

Rowan Koebel

"Allawah"

Walcha NSW 2354

23 January 2023

Winterbourne Wind Farm SSD – 10471

My name is Rowan Koebel, I am a mother and third generation grazier living in the Walcha district and I entirely object to the proposed Winterbourne Wind Farm.

I am deeply concerned about the many ways in which this proposed project will negatively affect our community and the natural environment in and around Walcha. Furthermore, I feel that these concerns (further outlined below) have not been at all adequately addressed by the project developer, Vestas.

The town of Walcha is ideally situated in a region internationally renowned for its natural beauty and wonderful biodiversity. The Oxley Wild Rivers National park, part of the World Heritage Gondwana Rain Forests is right on the doorstep of Walcha residents and visitors and is home to a vast array of native flora and fauna, including protected and endangered species that are not found anywhere else in the world. Proposing an industrially sized project such as the Winterbourne Wind Farm in such close proximity to an area of such profound environmental significance beggars belief.

The construction of the Winterbourne Wind Project will lead to erosion and sedimentation due to the location of the proposed wind towers. The land on which Vestas is proposing to build the Winterbourne Wind Farm is steep and fragile, and the project development including clearing of vegetation, building of roads and construction of the wind towers themselves as well as all the associated traffic will lead to erosion and in turn sedimentation and contamination of waterways that flow directly into the National Park and World Heritage Wilderness area.

Ongoing pollution from the project will also be an issue with runoff from the site impacting soils, waterways and air quality. A significant cause of pollution is leading edge erosion on the wind turbine blades. Ongoing environmental wear and tear on the blades over time leads to erosion of the blades which one European study (*"Leading Edge erosion and pollution from wind turbine blades"* Asbjørn Solberg, Bård-Einar Rimereit and Jan Erik Weinbach) found to generate approximately 62kg of microplastics per year. At a rate of 62kg per turbine per year the emissions of microplastics for the Winterbourne wind project would be 7,378 kg per year or 147 tonnes of microplastics over 20 years. Surely this level of contamination and pollution so close to a World Heritage listed site cannot be justified.

The impact this development would have on native wildlife is another significant reason why the Winterbourne Wind Farm should not be allowed to go ahead. The construction of the wind farm will necessitate the clearing of 207 hectares of native vegetation which forms vital habitat and wildlife corridors for a range of native species including Koalas, Spotted Tail Quoll, the Greater Glider and Squirrel Glider, Glossy Black Cockatoo, and Barking Owl. The turbines themselves will pose a significant threat to several bird species including Wedge Tailed Eagles and raptors, as well as endangered birds such as the Little Eagle, Glossy Black Cockatoo and White Throated Needle Tail. The EIS document notes that there will likely be “collision and mortality” affecting these bird species. Vestas are aware of the ecological impact this proposed development will have on the local environment and are proposing to pay \$64 Million as part of their Biodiversity Offset Scheme. This payment is supposed to compensate for the loss of habitat and destruction of wildlife; however I don’t see how anyone can assign a monetary value to something as unique and irreplaceable as the natural environment. If these ecosystems are destroyed they are gone forever and no dollar value will change that.

I believe that the environmental risks associated with the proposed Winterbourne Wind Farm are simply too great to justify the project being allowed to proceed. If this development goes ahead the environmental repercussions will long outlast the life of the project itself.

The impact the Winterbourne Wind Farm will have on the health and wellbeing of the people of Walcha is another significant concern which has not been adequately recognised by the developer. The EIS outlines “operational noise” as the only notable health impact of the project which is simply not true. Other health impacts such as air quality, Bisphenol A (BPA) contamination, and the impact on accessibility for emergency transport vehicles and aircraft needs to be addressed further. While the EIS does address the issue of noise caused by the turbines, L Huson & Associates Pty Ltd, an acoustical engineering company commissioned by community group, Voice for Walcha have found significant errors in this section of the report. While the initial report in the EIS states that *“no property owner other than those who have agreed to have turbines installed on their land, will experience sound levels higher than what is allowed by NSW Planning”*, due to the errors in calculations made by the developer the actual sound levels may be as much as 14 decibels (dB) higher than predicted. This is a significant increase in noise levels as from a scientific viewpoint every 10dB increase in sound level is heard as a doubling in “loudness”. This means that substantially more properties and residents will be affected by the noise of the turbines. While wind farm developers such as Vestas maintain that there is no evidence of harm at the levels of infrasound and low-frequency noise emitted by wind turbines, a growing number of studies are suggesting that the long

term health impacts of noise pollution from wind farms may be far more significant than developers would like us to believe. The effects of sleep deprivation and disturbance (a very real concern for anyone living within range of the turbines) is far better documented, with a range of negative health consequences including stress, mental health, cardiovascular issues, hearing loss, tinnitus, changes in blood pressure, cancer and chronic infections all linked to poor sleep.

Air quality will certainly be an issue for the people of Walcha, particularly during the development phase of the project where fumes and emissions from vehicles and other machinery will be near constant as well as the dust generated by the construction of the wind farm. Poor air quality has a significant impact on many vulnerable people in our community including children, asthmatics and the elderly and will also negatively affect otherwise healthy people.

Bisphenol A (BPA) is an organic synthetic compound resin used in the manufacture of wind turbines and poses a significant contamination risk to the Walcha community and beyond. BPA is released into the environment at an alarming rate as the turbine blades begin to suffer from leading edge erosion (as outlined previously.) These BPA microplastics emitted by the turbines are toxic to humans, they impact on fertility, are potentially linked to cancer, and they contaminate water and food chain sources. As Walcha is an agricultural area focussed on prime beef and lamb production, contamination with toxic plastics will be a frightening reality, the effects of which will reach far beyond the Walcha community if the Winterbourne Wind Farm is allowed to proceed.

Walcha is a small town which frequently relies on emergency transport vehicles and aircraft to transport critically ill and injured patients to larger centres for treatment. The development of the Winterbourne Wind Farm will significantly impact accessibility for these means of transport and could ultimately cost lives.

In cases such as car accidents, farm accidents or other medical emergencies the Westpac Rescue Helicopter is called upon to airlift patients to major hospitals in Newcastle or Sydney. Helicopter access will be significantly hindered by the 260m tall turbines particularly on days where low-lying cloud is a factor, (which due to Walcha's height above sea level and proximity to the east coast is quite frequent.) In some cases, the combination of the wind farm and the environmental conditions could make patient retrieval by air impossible. This seems to be an unacceptable risk to our community which I don't believe the developer has taken into account.

During the construction phase of the project there will be 376 vehicles moving through Walcha daily with this increasing to 558 during peak construction. The majority of this traffic will be traveling between Tamworth and Walcha with the oversized trucks carrying sections of turbine taking upwards of two hours to complete this section of the journey. The section of road between Bendemeer and Walcha will be of particular concern as the road is narrow and windy, allowing very

few places for vehicles to pass. This poses a huge problem for anyone requiring ambulance or private vehicle transport to Tamworth hospital (the nearest large hospital for most people in the Walcha district.)

The increased traffic on our roads will have a detrimental effect on local infrastructure. The sheer volume of traffic alone will destroy roads that are already in need of repair and will severely hinder Walcha residents' ability to travel for business, health or leisure reasons. The huge increase in traffic will also cause significant safety concerns for other users of the roads including pedestrians, commuters, school children and busses, and cyclists. The Oxley Highway between Bendemeer and Walcha is narrow and winding with very few places to safely overtake even under normal traffic conditions, add to this B-doubles which will take 55-60 minutes to travel this stretch of road rather than the 30 minutes it takes in a car and unsafe situations are bound to arise.

The heavy traffic associated with the wind farm will also be traveling along a number of school bus routes. This poses an unacceptable risk to our children, many of whom walk or ride their bikes to the main road to meet the school bus each day. The risk to children does not end when they get onto the school bus. Local bus drivers (while familiar with the local roads) will not be familiar with sharing the road with the volume of heavy vehicles associated with the wind farm, and the truck drivers will be unfamiliar with the local roads altogether. As a mother I cannot find endangering our children to be an acceptable risk associated with the Winterbourne Wind Farm.

The huge increase in traffic and congestion will be a significant deterrent to prospective tourists. Many small businesses in Walcha rely on tourism dollars to keep the doors open, particularly in times of drought when the local agricultural economy begins to struggle. Add to this the visual eyesore that will be the wind farm once it is completed and Walcha's tourism industry will be decimated. The developer has proposed placing a wind turbine 2.5km from the Aplsey Falls lookout and another 3.5km from the Steep Drop Falls Trail. A South Australian study (*Lothian, Andrew. (2006). VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT OF WIND FARMS IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA.*) into the visual effects of wind farms on scenic locations found that "*wind farms had greatest negative effect on landscapes perceived as highly scenic*". Consider what a devastating effect the construction of a 119 turbine wind farm will have on the scenic quality of the area around Walcha, including the Oxley Wild Rivers National park.

Due to the poor community consultation process by Vestas regarding the proposed Winterbourne Wind Farm many of the issues outlined above have not been suitably addressed in the EIS, if at all. If

this project is allowed to proceed the Walcha community will be left feeling the negative effects for decades to come, well beyond the life of the project itself. The raft of issues and failings associated with this proposed development will be something that future generations are left to deal with, and I cannot in good conscience see this as a fair outcome for our children. My family has lived in the Walcha area for over 50 years and I would hate to see my children decide that this wonderful community is not where they want to live due to the ill-effects of a development that they have no say in which has been proposed by an international developer who clearly has no concern for our small community. I firmly believe that the environmental, economic, social and health implications of this project are far too extensive to justify the proposed development of the Winterbourne Wind Farm.