

Rye Park wind forum turns ugly

By JESSICA COLE

Sept. 30, 2015, 6:30 a.m.



- Courtesy of the Yass Tribune

OPPONENTS of the Rye Park Wind Farm proposal are defending their actions while the proponent, Trustpower attacks their behaviour in newspaper advertisements throughout the region.

The proposal is for 109 wind turbines, each 157 metres tall, with an approximate capacity of 327MW.

The company claims that at a community information day held at the Rye Park Memorial Hall last Tuesday, a group of small, unruly protesters threatened people conducting the information day with violence and theft.

Trustpower said a sign-in list, on which people entered their contact details for more information, was stolen from the meeting.

Now, through advertisements in local publications, they've warned residents on the list of the possibility of intimidatory behaviour from group members.

But resident Jayne Apps said she was upset at accusations of abusive behaviour. She said she had arrived at the information day at approximately 5.30pm, at the time of the incident, and was greeted by security guards.

"They put me on edge straight away; it was in itself intimidating. I understand they had previous threats which is why they had the guards, but this had nothing to do with the residents of Rye Park," she said.

"There were individuals who were upset about not getting the information they were asking for and there were raised voices in the hall. I didn't see what happened outside."

Ms Apps described the atmosphere as unsettling but said she did not witness any physicality.

"Out of the 130 submissions in May last year, only eight were positive. They have tried to buy the silence of the community since then by offering neighbouring benefits. This was in no way a planned protest," she said.

Ms Apps said if the company was trying to prove it was there for the long haul, instead of causing further "antagonism," it should consider apologising to the community.

Resident Mark Glover is angry with Trustpower and denies the imputations of violence and intimidation.

"If anything, Trustpower and Epuron were the ones who were violent and intimidating," he said.

"I mean I've recently had a knee operation, and fellow resident Jim Field is 79-years-old for God's sake!"

He also hit back at claims by Trustpower that the community supported the proposal.

"It's clearly a wrong assumption that this community supports the wind farm," Mr Glover said.

"Since when has a community ever supported a wind farm development?"

Mr Field, who was reported to have taken hold one of the development officers, Rontheo Van Zyl by the throat, also denied all violence claims.

"I actually shirt-fronted him and had my hand around the back of his head, but I didn't have him by the throat," he said.

"If anything the security guards from Trustpower were the ones who were violent towards me. I had three blokes on me at one stage - one who pushed me from the front and two at the side. I'm nearly 80 years old! I was telling them 'There'll be trouble if you don't let me go!'"

But Mr Van Zyl previously said the Trustpower staff and consultants were simply there to provide information.

“We had already been subjected to several phone threats of violence and, although we didn’t really anticipate any harassment of this kind, we had engaged two licensed security officers to be in attendance,” he said.

“I must emphasise that at no point did any Trustpower staff or its consultants restrain or take any physical action against the protesters, and they remained calm and did their best not to respond to this outrageous behaviour.”

Local resident Rod Gibson, who hoped to host one of the turbines, said Trustpower was more than accommodating and it was disappointing that residents had behaved in this manner.

“I believe their behaviour was out of the norm and aggressive.

“I think they are just angry and their agenda was to shut the meeting down, which would not help anyone. It’s difficult to talk to some of these people who attack everything you say.”

“There are many people in Rye Park who think positively about the proposal and they have the right to this information.”

Trustpower will be holding another community meeting at the Yass Memorial Hall on Friday, October 9 at 7pm.