

SUBMISSION SENATE ENQUIRY: THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACT OF
RURAL WIND FARMS Reporting date 30th April 2011

Thank you for this opportunity to contribute to this enquiry.

We are being told by all persuasions of politics and all levels of Government that we must curb our use of brown coal and turn to green solutions “Renewables”. One of these so called renewables is “Wind Power”. The previous State Labor Government of Victoria was convinced that Wind was the answer. We were told by them and also the press how great it was for it would reduce the amount of CO2 produced and power hundreds of 1000’s of homes. What they did not tell the public was this is “Old” technology, it has increased in size and been given a makeover, but what makes it work has not changed. It is an unreliable source of electricity only produced when the wind blows, unable to power homes on a regular basis. It must always be supported by a base load. Wind Power has been installed in many European countries, USA, Canada, New Zealand and Japan. After reading many overseas newspapers in regards to Wind Power, questioning its ability to solve their power problems I am amazed that both State and Federal Governments did not start questioning their decision to undertake this old technology. Also reported in the press was the effects Wind Farm were having on the local communities, residents started to develop medical problems. Local Doctors started to notice a pattern of complaints, occurring amongst their patients that lived near Wind Farms, another reason for Governments to question this technology.

Nearly two years ago our family was advised that West Wind Energy planned to build a Wind Farm in the Shire of Moorabool west of Melbourne. It would consist of 110, 150 Metre turbines which could be either 2 Mega Watts or 3. Our residence would be impacted by 5 turbines less than 1 Kilometre away and another 26 within 2 to 3 kilometres. We were being advised by the State Government that projects like this would involve a lot of consultation between the company and the residents. Consultation was negligible; the Company was not at all interested in our concerns. The company was advised by the Planning Minister that an EES (Environment Effects Statement) would not be required for their Planning Permit.

The Planning Minister of the time sent the Planning Permit to a Panel Hearing. This Panel Hearing lasted for two weeks. From day one all the residents felt we are just going through the motions. The Wind Company was represented by a Lawyer and three helpers, we were told it was an informal hearing but the Lawyer found it necessary to bring up points of Law or not let evidence on behalf of the residents be considered. The only guide lines the State Government had in regards to Wind Farms was 1998 New Zealand standards which related to noise. These standards were 12 years old and related to turbines when they were 50 metres high. These standards had been superseded by 2010 standards but they were not allowed to apply to our hearing.

The Wind farm company had so called professional companies produce the reports that were required for the Planning Permit. Their so called noise expert reports were soundly

questioned by the residents and their expert witnesses, pointing out many faults, such as below standard noise recording equipment, noise recorders placed in incorrect positions. The expert witnesses engaged by residents at their own expense also advised the Panel that the noise encountered by some residents would be above the allowed standard. After a few months, a day before the Labor Government of Victoria went into caretaker mode for the forthcoming election the Planning Permit was approved with conditions. All noise reports had to be repeated because they were not up to the standard required.

As previously advised by the Ombudsman's Department if the permit was granted we could take the case to VCAT on the grounds the Planning Minister did not require an EES (Environmental Effects Statement) A number of residents decided to take this action, but this avenue was blocked because unbeknown to residents in Feb of 2010 the Minister had called the project in, thus taking away any avenue of appeal. The residents were not advised at the time the Minister had taken this action.

Because this Wind Farm Planning Permit was approved, affected residents have been denied natural justice. When new consultants are chosen and their reports completed this information will not be made available to residents to investigate and discuss. If panels confronted with inadequate assessments simply grant permits subject to further assessments being done to the satisfaction of the Minister, then what is the point of a panel hearing.

Another weak link in the Panel Hearing was the Flora and Fauna reports, the company hired by the Wind Farm company was requested, by the Planning Panel to go away and complete another report the next day in regards to the Wedge Tail Eagle population of the area. This company was given a second opportunity to correct wrong information, the Chairman should have suspended the hearing, and requested that more time to be spent on the information supplied. My main concern is that the avifauna surveys were inadequate and do not provide a solid scientific basis for assessing the long term impact of this project on avifauna. The surveys were conducted over a very limited period of time (5 days in March 2009) and did not allow for seasonal variation and movement of species, Of particular concern is the fact that the months preceding March 2009 were some of the driest and warmest on record. It is therefore not surprising the lack of water birds and waders were scarce. The survey covered a very small area (8 sites each of 200 metres radius) and therefore may not adequately represent the avifauna present across the site. It is of great concern that wetlands and seasonally inundated sites were not taken into consideration. There is a wetland on the site that has received Government grants in the past, also there are a number of sites which are recognised as being subject to inundation, The same concern relates to the Wedge Tail Eagle reports the surveys limited to 5 days in March 2009 only observed from a small number of sites, this was conducted over a short period of time at each observation points 20 mins per survey and 4 visits per observation point meaning the observation point was only visited for 80 minutes in total. Twenty minutes observation time is inadequate for Wedge Tail Eagles and other raptors surveys because many of these species can spend long periods perched at vantage points awaiting favourable foraging conditions.

I hope this Senate enquiry will address all aspects of Wind Farms, because affected residents feel abandoned by their Government representatives.

Every citizen of Victoria has the right to a good night's sleep, but this has been taken away from certain citizens of Victoria that live in the middle of a Wind Farm. Lack of sleep can become the underlying cause of many illnesses.

A comprehensive, independent medical study should be undertaken on the effects of audible noise and infrasound on residents living near existing Wind Farms.

Solid Guidelines must be put in place, turbines must not be placed near family homes, a minimum of 2 kms or in certain areas this might need to increase to 5 kms or more.

Consideration should be given to families who wish to sell their property, will they be disadvantaged? Will the property be able to be sold, or if sold will they receive the valuation price. Perhaps some form of compensation should be considered.

An enquiry into the Planning Panel system should be undertaken.

As soon as a Wind Farm Company approaches host land holders to erect a Wind Farm, residents who will be impacted, should be notified straight away and not two years later when all the plans are drawn up.

Stop the false advertising and give the general public the correct information, regarding how many houses it will provide power too, and the power produced will be intermittent and that it will always need a base load as backup.

I hope at the end of this enquiry, will emerge a solid set of guidelines that will apply Australia wide.