

, 10 January 2011

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Ben Moore wind farm

I am writing to express my concerns regarding the development of the Ben Moore wind farm. In addition, I would like to raise concern about the planning approvals and development of multiple farms within one area.

I am aware that personal and subjective information and opinions are only seen as an interesting and informative guide and nothing more, but if there is no legislation or regulation that states that wind farm developers are obliged to submit sound social research regarding the landscape impact of wind farm as part of every planning permit application then subjective landscape assessment should be considered and taken seriously.

I have always been a bit skeptical about the development of wind farms and their ability to be used as an efficient renewable energy source, but I have never felt personally connected enough with the neighbouring wind farm developments to take action and make a submission. This changed when I heard about the proposal of the Ben Moore wind farm. This wind farm will be built in my backyard. In reality it will be almost 5 km away from our house, but taking into account that my backyard overlooks Ben Moore, that there is not one single dwelling between us and Ben More and that that was the main reason why we bought this 50 acres property, I want you to consider this as my backyard or even think about it as being your backyard.

When we received a letter in the mail from Transfield Service stating that they will develop a wind farm of 50 to 60 wind turbines in the Ben Moore area I started researching other wind farms and the process and legislation around wind farm developments.

I would like to raise several concerns regarding the Ben Moore wind farm and the development of wind farms in general. Please take following issues into consideration:

1. Can we improve the sharing of research data regarding wind farm developments? How can we make sure that the process of wind farm planning and development keeps improving? Can the government develop legislation around this issue? The guidelines need to be

updated more regularly as mistakes get made in every wind farm project. We need to learn from our mistakes. The output data from existing wind farms should be taken more seriously and should be used *instantly* to improve current legislation and guidelines. Within a short period a lot of new wind farms have been approved, but I found nothing that showed that the output data and problem solving data of current wind farms had been used to change or update the current legislation or guidelines. Developing wind farms and showing the people that this government is working on creating renewable energy systems is one side of the story and that side gets all the publicity, but who can show me proof that the government is also working on the research regarding existing wind farms. The data regarding the effectiveness of existing wind farms should be published more frequently and more detailed. Why would people trust wind farms if they are never given real up-to-date information about the effectiveness of current operating wind farms? I feel that this information is being kept behind closed doors or is not easily accessible or that it takes too long for this information to become available and this implies that this information is not positive enough to be shared and published through the media or it might imply that the government is not interested in making sure that the projects they approved are successful and not risking the health of the Australian people or the Australian environment.

The government needs to consider that taking time to learn from your mistakes is more important than approving several projects in a short time. Why have all these wind farm projects been approved BEFORE the large Waubra wind farm post-construction data was released? Wouldn't it be easier to build more efficient wind farms using the post-construction data from other wind farms, then to have to fix up the same mistakes several times?

I don't want to go into the discussion regarding the viability and effectiveness of wind farms as renewable energy source, but the fact that local newspapers publish articles that are loaded with concerns and issues raised by local residents and politicians on a weekly basis means that something is not right. Why have I not found an article with "good news" regarding the wind farms? There might not be any good news regarding this million dollar industry that impacts thousands of families' lifestyle.

2. The second issue I would like to discuss revolves around noise legislation. I understand that the revised 2010 New Zealand standards will be used to assess the noise levels at Ben More, but are these appropriate standards to use in a rural area. I think that the government and wind farm developers are forgetting that a constant noise level of 40 dBA is still too high in a country side area. It is important to remember that people living in this area are used to living in a "quiet" place, probably closer to levels of 20 to 30 dBA. So, why would it be "ok" to have noise levels up to 40 dBA after putting wind turbines in. I realise that current wind farm developers are trying to keep wind turbines 1 km, hopefully 2 km, away from dwellings. Noise levels have been formally, objectively, assessment by several professionals. My personal opinion here is that companies using the standards need to consider that the areas where these wind farms are being built are "quiet" country areas with only natural noise. Even if the wind turbine noise does not exceed the background noise by more than 5 decibels, then it will still need to be considered that wind turbine noise is an industrial noise, not natural. This should not be considered "acceptable" in residential or even farming zone.

3. For the governmental agencies and ministers reading this I would like to add this thought: Australia is growing, the population in the major cities will keep growing (no matter what immigration policy) and governments will have to keep promoting the rural areas as living and working areas. Now think about what people that have moved to a rural area feel when all of a sudden their rural town changes into a wind farm area. These wind farms will stop people from moving to the country and will even bring people back to the cities. If my backyard view changes from a tranquil nature landscape to a wind farm landscape then that will definitely make me think about whether the convenience of living in the city is becoming more important than the 'wannabe' country location that has lost its pro's.

Why do people live in the country or a rural area?

Some live here because they were born here, they would not like to see their rural area changed as they find the history of the place very important and they are also dreaming of their children and grandchildren enjoying living in the same rural area they so much love.

Some people moved to the country because they want to swap their city or suburban life for a life in the country or in a small country town. For this group of people the scenery is a very important factor and often one of the most important reasons for moving and leaving behind the convenience of the life in a city or town. For these people the visual impact of the wind turbines should be taken very seriously.

Some live here because it's part of their income and their profession. Most farmers see the country scenery only in terms of what they can earn of the land, what crop to put in, how many sheep can grass on it or how much fencing it needs. Those farmers are often also the land owners that the wind farm developers pay large sums of money to every year. As much as this is a fair compensation, as the land is so important for the farmer's income, it is unfair that this group of people is the only group that gets a financial compensation.

4. This then leads to my next suggestion or question. Can we find locations for wind farms that have minimal impact on the environment and no or very minimal impact on human, cultural and local values?

I understand that expenses can be significantly reduced by building wind farms very close to the transmission lines, as it eliminates the costs of building substations. I also understand that not every area in Victoria or Australia is suitable as a wind energy resource, but the limited area that has both high wind resource and is close to the transmission line is now being "over-used". We need to take into consideration that this area has already and will change dramatically due to the large amount of wind farms. The environmental, cultural and local values in that specific area are not protected anymore, as the development of wind farms has become more important than the environmental, cultural and local values. Regarding these values, I would like to point out that values are subjective and that the values of the population in this area are different than the values people consider important in other areas. This is an undulating country area and the visual impact of wind turbines on this area is of extremely high importance for the local population. This area has higher and different environmental, cultural and local values than suburban areas. It is important to respect everyone values. Locating wind farm to areas with very low population might mean

extra financial expenses and maybe less profit for the wind farm developers and electricity suppliers, but it will be easier to respect the rural population's values.

It must be possible to find locations where the wind turbines can be build relatively close to the transmission line, but not in the view of a family's house and home they work hard for every day. In some European countries land based turbines are no longer permitted (e.g. Denmark) and they focus on offshore installations.

5. Previous issue already highlighted the importance of the visual impact of wind turbines and wind farms. While reading some panel reports and guidelines I noticed that the visual impact is not seen as of high significance and that personal or subjective opinions and evaluations, like mine, are not taken seriously (re. Bald Hills Wind farm ESS Panel Report June 2004). Often the terms "acceptable" and "reasonable" are used in official documents. It needs to be raised that these terms are very subjective as well and that a more standardized approach is needed. Panels (e.g. Bald Hills Panel) have raised that some landscapes are so sensitive and have such a high significance that in principle there will be a landscape reason for determining that wind turbines should not be constructed. Due to the lack of formal social research or community opinion based evaluation of the landscape it becomes the Panel's decision to consider the degree to which there is a necessity for social research input into the landscape assessment as part of the social impact evaluation. By making a community based evaluation of the landscape and visual impact compulsory for every wind farm planning application the values of the residents can be respected. Why not set regulations around the outcome of the community opinion, for example 50% of the households living within a 5 km radius need to accept the landscape and visual impact.
6. I am not aware of any "objective research" related to the devaluation of properties in wind farm areas, but common sense tells me that it will become a lot harder to sell our property if the back view includes wind turbines. I found following quote from Michael McCann of McCann Appraisals LLC in Chicago, Ill. This completely formulates my thoughts: "Turbines are large-scale industrial machines/projects, which surround homes, unlike any other large-scale projects. I have never seen a situation akin to wind farms where an industrial zoning 'overlay' encompasses and surrounds existing homes. No other industrial, retail or other type of large-scale project gets approved without first buying out the existing residences rather than surrounding them. A home is the biggest investment most people have in their life and deserves value protection from a dominating land use, which generates profits for the developers and is claimed to be for the public good. It would seem that most wind energy companies are unwilling to compensate people fairly for value loss...nor buy them out."
7. This also brings me to the financial side of things. Why do only the farmers owning the land on which the wind turbines are built receive financial compensation? I understand that the land owner needs to receive a compensation for the land on which the turbine is built and I have no problem with that. This group of people often finds it easier to accept the development of wind farms, as the financial compensation is often high enough to persuade them. Some of the landowners don't even live close to the turbines, they only work the land there. The family that lives close to the farming zone and wind farm, but doesn't own the

land, receives no financial compensation, even if the wind turbines are only 1 km away. People live here for the space, quietness and nature views. If a company takes that away from them then it should include a financial compensation high enough to compensate for this loss. It needs to be understood that the lifestyle here is completely different than in a suburban area. We don't have and don't want high fences around our backyard. We enjoy the view. We give up a lot of the convenience of living in a town or city. We travel longer to and from work and shops, and spend a lot more money on our car, property and garden. So, if we cannot win the fight against the development of wind farms close to residential areas, then we should at least receive a compensation that shows the government and wind farm companies respect the rural population's values. For some people all the money in the world would not even be enough to compensate the visual and emotional impact wind farms have, but it will at least show a bit of respect and understanding and it might help ease the pain.

8. Personally, we want to use this letter to formally oppose against the development of the Ben Moore wind farm. We cannot bring any objective research data forward that shows you why this wind farm should not be approved, but we ask you to respect our and our children's life, lifestyle and values as a basic human right.

We bought this 50 acre property 5 years ago. In 2005 we moved, as skilled migrants, from Belgium with our 1 ½ year old twin boys. We moved to a rural area, more specific a small country town of not more than 150 people. We moved because we wanted to give our kids and ourselves a country lifestyle with space, fresh air and nature all around us. We left our family, culture and financial security behind. We are now enjoying our life here and as president of the Lexton Progress Association, owner of a local joinery and as a respected Speech Pathologist we feel we have integrated well in this area. We would not be able to leave the things we have built and achieved here anytime.

The main reason why we choose to buy this property was the back view and space. We had come across other rural properties of the same price and size, but the fact that this property had the undulating landscape view from the backyard, and even from the front of the house, made us fall in love with this house and acreage. This view is the view on Ben Moore. Standing on our back porch we can see Ben Moore over a +/- 150 degree angle, from North to South-West. We have not put in any trees or natural barriers around our property, in contrary we have cut down some trees to increase the view on Ben Moore. We have generally spend a lot of money on optimizing our view: demolishing sheds, removing some trees, internal changes (living areas moved to the back),...

9. Another reason for not accepting the development of the Ben Moore wind farm or any other wind farm in the area is that this area is "overloaded" with wind turbines. I realise that this is caused by it's ideal location, but enough is enough! It feels unfair to keep worrying and overloading the same group of people, the same shire and the area.

The wind farm in Waubra already gives us a very clear idea of what it will be like to live in an area with lots of wind turbines. Driving to Ballarat every day is completely different since Waubra's wind farm has been established. The beautiful country views are 80% gone. The scenery has an industrial touch now and it is still very hard for me to accept this, as the drive to and from Ballarat is one of the reasons why I enjoy living in the country at 50 kms from

work. The drive used to be relaxing, since the wind farms are there this 30 minutes drive has become a 'worrying' time; thinking about what I can do to make people change their mind about accepting wind farms in this area, what this area will look like in 50 years time, when all the turbines will be old and maybe even unusable. Soon the Stockyard Hill and Lexton wind farms will be built and they will also be seen from the Sunraysia Highway. I would like to ask the minister for planning and anyone involved in the decision making if they realise what this area will look like when all the wind farm projects are built. So, please accept that we have enough wind turbines in one area. Is it possible to look at each wind farm planning application more in relation to the existing wind farms or approved wind farms in that same area?

10. The aircraft warning lights are also a concern for us. I realise that not every turbine will need aviation safety lights, but seeing the red flashing lights from our backyard or even when looking out of the window, even when it's only one, would be devastating for us. We did not move to the country to see red flashing lights every night while sitting outside or in the living room. People who live in the city expect and don't mind lights when they look out of their window at night, but in a rural area this is not acceptable. The fact that aviation safety lights are needed on some turbines is another argument that proves that a wind farm is not a farm but pure industry and that it does not belong in this landscape and this close to lifestyle properties.
11. I also want to raise some concerns regarding the procedures used in the planning process. We have been quiet well informed about the Ben Moore wind farm plans by mail during June-August 2010, but it feel that a real opportunity to express our opinion has not been promoted. The community open house that was organised by Transfield Services was not sufficient. First of all it needs to be addressed that organisational mistakes regarding the date of the open house caused confusion amongst the residents. Originally Transfield Services announced that a community open house would be organised in Lexton, but that opportunity was cancelled and replaced by a community open house in the neighbouring town Amphitheatre. The change of date confused lots of people and a lot of people thought that there would be another opportunity to discuss this wind farm project in Lexton. Due to the poor organisation of community consultation the community members have not at all been motivated to share their opinion. A large number of Lexton residents did not attend this open house in Amphitheatre because of the location and change of date, a lot of these people would have attended an open house in Lexton. The fact that 2 communities/towns are closely involved with the Ben Moore wind farm and that only one open house was organised in one of the town shows that Transfield Services is not trying hard to get to know the community's opinion.

The community consultation in generally is very limited for most wind farm projects. The fact that this stage runs over a 12 month period does not mean that the local community gets approached a lot. The fact that it runs over 12 months slows down the process which is a good thing for people like me, who want to take the time to research and write extensive letters, but it give other people the feeling that this wind farm is still a long time away and that there is no need to take actions now.

Due to the lack of regulations regarding compulsory extensive and formalised research of the community's opinion, the amount of people who formally oppose against wind farms is very small. The fact that wind farms developers are not obliged to formally research the community's opinion in the form of a formal survey can be seen as a way of keeping people quiet. It is easier not to have to confront the statistics regarding the opinion of the people that will be living close to these wind farms every day. Everyone has the right to express their opinion, but not a lot of people do this in a formal way if they are not promoted to do this by filing out a simple form or by answering simple questions. Hardly anyone will take the time or knows how to try to change things around and fight for the harm that will get done by writing a formal letter. This is of course a significant advantage for the wind farm developers, as they can just go ahead with their project. They only need to worry about the financial viability of the farm, keeping the landowners happy and following the government's guidelines. So, once they know that there will be enough wind, it will almost be sure that the wind farm will be build, maybe with a few less turbines then in the first proposal but that's it. No individual or group of residents that have to live with the turbines everyday can make a difference. That is why most people give up and don't bother fighting this injustice.

12. The last issue I would like to raise is the health issue. I am not sure whether the noise can cause health issues, but I have already experienced that the development of wind farms can cause health issues due to the emotional impact it has on people.

During the development of the Waubra wind farm I already suffered from stress related problems. Every day a new wind turbine was put up in this beautiful area I came home all worried and stressed and could not accept that the beautiful scenery that I was so proud of driving through from home to work and back has now changed into an industrial view. It made me cry! If projects can cause a significant change in a person's emotional state and health, then that means that the social impact of such projects is significant and requires specific research and regulations. It is not acceptable that people have to suffer from depression and other health issues due to the lack of proper regulations that take into account the community's opinion.

Lots of people that drive through Waubra say things like "I don't mind wind turbines, we need them as a renewable energy source and they don't look that bad at all". If you then ask them "But would you like to live in this wind farm area?", every single person says "No".

To conclude I would like to refer to the "Policy and planning guidelines for development of wind energy facilities in Victoria" (revised 2009) Section 3.2.4.

"A balanced approach to wind energy development - Wind energy projects contribute significantly to meeting renewable energy targets. Assessing wind energy developments therefore requires that appropriate consideration be given to these broader benefits, while protecting critical environmental, cultural and local values."

Every discussion about the appropriateness of a wind farm in a specific area will always come down to the idea above. It's about finding a balance between developing renewable energy facilities and

protecting the environmental, cultural and local values, but if one specific area (the windy areas close to the transmission lines) has several wind farms and becomes overloaded with wind turbines then there is definitely a lack of a balanced approach. In this area the protection of critical environmental, cultural and local values has become a lot less important than the benefits of the development of renewable energy facilities. The balance needs to be right for everyone, including the people that live near the wind farms. The balanced approach is missing two important things:

- More specific regulations regarding the cumulative effects, including visual effects, of the proposed wind farm in relation to other existing or proposed wind energy facilities in the area.
- A policy that makes it compulsory to *formally* research the opinion of the community members and then take into account the result.

Please consider this letter as a submission opposing the construction of the Ben Moore wind farm. I look forward to receiving your response to the issues discussed above.

Thank you for taking time to read and respond to my concerns.

Yours Sincerely

Els Tielemans & Johan Debast