The Pyrenees Shires Submission on:
The Social and Economic Impact of Rural Wind Farms

In principle Council support renewable energy projects that are appropriately assessed and are sited so as not to cause detriment to non-stakeholder properties and residents.

Pyrenees Shire currently has over 400 wind turbines across six separate projects in various stages of the planning process, including the 157 turbine Stockyard Hill wind energy facility development that was approved in October 2010.

Council's role in the approval and management is currently limited to two of these projects, as under current Victorian planning law the State is the responsible planning authority for all projects over 30 megawatts in size. However, the issue of the on-going enforcement responsibility for wind farm projects of over 30 mega watts has been one of conjecture over the last 18 months, with the previous Victorian state government being unwilling to enforce the condition requirements of these permits, despite the legal requirement existing under current Victorian planning legislation for them to do so.

Council's legal advice clearly demonstrates that the State cannot transfer its responsibilities for project management under current legislation.

Through submissions to various wind farm developments and enquiries over the last two years, the Pyrenees Shire Council has put forward a number of consistent messages about wind farm development in the Shire.

Due to their size and scale, wind farm developments have the potential to cause significant impacts on adjoining land owners if they are not appropriately sited and effectively managed.

Many state governments, including Victoria have adopted their own set of guidelines for the assessment of wind energy facility developments. Council sees that the current Victorian guidelines (*Policy and Planning Guidelines for the Development of Wind Energy Facilities in Victoria, Sept 2009*) are not currently robust enough to protect against potential negative impacts and fail to provide strong enough direction on the assessment requirements. Specifically Council would like to see the following as part of the guidelines:

- Siting of towers with at least a 2km setback from non-stakeholder homes, as the most effective technique to limit noise, blade flicker and similar impacts,
- Adoption of a more rigorous noise assessment standard. NZ6808:1998 has been in use in Victoria for over 10 years and was recently superseded in New Zealand last year by NZ6808:2010. Many of the assessment methodologies contained within this standard are now well out of date, and the recent experience with the Waubra wind farm, where 32 noise related complaints have been received by Council and DPCD since the first turbine

was commissioned 18 months ago shows that this noise standard is in urgent need of replacement;
- Achieving a 400 metre setback from property boundaries for both safety and to protect property rights,
- Siting key wind farm infrastructure and facilities on major roads,
- No lighting for wind turbines, unless in close proximity to an airport,
- More effective noise monitoring, reporting & intervention protocols,
- Projects to include details of all infrastructure, such as electricity grid connections.

Currently the Pyrenees Shire, along with many other Councils currently affected by wind farm development are actively working through the MAV with DPCD to review the current guidelines and make recommendations to the state government for priority improvements.

Councils Role with the Assessment of Wind Energy Facilities

The current role of Councils in relation to the assessment of WEF's is determined by whether the proposal is above or below 30MW in output. Proposals below this threshold are currently assessed by local Council planning officers. However, it has been our experience that proposals of fewer than 30 mega watts capacity usually have the same degree of complexity involved with the assessment of key issues such as noise, flora and fauna, cumulative impacts, shadow flicker and road impacts, which take significant hours of officer time to assess.

Council's role in assessing expert evidence is difficult due to the specialist skills required, and the volume and technical nature of material provided often poses some difficulties for Councils in being able to develop the capacity to devote sufficient resources to the task. There is also often a need to engage specialist consultants (at Councils expense) to assist with the assessment of complex noise reports.

Experience is showing that the current approvals process is leading to many Council's (due to resourcing constraints) defaulting to accepting a lot of expert evidence on face value and deferring the hard decisions to a secondary consent phase of endorsing management plans.

Perhaps due to the noise hazard and health risks emanating from the Waubra wind farm, it has also been our experience that communities within our region are becoming increasing negative and generally less supportive of wind farm projects. For instance, with the Chepstowe wind farm planning application for three turbines that was lodged with Council in February 2010, over 120 objections were received by Council. The effective management of the community consultation process for projects attracting such large numbers of objecting submissions also places increasing resourcing constraints on small rural Councils.

The recent change of Government in Victoria may in time, change the current process, as the new government have a current policy commitment to make local government the planning authority for the assessment of all wind energy proposals, regardless of their size. Such a move would place massive resourcing constraints on local government's already limited resources, and unless significant support can be provided by specialist staff from DPCD this model is seen as being unworkable.

Policy and Planning Guidelines for the Development of Wind Energy Facilities in Victoria

The primary planning policy guideline instrument is the Policy and Planning Guidelines for the Development of Wind Energy Facilities in Victoria. This document is intended to give

proponents, authorities and the Victorian community guidance in assessing wind energy proposals.

However, the guidelines provide a wide range of ways of assessing a proposal. The method used depends on the following influences.

Legal Process	Resp Authority	Appeal Method
EPBC Controlled action – consequently an EES is required	Minister for Planning	Panel – final Decision by Minister
Not a EPBC controlled action, EES required	Minister for Planning	Panel – final Decision by Minister
No EES, Application over 30MW – Planning Permit is required	Minister for Planning	Panel – final Decision by Minister
EES Required, Application under 30MW	Minister for Planning	Panel – final Decision by Minister
No EES, Application under 30MW – Planning Permit is required	Council	VCAT

As outlined earlier, when a WEF application is under 30MW, a Council is the Responsible Authority, and should the application be referred to VCAT for review to VCAT the Council is bound by the decision of VCAT.

If the Minister is the Responsible Authority he is not bound to accept any of a panel's recommendations – unlike a VCAT decision which is final. There is also no time limit on how long he has to make a decision.

These "distinctions" are not widely appreciated in the local community and WEFS are often seen as unstoppable due to the average citizen often experiencing difficulty in understanding what has become an increasingly complex planning framework.

Consultation

Presently there is limited effective direction provided within the Victorian wind farm guidelines on the accepted methods of effective consultation for wind energy facility proposals. As a result the level and effectiveness of the consultation being undertaken between wind farm proponents the community and Council varies greatly. There is a need for comprehensive guidelines and consistent standards to be developed in relation to the consultation process.

Enforcement of Permit Condition Requirements

It is the Pyrenees Shire position that under the current provisions of the Pyrenees Planning Scheme and the *Planning & Environment Act*, the Minister for planning is legally responsible for administering and enforcing all matters relating to wind energy facilities exceeding 30 mega watts in capacity.

Council presented two legal opinions, from Gary Testro and Simon Molesworth QC at the Stock Yard Hill Wind Farm Panel Hearing. Both of these opinions unequivocally back the position of Council that the Minister is responsible for enforcing all matters relating to wind farm permits exceeding 30 mega watts. The following extract is provided from page 6 of Mr Molesworths advice in support of our position:

'In circumstances where a wind energy facility is one that has a capacity of 30 megawatts of power or greater, it is indisputable that the Minister is the responsible authority pursuant to the Schedule to Clause 61.01 of the State's Planning Schemes. In circumstances where such a wind energy facility has been called in, then Section 97H simply reinforces the fact that the "first responsible authority" is responsible for permit administration and enforcement. Consequently, it would be the Minister that retains that responsibility'.

Having robust enforcement mechanisms in place to administer a development of this scale is considered critical to providing adequate assurance to the local residents that are potentially likely to be affected by noise impacts from the turbines.

Council's have neither the technical skills or financial resources to take on the responsibility (and associated liabilities) of enforcing a planning permit in respect of which it had little input in issuing and were not privy to the precise details of the considerations which led to this outcome. Issues such as enforcement of complex noise testing requirements are too large and complex to be dealt with by individual Council's acting on their own.

Critically, Councils have not been treated as co-Responsible Authorities through the assessment process, and have had little (if any) part to play in formulating Permit Conditions. It is also understood that Councils have had minimal involvement in secondary consent processes, on matters of detail design, environmental assessment, and on-going site management.

The Pyrenees Shire have previously made recommendations through the Planning Minister and via the MAV that steps be taken to appropriately resource DPCD with a regional co-ordinator that would have access to appropriate technical experts that would be charged with the responsibility of ensuring compliance with wind permit conditions. It is our view that setting up a unit would ensure a consistent approach to the handling of wind farm enforcement matters across the state of Victoria. To their credit, DPCD have recently appointed an officer to fill this position for a trial period of 12 months.

In accordance with the legal opinions provided by Council, the following are seen as key issues that need to be addressed to establish the required certainty and public confidence in the enforcement process:

1. Ensure that all permit conditions are drafted to ensure that the responsibility for determining on-going compliance rests with the Minister;

2. The State Planning Minister takes steps to fully implement the enforcement model previously presented to the Minister through the MAV.

Issues with Project Assessment:

Noise

Since the Waubra Wind Farm was commissioned in 2009, 32 complaints of noise sand health related effects have been received by Council and owners living between 800 m and 3 km of wind turbines, especially from turbines concentrated to the south.

The details of the noise issues reported as a result of the Waubra wind farm is summarised as follows:

- audible noise complaints (mainly modulation, mechanical noise, 'humming type sounds and properties further away from turbines report hearing sounds that they describe as being like a 'train or truck rumble that never arrives';
- difficulties sleeping
- headaches, nausea, dizziness

Similar symptoms have been reported by a majority of the Waubra and Evansford residents that have lodged complaints with Council, with most complainants stating that the symptoms are significantly worse at night time and under periods of stable weather patterns.

In accordance with the requirements of the permit conditions, the wind farm operator provided an independent post compliance noise report prepared by Marshall Day acoustic consultants to DPCD in late 2010. The independent peer review of this report by DPCD revealed that a number of properties were in non-compliance with the noise threshold requirements set out in NZ6808:1998. It is our understanding that the Minister for planning and DPCD will be shortly meeting with representatives of the wind farm operator to further discuss the actions that will need to be taken to bring the facility into compliance with the relevant noise standard.

It is our view that many of the current issues with the Waubra wind farm stem from the operator being granted approval to construct turbines too close to non-stakeholder properties (some turbines are located as close as 800m from non-stakeholder dwellings). Other issues also stem from the inadequacies contained within the initial noise assessment report that was assessed in 2005 by the Planning Panel that issued the permit for the development. There were a significant number of non-stakeholder dwellings with sound level predictions just under the 40 dBA threshold specified in NZ6808:1998. However, non background testing was undertaken at any of these properties prior to the permit being granted in order to verify the accuracy of the predicted sound levels.

The number of noise complaints recorded at Waubra and at overseas wind farms emphasizes the importance of ensuring that appropriate setbacks, good wind farm design and the use of the most robust and up to date noise assessment tools, using the most up to date methods and noise testing equipment.

Council maintains that the current 1998 NZ noise assessment standard specified in the *Guidelines for the Assessment of Wind Farm applications* is out of date. Noise standards NZ 6808 (1998) is over 10 years old and includes outdated methodologies for the testing of sound emission levels from installed turbines. It should also be noted that the 1998 NZ noise assessment standard does not take into consideration the effects of temperature inversions, infrasound, cumulative impact of turbines, or consider the potential for higher densities of turbines per square kilometre to result in increased off-site amenity impacts.

Given the current variations in standards currently in use across Australia, we believe there is a strong case for the adoption of a consistent noise standard to be adopted for use across Australia. The current variations between states results in uncertainty and inconsistencies in assessment practices for both developers and the community. It would be the preference of Council that a standard be adopted for use at a national level that provides for both day and night time modelling in relation to temperature inversions and the effects of wind shear in stable atmospheric conditions and cumulative impacts to be taken into consideration. The current World Health Organisation (WHO) Guidelines for Community Noise specify that detrimental noise pollution health effects (disturbed sleep, etc) can occur where noise levels exceed 30dB over an eight hour period. The adoption of a national standard that provides for noise levels in line with these standards would be supported by the Pyrenees Shire.

We also believe that the 2 km setback has also been recommended by a number of recent studies, including the 2009 NSW *General Purpose Standing Committee Inquiry into the impacts of rural wind farms* and strongly believe warrants consideration for adoption at a National level.

Frequency of Sound:
Council is concerned at the lack of any assessment guidance within the current New Zealand noise guidelines for measuring and assessing low frequency and infrasound noise from wind turbines. Since the commissioning of the Waubra wind farm, Council has received a number of complaints of low frequency noise impacts from residents living between 1.5 – 3 kilometres from wind turbines. This is consistent with the findings from a paper titled *Public Health Impacts of Wind Turbines*, developed by the Minnesota Department of Health identified that low frequency sound becomes more pronounced at a greater distance from the turbine. This study also found that low frequency noise can also be heard inside dwellings and other buildings, as low frequency sound is not attenuated by walls and windows due to its very long wavelength. The type of wavelength formed by low frequency sound has also been found to decrease over distance at a far slower rate than high frequency sound.

The deputy director of the Institute of Environmental Studies at the University of NSW also gave evidence at the recent NSW legislative Council enquiry into Rural Wind Farms that problems associated with low frequency noise have been found to be more prevalent with older wind farm technology.

One of the main failings of the NZ6808:1998 standard currently in use within Victoria is that it fails to provide any assessment criteria or guidelines for dealing with the effects of sub audible noise.

Council has been informed that the Victorian government is currently investigating the impact of sub-audible noise from the Waubra wind farm and its effects on the health of residents. It is understood by Council that Work Safe has commenced work with the Department of Human Services (DHS) and the EPA to consult with local government and relevant individuals to identify potential hazards. The panel should consider the outcomes from this study as part of their consideration of this application.

The Pyrenees Shire believe that steps need to be taken at a federal level to ensure that the potential health impacts of low frequency noise levels are fully considered at the time of assessing major wind farm projects. If there is inadequate data available to correctly predict or assess these effects, then it is recommended that, then it is our view that conservative empirical setback distances should be adopted as a safety measure.

Cumulative Impact
The prime location factor is a combination of wind resource (which appears to mean the further inland the higher the towers), and the flat topography of the South West. Above all else, for the major wind farms, and access to the national grid passing east west through the middle of the region is a key factor.

The economic incentive is also self evident, as without a major grid, then the applicants (or others) would have to build one to get the power to the markets.

The issue of Cumulative Effect is more than simply visual impact. The process should be that where more than one project on contiguous or adjacent land has a combined total of over 30 mw,

the Minister must call in the proposals and ensure a co-ordinated process of preparing and exhibiting and assessing the proposals is undertaken.

Otherwise there is no capacity for a joint consideration of impacts, neither proposal needs to acknowledge the existence of the other, and the community is left to deal with two different means of assessment.

When an application is under consideration, with a further adjoining proposal than being submitted, but not at the same stage in the approvals process, then neither application takes any account of the presence of the other.

The numerous linkages, cumulative noise concerns, access, grid connection, flora and fauna concerns and visual amenity are all affected by the proximity of proposals.

When the guidelines were developed in 2003/04, proposals were quite small. Now, larger proposals of over 150 turbines often cover an area 15km long x 15km wide. Thus two very large proposals adjacent to each other will affect an area 30 to 40 km in length and width.

Wind Energy Facilities are large, complex and strategic land uses and assessing and considering their cumulative effects is a regional and State Policy issue that requires the Federal and State Government to show leadership.

The current Victorian Guidelines do not appear to be designed to deal with projects of varying size and scale, or the issue of cumulative impacts.

Suffice to say, the issue of cumulative effect raises a series of policy and procedural questions which require clarification and greater policy direction in the current guidelines, as they need to be properly and consistently taken into account in decision making for wind farm development.

Operational Issues

Connections to the Power Grid

Consideration of the means by which a connection to the grid is proposed needs to be taken into account. Consequently, the main issue to be resolved with wind energy projects is the connection to a Power grid.

No level of Government is required, or even attempts to date to require that the off-site power lines to the grid, to be considered as part of the application. While this is likely to change, it may not be for some years.

Some proponents do include how they intend to connect as part of their application, others do not.

The financial viability of constructing the connection line is problematic, as Powercor are apparently insisting the applicants build the connection and then hand it over to them. One applicant has informed Council that it has taken them over two years of discussions and yet they failed to obtain an agreement from Powercor.

Sections in the Victorian Policy for Wind Energy Facilities notes that at 2.1.2 and 4.8 “clarify” where connection to the grid occurs. Section 2.1.2 indicates:

- that the wind energy facility and the off-site connection to the electricity grid are normally subject to separate planning applications
- that where applications are separate the power line infrastructure is not required to be provided as part of the wind energy facility application.

This is not regarded as a best practice response, and is seen as an area of high priority where the Victorian wind farm guidelines need to be amended.

Co-ordination Issues during Construction
There is no co-ordination proposed between each individual development, and other sectors that will be active over the next decade, such as Blue Gum harvesting or gas facility construction.

Each project is a major development site, and the access to these sites often relies on the same roads as the only feasible access routes.

The destruction of, the local road network during construction is an issue that is difficult to plan for, as even if the proponents are willing to pay the cost, the Council is not able to schedule any relevant works until the project is committed.

Further the source of raw materials is often unknown until within a month or two of work commencing therefore what routes to be used are not predictable in a reasonable timeframe.

Visual Amenity
Currently in Victoria, the Wind Farm planning guidelines and scheme provisions provide minimal practical direction to consider what transforms a landscape.

Most rural Councils simply have not had the resources to totally assess their entire shires for landscape values or to undertake detailed mapping of biodiversity assets, and even then, may well have been reluctant to impose a Significant Landscape Overlay (SLO) over an entire shire, with the consequential impacts on normal rural activity and the number of planning applications that would be triggered.

Aviation Lighting:
Council is very concerned over the amenity impacts from aviation lighting being required on the turbines. The planning permit for the Waubra wind farm was amended by the Minister after issuing (without public consultation) to allow an increase in turbine height, and for aviation lighting to be placed on nearly half of the 128 turbines. This amendment was undertaken contrary to the findings of the independent panel report, which recommended that aviation lighting not be used on the turbines, due to the potential to cause amenity impacts well beyond the wind farm site. The Panel report findings on the lighting requirements are summarized as follows:-
'The Panel makes the observation that in the event that CASA requires lighting as outlined in their advice, then the consequences on wind farms may be severe. The Panel has had no material placed before it relating to the impact on visual amenity of several flashing lights appearing on the landscape. In spite of this lack of material addressing the issue it is difficult to imagine that the effect would not be significant.'

Complaints of the aviation lighting used on the Waubra wind farm have been received from residents living well over 20km from the nearest turbine and the lights can be clearly seen from over 30km from the wind farm.

Council notes that the current standards for the lighting and marking of wind farms are currently undergoing review by the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) and CASA.

To effectively address this issue it is imperative that CASA be required to formulate a nationally consistent policy position on this issue at the earliest convenience.

Siting of Turbines in relation to property boundaries:
Council also considers that siting wind turbines close to adjoining property boundaries could lead to potential land use conflict particularly with respect to "as of right" land uses. It is considered that this fails to comply with the purposes of the Farming Zone and the decision guideline under Clause 65 to consider the orderly planning of the area. Council has considered this to be a fundamental flaw in the project design.

In Council's view there is a need to consider how "as of right" land uses may be affected by wind farms.

In considering matters of social equity in addition to planning issues and safety risk management, the Council is quite firmly of the view that the setback of wind turbines from adjoining property boundaries for this project should be at least 3 times turbine height (i.e. 400 metres) from adjoining property boundaries where the owner has not agreed to a lesser setback or at least turbine height, plus 10% where the adjoining owner has agreed to a lesser setback.

Council considers that this would be more in keeping with the aim of ensuring both land use compatibility as well as reducing the potential for future land use conflict. Such incompatibility and conflict can be created by the siting of wind turbines close to property boundaries may limit future land use options by non-stakeholder landowners for their affected land, and to improve safety.

Land Use Conflict
The subject land within and surrounding the Stockyard Hill Wind Farm is included in the Farming Zone, the purposes of which are stated under Clause 35.07 of the Pyrenees Planning Scheme:

- *To implement the State Planning Policy Framework and the Local Planning Policy Framework, including the Municipal Strategic Statement and local planning policies.*
- *To provide for the use of land for agriculture.*
- *To encourage the retention of productive agricultural land.*
- *To ensure that non-agricultural uses, particularly dwellings, do not adversely affect the use of land for agriculture.*
- *To encourage use and development of land based on comprehensive and sustainable land management practices and infrastructure provision.*
- *To protect and enhance natural resources and the biodiversity of the area.*

The overall emphasis of the Farming Zone is to support agricultural land use and protection from non-agricultural land uses which could adversely affect the continuation of agriculture. The provisions of the Farming Zone are generally not supportive of residential use, particularly where such use is not closely associated with agriculture or could impact on the ability to continue agricultural activity.

Siting wind turbines relatively close to adjoining property boundaries results in impacting adjoining land from visual, noise and shadow flicker effects beyond the confines of the host property. This raises concerns in regard to the apparent restriction on other land uses occurring under the Farming Zone over land on adjoining properties. Council views this concern as serious, particularly in relation to those land uses that do not require a permit under the Farming Zone.

Under the Farming Zone a number of uses, including a dwelling, may be permissible with, or without the need for a planning permit based on certain conditions and subject to satisfying decision guidelines. The potential for land use to conflict with land uses and development which are "as of right" and which are not able to be assessed to mitigate potential conflict or impacts through the approval process under the planning scheme is of concern to Council. Council wishes to ensure that land use conflict is minimized through a balanced consideration in relation to re-positioning of some of the wind turbines to better achieve orderly planning for the area.

The Table of Uses under Clause 35.07-1 provides for a range of "as of right" land uses which would imply that such uses enjoy some support for and from the purposes of the zone. Clearly, if this is part of the intent of the structuring of land uses under the Farming Zone, then any adjoining land use or development that requires a planning permit such as a wind energy facility must ensure that it does not impede the ability for such "as of right" land use and development to reasonably occur. Accordingly, any restriction on the ability for "as of right" land uses to reasonably occur on land adjoining a wind farm caused by the close siting of wind turbines is considered to fail a key test of ensuring that land use and development proposals (in this case a permit required wind energy facility) do not prevent the interference of land use supported by the purposes of the zone and classed as "as of right" (in this case a dwelling on land greater than 80 hectares) on adjoining land from being restricted.

Federal Acts.
The primary federal Act involved is the EPBC Act. After the stage of deciding whether a site is worth pursuing and starting the signing up of landowners, the first public knowledge of a proposal is when the proponents erect an anemometer - which in Victoria does not require a planning permit.

At they same time they usually employ specialist consultants with expertise in the area of flora and fauna to collect evidence for a referral to the Federal Government pursuant to the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (EPBC).

The data is normally drawn from desk top surveys of known sources of data, and occasionally from on the ground field work.

It is normally expected that such field work takes a year so that all four seasons are covered. At what point in this field work a referral is made is up to the proponents.

Whether the state or local government is aware of the proposal in detail varies at this stage, but normally the relevant officers in DSE, DPCD and the Council are involved to the extent they are aware of what is intended, but usually do not know the content of the information to be submitted to the federal Government.

The same information, and usually over the same time frame is submitted to the State Government regarding whether an Environmental Effects Statement will be required.

Monitoring the EPBC website for proposals is often the first sign a proposal is moving into the public arena, as the data submitted is then publicly available.

If we assume a clearance is received from the EPBC provisions then in most cases the proponent then proceeds with the ongoing actual surveys are undertaken during which time the site and local area specific information is collected.

Assuming these surveys are done in a thorough professional manner, it is often the result that the information contained in the EPBC referral is outdated. Rare and threatened species covered by the EPBC Act that were believed not to be present are actually present.

The issue with this is that the process is essentially backed to front. Any EPBC clearance should only be made after the full on ground surveys are undertaken in a satisfactory manner. This would mean the initial assessment obtains a provisional approval, pending the results of the detailed work to enable a considered approval, or other actions as appropriate are undertaken.

Until the level of knowledge enables proponents to be able to select a site for investigation, that will be without significant environmental issues, and enable a WEF to be supported on flora and fauna grounds, rather than select a site and find out what issues there may be and then attempt to obtain permission for a WEF.

If any conditions are applied to a proponent by the EPBC permission, there is no requirement for the Council to even know what those requirements are.

If a proponent concludes that no further work is required on an issue they should be able to demonstrate to the Council, the community and other stakeholders that they have satisfactorily addressed the issue.

Secondary Consents

Approving secondary consents may happen well after the permit is issued, or soon after the permit is issued but are then not acted on for some years.

Some wind energy permits have variable commencement dates such as three years to commence and seven years to completion.

In this regard the staging of the submission of plans for secondary approval will be expected to be submitted as one total package of all consents and plans required prior to construction, and as required for ongoing matters.

Council will request that any permit issued contains a requirement that for any development plan over 2 years old, a general review highlighting any change in circumstances must be provided before construction commences.

If the permit is issued by the Minister for Planning, the Council expects to be provided in a timely manner with copies as of when they are submitted to the Department of Planning and Community Development (DPCD). Currently there is no process that controls what, when or how Councils are informed of the details contained in the Ministerial Permit, and or the secondary consents endorsed by the Minister.

Economic and Social Impacts:

The Pyrenees Shire has the following comments and recommendations to make in relation to the impacts that the income stream flows from WEF developments are having on the rural farm incomes in our region:

1. We would consider that current landholder payments are fair for the placement of infrastructure on rural land;
2. However, we would observe that the price escalates by CPI which will increasing make the landholder payments less attractive in the final 10 years of the project life. We would consider it much fairer that price movements in landholder payments be linked to the price of electricity;
3. We would support a system which shared landholder payments with non stakeholders whose properties adjoined wind farms as the impacts are not confined to the host property;
4. In Victoria a WEF pays a fee in lieu of rates which is broadly 20% of the rates (on a CIV basis) that a farmer would pay in the same area;
5. We consider Council is well under-resourced by this payment for the work in administration and asset (road) management that flows from the development of a WEF. In normal circumstances where a major facility is established in a municipality, the Council makes an agreement with the operator for a payment in lieu of rates that is usually beween 40-50% of that payed by normal ratepayers. Such an approach would see Council recieveing double its current income from WEF which would be a much more equitable outcome.

Conclusion

The Pyrenees Shire believes that there are a number of issues with the current wind farm assessment process that it is hoped this enquiry will address

- Mandatory minimum setback distances from non-stakeholder dwellings
- lack of rigour in the noise standards being used in many states, resulting in amenity impacts to non stakeholder residents living in close proximity to wind farms
- Clear requirements on the circumstances when aviation safety lighting would need to be provided on turbines
- Lack of direction/guidance in assessing cumulative impacts from wind farms

We see a strong role for the draft National Wind Farm Development Guidelines to be modified in consultation with state, local government and community input to address these issues.

Chris Hall
Town Planner – Pyrenees Shire Council

14th of February 2011