

Patron: Professor David de Kretser, AC, Governor of Victoria

Our Ref: EF:wfs
Enquiries: Euan Ferguson
Telephone: 03 9262 8312
Your Ref:



10th February 2011

Department of the Senate
PO. Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

Submitted via the Senate Online System

Dear Sir / Madam

SUBMISSION: INQUIRY INTO THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACT OF RURAL WIND FARMS

The Country Fire Authority is currently researching the impact of Wind Farms on bush fire safety. Due to the increase in the number of these farms (8 in operation, 28 approved, 2 with permits lodged, 21 in the feasibility stage) and CFA's statutory responsibility for fire prevention and suppression, we are reviewing our Emergency Management Guidelines for Wind Farms. Included in this review are the standard permit conditions as set out in the Department of Planning and Community Development Planning Permit. (granted by the Minister under division 6 of part 4 of the Planning and Environment Act 1987)

Although the risk of a bushfire being started by one of these wind farms may be low, the Country Fire Authority's aim is to develop achievable and practical fire management practices for these projects.

Research shows most fires occur in the 'nacelle' (top of the tower) and the resulting falling debris is a risk to the immediate area. This risk is heightened on a high fire danger day with burning debris being carried further by strong winds. Fire fighting would be confined to extinguishing any resulting spot fires from a safe distance from falling debris. With this in mind the siting of the farm with regards to wildfire overlays, surrounding vegetation and nearby plantations needs to be given greater weight in the planning stages.

The Country Fire Authority will be exploring further whether there is a need for restrictions to be placed on the operation of these farms during the declared Fire Danger Period, Total Fire Ban and Code Red days. In addition, the requirement for further restrictions during the construction stage may also warrant further investigation. This may include but not be limited to:

- restrictions on smoking on site except in prescribed areas
- all vehicles to carry emergency communications equipment
- all vehicles to carry fire extinguisher or fire fighting equipment
- all vehicle to keep to made tracks
- vehicles with catalytic converters prohibited from site on high fire risk days
- implementation of 'hot work' permits, particularly during Fire Danger Periods

Pre-application consultation is not a formal requirement of the planning process; therefore the Country Fire Authority is not necessarily notified in the early stages. The onus is on the proponent to contact the relevant agency to determine its requirements.

Wind farm technology was initially designed for operating in areas with different climatic conditions to Australia. The Country Fire Authority would also like to explore whether the design tolerances with regards to the automatic shut down of the turbine, are appropriate for the Australian climatic conditions.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Euan Ferguson', is positioned above the printed name and title.

Euan Ferguson AFSM
Chief Officer
Country Fire Authority