

Supplementary
Submission
No 36a

INQUIRY INTO RURAL WIND FARMS

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Submission to the NSW Government's Rural Wind Farms Inquiry I would like to bring to the Committee's attention some misleading information given in sworn evidence to the Rural Wind Farms Inquiry by Christopher Croker at Goulburn on 1 October 2009.

Mr Croker's evidence concerns the proposed wind farm in the Golspie area which Wind Prospect is considering building. As Mr Croker states, a wind monitoring tower was erected earlier this year to ascertain the suitability of the area for the proposed development.

The first point that should be made is that the area covered by the proposed wind farm is much more extensive than Mr Croker alludes to. It will not only run along a ridge line known as The Levels, it will also run along a ridge line that follows the Bolong Road south from the property known as Bolong all the way to its junction with the Golspie Road then south again until the junction of the Golspie Road with the Cummins Road a length of some 15 kms. Our property is located in a valley between the Bolong Road and the Levels and would therefore be surrounded on three sides. Another wind farm has been mooted for the Fullerton area which is just north of us and if this goes ahead we would be virtually surrounded by turbines.

In his opening statement to the inquiry Mr Croker states that "the company approached landholders in and around the proposed area of the development and a series of consultations have been held at the local hall with no objections at this stage to the proposal for a wind farm".

This is wrong. We were never approached by his group or Wind Prospect even though we are in the middle of the proposed wind farm, nor were we invited to any of the consultation meetings. We only found out about it through a neighbour. I have met with Scott Evans of Wind Prospect who showed me the areas the company was investigating but refused to show me the location of the wind turbines even though this information has been shown to adjoining landowners.

He is also wrong to state that there have been no objections. We have voiced our objections verbally to the company and in writing to this committee. Several of our neighbours (four of whom have property along the Bolong Road) have refused to have anything to do with the proposed wind farm. Some have communicated this to Wind Prospect. It is important to state, however, that since no formal development application has been made, there is no formal "objection" process in place. We believe there are many landholders in the area who don't know about the proposal. Furthermore it appears that Wind Prospect has so far only approached those landowners who would directly profit from having wind turbines on their property and not those landowners who would be affected by them. If Mr Croker and his

group have “insisted on transparency within the group and the company” there is not much evidence of it.

Mr Croker was asked by the Chair “Are there any landowners in the area or contiguous to it who are strongly opposed to the project.” He replies: “no I have one neighbour on the eastern side of me who said that he did not want to be involved. However, he was quite comfortable for it to go ahead.” As noted above this is wrong. We can state categorically that we are opposed to this development as are (at last count) another four landowners on the Bolong Road.

Mr Croker said in reply to another question that a group of “about 40 farmers” has been dealing directly with the developer Wind Prospect and that this has been done in the interests of “keeping the fabric of the community together”. This is misleading. He doesn't state how many members of the group of 40 farmers have dwellings and live on properties where the wind turbines will be located or live elsewhere. Writing again from experience based on owning a property on the Bolong Road, the only farmers who have indicated an interest in having turbines on their properties are those who don't live there. Closer scrutiny of Mr Croker's claims would almost certainly reveal that significant proportion of those 40 farmers that he refers to would not be directly affected by locating wind farms on land which they own but do not live on.

Mr Croker's assertion that Wind Prospect has not been involved in “commercial in confidence’ negotiations with property holders outside his group is also wrong as we have seen individual contracts sent to farmers along Bolong Road.

Furthermore Mr Croker's assertion that decisions on setbacks, tower heights etc would be decided by a group of farmers, is worrying at the very least. Wind Prospect should be asked whether it, as a company, has given some sort of verbal undertaking to the group that this will be the case. If so, it would fly in the face of all developmental and environmental guidelines and precedents.

I'd also like to make a couple of general points concerning Mr Croker's assertions about the decline of rural Australia. The ability of farmers to withstand drought, recessions, falling commodity prices etc depends largely on their land management and business skills. There is no evidence whatsoever that having wind turbines will see an investment in better land management or reduce the drift of young people away from the land. Indeed the erection of these towers could have the effect of making fewer people want to invest in farming or live in the area.

John Zubrzycki

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