

Collector Wind Farm submission

My family and I live in Collector, and I am opposed to the Wind Farm.

My submission will largely deal with the poor community consultation conducted by the proponent.

The Planning NSW Green Paper, 'A New Planning System for NSW' states that Engaging with the community at the earliest stages of the planning process. This has not occurred in the case of Collector Wind Farm. The planned wind farm was provided to Collector residents as a fait accompli – while there had been engagement with the involved land-owners, Collector residents were not told of the plans until a flashy presentation arrived at the Collector Hall. As the Green Paper notes:

'In order to improve awareness and transparency and certainty to the community and industry, consultation with the local community, stakeholders and industry should be conducted during the strategic planning and plan making stage with issues identified and resolved, including economic benefits, necessity and viability.'

There are three points I would like to deal with from this quote: economic benefits, necessity and viability. I would also address community attitudes to the wind farm.

Economic benefits

- What will be the economic benefit to Collector and the region of this wind farm?
- I note that the access to the site will be via the Hume Highway and Lerida Road – will there be any economic benefit to Collector at all during the construction phase? Will the construction sub-contractors be encouraged to use local facilities, such as the Pub and Shop, or will all the economic benefits flow to Gunning and Goulburn.
- Will the Gunning-Collector road be upgraded? Or is it easier for the proponent to source its materials and labour from Goulburn and thus avoid upgrading a notoriously dangerous road. If material and labour are coming from Canberra for the wind farm, will consideration be made to improving the Gunning-Collector road – it should be sealed as a priority – however not at any cost to the Collector Community Enhancement Fund.
- While the proponent has made a commitment of \$200 000 per annum for a Community Enhancement Fund, the management, governance and disbursement of these funds have not been established. As an appointed member of the Community Council, I have made a separate submission on these funds, so I will not further elaborate on this issue.
 - However, I remain concerned that any funds provided by the proponent could be used to provide services which are the responsibility of the Upper Lachlan Shire Council, and which other towns in the Shire enjoy – such as kerbs and gutters, sewers and water, and street lights.
 - I note there have already been discussions in the Upper Lachlan Shire Council about using funds from Walwa/Gurrundah wind farm to assist the broader council area – the Crookwell Gazette noted on 2 August 2012 that the Upper Lachlan Shire Council has the right to send back to the committee for further discussion any proposal that it disagreed

with. The Gazette further reported that one Councillor commented that 'a requirement that only people in the 10 kilometre radius would benefit was "ridiculous"', and the same story reported that another councillor stated that 'Council should have the major say, and (Council) would merit some compensation for the cost of supplying the administrative and practical implementation of the fund'.

- Previously, the Upper Lachlan Shire Council was considering funding the heating of Crookwell's swimming pool using wind-farm community enhancement funding.
- I call on the Planning NSW to include provision in any approval that funding provided for the Community Enhancement Fund:
 - be used for works and proposals which are not the Upper Lachlan Shire's core responsibilities to its ratepayers,
 - the funding provided by the proponent should not be used to fund Council administration or implementation of the funds, and
 - the funds be used for the benefit of Collector and area residents, not used to fund development in other areas of the Upper Lachlan Shire.

Necessity

- Is the wind power farm necessary? Windfarms make the majority of their profit from the sale of peaking power, and it is being reported that the requirement for additional power plants to service this requirement has been overestimated.
- *In 2011 the Australian Electricity Market Operator (AEMO) released the Electricity Statement of Opportunities (ESOO) report. The ESOO report forecast that total demand for electricity in the National Electricity Market (NEM) would increase over time, however since this report was released actual demand has fallen. The actual NEM electricity demand for the Financial Year 2011-12 (FY12) was 2.4 % lower than the previous year (FY11) and 5.7% lower than the ESOO medium economic growth forecast.*
- *Reasons for the current reduction in demand can be attributed to:*
 - *Increasing awareness of high delivered electricity costs impacting energy usage decisions;*
 - *the high Australian dollar reducing demand for exports;*
 - *low global prices for commodities such as aluminium; and*
 - *the increasing output from Solar photovoltaic installations.*
- *Aluminium smelters are energy intensive and use large amounts of electricity, meaning that changes in consumption patterns will have an impact on the NEM. Generally speaking the consumption from an Aluminium smelter is equivalent to the production from a large-scale base load generator, so the withdrawal of an aluminium smelter from the NEM has the same effect as the addition of a new generator.*
- *Recent developments in the Aluminium industry that are likely to affect NEM demand include:*

- *As of January 2012, the Kurri Kurri aluminium smelter closed one of its three potlines, reducing electricity consumption by approximately one third.*
- *As of May 2012, Norsk Hydro announced a total curtailment of production.*
- *In late June 2012 Alcoa announced that it was to receive a \$40 million government assistance package to keep the Point Henry aluminium smelter operating until at least July 2014.*
- *AEMO expects electricity demand for the coming year (FY13) to remain flat with 0% growth, however they do forecast a return to growth in coming years (FY14 and beyond). The National Electricity Forecasting Report expects an average 1.7% growth in annual NEM energy for the next 10 years, down from the 2.3% forecast in the 2011 ESOO. The 1.7% growth in annual energy consumption is strongly linked to large industrial projects in Queensland, most notably coal seam gas developments. However this growth scenario would be optimistic at best if aluminium smelters continue to close.*
- These figures call into question the requirement for increased electricity generation. While I understand that the projections for the Collector Wind Farm are that it would be one of the most efficient wind farms, the level of antipathy and opposition to the Wind Farm should be a factor in the consideration of its construction and operation. From my discussions with the community, there is widespread concern about the impact this project would have on our lifestyle – and the lifestyle is the main reason why people move to Collector and the surrounding region.
- Just because the proponent is allowed to under the legislation, and will make money out of the proposal, is not sufficient reason to do so. The division and anger that the proposal is causing in the small community of Collector is palpable, and this should not be ignored in the planning and approval process. As the Planning Green Paper notes, communities value their neighbourhoods, heritage and local environment, and have a right to be involved in decisions that shape their community.

Viability

- Will the wind farm be viable?
- While the business model presented by the proponent is viable now, it is based on Renewable Energy funding from the Federal Government. As the proponent's own spokesman, Nick Valentine stated in the Goulburn Post in August 2012, 'All renewable energy technologies are provided financial incentives through the (Federal Government's) Renewable Energy Target and that is necessary to make them initially competitive...'
- There is no guarantee that the financial incentives will be enduring. The Goulburn Post reports that each turbine receives a subsidy between \$250-500 thousand per annum. What is the proponent's plan if the government subsidies are removed? Will these turbines remain in place, in hope of a return to the subsidies, or will they be removed. The lack of an announced plan is of concern and should be addressed in any approval.

- Mr Valentine stated in August 2012 that the expectation is that the cost of wind will come down over the next 20 years to where it is equivalent to coal. I prefer evidence-based information rather than expectations - as does the Planning Green Paper. As a condition of approval, the proponent should be forced to disclose its cost modelling on wind power, and guarantee that if the wind farm becomes uneconomic, it would be removed, and not left standing in the hope that wind would become a value-for-money proposition at some time in the future.

Community Attitudes


- There are two surveys which are widely quoted in relation to the proposal.
- In 2012, The Friends of Collector commissioned StollzNow Research to conduct a survey of residents living within 10km of the proposed Wind Farm. The result: more than 80 per cent of respondents were opposed.
- The survey also found that 87pc of respondents had concerns about their property value and the majority were worried about the visual aesthetics of the area, the flashing red lights on top of the turbines, noise, adverse effects on local fauna and potential impacts on their health.
- Most significantly though, one in five respondents said they would leave the region if the wind farm was approved.
- However, the proponent claims the community supports the development, pointing to a survey conducted in 2010 by Auspoll which found two thirds of respondents listed themselves as either “strongly for” or “for”. However, the company recorded 400 results from more than 4000 calls within a 50km radius of the village, meaning respondents could have been as far away as Goulburn or the outer suburbs of Canberra.
- Mr Valentine said “The reason for a 50km radius is that was the distance required or the area required to obtain sufficient population to allow a statistically rigorous survey”. While this may be true, it is also illustrative to look at the detailed information from the Auspoll survey.
 - Only six per cent of those surveyed were from Collector. The majority (61%) were from Goulburn, Gunning, Gundaroo or Bungendore – who won't see or hear the wind farm.
 - Only twelve percent of those surveyed live within 10 kilometres of the wind farm, and 70 per cent of those surveyed live more than 20 kilometres from the wind farm
 - Unsurprisingly, given the distance of the majority of respondents from the wind farm, nearly half (48%) the respondents indicated that they had heard little about the Collector wind farm project, and one third of respondents (33%) felt they had heard nothing. And fewer than half the respondents (45%) indicated that they wanted to hear more about the project.
- I believe the proponent has been ‘fast and loose’ with the results of the Auspoll survey, and the support has been overstated. This has added to the level of distrust in the community, and is not in accordance with the transparency requirement for any planning proposal.

- However, there is a notable and accurate (but now out-of date) poll – as there was a referendum conducted in the Upper Lachlan Shire in 2008 to gauge the level of support for the continuing development and construction of wind farm turbines in the Upper Lachlan Council area. The result was 70% support for the wind farms. Given the level of development of wind farms since 2008, it would have been enlightening for the Upper Lachlan Shire Council to hold another poll – particularly as the local elections were held in September 2012.
- Given the continuing disputes and levels of concern over the development and construction of wind farm turbines in the Shire, I believe the State Government, as the consent authority, should arrange a new poll, run by the NSW Electoral Commission, to gauge the level of support for wind farms in the Shire. This would provide an accurate picture of the support, and give a sound basis to the Community, the Shire Council, the State Government and the Proponent on which to proceed in planning for the wind farm.

Finally, I wish to note that I make this submission as a private citizen, and the views expressed are my own and I do not speak for any organisation or group in this submission.

I thank you for your consideration of this submission, and I look forward to the PAC meeting.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A.J. Walsh', written in a cursive style.

Anthony Walsh

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24 September 2012