

30 January 2011

Submission For :
Australian Senate Inquiry re:
The Social and Economic Impact of Rural Wind Farms

Introduction:

My name is David McLaren and I reside in Warrnambool, South West Victoria.

South West Victoria is one of the most productive rural areas in Australia with Dairying in particular a major contributor to national rural production, along with vibrant, productive and efficient beef & lamb industries.

Productive Cereal cropping and other rural industries are also well represented in South West Victoria.

Wind Farm Impacts - A Personal Viewpoint

My parents , operate the family farm at The Sisters running beef cattle. (Up until several years ago Dad conducted a dairying operation until the age of 75).

The farm sits amongst the rolling hills of The Sisters, a locality situated 10 km south of Mortlake in South West Victoria. The farm has been owned and operated by my father and his father since 1912.

In early 2008, my parents were approached by Wind Farm Developments to seek their interest in participating in a wind farm proposal at The Sisters.

At this time, Wind Farms were not prominent in the awareness of the general public in the area and Mum & Dad were at first curious as to the 'proposal' so cleverly 'sold' to all potential participants.

In a very short time however, my parents decided they were not interested in participating, despite being vigorously pursued by 'Wind Farm Developments' (WFD).

The Wind Farm Proposal at The Sisters consists of 12 - 135mtr wind turbines allegedly generating up to 29.9 Mw of electricity.

10 residences sit within the perimeter of the project with my parents being the only non participant within this area. Another 5 non participant residences sit just outside the perimeter of the proposal Area.

The proposal 'landlocks' my parents farm with 8 turbines being proposed within 1.6 kms of the family residence. "The McLaren property is effectively an island surrounded by participants in the wind farm application with eight of the turbine sites within 1.6kms of their property" Ref. VCAT Decision 27 April 2010 –attached.

The Following Letter dated 4 August 2009 to the then Shadow Minister of Planning in Victoria summarises our situation and our concerns some 18 months ago.

Clearly our concerns have increased considerably since that time as more information relating to the impacts of Wind Farms has become available. Personal research involving visiting areas such

as Waubra (35 kms north West of Ballarat) and Cape Bridgewater (near Portland) have provided first hand evidence of the impact of turbines on residents who live in close proximity to same.

Matthew Guy
Victorian Opposition Planning Spokesman

Hi Matthew

I am writing to you in reference to the proposed wind farm at The Sisters, a small rural location in south west Victoria, 10 kms south of Mortlake and approx 40 kms north west of Warrnambool

My name is David McLaren, I along with my wife & 3 children reside in Warrnambool, however my parents still reside on the family farm at the Sisters running beef cattle. (Up until several years ago Dad conducted a dairying operation until the age of 75) .

The Sisters is a small rural (predominantly dairying) community located in the Moyne Shire set amongst The Sisters Hills. My parents farm is located in the centre of the Sisters Hills.

Early last year Wind Farm Developments (WFD), a New Zealand company with experience in Wind Farm 'Consenting Processes' (their words as per their website), approached Mum & Dad about the possibility of participating in a wind farm development at The Sisters. After not responding to the enquiry, WFD further contacted my parents in pursuit of their participation in the project. After a time Mum & Dad eventually convinced WFD they did not wish to participate. As is common with such Wind farm developments a veil of secrecy surrounded the processes to seek agreement from landowners to participate in The Sisters project, with my parents neighbours never mentioning the subject, and non participants having no knowledge of the project until a public meeting was announced 12 months ago to showcase the project.

The project involves 12 135 metre high turbines generating an estimated 29.9 mW of electricity. The reason for being under 30 kW being that a local govt authority are responsible for issuing a permit and the developers find this an easier path to approval of projects.

My parents are located in the centre of the proposed windfarm and are landlocked by participating farmers.

Myself and two of my sisters lodged objections to the project along with 3 other locals 2 of which are located on the perimeter of the proposal.

Our main objection to the project is based on the **visual impact** on the landscape in addition to major health concerns due to **Noise** pollution due to the **close proximity of the turbines to my parents home** and other nearby residents. We also have concerns re **Sunflicker & shadowing** from the easterly turbine which would sit just 700 metres from my parents residence. Another turbine is proposed less than 1 km from the public hall and fire station.

10 residences sit within the perimeter of the project with my parents being the only non participant within this area. Another 5 non participant residences sit just outside the perimeter of the proposal Area.

A public meeting was held by the council on the 15th July 2009 to enable all those lodging submissions to state their case.

A monthly **Moyne shire council** meeting on Tuesday 28th July considered WFD's application for the wind farm at The Sisters, and **voted overwhelmingly (7 votes to nil) to reject the application.**

I refer to your comments as reported by the Ballarat courier 27 July 2009 and note with interest that you have a clear understanding of the issues surrounding wind farms and the lack of guidelines to control such developments.

I note also the many concerns surrounding health risks due to living close to windfarms. We have conducted significant research in this area, particularly as the above proposal, if approved, would result in my parents being surrounded by 8 turbines, 2 within 700-800 mtrs, & 5 more ranging from 1km to 1.6 kms from my parents residence.

'Acciona Energy' have advised that they are to lodge an application for a 96 turbine wind farm just north of The Sisters (Ref The Warrnambool Standard classifieds 3/8/09).

A 'permit' was granted for the above proposal in late 2010.

One of our main arguments against The Sisters Wind Farm is that its **location is totally inappropriate**, and that there are vast areas of land with few residential homes in close proximity, that are more suitable for windfarms. (Such as the abovementioned Acciona Windfarm proposal).

It seems clear that there are **insufficient guidelines to manage the location operation and impacts of windfarms in Victoria**. For example there is **no minimum setback distance** that a turbine can be located from a residential property. It appears rules re turbine location are determined by subjective measures such as background noise and land elevation.

The Moyne Shire council have listened and acted in relation to our concerns re the location of a wind farm at The Sisters, by rejecting the proposal. The council's support has been much appreciated.

Wind Farm developments have already indicated they will appeal the matter with VCAT. I have recently read a detailed account of the VCAT decision – Acciona Energy v's Corangamite Shire, a case where Corangamite shire rejected a wind farm proposal near Port Campbell only to have this decision subsequently overturned by VCAT.

Given current government policy, there appear limited avenues with to mount a successful case against a wind farm (if appealed to VCAT) irrespective of its size, location, proximity to local residences, impacts on those living close to turbines etc.

Please do not hesitate to contact me as we are extremely concerned that such a proposal could be located in such a closely settled area where there are many alternative locations that would not impact directly on nearby residents.

It would be much appreciated if you could contact me in relation to the above.

Wind Farm Developments did take the matter to VCAT with **VCAT upholding Moyne Shire Councils decision** to refuse the permit. (See attachment 1 – VCAT decision).

Wind Farm Developments appealed VCAT's decision arguing that the tribunal decision was based on the 2010 NZ Noise standard which had not been added to the planning guidelines at the time. – The 1998 still exists in Planning guidelines- Why???

Current Status is that the parties agreed to refer the matter back to VCAT with the emphasis on the noise issues of the proposal.

Specific Concerns re Impacts of Wind Farms on Rural Communities:

The VCAT decision (attachment 1 provides a good summary of our objections to The Sisters Wind Farm Proposal.

Issues included; **Concerns re negative Health impacts** caused by turbines exceeding reasonable noise levels, along with the impact of ‘infrasound’,

Cumulative Impact of the establishment of multiple Wind Farms that are either directly adjacent or very close to other wind farms eg. The Hawkesdale WF (approved), Peshurst WF (application under consideration) and the Willatook WF, with a total of **555** proposed turbines and together spanning an area some **30 kms from North to South**, would create a massive area (forest) of turbines with a combined impact on the environment that is unparalleled in Australia.

Health Impacts – Examples of effected families in areas where Wind Farms operate close to homes.

Waubra is a small rural locality located 35 kms north west of Ballarat, Victoria.

I have visited Waubra on two occasions the second visit being in October 2010 where I attended a meeting at the Evansford Hall just north of Waubra. The feeling at this meeting was one of immense concern at what had happened at Waubra and to develop a strategy to ensure further turbines are not constructed – There is an extension of the Wind Farm proposed for Evansford.

Impact on the local ‘Community’

Rural Areas are renowned for their community spirit and sense of working together cooperatively.

The social division caused by the operation of the Waubra wind Farm is obvious, as was evidenced first hand at the meeting at Evansford where concerned residents showed their disillusionment with a local municipal councilor whose views were obviously at odds with residents. A sole Wind Farm supporter stood at the back of the Hall without uttering a word.

Local Wind Farm Participants – Interestingly there were no participants or “Acciona” representatives at the meeting. Participants sign up to **‘Gag’ clauses** where they agree not to comment on their relationships with the Wind Farm Developers. What do they have to hide??

The community impact was referred to in The Sisters WF VCAT tribunal decision (point 51 attached) as follows::**Social Division** has been caused in this small community by the Wind Farm Proposal. We feel that whatever our decision, the damage has already been done, and that relationships within the community may never be the same again”:

Prior to the Wind Farm application at Waubra, there was virtually no opposition locally, such were the assurances given by ‘Acciona” that there was nothing to be concerned about.

One such Waubra farmer was offered 8 turbines on his property but decided there was no way he would agree to having a third party have such control over his property . Contracts with Wind Farm Developers commonly involve 25 year leases on properties with an option for renewal at the Developer’s discretion. No property transactions or even construction of ‘plantations’ are to occur without the developer’s consent. – How Land owners can be so gullible is beyond comprehension.!!

It seems many sign up without completing their own due diligence.

Displacement of Families:

No where is it this more evident than at Waubra, with 11 houses in the area being vacated by people complaining of noise issues.(Sunday Herald Sun 30 January 2011)

I have personally contacted three of these residents and their stories are extremely disturbing. Another family in Cape Bridgewater near Portland, Victoria have recently been forced out of their home to the impact of noise pollution from the turbines located closeby.

Interestingly, almost all the turbines located at Cape Brigewater are owned by a small no. of **absentee landowners**. I was told (and this is unconfirmed) that one such landowner is a 'professional' who lives several hundred kms away and curiously purchased the property prior to the wind farm being established.

Absentee Landowners in Wind Farm locations are growing progressively along with the continued rollout of Wind Farms with Waubra the most obvious example.

Health Impacts of Wind Farms:

Health Impacts due to turbine noise include: Sleep deprivation, Headaches, Heart Palpations, High Blood Pressure, Tinnitus (ringing in the ears),dizziness and nausea, Irritability and depression and problems with concentration and learning.

Such are the examples of negative impacts from Wind Turbine noise that South Australian General Practitioner, Dr Sarah Laurie has conducted extensive research into such health impacts.

Dr Laurie has established the 'Waubra Foundation' , as a means of assisting in the undertaking of Independent Research into wind farm turbine impacts on health.

During October 2010 Dr Laurie visited several Wind Farms in Victoria including Waubra, Cape Bridgewater and Toora (Gippsland). Predictably, the results from Dr Laurie's research is consistent throughout the areas studied.

The alarming point is that there are most likely many more cases of people suffering that go unreported – The impacts suffered by participants who are unable to complain do to 'gag' clauses.

Renowned United States Medical practitioner Dr Nina Pierpont, MD PhD has written a book on the health Impacts of Wind Farms, Titled "Wind Turbine Syndrome" This book provides evidence of the impact on a number of families impacted by Industrial Wind Farms.

Response of Wind Farm developers to Health Issue claims:

Wind Farm developers are consistent in their response that there is 'no peer reviewed evidence to support such claims.'

If there are no issues, **why have "Acciona" purchased in excess of 7 properties** in the **Waubra Area?**

Acciona generation director Brett Wickham stated that "the most recent two houses bought by Acciona were purchased in September and October last year , when noise levels detected on the property **were in breach of the company's planning permit**" (Sunday Herald Sun 30/01/11)

One the most important claims from Wind Farm Developers is that there are no health impacts from Turbines. – Surely the above example is self explanatory.

One of the most frustrating issues with Wind Farms is their lack of regulation. What happens if noise levels are above planning permit levels? Who enforces the permit conditions?

Other Concerns:

Fire Risk – In South Australia there have been 3 turbine fires over the past several years,thankfully none on a day of extreme fire risk !!!

South West Victoria is amongst the most bushfire prone areas in the world. The risk of bushfire caused by turbine fire is preventable!!

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The Sisters Wind Farm Proposal

The issues raised above had largely not been raised prior to the construction of the Waubra Wind Farm and those at Cape Bridgewater, Toora and others.

The small 12 turbine Wind Farm proposed for The Sisters involves all the issues described above and would inevitably result in disastrous outcomes for this small productive rural locality.

What we do have is access to the mounting ‘alarming’ evidence of operating Wind Farms and the issues they have created.

Thankfully, the Victorian State Liberal Party have formulated a policy including a **minimum ‘setback’ distance of 2 kms** between turbines and non participant properties.

The sooner this policy is legislated the better.
Time is running out for the residents of The Sisters.

Thanks
David McLaren