

Boco Rock Modification 1 - Visual Impact Assessment

This VIA should never have been accepted in its present form.

DPE appointed Green Bean Design (GBD) and its principal Mr Andrew Homewood, as an independent consultant, **“to review and verify the LVIA findings”** of the Crudine Ridge wind farm LVIA that had been submitted by CWP Renewables (strangely, this review has never been published). Aside from the fact that Mr Homewood appears to have developed a valuable practice writing LVIA's for wind farm developers, there is a very specific link with CWP. Mr Homewood had done LVIA's for two other CWP wind farm projects (the original LVIA's for Boco Rock and Sapphire) on which he was employed by CWP as their paid consultant. On that basis there were no reasonable grounds for DPE considering GBD independent of CWP. Like all experienced consultants looking ahead, Mr Homewood had an interest in “staying on their good side” with the hope of future work from CWP. He apparently managed to do that, since CWP employed him as their LVIA consultant on their recent Bango wind farm EIS.

And now we have this latest Visual Impact Assessment from GBD for a CWP wind project which will be evaluated by an organization (DPE) that had employed GBD on more than one wind farm consultancy, one of which was specific to CWP.

Am I the only one that thinks these relationships are in conflict?

If any VIA required a truly independent (of both DPE and CWP) peer review it is this one.

In the second paragraph of the Executive Summary, Mr Homewood writes:

“The purpose of the Modification is to accommodate larger but fewer wind turbines to drive down the levelized cost of energy and minimise impacts on the surrounding community and environmental values.”

a statement for which Mr Homewood offers no supporting evidence and, in his extensive previous writings for wind farm developers, has shown little expertise.

The VI Assessment

Once again Mr Homewood has confirmed, for whatever turbine size modification, there will be no significant increase in visual impact. So we are offered statements such as:

“Within the parameters of normal human vision, the proposed Stage Two wind turbines are not considered to give rise to an increased level of visual magnitude which is significantly above that determined for the approved Yandra Cluster wind turbines.”

Or:

“The proposed increase in tower height, as well as overall wind turbine tip height of the Stage Two Modification wind turbines, is unlikely to result in any significant change to the extent of wind turbine visibility.”

Note, there is no mention of the increase in Rotor Swept Area (RSA) in that statement. It is the movement of the blades to which our attention is immediately and constantly drawn, and, apart from distance, the most significant component of visual impact.

In this case, the RSA increase is 137%, an increase unsurpassed, I believe, by any previous turbine Modification Application.

In Mr Homewood's professional judgement, this increase is insignificant.

(The swept area of the proposed 20 turbine configuration is 48% larger than the swept area of the approved 32 turbine configuration. In Mr Homewood's professional judgement, this contributes to an insignificant Visual Impact increase.)

(One again, in a number of places, we are informed that some extra blade tips will be visible from some properties. A reminder that these little tippee thingees could be up to 48 metres long)

Failure to visually assess the proposal as per the Guidelines.

The 2016 Wind Energy Guidelines state on Page 14 that the proponent needs to

“have: considered existing dwelling entitlements on land within the vicinity of the wind energy project.”

DPE Secretary McNally also confirmed to me that it is important for proponents to identify all **land** that may be affected by a proposal.

Whether the property has an existing residence is irrelevant.

Whether the property has an approved DA for a dwelling is irrelevant.

As this VIA must be assessed under the 2016 Guidelines, and as this issue has never been addressed before for this wind farm, any merit assessment is invalid without such a review.

To assess just one non-associated property without a dwelling (but at one stage there was a DA application before council) within 4km of the approved Yandra Cluster wind turbines confirms the invalidity of this VIA.

The department should ask the owner of this property why they let the DA lapse.

To assess no properties outside of 4 kms confirms the invalidity of this VIA.

Mr Homewood, of all experts, would know that properties can be highly visually impacted by 200 metre turbines at distances greater than 4 kms, despite what the deeply flawed Visual Assessment Bulletin (2016) says.

Neighbour Agreements.

Neighbour Agreements (NA) are normally signed to waive away the rights of visually impacted property owners.

The reason given for the lack of impacted properties evaluated in this VIA is:

“It is noted that Neighbour Agreements have been accepted by all owners of constructed dwellings within 4 km”

Mr Homewood therefore indirectly confirms that land with a dwelling **entitlement** was not assessed in this VIA as required.

Mr Homewood also confirms that Neighbour Agreements may not have been signed with owners of land with residential rights.

(Is “accepted” the same as signed?)

Importantly,

The Department must determine whether all these Neighbour Agreements were signed after the conditions of this modification were known, as any NA signed without this knowledge is highly suspect, to say the least.

Also, as stage 1 turbines were constructed considerably smaller than those currently approved, **were NA signatories shown a comparison between currently operating turbines and the proposed size after this Modification before NA signature?**

Cumulative Visual Impact

We effectively have two adjoining wind farms owned by two different entities. The cumulative visual impact of the existing wind farm with the new wind farm on all affected properties must be identified.

Ignoring the 2016 Visual Bulletin

Mr Homewood once again has advised:

“This VIA has not addressed the Stage 1 Preliminary Environmental Assessment (pre-lodgement) guidelines as these are not pertinent to the preparation of a wind farm modification.”

Community values and perceptions of the landscape certainly are pertinent, especially as GBD didn't address them in the LVIA for the original proposal as the DGRs required. (See Page 4 of the DGRs, Visual Impacts, Paragraph 1)

Invalid ZVI

Once again we are presented with an abbreviated ZVI of 10 kms or less for 200 metre turbines. Mr Homewood knows from the literature, including his often quoted SNH, that ZVIs for turbines of this size should be orders of magnitude greater.

An old favourite

“At a view distance of 4km the approved Stage Two and proposed wind turbine modifications would be perceived at less than half the height of the amended wind turbines when viewed at a distance of 2.7km.”

Fig 7 doesn't show that at all.

Shadow Flicker

Surely a 137% increase in RSA has the potential to change the existing assessment of shadow flicker. Neither the VIA nor the overall EIS appear to have addressed this issue.

The sham of vegetation screening finally exposed.

Many, many submissions have been made over the years by wind farm communities questioning the feasibility of Visual Impact mitigation by the planting of screening trees.

The department, through its managers and planners has ignored most of these representations and parroted the vegetation mitigation nonsense, because it was of least cost to the developers and supportive of a favourable assessment.

I was therefore delighted to read in the transcript of the meeting (29 October, 2018. Page 8) between IPC Commissioners and Mike Young from the department that this nonsense had been called out when discussing the Visual Impacts on residence C04 in the vicinity of the Yass Valley wind farm.

<https://www.ipcn.nsw.gov.au/resources/pac/media/files/pac/general/transcripts/yass-valley/ipc-meeting-with-dpe-transcript.pdf?la=en&hash=CBA6E95E4DF304DE8F6A1A45E0E5334D>

To quote Commissioner Pilton:

“I'm intrigued with the idea that you're going to screen it with new trees and things, given the time it's going to take – I assume plant little trees. So it'll only reach sort of reasonable height by the time it's going to be decommissioned. So the screening – it's just not going to happen.”

To which Commissioner Lipman added:

“No. It's not”

Thank you Commissioners.

Mike Young of course had no answer and changed the subject.

Mr Homewood continues to rely on vegetation screening as his primary mitigation recommendation.

Mandatory disclaimers missing.

Both CWP Renewables and Green Bean Design fail to warrant that their work is neither false nor misleading which is mandatory under the EP&A Regulation 2000 [71(f)(iii)].

Once again the Department has allowed this transgression to occur. Department management and planners have been advised of these omissions repeatedly.

Some of the rest

View angles. Please see previous submissions

Residence SPR002 wasn't assessed in 2009 by Mr Homewood so the VI difference as a result of Modification 1 also can't be assessed, only guessed.

From Page 35:

"The proposed Stage Two Modification is not considered to be dissimilar to other approved and constructed wind farm projects in the NSW Southern Tablelands"

Translation: This mod should be approved like every other previous wind farm and mod.

From Page 25:

"There would be some change in the composition or contrast between the approved and proposed wind turbines and the surrounding landscape due to the removal of at least 12 approved wind turbines."

and from Page 35

"The proposed removal of up to at least 12 approved wind turbines from the Yandra Cluster is considered to result in an overall reduction of wind turbine visibility from view locations surrounding the Yandra Cluster. Wind turbine removal would also mitigate the visual complexity of wind turbines where overlapping in the approved wind turbine layout."

Mr Homewood is careful not to write that the removal of 12 turbines would result in a lower VI, probably because of a professional opinion he has offered in the past where as little as one turbine could result in HIGH VI.

Obstacle lighting. Would we expect that this should be reconsidered due to the turbine height increase of 48 metres?

Photomontage. Fig 10 page 32.

Note the telegraph pole. Let us say, once again, that other VI experts caution against photomontages that include tall vertical structures in the foreground due to the misleading visual contrast they make with the turbines behind them.

Also, see previous submissions about GBD photomontages.

Wireframes.

See previous submissions. The less said the better.

From Page 17 of CWP's contribution:

“The Indicative layout selected the 20 WTGs which would cause the most similar impacts to the “worst case” using the outermost WTG locations as well as those which are at greatest elevation, creating a highly conservative assessment.

I'd love to see a barely conservative indicative layout. Any chance?

Do I expect the Department to do anything as a result of this submission?

Of course not.

I write it to reinforce the rural communities' views that wind farm LVIA's are incomplete, include statements that are false and/or misleading and that the department will not do anything about it. But the evidence keeps accumulating, tic, tic, tic,