

Australian Industrial Wind Turbine Awareness Group

14th January 2013

Media Release

“Communities Burned by Turbines”

The past weeks extreme weather conditions and high fire dangers across the nation, especially eastern Australia, have once again heightened awareness of the dangers and difficulties of fighting fires in close proximity of industrial wind energy developments.



Lake Bonney Wind Farm SA

Over the last week aerial water bombing has been critical in containing fires in many areas of proposed wind turbine developments. **If the wind turbine developments had already been in existence aerial water bombing would not have been able to be utilized** and fire would likely have continued to spread out of control, destroying life, more homes, property and livestock.

As stated by the NSW Rural Fire Service: “Aircraft are one of the most essential tools of the Rural Fire Service. http://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/dsp_content.cfm?cat_id=1120

Aircraft support firefighting efforts not only by water bombing, but by supporting back burning and hazard reduction operations, reconnaissance flights, air attack supervision and conducting medical evacuations.

Fires can strike quickly and be incredibly dangerous.

Aggressive initial attack is the key strategic principal that most fire authorities now pursue. The utilizing of fire fighting aircraft in this initial attack is an important strategic approach as they have the capacity to react quickly and decisively to fires in most terrains, which also assists ground crews in containing fires.



Aerial bombing

Whilst each wind turbine development and situation would have varying operating implications, it is very clear that wind turbine developments impose significant threats to the ability to safely operate aircraft in the vicinity of the turbines, especially under the extreme conditions associated with bush fires in Australia.

The pilots operating the water bombing aircraft are highly qualified and will always consider the degree of risk associated with infrastructure, and the conditions in which they are flying. They will always put the safety of themselves and their aircraft first.

Heavily laden fire or spray aircraft have imposed limits on their manoeuvring ability and must be operated very conservatively. Along with the increased risk of accidents and collisions given the height of the turbines, turbulence and visibility due to smoke and the known interference wind turbines produce on hampering radio reception, no professional pilot would take the risk of flying within what they deem a safe distance of the development, as it would be a threat to legal aviation activities.

Essentially fires that burn near industrial wind turbine developments can only be fought by ground crews and aerial support when the fire has travelled a safe distance from the turbines. That may include

having to let the fires burn through turbine clusters, increasing the ferocity of the fire and making its containment on the downwind side of the cluster all the more difficult and dangerous.

A sad fact is that we know that aerial fire bombing is essential to fight fires in our harsh climate and landscape and can prevent the loss of life, home, property and livestock and yet some pilots who perform aerial fire bombing have privately told concerned rural residents that they are not allowed to speak out about the increased risk wind turbines pose.

Aerial fire fighting clearly will be constrained because of pilot safety issues and pilots who are not bound by their contractual or employment constraints from speaking out have said so. David Anderson, the pilot quoted in the following recent news report from South Australia's Yorke Peninsula, where locals are concerned about the impact the CERES Project will have on the safety of families and homes within this large wind development, has made this point clearly. (David Anderson actually OWNS & is Chief pilot for Australian Helicopters, who are contracted to fly the MedVac rescue helicopters, so is well placed to give a professional opinion in this matter)

Link to story: <http://au.news.yahoo.com/latest/a/-/latest/15786582/bushfire-fears-over-wind-turbines/>

Until now the fire authorities have asserted publically that wind turbines would pose no greater risk than any other elevated hazard such as power lines. However, in a letter dated 9th January 2013 the South Australian CFS Chief Greg Nettleton wrote that "in some circumstances aircraft **will not** be utilised because risks caused by vertical obstructions exceed safe operating conditions." In specific relation to the proposed Ceres Development, he writes that the CFS would "**adopt a position that it is unlikely water bombing aircraft would operate in the immediate vicinity of the wind turbine farm** if the risk exceeds safe operating conditions (and we) would consider the wind turbines' effect on safe aircraft operations when combating a fire **in or adjacent** to the wind turbine farm.

David Pearce, Manager of the South Australian CFS Aviation Service, has stated that "visibility in the vicinity of a fire is generally poor due to the smoke" and that any obstacle in the airspace where we're running aircraft is a problem for aircraft obviously."

The Aerial Agricultural Association of Australia state in their Windfarm Policy "Windfarms and their preconstruction wind monitoring towers are a direct threat to aviation safety."

Hart Aviation in their Assessment for the Crudine Ridge Wind Farm for Wind Prospect state: "Helicopter or fixed wing aircraft operations within the confines of any wind farm and below the top of the wind turbines are potentially hazardous and not recommended."

Government planning authorities are approving inappropriate industrial wind turbine developments in some of the most fire prone areas in the world where there is an inability to use effective fire fighting procedures. The lack of aerial support in amongst turbine clusters are putting ground crews that may follow wind turbine access trails normally along ridge lines at extreme risk.

Wind developers state that the roads that are built throughout wind turbines projects allow greater access for vehicles in the event of fires. The grim reality is that these roads would become death traps for fire fighters given they would not receive aerial support due to the obstruction posed by the turbines for pilots.

Wind energy developments are continuing to be built in fire prone areas with a total disregard for extra fire protection requirements that should be in place due to the increased fire risks from wind energy developments

- Each turbine is a potential incendiary device, with up to 800 litres of highly flammable gear box oil in the nacelle.
- Fire can start from turbine operation or lightning strike to the turbine.
- Turbines are continuing to operate on days of high fire danger (when other potential sources of fire ignition must cease operating e.g. harvester, grain trucks, etc)
- Burning spinning turbines have the potential to spread burning flying debris over a wide area increasing the danger to life and property and spreading of fire.
- Rural fire brigades are not equipped to extinguish fires in 150m high burning turbines and must wait for the turbine to collapse before they can safely extinguish the fire.

In November 2010 a turbine at Starfish Hill, South Australia ignited. On arrival, CFS officers could do little but watch the blaze from half a kilometre away, as the situation was deemed too dangerous to approach. "There was not a damn thing you could do about it," said Mr Crawford (Group Officer for the Southern Fleurieu CFS) of the turbine fire. When Work Safe arrived to the scene, CFS officers were told to retreat a further 500 metres away from the fire, as the blades continued to spin. "There were tips of the blades flying some distance," said Mr Crawford. "You could go no closer than a kilometre away.

<https://www.wind-watch.org/news/2010/11/20/cant-fight-the-fire/>

Current fire fighting strategies are inadequate to protect people living in the vicinity of wind energy developments from raging fires in our often hostile Australian climate.

It is only a matter of time before there is going to be a catastrophic fire that could have been avoided, because proper due diligence by all responsible authorities has been ignored.

Planning authorities **MUST NOT** site wind turbines in areas where there is a high fire danger and risk to life and property.

Fire authorities **MUST** ensure that wind turbines **DO NOT OPERATE** on days of high fire danger and must put strategic policies in place for wind energy development zones, recognising that aerial bombing is severely constrained in these areas.

Links to the reality of turbine fires:

www.turbinesonfire.org

www.windaction.org/pictures/1527

<http://www.adelaidenow.com.au/burning-wind-turbine-starts-fires/story-e6freol3-1111118739534>

<http://www.windaction.org/pictures/1527>

<http://www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2009/02/04/2482542.htm>

<http://www.wind-watch.org/news/2010/11/20/cant-fight-the-fire/>

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-01-08/approval-sought-for-major-wind-farm/4457230>

Links to Wake turbulence caused by wind turbines:

www.wind-watch.org/documents/how-much-efficiency-is-lost-by-putting-hawts-near-one-another-in-a-wind-farm/

<http://www.arising.com.au/aviation/windturbines/index.html>

Under the section 266 of the Criminal Code – it is the duty of ...

‘everyone who has in their charge or under his control anything, whether living or inanimate, or who erects makes or maintains anything whatever, who in the absence of precaution or care may endanger human life, is under a legal duty to take responsible precautions against and use reasonable care to avoid such danger, and is criminally responsible for the consequences of omitting without lawful excuse to perform such duty’.

‘R v Pacino: Extending the criminal Negligence?’

<<http://www.murdoch.edu.au/elaw/issues/v5n1/mcfar51.html>> (accessed 11 December 2007)

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