

The Social and Economic Impact of Rural Wind Farms

My name is Glenn Brew and I live at Evansford Vic.

During lambing (Aug and Sept 2009), I spent many hours working in a paddock 1 to 1.5 km's from a group of Wind turbines. After the first few days I started to get a headache and this got continually worse as the lambing went on. During my life I have had approx 12 headaches, since the operation of the Waubra Wind Farm I have had over 60. I was beginning to think I had a brain tumour but latter discovered that other farmers in the area were experiencing headaches when they were close to the turbines. Towards the end of lambing I was not spending as much time this close to the turbines and my headaches gradually ceased.

In Nov/Dec 2009 I was doing some fencing at about 1.5km's from the turbines and the headaches returned. Once again the headaches ceased when this job was complete and I was away from the turbines.

On another occasion while feeding hay to the cattle out of my trailer, I was overcome with dizziness and almost fell from the trailer. As I hung onto the side of the trailer it felt as if I was in a small boat bobbing up and down in a series of small waves. I looked up at the turbines and I could clearly hear a loud chopping sound coming from them. I also noted I was in a direct line with two of the turbines (one behind the other), and their blades seemed to be spinning in sync. I got into the car and moved about 300m out of the alignment and the sensation abated.

My tinnitus has become so much worse, to the point now, that listening to people talk in a one on one conversation can find me having to continually ask them to repeat themselves. This didn't start happening till about 2-3 months from the full operation of the turbines.

Over the summer we had a dilemma! Do we open the window at night to cool the house and be kept from sleeping by the pulsating swoosh swoosh of the turbines, which is something like a Chinese water torture, or keep the windows shut and not sleep from the heat. We could buy an air conditioner, but the use of this produces a huge amount of CO₂, which is kind of pointless.

Some nights the audible swoosh (even with the windows shut) of the turbine blades keeps me awake. I still get headaches and sometimes am overcome with dizziness even with a much reduced time spent in the worst effected paddocks. I am often very tired and lethargic and it seems as if, the more time that goes by, the more sensitive I get.

I deliberately avoid the top paddock which is closest to the turbines, and when I do have animals up there I make sure they are not lambing or calving, which would mean I would have to be checking them regularly thus putting myself in danger of headaches. This limits the land use of the most fertile and productive land on my property.

I live on the northern end of the wind facility and wonder if the cumulative effect from the noise is more noticeable here, as our cattle are now nervous and spook easily. Our cattle are Red Poll and were selected for their quiet nature and good mothering. Our sheep are Wiltshire Horns and are renowned for extremely good mothering skills, and for lambs "*that have a strong desire to live*". This year Aug/Sept 2010 we brought the sheep down to the house paddock for lambing so I could avoid headaches. During their pregnancy the sheep were in our middle paddock where I had experienced the dizziness. During lambing I watched lambs being born dead or dying within minutes after birth. Some mothers were walking off abandoning their lambs straight after birth. When we reached a 44% lambing loss I called the DPI. Tests performed could find no major mineral deficiency. Although this is anecdotal evidence, I would like to see independent research into the health effects on wildlife, and on domestic animals (pets and livestock).

PROPERTY VALUES

This recent article appeared on www.saukvalley.com on the 29th January 2011.

“A real estate agent says many of her customers don’t want to live near wind farms, which has caused home values to drop in those areas. Beth Einsele said she has shown her share of properties near Lee County wind farms. She said the houses there can’t sell for as much as similar homes in other areas of the county.”

At Waubra many properties are bought by the Wind Facility owner Acciona. This gives a false representation of the value of homes in the area, and as I have been lead to believe, bought for more than their true value. Acciona has been buying the properties because the owners have complained about noise, ill health or visual disturbance. Just recently another two farms have been bought by Acciona, because they would be in breach of the permit conditions regarding excessive noise, so rather than fix the noise problem they paid to silence the complaints. The Noise problem is not fixed. Locals are being forced out of their homes because they cannot live with the noise and health effects. Farms houses are left abandoned because there is no one who wants to live near or amongst a noisy wind farm.

For many of us the beauty of the region is why we settled here, and it has now been destroyed. No one is moving into the area, they are moving away.

One of my concerns is the by product of foreign owned wind turbine companies, whilst they might only be leasing the land the turbines are on, they are in fact buying up surrounding farm land and homes to cover their inability to meet the noise guidelines. Does this mean they are effectively securing foreign ownership of even more Australian prime producing land?

This link shows the concerns international estate agents have for property values

<http://www.wind-watch.org/news/2010/09/20/u-s-wrestling-with-property-values-and-setbacks-for-its-wind-turbines-2/>

EROSION AND STORM WATER

According to the Waubra Panel report, Ballarat Planning Scheme specifies the following additional decision matters

“Methods proposed for the disposal of storm water

Management and ongoing maintenance of access tracks and other vehicle use areas will be required to limit any erosion.

Storm water run off and litter from the site should be managed and minimised to prevent pollution to waterways.”

Acciona is neglecting their duty, the access roads were created on the hills without any proper drainage or management plan. It is obvious after recent rains, the run off from their roadways, which connect the turbine towers to the council road has created dangerous erosion on Stud Farm Road. It has been an expensive exercise for the local council when this was avoidable. Significant road side erosion is also damaging to the environment through the now, silting up of water ways.

Is the ground around the base of turbines poisoned for fire hazard reduction? If so, this would increase soil erosion. If there is not poisoning, What fire control plan do they have for turbines catching fire?

DECOMMISSIONING OF TURBINES AND OTHER EQUIPMENT:

In the Waubra panel report, Mr Townsend who represented the wind energy facility operator, makes a proposal to the panel which they fall for hook, line and sinker even though the Pyrenees council sensibly suggest responsibility for the removal of turbines should be restricted to the wind facility owner, they were ignored.

*“Mr Townsend proposed conditions addressing decommissioning as follows:
The wind energy facility operator must, without delay, notify the Minister for Planning in writing as soon as all or any wind energy facility generators (turbines) have permanently ceased to generate electricity, whether due to planned removal, faults or otherwise. Within 12 months of that date, the wind energy facility operator, or in the absence of the operator, the owner of the land in which the relevant generator is located must undertake the following to the satisfaction of the Minister for Planning:
Remove all non-operational or downed equipment..... “*

*”The Pyrenees Council considered that responsibility should be limited to the wind energy facility operator and should not involve the individual land owners.
The Panel does not agree with this proposition (from council) and considers that the prime responsibility should be with the operator but for added security the responsibility should revert to the land owner if necessary”.*

The wind facility operator has no binding regulations to ensure the removal of non-operational or downed turbines. There is nothing to prevent them from just walking away. What happens to the huge sub-station?

What happens if the wind company goes “belly-up”?

Are land owners aware they will be responsible for the removal of turbines? And the cost?

Is Waubra going to look like Texas U.S.A. Where non-operational turbines are now standing in fields rusting?

Safe Practice guidelines in the U.K. Propose wind facility owners place a money bond for the removal of decommissioned turbines. In Scotland *“Planning authorities should satisfy themselves that funding for decommissioning will be available when required”.*

INTERFACE BETWEEN COMMUNITIES COUNCIL AND GOVERNMENT

The Waubra Panel report shows residents and councils recommendations are deliberately ignored in order to fulfil Government's desire to be “seen to be green”.

Referring to the Panel Report the Ballarat Planning Scheme specifies the following additional decision matters:

Clause 52.32 applies to land used and developed or proposed to be used and developed for a wind energy facility. The purpose of the provision is:

*To facilitate the establishment and expansion of wind energy facilities, in appropriate locations, with **minimal impact** on the amenity of the area.*

*The effect of the proposal on the surrounding area in terms of **noise**, blade glint, shadow flicker and electromagnetic interference.*

*The impact of the development on **significant views, including visual corridors and sightlines.***

The impact of the facility on the natural environment and natural systems.

There are so many anomalies **WAUBRA DIDN'T HAVE A CHANCE**

The document titled Revitalising the Grampians Pyrenees Region: Strategic Plan 2002-2005 was presented to the Panel as part of the submission from the Pyrenees Shire.

A goal of the Strategy is:

*- To improve the value of **primary production** by diversification and the supply of value added products into high yield niche markets.*

To meet the Government and Wind lobby groups push for so called “Green Energy” The Waubra Panel members deemed that “A strategy to achieve this goal is to encourage the establishment of wind farms”.

What are they thinking, what part of industrial wind generated energy is a primary production? The idea of value adding is to increase the profits on farm and in the shire, not have any of the profits sent overseas.

Our farm was to produce organic lamb, beef and hay. This is more in line with the above strategy, now with the impact of the neighbouring wind farm this is now all in jeopardy

The terminology wind farms is an oxymoron they are not farming anything, it is advertising spin to make an Industrial site sound rural, to those who don't have to live near turbines.

OTHER CONCERNS

Michael J. Trebilcock, Professor of Law and Economics, University of Toronto, reports on the problems with wind power

"Denmark, the world's most wind-intensive nation, with more than 6,000 turbines generating 19% of its electricity, has yet to close a single fossil-fuel plant. It requires 50% more coal-generated electricity to cover wind power's unpredictability, and pollution and carbon dioxide emissions have risen (by 36% in 2006 alone).

Flemming Nissen, the head of development at West Danish generating company ELSAM (one of Denmark's largest energy utilities) tells us that “wind turbines do not reduce carbon dioxide emissions.” The German experience is no different. Der Spiegel reports that “Germany's CO2 emissions haven't been reduced by even a single gram,” and additional coal- and gas-fired plants have been constructed to ensure reliable delivery.

Indeed, recent academic research shows that wind power may actually increase greenhouse gas emissions in some cases, depending on the carbon-intensity of back-up generation required because of its intermittent character. On the negative side of the environmental ledger are adverse impacts of industrial wind turbines on birdlife and other forms of wildlife, farm animals, wetlands and viewsheds.

*Industrial wind power is not a viable economic alternative to other energy conservation options. Again, the Danish experience is instructive. Its electricity generation costs are the highest in Europe. Niels Gram of the Danish Federation of Industries says, “**windmills are a mistake and economically make no sense.**” Aase Madsen, the Chair of Energy Policy in the Danish Parliament, calls it “**a terribly expensive disaster.**”*

The full article can be read at

<http://network.nationalpost.com/np/blogs/fpcomment/archive/2009/04/08/wind-power-is-a-complete-disaster.aspx>

Eric Rosenbloom is a writer and Science Editor, and has shown that a little research shows that wind facilities do not in fact live up to the claims made, the impact on the environment and peoples lives are significant, and the findings of this report can be reviewed in the following link

<http://www.wind-watch.org/documents/wp-content/uploads/ProblemWithWind.pdf>

Rodney Glenn Brew