

I am pleased to have the opportunity to be able to provide a submission to the senate enquiry into the social and economic impacts of windfarms. This is a personal account of how a proposed windfarm in The Sisters has impacted on my family and our community. A brief background of our situation is a proposed 12 turbine windfarm by Windfarm Developments P/L for The Sisters was rejected by The Moyne Shire in July 2009, 7 votes to 0, based on the project being too close to homes. The shire decision was appealed at VCAT and in April 2010 a permit was again rejected based on noise testing not meeting the current 2010 NZ noise standards which were introduced in March 2010. Windfarm Developments appealed this decision at the Supreme Court claiming the 1998 NZ noise standard should have been used instead of the 2010 NZ noise standard. The Supreme Court has ordered the application back to VCAT with a decision to be made based on the outdated 1998 NZ noise standards. We are currently waiting for a hearing date for the second VCAT appeal.

Before Windfarm Developments P/L came into our area we were a happy and close knit community. There has been a terrible strain put on our community through the long drawn out process of appeals and court hearings, as was noted by VCAT members Mr Bennet and Ms Mainwaring in their decision.

“We do have a concern related to the obvious social disruption. 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.”

Six landholders were secretly signed up for The Sisters Windfarm by Windfarm Developments P/L months before the community knew anything. They all had to sign confidentiality contracts and were sworn to secrecy. The open day at The Sisters Hall months later masqueraded as “consultation” and was the first we knew what was in store for our community. At this open day we were shown maps of where turbines were to be located some of them were within 500 metres of our homes and were 135m high to the tip of the blade. One farm is completely landlocked by the windfarm. We were incredibly shocked and had no idea of what was to lie ahead of us. Friendships were immediately tested as we approached our long time friends and neighbors involved in the project for an explanation.

Our family has been greatly affected as we have spent years fighting this project through lengthy appeals. We have been consumed by the research needed to inform ourselves of the impacts and affects of windfarms. We are constantly distressed at the information we are discovering. The overwhelming evidence of ill health effects caused by living near turbines leading to people not being able to work on their farms and having to leave their homes and also the property devaluation. I resent having had so much time taken up by this matter; it is time that should have been spent focusing on our family. For years we have spent hours and hours being distracted by windfarm research and frustrated by the process. We have spent days attending hearings and appeals not only in Warrnambool but also in Melbourne. We have also spent many hours lobbying politicians to bring some satisfactory guidelines into this out of control issue of windfarm development. This in itself has been a very frustrating exercise as we have found it hard to get any of them to listen to our situation.

My husband has lived at The Sisters for 50 years and with our four children we have dairy farmed on this property for 23 years. We are passionate about the area and have great friends and neighbors. We are deeply saddened by the division in the community and have tried to maintain friendships and remain civilized but the longer the process drags out the harder it becomes. The trust is gone and the resentment strong. We are very critical of the windfarm company not telling landholders the whole truth when signing them up to the development. Instead landholders are put in a position where they are not only putting the health and livelihoods of their neighbours at risk but also that of their own. Some of their own homes are no more than 124m, 267m and 350m of turbines. We have personally met people who live amongst turbines in Waubra and Cape Bridgewater and are experiencing ill health, land devaluation and have not only been forced to leave their homes but are unable to work on their farms. We feel deeply distressed for their suffering and the unbearable situations they find themselves in. The government must not only help those suffering in this situation but learn from the problems of the windfarms that are already operating and not bring the same grief to more and more families.

Agriculture and rural communities are the life blood of this country. We are farmers working and living on the land. We live in fear of our future and will continue to fight what is an enormous battle against this disastrous windfarm development.

Danny and Linda Kenna

The Sisters