

Submission  
No 27

## INQUIRY INTO RURAL WIND FARMS

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**Legislative Council General Purpose Standing Committee No 5**  
**Inquiry into rural wind farms**  
**SUBMISSION**

I enjoy going to work. Not because I like my job but because I live next to a wind farm.

Lies, deception, arrogance, frustration, false assurances, secrecy, incompetence – these are just some of the words that describe our experience over the past four years.

To appreciate the problems with assimilating wind farms into local communities, you only need to look at the Inquiry's title. Why is it an inquiry into rural wind farms; what is it about wind farms that precludes them being located in urban areas? Answer that and you will no doubt identify what are the residential, environmental and property value impacts. The answer will also show that the impacts upon rural and urban will be the same, but the number of residences affected will be quite different. Notwithstanding that the impacts will be the same, locating the wind farm in the rural locality is the apparent norm but locating a wind farm in an urban area is apparently not acceptable.

It is generally written that in order to be economically viable, wind farms must be built in close proximity to existing infrastructure. This really means that private developers are not prepared to pay for associated infrastructure costs; nor pay for the higher installation costs that would be incurred if the wind farm was installed in an urban setting. So the true driver of where to locate the wind farm is cost efficiencies or in other terms, profitability. To be profitable, there must first be some wind to generate a base income, as well as a low cost foundation to establish the wind farm. I have assumed that the emphasis is upon electricity generation for income; but maybe it is truly subsidies and emission trading schemes that make real profitability. But I digress. For as long as private developers have the power to identify where they wish to locate a wind farm; it shall be determined by profitability, and not issues such as residential, environmental and property value impacts.

It seems that once a wind farm is proposed, its reality is inevitable unless the the financial situation delays its construction or there is not the political will (i.e. an urban situation). How many wind farms have the State Government not approved? From an affected parties perspective, the Environmental Assessment process followed by the Department of Planning and Land and Environment Court in effect is not an independent planning compliance process. It does not reject proposals; it tailors developer's proposal so as to minimise any perceived environmental impact. In so doing, there appears to be a culture within each party that the residential, environmental and property value impacts can be minimised by limiting the number of people affected. For example, the local LEP required that a wind farm not be visible from a town or village, but no such visual amenity protection is afforded for residences outside that urban group. Such practices do not mitigate the impact; it just imposes the same impact upon a smaller group. It remains ultimately the private developer that decides who will be impacted as it is the developer and not Planning Authorities who choose where to locate the turbines. Again I emphasise the point, determined not by environmental issues but by profitability.

The most significant impact that I can currently qualify is noise. I can only escape that noise if the wind does not blow or by being away from home. It took four days from after the turbines first started rotating in late July 2009 to have noticeable health effects. Our concerns expressed to the wind farm developer have been met by silence. It is only by going public and to external authorities on the noise issue that our concerns have started to receive attention. That is not to say the noise has stopped; for that would also mean a loss of revenue. That is not to say the noise will be stopped; for that will have significant ramification to profitability. Nor am I confident that the developer's compliance problems and our noise concerns will be not be dismissed and over-ridden by the State's needs. By going public, we have ultimately affected our property value. They say there are three fundamental factors to success in property investment – location, location, location. The implication is that property value will

increase where the location is good. If on the other hand the location has become one where the peaceful rural environment has been replaced by ever present noise annoyance, I would imagine the converse would hold true and that property affected must be devalued. By how much devaluation I do not know, and even then there remains the question of whether it shall sell. A block of land two doors down has now been on the market for almost a year.

Exactly how much the location of rural wind farms is due to the optimisation of wind resource use or due to the proximity of infrastructure can only be addressed by the State and private developers. For example, if the State had both generation and transmission responsibility, would it locate its wind farms in the same location as a private developer who does not have the same transmission overheads? In each of those scenarios what would be the actual residential and environmental impacts (as opposed to the skewed assurances given in Environmental Assessments)? Having seen South Australia's Wattle Point wind farm, it being compact and almost at sea level, I do struggle to understand the fixation that is occurring in NSW for stringing out wind turbines along endless ridgelines and changing vast rural landscapes.

Whilst I cannot address the role of wind farms in the power generation debate or the gas emission debate, I can state that there is nothing nice about living next door to a wind farm. It imposed itself upon me. The environment that I chose to be my residence is no longer. Despite 2.5 km separation from the turbines and assurance that we would hear no noise, we now face the prospect of noise pollution for next 20 years or more. Will someone have the stomach to make the developer accept errors in his development and take measures to honour his assurance, that potentially meaning a 25% loss of generation.

The wind farm that adjoins has only addressed the needs of future demand; it has not reduced the number of cars off the road, it has not replaced any of the existing electrical generators, it has not made any net reduction to current emissions. It may argue that it is reducing emissions, but in reality it has only replaced one form of pollution with another (noise).

Thank you for the opportunity to add to the wind farm debate.

Regards,

David Page