

**Submission
No 49**

INQUIRY INTO RURAL WIND FARMS

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SUBMISSION RE: Inquiry into rural wind farms

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Preamble

We wish to submit the following in relation to this inquiry.

Humphrey is an ornithologist and world renowned wildlife artist. He is the author of 2 large volumes relating to Australian birds of prey and Wedge-tailed Eagles respectively. Further, he has been the subject of numerous articles in both scientific and popular journals. His in depth knowledge of Australian bird species along with his intricate depiction of these birds has led to his work being used to illustrate a large number of scientific and reference books. His work is represented in a number of volumes on Australian art and he has been interviewed by the Victorian State Library Archives.

We own and run a cattle property near Crookwell , on the Southern Tablelands of NSW. This area has been (and continues to be) targeted by the Wind Energy Industry to establish wind turbine installations.

To label these developments as “farms” is a deliberate misnomer. They are not agricultural or pastoral developments but industrial sites dominated by multiple turbines, each being the height of a 45 story building..

We are long term members of the Crookwell community. We believe that it is vital that the inquiry hears from those, like ourselves who have first hand experience of the effects that wind farm developments have on rural communities.

We would like the opportunity to orally address the General Purpose Standing Committee No 5 inquiry into rural wind farms.

Term of Reference 2 : Locating rural wind farms to optimise wind resource use and minimise residential and environmental impacts.

PREMISE It appears that the political imperative to gain voter approval by assuaging the urban voters' desire to reduce their collective guilt about greenhouse gas emissions is the driving force behind the decision to site “wind farms” anywhere in rural areas without a credible, independent social impact study. The assumption seems to be that as rural areas are less densely populated than urban ones , wind turbines can be located there irrespective of the damage that is done to communities.

No serious account is taken of

- (a)the destruction of social cohesion within rural communities,
- (b)the negative impact on the economies of small rural communities
- (c)the negative health effects imposed on neighbouring and nearby residents
- (d)the enormous loss of amenity of neighbouring and nearby residents

when wind farm proposals are approved by this government.

The Destruction of Social Cohesion

The devastating effects on social cohesion were felt in Taralga as soon as the development of a wind farm was proposed for the area. Residents who opposed this development were harassed by those who wished to host wind turbines on their property. Threats of physical damage to property and life were suffered by a number of the opponents and some chose to leave the area in order to avoid any further harassment and because the very reason for living in this rural community had been destroyed.

The social cohesion of rural communities is widely regarded as an iconic feature of “the bush”. Farming families often assist each other in rural enterprise pursuits and it is believed that rural community members rally around each other in times of hardship. This vision is quickly dispelled when one views the social interaction in communities which are targeted for wind farm development. The secrecy agreements that host landholders are required to sign by developers creates distrust between neighbours. Rural residents don't know if their neighbours have agreed to host turbines and

therefore devalue nearby residents' land value and rural amenity. Host landholders resent those who oppose local wind farms as they see it as depriving them of potential income.

In our area, feelings run so high that intense verbal arguments often occur in public places.

Negative Impact on the Economies of Rural Communities

Crookwell I Wind Farm was the first to be established in NSW. It has 8 turbines which have never produced the wind company's stated power capacity and in fact the turbines have often been under repair. The wind industry states that wind turbine installations are a boon to tourism but this definitely **has not been** the case in Crookwell. An article published in The Goulburn Post (April 6 2006) reported that a survey of tourists to the Upper Lachlan and Goulburn Mulwaree Shires came for the heritage landscape (83%) and heritage and history (81%) the establishment of large industrial sites will detrimentally affect the tourism income of small, rural townships.

Our area's growth has come from new residents who seek out a rural lifestyle and wish to avoid industrial landscapes. It has been our experience that once the possibility of the establishment of a wind turbine installation is known, land sales diminish or disappear. This is devastating to small rural economies such as ours. New residents are essential to the prosperity of our economy - they employ local builders, local electricians, local plumbers, local fencing contractors, buy their groceries locally, use local stock and station agents, local vets and local doctors, send their children to local schools.

This is what keeps the rural economies of the Southern Tablelands viable but we will feel the dire effects of wind turbine installations on our economy as **Crookwell II, Cullerin Range, Conroy's Gap, Taralga and Gullen Range** 'wind farms' have been approved for development.

There is no need to emphasise the economic distress of rural communities due to the ongoing drought and the effects of this drought will be felt for many years to come. The additional burden due to wind turbine installations could easily be the breaking point for some of these economies.

While wind farm proponents state that economic advantages will come from the establishment of this industry, in reality, local areas achieve gain very little economic gain. The few host landholders gain to some degree for an unspecified period but those who own a neighbouring or nearby properties suffer economically as a consequence of decreased land value and more importantly the loss of a potential buyers for their farms – most potential buyers of rural properties withdraw their interest as soon as they become aware of the likelihood of nearby wind turbines.

Proponents will state that jobs are created by wind farm establishment - but in reality rural areas gain precious little as the majority of jobs involved in wind farm establishment are specialised and therefore not given to locals and as the running of wind turbines is computerised and co-ordinated from a distant source, NO local jobs are created in this phase either. The only economic gain to rural economies is a minimal and extremely short term one which comes from the construction workers accommodation and meal purchase.

Negative Health Effects Imposed on Neighbouring and Nearby Residents

Wind Turbine Syndrome is now accepted by the medical fraternity as a recognised medical condition. People exposed to loud noise, throbbing infrasound, vibration and strobing flickering light suffer a suite of symptoms medically recognised as Vibro-acoustic Disease (V.A.D.) The type of VAD produced by the impacts of wind turbines is referred to as Wind Turbine Syndrome (W.T.S.)

The symptoms of WTS include:

sleep deprivation, headaches migraine, tinnitus – ringing noises in the ear, disorientation – dizziness/vertigo, nausea, anxiety / depression.

The following are some of the international medically respected specialists acknowledging the existence of WTS

Dr Nina Pierpont MD , Ph.D USA

Dr A. Harry MD, Ch.B, PG Dip ENT UK

Prof. M Alves-Pereira New University of Lisbon, Portugal

Frey & Hadden Report 'Noise Radiation from Wind Turbines Installed Near Homes : Effects Upon Health' Feb. 2007

Dr N. Castello Branco, Portugal

Dr B. Osborne Nth wales, UK

Dr D. Iser Vic. Australia

The French Academy of Medicine, March 2006

Dr Nina Pierpont, MD, PhD in her exhaustive study called '*Wind Turbine Syndrome: A Report on a Natural Experiment*' discusses the adverse effects experienced by those who live near to wind turbines.

Specifically she recommends "a minimum 1.5 mile (2.5km) setback and in hilly or mountainous areas, where valleys act as natural channels for noise, this 1.5 mile (2.5km) setback should be extended anywhere from 2-3 miles (3-5km) from homes".

The scientific/medical research done by Dr Pierpont and those others listed are dismissed by wind farm developers and the NSW Department of Planning simply accepts the claim of these developers that no health effects are suffered as the result of proximity to wind turbines.

That NSW residents are forced to suffer health effects, because the claim of proponents who have a vested interest in denying any negative consequences of their developments, is appalling. Further that the conditions stated in Development Control Plans of local Shire Councils is ignored by both the developers and the NSW Department of Planning makes a mockery of the democratic processes of local government.

The Upper Lachlan Shire's DCP on Windfarms gives its accepted setback distance from a turbine to a non host residence as 2 kms.

The approved wind farms in this shire (Crookwell II, Taralga, Cullerin and Gullen Range) ignore this document and **drastically reduce** the setback distance to non host residences and from non host property boundaries..

Recently the television program, *A Current Affair*, screened a segment which highlighted the

excessive impacts that wind turbine noise is having on those in proximity to wind turbines. The noise level suffered by these residents within their house was many, many times higher than that projected by the developer in its Environmental Impact Statement. No independent noise studies are conducted by NSW Department of Planning and those levels suggested by the developers are accepted at face value.

Developers state that noise levels are calculated on the noise INSIDE a dwelling, and at times on the noise heard in only the bedroom of a residence.

We have intricately studied many Environmental Impact Statements / Environmental Assessments submitted to the NSW Department of Planning by wind farm proponents and in none of them is it recognised that the farmland neighbouring and in close proximity to proposed wind farm sites is the workplace of the people living there. As farmers, our days are spent OUTSIDE in the paddocks , in ALL SEASONS.

There is no mention of mitigating noise in our workplace - doesn't this level of noise represent an occupational health and safety risk ? We are aware that 2 men who were fencing on their property next to the small Crookwell 1 turbines suffered headaches due to the throbbing noise of the turbines. These headaches grew in intensity until the men were forced to quit their work and seek assistance. Such an imposition which can impede one's work and therefore have a negative impact on one's ability to create a livelihood cannot be condoned.

The stress placed on those who recognise the threat of nearby wind turbines to their rural amenity has devastating results. One resident whose family had lived in the area for generations and whose property was to neighbour the Taralga development has suffered clinical depression as a result of this development proposal.

Our young child has suffered from adult and peer harassment simply because her parents have sought to oppose wind farm installations in the Upper Lachlan Shire. She finds this and the threat to her way of life so depressing that she cries about this often and has difficulty sleeping. When a description of

our daughter's distress was given to the developer who wishes to erect 128m high turbines on our property boundaries he smirked and said, "All kids cry". When asked if he would like wind turbines near his own house his response was "Of course not".

Loss of Rural Amenity

The very reason that many people choose to live in rural areas is the amenity it provides. It is the ability to feel close to the natural world and appreciate the rural landscape that induces farmers to remain on the farm even when agricultural/pastoral incomes dwindle. The establishment of huge industrial structures which dominate the landscape and produce noise which is impossible to ignore totally destroys the amenity of many rural residents. That fact that community groups which oppose wind turbine installations are established where wind turbines are proposed indicates the level of heartfelt resentment by those who truly value their rural landscape and lifestyle.

The fact that these people spend many thousands of their precious dollars researching the effects of wind turbine installations and spend many hundreds of hours compiling evidence to counter the outrageous claims made by wind turbine installation developers in their Environmental Impact Statements / Environmental Assessment is testimony to their desperation to protect rural landscape and rural amenity. To have these well researched arguments ignored by the NSW Department of Planning is counter to the democratic process and gives rise to the suggestion that wind turbine installations will be approved no matter what the environmental or social cost.

Environmental Impacts

The Environmental Impact Statements which accompany wind farm development applications are disingenuous and indicate a lack of rigor in preparation.

Because of the economic imperative on the part of the developers, the reports they commission show little serious regard for the protection of ecologically sensitive areas, the preservation of native species and their habitat.

As evidence of this we refer you to the **Fauna Impacts section of Attachment 1 and the Biodiversity section of Attachment 2.**

Term of Reference 3 : The impact of rural wind farms on property values

Numerous examples have been cited in the UK, Europe and USA of property devaluation as the result of nearby wind turbine installations.

Across NSW landholders who neighbour wind farm developments have had their properties valued and found that the introduction of wind turbines nearby would significantly devalue their asset.

This is true in our own shire (due to the imminent Crookwell II development) and in such places as Black Springs where one property owner was advised by a registered valuer that his loss of value will be in the vicinity of \$2.5 million.

The NSW Department of Planning's Director General in his conditions of approval statements for both the Taralga and Gullen Range wind farms accepts that living in close proximity to wind turbines is impossible for some of the neighbours and rules that the developer must acquire the indicated properties. This is admission that these properties could not be sold on the open market for anything like the pre wind farm price and that finding a buyer would be virtually impossible. In the case of the Gullen Range Wind Farm, the Director General has stated that the developer must acquire a property which had been subdivided, as it was recognised that no buyers could be found to purchase a building block so close to wind turbines.

Many other residents are in the same position as the Taralga and Gullen Range landholders but as they did not make a sufficient fuss to the Department of Planning, their properties will not be acquired by the developer but will be rendered virtually unsellable.

To date, there is no independent review of the potential of loss of property value to nearby landholders undertaken by the Department of Planning when assessing a wind farm development application. Unless the individual landholder is knowledgeable enough to directly lobby the Department, no consideration is given to the potential for his/her economic loss.

The problem for those who cannot remain living with the noise, shadow flicker and visual intrusions of wind turbines is that their property is exceptionally difficult to sell.

For many rural property owners, their property is their form of superannuation. To place wind turbines near their properties is to significantly reduce the superannuation available to them.

Within the Upper Lachlan Shire there are almost 300 wind turbines erected, approved or proposed. This is a shire in which population growth had come from those who sought a “tree change” ie they came to enjoy a tranquil lifestyle in a rural landscape. They did not come here to live near the noise and visual intrusion of wind turbines. Potential buyers withdraw their interest in properties which will (or even might) have turbines in the vicinity.

The Green's Senator John Kaye has publicly stated that he would like to see 25 times more wind turbines erected in NSW. These, of course would have to be within the NSW Government's designated precincts. The Upper Lachlan Shire is indeed within the boundaries of one of these precincts and if Senator Kaye had his way, we would see about 7,500 turbines across our ridge tops each soaring 130m into the air.

How difficult might it be to sell a property in the Upper Lachlan Shire then?

Term of Reference 5 : The potential role of energy generated by rural wind farms in relation to the Australian Government's Renewable Energy Target

Wind turbines are inefficient and erratic generators of energy and will play little or, in some cases, no part in relation to the Australian Government's proposed Renewable Energy Target. Statistics quoted by developers and supporters of the wind energy industry are fictitious and cannot be substantiated and stand scrutiny.

For some years now wind turbines have been operating in Australia and figures relating to their efficiency should be made readily available to this inquiry into rural wind farms. Information which we have concerning the existing Crookwell I wind turbines is that they are operating at approximately 12% of their stated capacity. These turbines can be viewed from our property and

frequently are becalmed, lie idle for days on end.

Recent studies of the efficiency of wind turbines currently operating in South Eastern Australia using AEMO website data, prove the inaccuracy of the claim made by wind farm advocates that if enough turbines are constructed across South Eastern Australia, there will always be enough turbines operating somewhere to generate consistent power.

Recent German studies have indicated that the hundreds of wind turbines operating there have had no demonstrable effect on the reduction of that country's greenhouse gas emissions.

Energy produced by wind turbines is unpredictable, unreliable and therefore inefficient.

Term of Reference 6 : Any other relevant matter

It is our experience that due process is not followed by the NSW Department of Planning when it assesses wind turbine development applications and the accompanying Environmental Impact Statements/Environmental Assessments.

A recent example of the Department's failure in assessment is its approval of the so-called Gullen Range wind farm. Concerned residents were presented with an EA of more than 1,000 pages. This document contained repetition, fundamentally flawed methodology and nebulous information. It also contained ludicrous comments and assertions eg a mitigating measure suggested to reduce hazards to raptors was that carrion be continually removed from the site. The site in question is 32kms long and 10kms wide. An enormous workforce would be required to comb this area in order to achieve this stated aim. It is our view and the view of others that this development proposal was unassessable on a number of grounds. Photomontages displaying turbines in the landscape were totally misleading as were descriptions of the landscape itself. The so-called visual expert apparently responsible for landscape description and montages had visited the area on 2 occasions on 2 separate days. He was unable to explain where photographs used for the purposes of montages were taken and displayed a profound ignorance of the area and its topography. He made the staggering statement that this landscape was very well suited to wind turbine development. This

statement was supported by him saying that it was not a National Park and did not possess a scenic lookout. We cite this as an example of the totally inadequate research which comprises the foundation of the Environmental Assessment.

Community consultation regarding the Gullen Range and Crookwell II wind turbine proposals were farcical. Concerned residents and representatives of community groups were told by developers that these developments were going ahead and that there was nothing that the community could do about it. A significant number of rural residences will be profoundly adversely effected by these massive industrial developments. Wind turbines proposed are 130m tall and will tower over people's dwellings. Such dwellings will be subject to unacceptable noise, in some cases shadow flicker. The inhabitants of these dwellings will have the very reason they live where they live destroyed

It is suggested that this Inquiry should examine the shortcomings of the planning and approval processes concerning wind farms and make recommendations for improving these processes.

Conclusion

It is essential that the members of the Standing Committee recognise that the above mentioned social impacts, loss of property values, environmental impacts and the overwhelming feeling that democratic rights are being denied to them, have a cumulative effect on the residents of rural communities.

The Committee should not limit itself to addressing the efficiency of wind turbine power, but, as the representatives of ALL NSW residents, be concerned with the implications of establishing wind turbine installations in proximity to rural landholders.

Rural residents are forced to use their own limited funds to prove the inaccuracies of the proponents' Development Application and Environmental Impact Study and illustrate the

detrimental effects of noise, shadow flicker, visual impact, land devaluation, ecological impacts etc to the NSW Department of Planning. The response from this NSW Government Department was that it doesn't check the Development and Environmental documents as it believed that they would be accurate "because the developer said so". This highlights the necessity of an independent review of competency of such development applications and associated documents as it is unconscionable that community members are forced to raise their own funds to indicate the glaring errors apparent in many of this industry's development documents.

The political imperative to promote wind farms as a highly visible means of assuaging the urban voter must be weighed against the minimal reduction they cause to greenhouse gas emissions, their high cost per kilowatt produced, fluctuating/variable energy production and the many and cumulative adverse social and environmental impacts they create.

The mandatory renewable energy target will result in the cost of wind farm development being significantly subsidised and further subsidies should not be allowed by developers avoiding the social and environmental costs that they impose on nearby residents and communities.

It should be seen by the public that this Inquiry recognises

that rural residents :

ARE NOT second class citizens whose amenity can be ignored

ARE NOT to be subjected to social injustices that their urban counterparts would never accept

that rural landscapes :

ARE NOT dumping grounds for visually intrusive industries

ARE NOT to be regarded as less valuable than coastal ones or urban ones
