

Submission  
No 98

## INQUIRY INTO RURAL WIND FARMS

**Organisation:** Sydney & Northern NSW Branch of the Australian Garden  
History Society

**Name:** Mr Stuart Read

**Position:** Chair

**Date received:** 22/08/2009

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To: Beverly Duffy  
Legislative Council Committee of Inquiry into Rural Wind Farms  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
SYDNEY 2000

Dear Mr/Ms Duffy,

I realise it's a day after the 21/8/9 submission deadline but hope you'll accept this late one, which I make on behalf of the Sydney & Northern NSW Branch of the Australian Garden History Society's 300 or so members.

We are one of three branches of the Society\* in NSW. I am unaware if the other two have/will be making (late) submissions – I will let them know but suspect it's too late now for more submissions? I imagine at least the ACT, Monaro & Riverina Branch of AGHS may wish to make a late submission if possible – thus I am copying this email to chair Mr Tony Byrne. I also copy it to Southern Highlands Branch Chair, Ms Eleanor Dartnall.

The AGHS is the leader in concern for and the conservation of significant cultural landscapes and historic gardens through committed, relevant and sustainable action. We have some 1600 members Australia-wide with 3 branches in NSW. The Sydney & Northern NSW Branch runs from Sydney's basin (Wollondilly/Camden at its south), west and north to the Queensland border. We have a Northern NSW Sub-Branch of members based around Armidale.

We support the inquiry but would like to ensure its deliberations include recommending or requiring the NSW Government to apply 'best practice' methods to the assessment and approval of any wind farm proposal (or fast-tracked approvals as the NSW Government (viz the Premier's recent announcements) seems determined to do) in NSW.

By 'best practice' we mean that any proposal is subject to running the 'best practice' methodology developed by the AusWind national industry body and the Australian Council of National Trusts, through consultants Context P/L. This method was funded by Federal Environment Minister Peter Garrett and essentially seeks to document how best to engage and consult local communities in areas where wind farms are proposed, to determine what community values these landscapes have to their inhabitants and users – and thus enable assessment of the best location, scale and form of wind farms in those landscapes, to respect and not detract from these values. For more info on the method see <http://www.auswind.org/landscapevalues/> : click on the *National Assessment Framework* at the bottom of the page.

We understand that AusWind is only accrediting industry players who adopt this 'best practice' method in progressing their proposals, i.e. taking details of these early in the process to the local communities affected, explaining projects and their likely impacts (physical, visual, socio-economic) thoroughly and seeking to consult communities about this, early.

Some 'best wind potential' areas of NSW also happen to be co-located in significant historic rural cultural landscapes, places of great beauty where the landscape's form and character express early and often continuous historic settlement, consistent land management patterns (pastoralism, agriculture), subdivision/squatting/closer settlement etc. Many contain historic towns (e.g. Taralga, Guyra, Goulburn, Crookwell, Gunning, Collector, Bungendore, Armidale, Blayney, Millthorpe, Muswellbrook, Scone) and have potential to have adverse visual impacts on the landscape settings of these historic towns. Many such towns depend increasingly on domestic and international cultural tourism for their livelihoods, trading on their historic character. We understand that something like 10-15% of all tourists cite 'cultural tourism' as their chief interest in visiting rural NSW and in making decisions on where to spend more time (and thus, money). Wind farms have potential to detract from this micro- and medio-economy and accordingly due care is needed in assessing and approving their location, scale, form and management.

One key factor we consider with wind farms is that mechanisms must be worked out and delivered whereby all or the greater majority of people in affected communities gain some direct benefit from wind farms – not simply the companies installing them, or (often) remote investors in those companies. Inequities such as the ‘participating/affected farmers’ benefitting directly, but their immediate rural neighbours being directly impacted upon by wind farms (through noise, visual impacts, etc) receiving no direct benefit (compensation, planting for screening, assistance refencing, whatever). This inequity of outcome of course breeds widespread rancour and erodes broader support for wind farms. If communities could see broad benefits from ‘buying in’ to wind farm proposals, they may support them more – a ‘win:win’ outcome, surely?’

Public controversy appears to be dogging the roll out of wind farms around Lake George, Crookwell and south of Goulburn and around Guyra could perhaps have been avoided or lessened had this ‘best practice’ method of public consultation occurred, early in the process, and the full implications and impacts been explained, honestly and in ways the community could readily grasp and understand.

The Branch is not opposed to wind farms – we in fact welcome NSW increasing its ‘green power’ sources - in contrast to having/increasing coal-fired power stations in historic landscapes – e.g. the Hunter Valley. However we do consider their impacts must be mitigated. This can be done by sensitive location with regard to significant historic features, breaking up their often large scale by not having a large, single-cluster of turbines – at least in locations where historic landscapes and the settings of historic towns or properties are concerned. This is not rocket science. The large scale of the Lake George wind farm for instance seems disproportionate given its setting.

The AGHS as a national society is making a submission objecting to the location and scale of a wind farm in the Western District of Victoria, near a historic rural landscape and garden, Mawalok estate. The turbines will intrude into the main designed vista from this homestead and garden into its landscape setting. Careful relocation of turbines could easily avoid this impact – a minor design ‘tweak’ – if considered early on in the process.

I wish the Committee well in its deliberations and am, sincerely, yours

Stuart Read  
Chair  
Sydney & Northern NSW Branch  
AGHS

\* more on the Society can be found at [www.gardenhistorysociety.org.au](http://www.gardenhistorysociety.org.au) and the branch at the ‘branches’ tab of that website

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