

## 4. COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

### **Director-General's Requirements - the EA must:**

1. include a comprehensive, detailed and genuine community consultation and engagement process must be undertaken. This process must ensure that the community is both informed of the proposal and is actively engaged in issues of concern to them, and is given ample opportunity to provide its views on the proposal. Sufficient information must be provided to the community so that it has a good understanding of what is being proposed and of the impacts. There should be a particular focus on those non wind farm associated community members who live in proximity to the site; the Environmental Assessment
2. must clearly document and provide details and evidence of the consultation process and who was consulted with;
3. clearly identify all issues raised during the consultation process which must be tabulated in the Environmental Assessment; and
4. must state how the identified issues have been addressed, and how they have informed the proposal as presented in the Environmental Assessment. In particular, the Environmental Assessment must state how the community's issues have been responded to.

### 4.1 SUMMARY OF OBJECTIONS

Community Consultation: Flyers Creek Wind Turbine Awareness Group (FCWTAG) objects to the Flyers Creek Wind Farm proposal:

- 4.1.1 The community consultative process has been extremely inadequate, and there has been a lack of detailed information available from Infigen Energy.
- 4.1.2 The proponent has failed to engage with the community and has fostered division within the community.
- 4.1.3 There has been a tendency to claim other organisations' meetings, minor newspaper articles and other media items as part of the community consultation. Often these have not been relevant to the FCWF proposal.

- 4.1.4 From a face-to-face point of view there has been a lack of respect, and a dismissive attitude by Infigen to many district residents, particularly if they reflect an opposing view to the FCWF.

## **4.2 OVERALL COMMENT**

Community Consultation has amounted to one event held over 2 days at the Tallwood Hall on Friday 19<sup>th</sup> November and Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> November, 2011 and one on one meetings' with a selected few community members.

Infigen Energy's conduct would be better described as "lack of community consultation".

Overall, Infigen Energy's attempt at community consultation has been inadequate and its attempt to convince the community and others that they have fulfilled this role sufficiently is misleading and appears calculated.

Our concerns and questions have never been addressed adequately and our requests for a Public Forum have never been met.

Misinformation, denial and secrecy has created a division within the community and fuelled anger amongst those who will be affected if the project is allowed to continue. Infigen will give no guarantees that we will not be affected.

Neighbours who once relied on neighbours or a family member to lend a hand now have no-one to depend on. Marriages are at breaking point over loyalties to other family members and others are keeping quiet as they don't want to upset their friendships or family members even though they oppose the project. Those we (the FCWTAG) have spoken to are hoping the project never goes ahead.

The Environmental Assessment fails to identify the community disruption that has occurred in this community already or around any community where there is an existing wind farm.

This is an all too familiar story around the world, the lack of community consultation and division of communities. Government Authorities are allowing corporate greed and inadequate policies to divide communities. This has to be stopped and responsibility needs to be taken for the damage that is being done by inappropriately siting turbines too close to communities.

**We note that there has been no consultation or instructions from the Director General to consult with Errowanbang Public School or the Department of Education. This school sits in the valley and will be surrounded by turbines overshadowing it, with the closest turbine approximately 1.5 km away and many turbines within an**

**irresponsible distance. The “Duty of Care” to these children is the responsibility of the Principal of the school and the Department of Education.**

### **4.3 INTRODUCTION**

Infigen Energy (FCWF) claims to understand the benefits and needs required to implement an effective program of community consultation as part of the development process.

Flyers Creek Wind Turbine Awareness Group would sincerely like to understand FCWF’s concept of community consultation and identifying stakeholders, and the methodology and timing they have used in informing the individual stakeholder groups.

### **4.4 STAKEHOLDERS**

#### **4.4.1 History of the Local Community and Infigen (FCWF)**

The proponents of FCWF proposal claim that the initial idea for a wind farm was suggested by a couple of local farmers who contacted Babcock and Brown some years ago describing the Flyers Creek area as being suitable for a wind farm. We note that the Department of Planning’s Keiran Thomas wrote to Mr Jeff Bembrick of Connell Wagner Pty Ltd Environmental Consultants for FCWF on 24 November, 2008 stating that on 24 October, 2008 the Director-General of the Department of Planning declared FCWF to be classified as Part 3A and FCWF lodged an application in December, 2008. This project has therefore been in the pipeline for more than 3 years.

Why then was Infigen Energy selective in their community consultation, choosing to ignore the majority of our community (stakeholders) until November 2010 when they sent notification to residents that there would be Community Consultation at the Tallwood Hall on Friday 19<sup>th</sup> and Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> November, 2010?

A project overview was received with the notification of the Consultation Days in November 2010 and the only other correspondence has been that some community members received a letter dated January 4, 2011, thanking them for attending the Community Information days at Tallwood Hall.

#### **4.4.2 Stages of Consultation – one two-day community information consultation**

In 2008 Infigen Energy installed three 80 metre meteorological masts at the project area potentially visible to nearby neighbours! Most people had no idea what they were and were not informed or consulted. How can this be classed as a key stage of consultation to the community?

Infigen claims that two front page articles (2008 and 2009) in the Central Western Daily (Orange) in the early stages are classed as community consultation. Considering the majority of residents of the Flyers Creek Community live 20 to 30km from Orange and would not frequently buy a newspaper, it would be by absolute chance that residents being affected would have knowledge of these articles.

In November 2010, neighbours within about 3km were consulted. This community consultation at Tallwood Hall on the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> November, 2011 was a token gesture. There was no public discussion and most people felt that they had been set upon by a 'salesman'. The walls and tables were adorned with out- dated maps, missing many homes to the northern end of the project and photo montages that really did not depict the true representation of the turbines to be erected. The general feeling from many attendees was that Infigen Energy and Aurecon (the environmental consultancy) representatives were only there to tell us what will happen whether we liked it or not. Our concerns and questions were met only with indifference leaving people angry and upset that none of their concerns were of any relevance whatsoever to Infigen.

Infigen implied that the notification was sent to residents within a 3 km radius. However members of our group and other members of this community that live within 3 kms have advised us that they did not receive notification of this day and found out by chance. In fact these two days over one weekend passed with some local residents unaware that the community consultation had ever taken place.

Why was a 3 km radius deemed appropriate, when people at much greater distances than 3 kms will be impacted and are part of the Flyers Creek Community?

Infigen also state that multiple advertisements were placed in the Central Western Daily, the Blayney Chronicle and the Local ABC Radio during the two weeks prior to the community information days. This is a rather hit and miss approach to informing a community that will be heavily impacted by a major industrial development the scale of the proposed Flyers Creek Wind Farm.

The objective of the Community Information Days was to provide detailed information on the proposed project, answer questions about the project design, and to obtain feedback and understand further issues of relevance to neighbours. As we can see this was a mere fallacy.

Infigen Energy states that the majority of attendees at the Community Information days were supportive of the proposed development. Do they have a true confirmation of this and what part of the community are they talking about? **The immediate consequence of this community information day was the formation of the Flyers Creek Wind Turbine Awareness Group by the many district residents who in fact did not support the proposed development.**

*Infigen states that a total of 31 attendees (60% of registrants) completed questionnaires; this may or may not be an accurate representative sample of the community! Only 49 people registered their attendance and several attendees chose not to register their details. Infigen's letter dated the 4<sup>th</sup> January 2011 stated about 60 people attended.*

There are 22 or 23 landowners hosting wind turbines. Recent correspondence to these hosts from Infigen Energy has encouraged these landowners to attend any and every event that promotes the proposal in any way. The purpose of this strategy appears to make sure that there is plenty of positive feedback which will then feed into the local media. There are approximately 160 residences within a 5km radius of the wind farm. Additionally the village of Carcoar, population 385, and Mandurama, population 187, both have a setback of 5 km. There are many more residents between the 5 - 10km bands. These numbers would suggest that something is wrong with the way Infigen has informed the community of the consultation days at Tallwood. Attendees who did not register probably have done so wishing to remain unknown because of the differences of opinions with friends and family.

Concerns were expressed by many about the consultation process and the feedback the FCWTAG has heard anecdotally from the majority who were there repeats itself. They felt belittled and were given no information or answers of any consequence.

Infigen Energy was sent a letter by the Director General Mr Sam Haddad on 16<sup>th</sup> August, 2011 directing them to adequately fulfil their Community Consultation obligations. Our community since this time has had no further consultation with Infigen Energy.

#### **4.5 PROJECT DESIGN CHANGES AS A RESULT OF COMMUNITY FEEDBACK**

Why does Infigen Energy believe that removing turbine #1 and #2 will improve the visual impact? All this does is remove 2 out of 46 turbines and we are supposed to be grateful for the concession. What remains will still be, should the proposal be passed by the State Government, a major industrial monstrosity in a magnificent rural landscape of undulating hills and rural landscape rich in agricultural history. Most of this community would disagree that #1 and #2 were the major issue at the consultation days! Was removing turbine #1 and #2 an attempt at Public Relations?

Infigen Energy states that moving turbine #31 just 100 metres north from the original location to place it on the "other" side of the top of the hill will decrease the visual impact. These turbines could be up to 150 metres tall so moving a turbine 100 metres is going to make little difference to any impact it will have. Who was this to satisfy?

#### **4.6 ISSUES RAISED DURING CONSULTATION**

Regarding negotiation and agreements entered into by landowners, one would have to ask whether these agreements were entered into with the full knowledge of the reported

impacts of wind turbines throughout the world. And did the landowners fully understand the implications of what they signed? Were these contracts entered into willingly?

Neighbours and community members have not been taken into consideration when designing the layout at all. Noise and health impacts are being reported up to 10km and more away from wind turbine developments, so why, when turbines are set so close to homes in this community, can Infigen Energy state that they have any consideration for human life?

Some people may view turbines as graceful structures but they have no place in a rural setting; they are industrial developments and nothing less.

People are very aware of the devaluation of property that has been reported world-wide; once again community consultation is misrepresenting the truth. When was the NSW Valuer General Report documenting no devaluation to farms and residences in areas hosting turbines? We know of at least one case in NSW where an application to the Valuer General resulted in the value of a property with turbines on it was reduced, with a concomitant reduction in property rates.

Two of the members of the FCWTAG have placed their home on the market. Their real estate agent has communicated by email that prospective buyers are not interested because of the FCWF proposal and in recent months there have been no inspections when historically this is a popular area for prospective buyers of small acreage holdings.

Human health and safety impacts are of major concern world-wide. Infigen Energy is negligently telling members of the community that there is no evidence of this and is using statements out of context.

Traffic effects can only be seen by this community as a major threat to our already frail road infrastructure and the safety on such. Members of this community have never had this issue addressed adequately by Infigen Energy or seen reports to address this issue. The Environmental Assessment also deals with this inadequately as there is no proper Traffic and Transport Management Plan available.

Inadequate consultation and awareness of the project is still a major issue and even though the FCWTAG has tried to inform the public there are people who are unaware of the extent and timing of this proposal. Comments have been received by the members of the FCWTAG that some people remain totally unaware that this project could happen.

Infigen Energy claims that normal pastoral activities can be continued! If humans can be affected why can't livestock? Where the evidence to suggest that there is no effect on livestock? Questions in regards to reliability and efficiency have never been answered with any empirical scientific evidence. There are reports both in Australia and world-wide of wind energy's inefficiencies.

Comment re photographs on Page 6-14:

Plate 6.1 Discussion with stakeholders at Tallwood Community Hall Information Day. 2 of the 3 ladies are members of the Flyers Creek Wind Turbine Awareness Group, along with Infigen Employee.

Plate 6.2 Jonathan Upson (Infigen Employee) with a Government employee who regularly attends promotional events and public meetings that are arranged by the FCWTAG.

On the whole the proposed Flyers Creek Wind Farm project has been handled in a very unprofessional manner with very little community consultation or regard for human life. The secret negotiations that apparently took for years before the community was informed of the project has been destructive to community cohesiveness and suggests there has been something to hide.

#### 4.7 MYTHS OF PUBLIC CONSULTATION

DATES	MEETING	COMMENT
19-20/11/2010	Community consultation – information days, Tallwood Hall. Arranged by Infigen Energy.	This is the <b>only meeting</b> arranged by Infigen. Publicity was poor. Was not presented as a question and answer format where people could have the opportunity to educate themselves about the FCWF proposal. Attendees were separated so that it was often a one-on-one conversation, with many people feeling isolated, overwhelmed and patronised.
14/03/2011	Blayney Shire Council meeting	FCWTAG asked and were permitted to speak briefly to Council (5 minutes + 2 minute extension). At the same meeting Infigen was given permission to speak to Council for one hour ‘in camera’. This FCWF proposal is a public issue and should have been aired publicly at the Council meeting.
27/04/2011	ECCO Group, Orange arranged a public meeting to discuss the virtues of wind energy. Presentations by Jonathon Upson (Infigen) and DEWWC representative.	This meeting has been classed as a FCWF community consultation by Infigen, yet it had nothing to do with Flyers Creek, did not discuss it and certainly did not promote it to Flyers Creek residents.



DATES	MEETING	COMMENT
28/11/2011	Community Climate Change Group, Bathurst arranged a public meeting – same format as above.	Again this has been classed as community consultation by Infigen. Again it had no relevance to Flyers Creek.
13/10/2011	Meeting called by Infigen in Orange to promote the establishment of a Flyers Creek Wind Farm Co-op, which would purchase one turbine from the FCWF.	This has been classed as community consultation. The purpose of the meeting was not information relating to the FCWF but a “sales promotion” for the co-op. Heavily attended by Infigen employees and associated consultants.
14/10/2011	Ditto. Meeting held in Bathurst	Ditto as above.
28/11/2011	Community Forum organised by Blayney Shire Council (at the request of members of the FCWTAG) to assist the Council assess community opinion in compiling its submission on the FCWF EA.	This also was classed as community consultation and was promoted on the Infigen website as being an Infigen initiative. This announcement has since been removed from the website and Blayney Council’s calling of the meeting was acknowledged. The meeting was arranged such that Infigen (Jonathon Upson) gave a short presentation with little opportunity for questions and answers.

#### 4.8 THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES

Infigen’s association with Government employees is questionable, and of concern to the FCWTAG and to the issue of community consultation. We believe that these employees should remain impartial to any company’s dealings and should be seen to be neutral. Instead repeatedly over the last year we have seen government employees attend meetings to support and sell wind energy to the communities of Orange and Bathurst and these very same employees having been asked by Infigen Energy’s Senior Development Manager to attend meetings to report back to him (personal communication).

There are definite issues of propriety in our view. These Government representatives promote Infigen Energy as being supported by Government. There are community members who tend to unquestioningly believe that whatever the Government says and publishes must



be trusted and accepted. While it is allowed that Government employees may hold personal views in private life, there is no place for bias and in some cases persuasion for such a person in the pursuit of his public duties.

#### 4.9 CONCLUSION

How does Infigen get away with presenting talks and sales events to the general public in Orange and Bathurst, and call it community consultation, when our repeated requests for a community forum are denied and avoided? On many occasions our group has requested technical information and answers to our concerns only to be supplied with vague statements or have our questions dismissed as nonsense. Infigen have never been able to supply us with any independent data, research or technical information.

We still do not have an accurate description, size or model of turbine. The information we have access to from Infigen is full of misinformation, inaccuracies and lacking in detail.

We do note that Infigen CIO, Jillian Carmody, who spoke exclusively to CIO Australia, made the statement, *“Availability of farms is extremely important, and by having intelligent systems, it was easy for them to slice and dice the information as needed for reports.”*

Carmody said the quality of Infigen’s data was another reason for the deployment. *“The meaning of data coming out of those farms wasn’t very consistent either,”* she said.

This begs the question that if the data from the wind farms wasn’t consistent one would then have to question the accuracy of anything being presented by Infigen Energy. Further the question must be asked: **What misinformation has Infigen Energy been feeding the public and government authorities?** Chapter 5 in this submission (Noise and Health) goes some way to answering this question.

#### 4.10 SOURCE MATERIAL

The following sources were used in this Chapter on Community Consultation and is either publicly available or can be produced on request.

Department of Planning - Letter to Mr Jeff Bembrick dated 24<sup>th</sup> November, 2008

Infigen Energy Notification of Community Consultation Days 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> November 2011 and Project Overview dated 4 November, 2010

Infigen Letter dated January 4, 2011

Copy of letters sent to Landowners by Infigen who have signed Leases with Infigen. Date 24<sup>th</sup> October, 2011 and 22<sup>nd</sup> November, 2011

Copy of Blayney Shire Council Facsimile dated 4 March 2011

Minutes of The Blayney Shire Council Ordinary meeting 14 March, 2011

References from Infigen Energy's website relating to Co-op meetings in Orange and Bathurst

Advertisement from Western Advocate relating to Infigen Energy's Jonathan Upson speaking at the Bathurst Community Climate Action Network meeting.

Letter from NSW Planning and Infrastructure Office of the Director General to Jonathan Upson 16 August 2011

Copies of emails from Flyers Creek Wind Turbine Awareness Group to Jonathan Upson of Infigen Energy requesting a Public Forum and emails requesting answers to questions.

Accounts by our group members on Infigen talks to outside community groups.

Letters referencing personal experience with Infigen Energy and consultation issues.

Article from CIO Summit 2011 Jill Carmody CIO Infigen Energy

What if you could own a wind turbine?

Minutes of Meeting Infigen's Wind Co-op 8<sup>th</sup> November 2011

Copies of emails between real estate agent and Flyers Creek potential property vendor about failed sale of property due to FCWF proposal.