

Submission Opposing the Jupiter Wind Farm

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission opposing the Jupiter Wind Farm.

My Background

My name is Brenda Gerrie and I live on a rural property about 40km from the southern boundary of the proposed project area.

I generally support the development of renewable energy technologies and indeed have had a house powered by solar energy since 1984.

I am familiar with the Jupiter project area; I know members of the local community and have spent many hours enjoying its beauty and the biodiversity of plants, animals and birds to be found there. I have visited the area for years to delight in Glossy Black Cockatoos nesting and to admire stunning displays of orchids.

When I first heard about Jupiter my initial thought went to how inappropriate that location was for a wind farm because it is a growing rural residential area with an extraordinary biodiversity.

I have talked with staff from the proponent's office on several occasions about Jupiter. Not an enjoyable or empathetic experience I have to say. Those conversations only heightened my concerns. But more about that later.

I am opposed to the Jupiter Wind Farm development.

Purpose of This Submission

I object to the development of the Jupiter Wind Farm on the basis that it is unprecedented, inappropriately sited and ethically wrong.

There are so many deficiencies in this EIS that taken individually may seem minor and inconsequential but taken together they add up to piece of work that underplays the impact of this wind farm on the environment and the community to the point of calculated deceit.

A deceit that sadly recurs in other past wind farm impact statements that have been approved.

For this reason I also have misgivings about the proponent's and the approving authority's capacity to judge and manage the project with fairness, respect and regard for the welfare, health and safety of the community in and around the project area given the number of people living so close and given what has happened with other wind farm developments.

The focus of my submission is the impact of the wind farm on the community, the appropriateness of an EIS process driven by a proponent who disrespects that community and an approving authority who seems unable to manage change and the ethical dilemmas if and when things go awry.

Impact of Wind Farms

There is no doubt that communities around Australia and the world are significantly impacted by wind farms. They generate conflict because of disputes, uncertainty and secrecy. Disputes about the impacts, uncertainty about the size and location of turbines and their likely affects as well as secrecy about the nature of agreements between the

proponent, participating landholders and other stakeholders, as well as concerns about whether promised obligations will be met and what will happen in the future in terms of wind farm expansion or abandonment.

The debate surrounding visual impacts, noise, adverse health effects and property values continues. The fact that a wind turbine may spoil your view, disturb your sleep, or reduce the value of your home may not be a material consideration, but it is nevertheless very real to those affected.

Communities become divided. Residents including hosts regret their decisions and leave their homes. Some communities have successfully lobbied to limit the operation of turbines to minimise their impact because the impacts have been greater than specified during planning.

This sadly is the norm. And I had no idea how bad it really was until I took lively interest in Jupiter.

This has nothing to do with being for or against wind farms. It has nothing to do with adhering to guidelines. But it does have everything to do with the location of wind farms and the proximity of turbines to people.

In the absence of a definitive separation distance between dwellings and turbines, it is only fair that the proponent AND the approving authority GUARANTEE no adverse effects or offensive noise. The NSW EPA defines offensive noise in terms of its loudness, its duration, whether it is in keeping with the area and the number of people affected by it.

Sounds like a wind turbine to me. No pun intended.

Jupiter Wind Farm EIS

The Jupiter Wind Farm EIS addresses the prerequisite requirements with assurances of significant benefits to renewable energy targets, GHG emission reductions, employment and economic stimulus. True of any suitable location. And so to use this as the primary argument to justify placing a wind farm so close to so many people is ridiculous.

I am not in a position to judge or refute the EIS claims. It is a weighty document that goes about ticking all the requirements in a pedestrian way. No problems- that cannot be solved - apparently... and the proponent applauds themselves for putting forward a proposal (and in few spots refers to it as a campaign... an odd choice of word eh?) with lots of benefits and such public interest that outweighs impacts.

As far as noise is concerned, the proponent's preferred option is to operate the wind farm in an unconstrained manner with the approval of landholders who are willing to turn a blind ear to the noise. Now that's a mixed metaphor.

And the visual impact will be low as long as affected landholders sit behind a small planting of trees, wait 20 years for them to grow and dream about a rural lifestyle that might have been.

Sounds idyllic doesn't it? No it is not... it is a travesty.

There is ongoing debate about the suitability of the guidelines particularly in relation to noise. And it galls me to read that the greater good of the Jupiter Wind Farm and public interest outweighs the profound impacts on so many people. Particularly when the EIS is in essence indicative and predictive and often done at a desk from pre-existing data about visual, health and environmental impacts and where the maps showing the geographical location of scenic, iconic and heritage values are computer generated.

There is no burden of proof on the proponent.

Indeed any discussion of the impacts of the wind turbine is a joke when the type of turbine and their exact locations are not known at this stage of the development and reliant on unnamed manufacturer specifications. Wind farms are much more complex than say airports or roads and yet the proponent chooses the locations, based on what? Willing hosts and nearby transmission lines...

The wind turbines are close together and already too close to many houses that even a micro move of 100m will mean more yet to be decided turbines even closer to more people.

If ever the precautionary principle should apply, it should apply to wind farm developments.

In the absence of any requirement by the proponent to follow the precautionary principle and disprove harm, the onus falls on disaffected stakeholders to watch-dog developments and prove transgressions.

And that is an almost impossible task... I feel so sorry for the community.

It galls me that Australian peer reviewed scientific studies indicating that acoustic measurements need to be refined and that possible health impacts of wind turbines at distances greater than 5 km are being ignored. Recent empirical scientific studies and a soon to be published book on wind farm noise show that noise measurements are flawed and that health impacts should not be ignored.

The NHMRC has said that there is no evidence that wind turbine noise affects health. But there is also a lack of scientific evidence to prove that wind farm operations do not create health impacts.

Once again the precautionary principle has been turned on its head in favour of the wind farm developer.

The uncertainties surrounding wind farms are many. The location of turbines, the terrain, the surrounding population, roads, towns, public spaces, vegetation corridors all influence outcomes. Even if stakeholders can prove a wrong or an injustice it is usually too late and the wrong will never be righted.

The proponent and the approving authority have a moral obligation to get it right in the first place. And there are many things wrong with the Jupiter project that even a lay person like me reading the EIS in a cursory way can see. For example, the preponderance of photomontages taken from roadsides and strangely devoid of dwellings and other infrastructure is striking and even when printed in a large format the distant turbines are fuzzy. And the same four trees are strategically placed to make the turbines disappear. All this designed to paint a picture of minimal impact without reference to the truth.

The proponent hasn't even provided an accurate description of the project area. The proponent describes the Jupiter project area as cleared grazing land with gentle ridge-lines close to the transmission grid and its proximity to other wind farms makes it very suitable for wind turbines.

Elsewhere, the EIS describes the project area as cleared grazing or agricultural land where rural residential development is not permitted.

Sounds perfect doesn't it?

No it is not. It paints a misleading picture because the PA is already surrounded by rural residential development as has been explained to the proponent many times. To persist with a mistake or a misleading statement makes it a lie.

The Jupiter Wind Farm is being hosted by a few larger properties surrounded by a sea of lifestyle blocks many less than 40 Ha. This is the truth.

The project area is in a highly populated and growing rural residential place where people enjoy a chosen lifestyle that will be disrupted by wind turbines very close to their homes.

And I strongly object to that.

Objection 1: Jupiter Wind Farm is unprecedented, inappropriately sited and ethically wrong

The scale of Jupiter and its proximity to people is unprecedented. As proposed, Jupiter is a large project of State significance - 88 turbines each 173 metres tall within a populated area where 78 dwellings are within a 2km benchmark of a turbine. Some dwellings are much closer than that.

Jupiter is inappropriately sited. The EIS itself states that the visual impact will be moderate to high on 66% (93 of 140) dwellings.

Turning a blind eye when you walk around your property, looking the other way or planting trees - as the proponent suggested to me - is just not going to cut it.... The proponent has no understanding that people who live on lifestyle blocks don't just sit on their verandah behind a screening tree planting admiring the turbines through the trees.

Elsewhere the line in the sand has been drawn at 2km - 2km from a dwelling or a public road for an interconnected network of 173m monoliths (or should I say behemoths) in constant motion. If the 2km buffer were to be applied to Jupiter very few if any of the proposed turbines would be left standing.

It is worth taking a close look at the southern precinct of Jupiter with 13 turbines. The separation between the northern and southern precinct is about 5km (not much less than the distance between Woodlawn and Jupiter) with the Kings Highway, a busy main road connecting Canberra to the coast running right between the two precincts. The southern precinct is quite small being less than 2km wide and about 6km long from north to south with an access road connecting the rural subdivisions of Mulloon and Manar running right through the middle. In the southern precinct there are 14 dwellings within 2km of EVERY turbine, 28 dwellings within 3km, 60 dwellings within 4km and 99 dwellings within the 5km buffer zone. Most of these blocks are less than 40 Ha and some as small as 3 Ha.

In summary, the southern precinct is less than a quarter (24%) of the project area but has more than a third (34%) of the dwellings within 5 km of turbines and will contribute about 15% of the power. This makes me ask who or what is driving this proposal?

I can paraphrase a famous poem with apologies to Tennyson:

Half a league, half a league onward... into the valley rode the six hundred

Turbines to the right of them, turbines to the left of them...

Someone had blundered

Theirs not to reply

Theirs not to reason why...

Theirs but to do or...

Sounds about right to me, 600 people within half a league (that's 2-6 km) will be profoundly impacted by the charge of the wind brigade.

More question for the proponent and approving authority...

Has everybody been contacted including absent landholders?

Have all contingencies been taken into account like building approvals, dual occupancy?

Has the full impact of so many wind turbines so close to so many people been properly explained?

I think not, I know not.

And the proponent certainly cannot because everything is yet to be decided.

If you are going to permit an industrial development in a residential area albeit rural residential you have a moral obligation to make sure everybody knows and understands the impacts.

So many questions still to be answered... but I keep coming back to two questions:

Why has the proponent chosen this particular site for the Jupiter Wind Farm? (Or should I say sites because they are separate entities requiring several kilometres of access through uninvolved properties to interconnect the two precincts)

Why did the approving authorities allow the proposal to get this far?

Jupiter Wind Farm is ethically wrong because it WILL have a significant impact on the quality of life of hundreds of people.

Objection 2: Misgivings about the proponent's and the approving authority's capacity to manage the project ethically with fairness and proper respect for the welfare, health and safety of a community above all else.

The proponent's website seems to overstate their capacity. Their only project is Jupiter and they have few staff. As a company they exaggerate their energy credentials across strategic locations claiming significant experience in developing environmentally friendly wind farms across Australia.

I ask them to name one project other than Jupiter that they are actively involved with?

It may not be my right to question the proponent's capability, but Jupiter is a project of State significance so somebody had better take a proper look at the proponent's capability and the veracity of the project.

On three occasions I rang the proponent, and each time I was lucky enough to talk to the project manager who just happened to be passing the reception desk. Lucky me... but the tenor of our conversations left no doubt in my mind about her disregard for community concerns. Some of the things she said were:

People don't have to look at the wind turbines... modern turbines make minimal noise... the project area is sparsely populated grazing land... we have no obligation to follow the

NSW guidelines, they are only a draft... our intentions are to get to the EIS stage as quickly as possible and after that we may or may not develop the wind farm... it depends on the choice and number of turbines and what gets approved.

Hmm, what does that all really mean?

It means a lack of understanding and respect for the community that will be affected by Jupiter.

It means that neither the draft or the final guidelines have been followed. So tell me which guidelines will you apply in assessing this proposal?

It also means, get in and get out as quickly as possible with as much as possible.

The bullying "them-against-us" tenor of the newsletter of December 2016 suggests that nothing much has changed since I talked to the project manager in 2014. It reflects the proponents disrespect for the community and just adds fuel to the fire of conflict, fear, uncertainty and secrecy.

The lack of a minimum offset in NSW is like a gold honey pot to a greedy bee. And it is an easy path to guaranteed approval and then on-sell the development to a different kid on the block. Out go the community concerns... out go the guarantees...

The approving authority has a 100% approval rate. Inspires confidence doesn't it?

Well no, not really...

Just look at what happened at the nearby Gullen Range: 69 of the 73 turbines were placed in the wrong spot, closer to dwelling than the EIS has stated and the proponent had promised.

And nobody noticed until the turbines were up... But the approving authority said the difference in visual impact was minimal... I suppose an eyesore is still an eyesore in the eye of the beholder? Stressed residents sold to the wind farm developer and walked away.

Fear, uncertainty, secrecy and disregard for community health, welfare and safety seem to be the norm. This is ethically wrong.

The community for good reason does not trust that the approving authority will properly consider their concerns about noise and visual impacts and other adverse affects.

So please commission independent studies of noise and visual impacts before the Project is assessed and again after the exact location and model of turbine is known.

And please factor into that assessment the rural lifestyle of enjoying the whole block and take a look at how close turbines are to boundary fences.

End Note

I wanted this submission to be about people, but then I has a quick read of the sections of the EIS on the environment and biodiversity. Oh dear!

So I have to make one last point. As a keen environmentalist I know Mulloon and Manar to be second to none as an area for bird watching and native plant spotting. The area forms part of an important wildlife corridor that links to Tallaganda National Park where I live and then on a continuous corridor right down to the Nadgee and Croajingolong Wilderness and across the border into Victoria on the coast. It is a biogeographical boundary of high environmental value on The Great Divide that will surely provide an escape route to cooler

climates for birds and animals as climate change has an effect. None of this is mentioned in the EIS.

And the proposal is to place a state significant wind farm right in the middle of this special place?

The proposal says that only 85+ ha need to be cleared. That's 85 reasons to reject the wind farm.

The proposal say there might be 37 threatened species in the area. That's another 37 reasons to reject the wind farm.

Questions I am Asking...

I am asking the proponent:

1. What guarantees do you give that there will be no adverse affects or offensive noise on anyone?
2. Why do you persist in describing the project area and surrounds as grazing land where rural residential development is not permitted when that is not true?
3. Has everybody who owns land within the 5km buffer been personally contacted? If not please supply the Department of Planning their names.
4. Name another Australian wind farm development you are currently involved with?

I am asking NSW Planning and PAC:

1. What guarantees do you give that there will be no adverse affects or offensive noise?
2. Why do you allow the proponent to persist in describing the project area and surrounds as grazing land where rural residential development is not permitted when that is not true?
3. Can you guarantee that the proponent has contacted everybody who owns land within the 5km buffer? If not why not? And not your responsibility is an unacceptable answer.
4. Neither the draft nor final guidelines have been followed. So tell me which guidelines you will apply in assessing this proposal?
5. Please commission independent studies to validate the noise and visual impacts as part of your assessment. And please validate these findings after the turbine model and exact locations are known. Please ensure that these studies are truly independent by commissioning someone who has NOT been a past party to the preparation of a wind farm EIS. And please make sure that the independent noise and visual impact study is an ON THE GROUND study and does not rely simply on the same computer software as Clouston and DNV used to assess Jupiter.

In Summary

There is only one guarantee and that is there are NO guarantees.

So I say again... in the absence of a definitive separation distance between dwellings and turbines and given the number of dwellings involved, it is only fair that the proponent and everyone else involved in the fire sale AND the approving authority GUARANTEE no adverse effects or offensive noise.

And if those involved cannot make and uphold such a guarantee then the Jupiter Wind Farm proposal must be rejected.

Brenda Gerrie, 12 February 2017