shown that tourism jobs have not materialised.

The Nationals believe wind farm proposals for South Gippsland have caused irreparable social divide without any of the claimed social benefits materialising.

Economic impact

Real estate agents have indicated to The Nationals that land sales in the Foster North area have stagnated because of the proposed Dollar wind farm development. Even with a reduced sale price tag properties have not sold. Housing developments in the area have been abandoned, resulting in loss of local employment opportunities. Collectively these events have had a profound negative impact on the local area.

It is difficult to imagine the local content of the suggested 60-70 short-term construction jobs compensating the community for this reduced economic activity.

As stated in the planning application, the development is at best likely to have a minimal impact on tourism in the area.

The Toora experience has seen surrounding land valuations decreased by the local council, resulting in reduced rate

revenue collection. This will certainly again be the case if the Dollar proposal goes ahead.

The Nationals acknowledge that the 15 landowners accommodating the wind turbines will benefit economically by doing so. However we claim that the nett economic effect of the Dollar proposal will be a significantly negative one.

Environmental impact

Forty-eight wind turbines of 110 metres in height will have a profound impact on the landscape of Foster North. But in particular it will impact most harshly on those who live in close proximity to the turbines. As well as the degradation of the visual landscape, issues like shadow flicker, blade glint, noise and bird kills need to be addressed.

The Nationals believe the only satisfactory means of dealing with these issues is for the planning conditions to require minimum separation distances between turbines and other infrastructure especially residential buildings.

In regard to this matter the Department of Sustainability and Environment's submission to the planning panel considering the wind farm proposal at Ballan is instructive.

Within that submission it is argued that:-

"There generally appears to be a current lack of established guidelines and standards in relation to setbacks and potential impacts of wind farms on adjoining Parks and fauna values."

"Parks Victoria considers a minimum of 1 kilometre to be an appropriate setback distance between the Brisbane Ranges National Park and proposed development to minimise the impacts of noise, shadow flicker and bird collisions and to reduce the impacts on the landscape values of the Park."

The Nationals believe that at the very least, people living on country properties should be entitled to the same consideration as birds, animals or tourists visiting National Parks. Using this Government department's own criteria, no turbines should be allowed within 1 kilometre of an established residence.

The Nationals argue it is common for industrial operations to be subjected to setback requirements and in that regard wind farms should be treated no differently.

The Nationals are also sceptical of the real benefits in regard to reduced greenhouse emissions that arise from wind farms. The Dollar proposal has a nominal capacity of 79MW. The Government's windfarm planning guidelines state that wind farms in Victoria can expect to achieve an actual output of 30% of capacity. In the case of Dollar this results in an actual output of just 24MW! Recent reports from places like Germany suggest the actual output is closer to a mere 11% of capacity. It would be instructive for the panel to acquire the actual output achieved at Victoria's existing wind farms.

Given the modest actual output of the Dollar proposal as opposed to the significant impact this development will have on landscape, lifestyle and other environmental values, The Nationals believe the claimed environmental benefits of this project are grossly overstated.

CONCLUSION

The Dollar Wind Farm proposal is not supported by The Nationals.
Nor do we believe it has broad community support in the South Gippsland region.

It is The Nationals view that this project has caused social division in the local community. It has and will continue to have a negative economic impact and delivers no nett environmental benefit.

The South Gippsland community do not want this or any other wind farm and those views need to be respected.

The Nationals urge the panel to reject the application.

Finally we wish to indicate our desire to make an oral presentation to the Panel.

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LEADER OF THE NATIONALS

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