

SUMMARY

The benefits of wind farms are highly debatable. Despite this there is no national policy on wind farms, states are competing against each other to attract wind power developers without any regard as to where the best locations for wind farms might be. The NSW government is a case in point. In 2009 it is decided that application fees for wind farm projects are being waived, that the approval process will be further streamlined and the threshold for critical infrastructure has been lowered. This was before the outcome of the 2009 NSW inquiry into rural wind farms was determined. The entire renewable energy planning process has been dominated by knee-jerk, election-related considerations rather than proper analysis.

In the rush to embrace wind power the NSW government risks destroying landscapes, dividing community, causing environmental damage to farm land and imposing high power costs on NSW consumers. There are many areas of Australia that are better suited to wind farms than the area from Eden Monaro north to the New England tablelands, areas that have more consistent wind and are further from population centres such as the Great Australian Bight, yet because states are competing rather than acting cooperatively the consumer suffers as does the landholder whose non-resident neighbour decides to allow wind turbines on his land.

Wind is an unpredictable power source. The greater the dependency on wind farms the greater the need for backup power sources when the wind stops blowing. This has to come from gas and coal-fired power stations.

It is essential that the Federal government undertakes an impartial inquiry into the costs and benefits of wind power with the participation of farmers, local communities, councils and end users, while at the same time exploring other alternative energy sources which are of greater economic and social benefit.

By lowering the threshold for planning purposes to 30MW the NSW government has opened the door to rash, untested, ad hoc development. Wind farms may give landholders some income but they destroy the incentive to make the land more productive and discourage sustainable agriculture. They have an adverse impact on the value of neighbouring land holdings.

Apart from well-documented impacts resulting from noise, vibrations, overshadowing, their construction will cause deep scars on this landscape.

Despite claims of wind power companies, wind turbines generate power for only 30 per cent of their operating time. A close examination needs to be made of the claims of wind power producers versus the reality, i.e. questions of efficiency. Also claims that they can power so many thousands of homes need to be carefully scrutinised as these are broad generalisations that make no allowance for distribution losses,

actual costs and household sizes.

ENVIRONMENTAL DAMAGE

Transporting

the turbine components requires access for very large low-loader trucks

and a large mobile crane able to move 50 tonne or larger components.

The 52-turbine Crookwell 2 windfarm will require 47km of road to be built where soils are poor and the scars of such construction will be impossible to erase.

An aerofoil blade, the size of a jumbo's wing, travelling at 200km per hour

is noisy. The air passing through the rotor is swept into turbulent vortices, the source of much of the sound, and within a metre encounters the obstruction of the tower and as a blade passes a tower every one to two seconds this imposes a pulsating quality to the aerodynamic sound which many people find deeply irritating.

The noise a wind turbine creates differs considerably in terms of its sound power level

at source and say at a distance of one kilometre. The further away you go the background sound becomes deeper and can be incredibly disruptive particularly in usually quiet rural environments. This sub-sonic noise is not taken into account when wind companies claim that distances over 500m are adequate for stationing turbines.

The consequences of shadow and reflective flicker are also apparent at greater

distances, making wind turbines much more obtrusive than static structures of

similar height. For this reason the industry's repeated attempts to compare them

with transmission towers ('pylons') are deceitful – pylons do not move and are of a

half or even a third of the height of big turbines.

IMPACT ON LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Wind farms bring very short term benefits for employment for local communities. They provide income for landowners but neighbouring properties are disadvantaged and lose value. In many cases, the turbines will be planted on land that is owned by people who do not live there. Since the announcement of several projects in the Crookwell area, dozens of properties have gone on the market as people try to avoid the inevitable negative impact that the completed wind farms will have on land values.

CASE STUDY

As an example of the kind of impact wind turbines will have, I wish to draw to your attention the impact that a proposed wind farm will have on our property

Our 280ac farm lies 28km north of Crookwell. It was established in the 1850s and still contains many remnants of that farming era. Although the landscape had been stripped of trees and terribly overgrazed, with a grant from Landcare we planted more than 2000 trees. We made plans to start a truffles farm and plant fruit trees.

Over the years we have employed local contractors to do fencing work, control weeds and do other jobs thereby stimulating the local economy. Late last year our dreams of settling here eventually were shattered by the announcement of a planned wind farm that would surround our sheltered valley on three sides by turbines more than 130m tall or the height of 30 storey buildings. These turbines will be visible from every part of the farm even though the closest ones will be approximately 1.2 kilometres from our house. The eight turbines located on the western boundary will cast a shadow over the entire property in the late afternoons. On the ridge beyond the eastern boundary dozens of turbines will loom over what is now a tranquil valley.

We have put investments in our farm on hold but we are determined to fight the proposed development. From talking to neighbours it is apparent that few people realise just how huge the wind farms will be. Few can comprehend that the existing wind farm near Crookwell is just one-third the height and a fraction of the scale of what is planned in what is one of the most beautiful parts of the Southern Highlands. We were attracted to the district because it retained its traditional character of well-tended rural properties and towns and villages free from over development. When the completed the half-dozen wind farms projects in various planning and construction stages will change this landscape and its heritage value forever.

ALTERNATIVES

Why are we investing on such a grand scale in wind farms when we have an untapped

source of energy in the sun. Almost every component for solar power is manufactured in Australia, in contrast with wind turbines which are made overseas. Encouraging solar power would also promote Australian manufacturing while lessening our reliance on imports.

Even experts such as Tim Flannery have expressed surprise that wind farms were being set up in NSW rather than the southern parts of the continent where winds are much more consistent. Many European countries are now putting wind farms offshore because of their social and environmental impacts and the reliability of the wind. One of the countries most involved in wind power manufacture, Germany, is investing heavily in research into solar-thermal. Germany has also been forced to build more coal-fired power to look after their energy needs as they found wind not sustainable except as an export industry.

In conclusion we would ask to consider carefully the points we have raised and reject any further unbridled, ineffective wind farm development.

Yours sincerely

John and Niki Zubrzycki

12 Cliff St

Watsons Bay

NSW 2030

02 9337 3923