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Powerless: the Victorian Government's policy on wind farms is destroying rural communities.

RURAL farming communities are being sold off for city votes, writes CASSIE FRANZOSE

It is hard to ignore the number of industrial wind-farm facilities approved by the Victorian Government over the past months.

Hundreds of giant (130-150m) turbines have been ticked off, from Ballan to Ararat to Mortlake.

The controversy surrounding these approvals is fraught with the raw emotion of communities being routinely ignored by the Government.

Ignored in favour of city dwellers for city votes.

What do these approvals really mean for our rural communities?

They mean community disintegration.

The impacts were well described recently by a prospective wind turbine "host landholder" from Stockyard Hill - and 2007 Rural Woman of the Year - Debbie Bain.

"Whether you are pro-wind or anti-wind, one thing we all agree on is the process is a process that is inequitable, it is without consultation, it is without a true viable economic base, it is purely a political PR process. It causes great anger and angst and sadness amongst the community," she said.

This describes, with appalling accuracy, what is happening in every community targeted for industrial wind facilities.

Why? Because the Government's planning guidelines place, for political gain, the widespread deployment of industrial wind farms over the adverse impacts on people and communities.

Basically, it allows wind-energy developers to use a divide-and-conquer approach, leaving our communities divided, depressed and disintegrated.

Another part of the collateral damage caused by the inequitable planning guidelines is the significant health issues for some who reside or work within 10km of such facilities.

The Government repeatedly defends its position to not investigate health complaints, even ignoring the recommendations of their appointed planning panels.

The Stockyard Hill Planning Panel states in its final report that the Government and the wind industry should undertake a "properly designed and professionally conducted investigation" into health complaints.

Yet the Government continues to deny and dismiss the complaints at Waubra, Cape Bridgewater and Toora.

And, in some cases, Government representatives, such as Ripon's Joe Helper, denigrate those who have spoken publicly about their health issues.

The suffering for some residents of Waubra is so acute they have abandoned their homes.

This is a world-wide phenomenon and given the number of turbines now approved for western Victoria, the migration of rural residents away from wind-facility sites has only just begun.

We are all impacted by the Government's flawed wind energy policy.

The spread of these projects is making a continuing and substantial contribution to increased electricity costs.

Wind energy plus necessary back-up costs \$120/MWh, coal about \$35/MWh and gas about \$50/MWh.

Wind needs back-up by gas to maintain a constant flow of electricity to the grid as the wind-speed changes.

The wind industry and the Government never compute or discuss the need or cost of back-up. Nor do they admit that because of back-up there is no net savings in greenhouse gas emissions from wind projects.

One of the most successful components of the industry's public relations campaign is the misleading information about the role industrial wind can play in reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Despite widespread deployment of wind turbines in Denmark and Germany, these countries are still as dependent on fossil fuels as ever.

It is time to learn from their mistakes and find a better answer - one that doesn't have such a lasting and damaging impact.

It's time for a new government in Victoria.

It's time for a government that listens to rural communities - one that protects our rural way of life, our wonderful communities and our environment.

A government that doesn't promote an expensive and destructive industry for political gain in metropolitan electorates at such a great cost to our rural communities