

Submission to Federal Senate Inquiry into the social and economic impacts of rural wind farms:

Context

We live near the small town of Hallett in South Australia which has two completed wind farms (Hallett 1 – Brown Hill; Hallett 2 – Hallett Hill), one near completion (Hallett 4 – North Brown Hill); one planned for commencement (Hallett 5- Bluff Range) and one (Hallett 3 – Mt Bryan) that has been the subject of an appeal by residents to the Environment, Resources and Development Court, which was overturned and is now proceeding to the South Australian Supreme Court.

Towns like Hallett are at the mercy of ‘developer friendly’ State Governments, which pursue a policy of enabling wind farms without consideration of the effects on residents. The Regional Council of Goyder Development Plan, and preliminary impact studies by the wind farm proponents recognise the environmental and amenity value of the Mt Bryan range – but these were overturned in the ERD Court decision which indicates political intervention rather than the case being decided on its merits.

In relation to the specific issues addressed by the Inquiry:

(a) Any adverse health effects for people living in close proximity to wind farms Residents near the Hallett 2 wind farm (which are further away from residences than the proposed Mt Bryan wind farm will be) have ongoing health issues from the noise and vibration of the turbine gearing and blades. AGL have not claimed an association between the wind farm and these complaints, but the four turbines nearest the house most affected are never operating – thus allowing AGL to claim (and presumably ‘prove’ through measurements) that there is no effect on that residence.

(b) Concerns over the excessive noise and vibrations emitted by wind farms, which are in close proximity to people's homes.

Refer (a). If all five proposed wind farms proceed, the township of Hallett will be surrounded by wind farms – with two wind farms within noise and vibration distance from the township (and the others presenting visual disturbance). Whatever the wind direction and speed, residents will be exposed to deep vibrations and noises similar to those made by jet engines – with sufficient international evidence to support concerns about ‘Wind Turbine Syndrome’: sleep problems; headaches; dizziness and nausea; exhaustion and depression; problems with concentration and learning; tinnitus.

We live in close to the proposed Hallett 3 wind farm (700m from a barrage of turbines and 300m from the proposed location of the substation) and have two children. Clearly we are very concerned about the proximity of the proposed wind farm and its effect on our health, particularly as these issues appear to be overlooked by Development Planning and Approvals processes. It is not acceptable that EPA minimum noise levels are the only criteria used, when there are a range of other well-established health problems caused by wind farms that should be considered. Noise levels for wind speed are calculated at an optimum height – but there are many reports that indicate that wind speeds are routinely underestimated, particularly at night, and the actual noise levels are consistently much higher. Once the wind turbines are built in an amphitheatre around our house, very little can be done to address this.

It is also not acceptable to apply ‘city-based’ noise measures to quiet rural homes where we can sleep with the windows open at night to catch the cool breezes and therefore don’t need airconditioning. Noisy wind farms will require closed windows, hence carbon-producing (and electricity burning) air conditioning – perhaps policy instruments that improvement house design are needed more urgently than new electricity sources.

(c) The impact of rural wind farms on property values, employment opportunities and farm income

Despite claims by the wind farm proponents that there is no effect on property values or time taken to sell residences near wind farms, this is not the experience of the Mid North! Properties affected by wind farms (or proposed wind farms) have been on the market and unsold for over 2 years – this in an area where many non-affected towns have 100% accommodation and strong demand for additional dwellings. This situation is well known in the area, but it is interesting that landowners on the properties earmarked for wind farms were the main opinions sought in this matter.

When the news of the failure of the first appeal for Hallett 3 was heard, the most frequently-heard comment was “well we’ll never sell our houses now, we’re stuck here forever”. Clearly the locals know the true situation regarding property values.

While a small number of farmers will benefit financially from the wind farms, there is almost no flow-on effect to the local economy. Very few locals are employed in wind farm construction or maintenance/management (you only have to drive on the roads in the area in the morning and afternoon to see the stream of wind farm vehicles commuting from the larger centres), and most shopping and supplies are purchased out of the area. So small communities like Hallett bear all of the social, economic and health costs of wind farm development with no benefits (although we are generously offered the opportunity to submit applications for a national AGL grants program that provides small payments for community projects, despite early promises of “\$30,000 a year for your community”).

(d) The interface between Commonwealth, state and local planning laws as they pertain to wind farms

Concerns about the planning and approvals have been expressed above. However the evidence-gathering process by the wind farm proponents is biased and unethical. In seeking support for the wind farms, the proponents undertook a survey of locals. These methods included:

A telephone survey that commenced with the question ‘are you in favour of wind farms?’. Anyone who answered ‘no’ was told, ‘well we don’t need your input’. With research like this, of course the community are going to appear supportive!

Visits to residents to describe the proposed turbine location and identify issues or concerns, without providing accurate maps of the proposed locations and simply assuring people that the wind farms would not be visible from their property (when at least 12 turbines will dominate their view).

Unfortunately for good process, the findings from these ‘consultations’ were allowed by the DAP and ERDC without question.

(e) Any other relevant matters.

Wind technology is clearly an important element in our response to climate change. Wind

farms have their place – but not next to people. Wind farm proponents claim that there are few optimal sites and that these need to be maximised, but this claim overlooks the fact that the main imperative for optimisation is profit – wind farms are viable in other areas (a friend with property in the Mallee, close to the grid, and no residents says ‘send them our way!’) but these options provide slightly lower margins. And so we pay.