

## **The Senate Community Affairs Committee**

Members of the Committee,

### **Re: The Social and Economic Impact of Rural Wind Developments** **Wind “Farms” – APPROACH WITH GREAT CAUTION**

It seems there is a heedless rush down the path of wind energy development. The rights, needs and futures of rural citizens are being openly neglected.

I am deeply concerned about the proliferation of permit applications (and approvals) for Industrial Wind Facilities in country areas and particularly in the Western Districts of Victoria. This important agricultural landscape is in danger of becoming a massive Industrial Estate. All at considerable cost to rural citizens who operate business in a range of sectors that have sustained rural communities for generations and also create employment and significant export income.

Industrial Wind Facilities pose a significant threat to –

- Health
- Environment and Landscape
- Community
- Livelihoods
- Employment
- Future of Youth
- Growth

I know attention has been drawn to the issues of impact on Health, Noise, Community, Family etc. and I am deeply disturbed by the symptoms and experiences reported by people forced to **live and work** in the vicinity of Wind Developments 24 hours per day and who cannot escape the disturbances they cause. I want to highlight the ripple effect these impacts will have on Agriculture. The Western Districts of Victoria are increasingly becoming more important for food production as this is one of the few areas in the State that reliably ticks these boxes –

1. Dryland Pasture Base
2. Reliable seasonal climate with good rainfall
3. Large tracts of fertile, arable land
4. Significant manufacturing infrastructure present
5. Good, clean, high quality Groundwater

My particular focus is the dairy industry. Based on Australian Bureau of Statistics material, dairying has been confirmed as south-west Victoria's leading industry. Dairy products and dairy cattle are the two biggest output sectors in the Great South Coast region (which includes Glenelg, Moyne, Southern Grampians, Corangamite, Colac Otway and Warrnambool Shires) and generate a multi-billion dollar contribution to the region's economy. Victoria exports about 85% of Australia's Dairy Products worth around 2.3 billion. Clearly, the South West is an important contributor to the export income of the State of Victoria. South West Victoria is also

recognized as one of the largest milk producing regions in the national industry and produces some 23% of national output; a proportion that is growing. The pressures that have come to bear on the milk producing regions in Northern Victoria, Gippsland and Queensland have further increased the importance of the South-West Victorian dairying region. Dryland dairying areas are precious and few. There must be certainty that prime productive land and those who work it are not at risk.

**It seems food producing areas are shrinking due to a number of pressures and they urgently need to be protected. Planning schemes should take account of these areas and ensure they are preserved for this purpose.**

We know the threat to health from Wind Energy Facilities is real. We know that people have been forced from their farms and homes with serious health issues from wind facility operations. (Waubra, Toora). We know land values are affected and real estate activity has been affected. What does this mean for food producing areas and dairying in particular – it being a highly intensive form of agriculture with a great deal of activity occurring on a single property on a daily basis ie. Seven days per week all year. I note applications for permits are beginning to push into dairying areas. Many of the permit applications for wind facilities I know of propose turbines of enormous height. There is mounting evidence to suggest the impacts of these larger turbines can be felt as far as 10 kilometres. How can farmers continue to work their properties effectively if their health is compromised by the presence of a nearby wind facility.? What about the staff employed on these properties. How are new staff to be attracted to these affected properties and how are they to be retained? These are serious concerns for any agricultural business.

**What about Groundwater? Good potable groundwater is a “jewel” in any food producing area and is of immense value to the dairy industry. What threat do wind facility developments pose in terms of the enormous foundation structure required for the towers that could interrupt the groundwater complex; what of stray voltage through groundwater and earth? What about impact on agricultural livestock? Livestock are far more sensitive to certain changes in the physical environment than humans and it is known that metabolic diseases and significant loss of production can occur in livestock located close to turbines. These problems can be devastating to a farming business. What about the threat of fire?**

**Devaluation of land and assets** and stalling of real estate trade is known to have occurred where wind facilities are built. This is a huge threat to agricultural businesses. Loss of equity creates a further and dangerous financial pressure in addition to those brought by depressed economic climate and poor pricing (which occur often enough). It weakens and can remove the ability to grow and strengthen. Financial institutions are not likely to lend to agricultural business in this kind of situation. It is well known that the agricultural base underpins the economic prosperity of many a rural community – if the farmers are not doing well, the impact is always felt by local business and services and in the local towns. Properties have even been abandoned. What impact are these things having on rural communities?

If I might focus briefly on the Mortlake South Wind Farm for which a permit has been granted. This proposed development lies in very close proximity to the towns of

Mortlake, Noorat, Terang and the further distant Darlington. The farming lands (dairy and beef) that lie between and around these towns are closely populated. There are schools located only a few kilometres from this development in Mortlake and Noorat. There is a hospital in Terang and schools there too. All these towns are heavily reliant on the agricultural base that has supported these communities for generations. There are many young people who plan their futures in this area. This is a very attractive area that lies within the Kanawinka Geopark. I am extremely concerned about the potential impact of this development and others in this area that are in the process of seeking permit approval. I feel the decision to approve a permit for this particular Wind "Farm" was completely irresponsible given the number of citizens that will be exposed to this development

We know wind facilities don't really fit the term "green" and generally only produce about 30% of their stated capacity. Wind energy is very expensive and requires use of fossil fuel energy to operate in certain conditions and ultimately will likely drive up electricity costs. If some are built, they should never be located in closely populated rural areas and close to towns. What about the thousands of people who potentially are affected by these developments, their communities, their children, employment, their futures, even regions as a whole? It is vital that community, agricultural productivity and sustainability, biodiversity and cultural landscape are protected from inappropriate developments

**We must learn from the overseas and local experience.** I have kept my concerns brief. There is ample evidence to support proper investigation of them.