

Presentation to the Planning and Assessment Commission Meeting

Rye Park Wind Farm

30 March 2017

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today in response to the Department of Planning and Environment's recommendation that the Rye Park Wind Farm be approved for development, subject to certain conditions.

I strongly support the proposed development and in addition to my comments today, I draw your attention to my written submissions made to the Department during their assessment process (copies attached).

I applaud the Department's decision to recommend approval of the project, however, I am concerned that some of their conditions will jeopardise the viability of the project and that that will adversely impact on the proponents ultimate decision on whether or not to proceed with development of the approved project.

Having reviewed the assessment report and the associated documents a number of times, I believe the conditions fall into two broad categories:

Firstly, those that are underpinned by sensible and well trodden planning laws, regulations and precedent and which take into account the interests and concerns of the broader community, as well as those in the immediate vicinity of the project.

Examples of these include

- preservation of the environment;
- road upgrades and improvements and ongoing maintenance;
- community enhancement funds; and
- make good requirements at the end of the project.

They all appear to be sensible and appropriate conditions to place on such a development.

Secondly, those that are based on unfinalised draft guidelines and, in the view of those more knowledgeable in the area than me, a misapplication of relevant zoning and planning regimes.

In relation to the second category, I am, of course, referring to the Department's decision to remove 25 wind turbines from the project on purely visual grounds.

One of the reasons cited is the cumulative effect of the number of wind turbines in the Rye Park area when taking into account a nearby project that may never be built. It seems to me that the age old cab rank rule makes sense in a development context and future developments need to be mindful of those already approved rather than the other way round. Sure, future possibilities should be a consideration, but the Department's report and the independent visual assessment report almost assume that the nearby project has already been built.

I personally do not mind the look of wind turbines and understand studies show that more people like the look of them than dislike the look of them. One thing is for certain, wind turbines look a lot better and are a lot more sustainable than the open cut coal mine that now exists on the farm I grew up on near Clandulla.

Both the Department's report and the independent visual assessment report suggest that there has been a lack of community consultation and then seek to assume that those who have not taken it upon themselves to comment are not in favour of the project on visual grounds. I agree that in the early years of the proposal the public consultation could have been handled better, however, by the time of the second public exhibition period, in my view, the only reason people did not have their views considered is because they made a positive decision not to publically give those views and that should not be taken as opposition to the project.

On page 39 of its report, the Department says that the project would "not fundamentally change the broader landscape characteristics of the area". If that is the case, why do the 25 wind turbines need to be removed from the project?

As previously stated, my main concern regarding the reduction in the number of wind turbines, other than seemingly being a decision based on flawed reasoning, is that it may result in no project being built due to the impact on viability.

The Rye Park Wind Farm will provide massive benefits for both involved landholders and the community as a whole. In particular, the project will inject significant economic benefits into the community and local businesses. I am yet to see a business that does not get a benefit from additional income. The community enhancement fund will provide much needed funding and will make things possible that will simply not get done without it.

At a personal level on my farm, most of the wind turbines, including those that would be removed under the Department's recommendations, will be situated on some of the least productive parts of my farm and will have little or no impact on the operation of my business.

If built, the project will provide direct economic benefits to my business in the form of:

- allowing me to employ full time labour
- allowing me to fence off gullies and other sensitive areas
- allowing me to better manage and eventually rehabilitate areas affected by salination
- allowing me to improve the productivity of my whole farm
- providing funds in times of drought

This list is by no means an exhaustive list.

All of those benefits will result in me spending most, if not all, of any income I received from the wind turbines on my farm and within the local community in the form of wages, purchasing supplies and services from local businesses and so on.

In my view, the increased demand for services, particularly rural services, in the area is likely to increase the supply of those services which will benefit involved and uninvolved landholders, as well as people who work in providing those services.

The project will also result in me, and others, paying more tax and, although most people do not like paying tax, I don't mind it because if no one pays tax nothing gets done and as a nation we go backwards.

The development, according to the Department's report, will provide a \$621 million capital investment into the local community and it will then provide annual community funds of \$2,500 per wind turbine per year in addition to the ongoing economic and other benefits throughout its term.

It is a once in a lifetime opportunity for the local community that, in my view, should be given every opportunity for success by approving the construction of all of the proposed 109 wind turbines.

Thank you for your time.

Brendan Cockerill

2014 Submission

[New South Wales Government](#)[Department of Planning](#)[Skip to content](#)[Home](#) > [Development Assessments](#) > [Major Project Assessments](#)

Brendan Cockerill , of Ainslie ACT, made the following submission on the project:

Rye Park Wind

Supports this project

I am writing to make a submission in favour of the proposed Rye Park Wind Farm.

I believe the project will provide immediate and long term benefits for the local community and Australia as a whole.

Since we purchased our property at Rye Park a run of dry seasons dramatically impacted on our ability to develop the property in the way we planned when we purchased it.

The proposed wind farm would provide us with additional funding to get the farm improvement back on track by allowing additional funds to be spent on fencing, pasture and soil improvement, weed control and land degradation control.

All of these improvements would require the purchase of goods and services from the local community and would also require the use of local contractors to carry out the work. These benefits would also be ongoing and provide an economic boost to the community.

Improving the productivity of the land is likely to result in higher primary production income which would result in more government revenue and would also improve the viability of the farm business and help us reduce debt and be better able to withstand droughts and times of low commodity prices.

I believe we are not alone and that the proposed wind farm would provide significant economic benefits for all of the involved land owners as well as the members of the broader community.

I also believe some areas are better suited to wind farm development than others and in my opinion the area around Rye Park where our property is located and where the Rye Park Wind Farm is proposed is very well suited to such a project as many of the issues associated with such developments do not apply to our property or the area in general due to its relative remoteness.

I grew up on a property in the Central West of NSW. The owner of the property spent significant amounts of money setting it up for irrigation on improved pastures involving a number of dams and a gravity fed irrigation scheme.

In the early 80's the owners subdivided the property and sold the blocks. A number of the blocks were purchased by a mining company.

Over time mining company purchased more of the blocks and have now turned much of the property into an open cut coal mine. Most of the areas now mined were once productive agricultural land. Who knows if it will ever be usable for anything else in future. I know this is a situation replicated in many productive agricultural areas.

I admit to not being fully aware of all aspects of the debate regarding climate change and its causes. However, just as I believe industrial development is likely to have had some adverse impact on the environment, I believe that industrial developments like wind farms can also have a positive impact on the environment by lowering the reliance on coal powered electricity production and providing landowners with income to better manage their farms.

Wind farms and agricultural production have shown that they can co exist and the additional income will provide real and direct benefits to the surrounding community.

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[Skip to content](#)

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Brendan Cockerill , of Ainslie ACT, made the following submission on the project:

Rye Park Wind

Supports this project

I believe this is the right development with the right developer in the right place. The developer has taken note of prior submissions and has adjusted the project to address the issues raised in a comprehensive and considered way. It has also sought to engage with the farmers and community to obtain feedback and to provide honest and open information on the project and its likely impacts. Not all of it is good in the eyes of everyone, but on balance it appears to me that the benefits of the project will far outweigh any negative impacts it may have and that the positive benefits for the broader community will be significant.

My family and I have been operating a grazing business in the Rye Park area for over 10 years and I can see that this project will have significant economic benefits for the farmers and community of Rye Park as well as for the surrounding area, particularly the major supply towns of Yass and Boorowa. The project will provide a significant direct and long term economic boost for the businesses in those towns and those benefits will flow through to the broader community.

Personally, the economic benefits of the project will allow us to invest more money into our farm and allow us to improve the sustainability of our farming systems and to improve our land. In doing so we will employ more local labour and spend more with local businesses. The project will not impede our ability to operate our grazing business in any way nor will it have any negative impact on our business.

While the project will generate electricity in a more sustainable, cleaner and less environmentally damaging way than some of the traditional forms of electricity generation, I also expect that the economic benefits of the project will have flow on environmental benefits at the farm level by providing funds for better whole farm planning and more environmentally conscious decision making. In our case this will include fencing off and regenerating environmentally sensitive areas such as gully's and putting in place better water infrastructure that minimises the impact on the environment.

The additional funding provided directly to the Rye Park community will enable the community to improve the town infrastructure in ways that simply would not happen if the project was not developed in the area. Those benefits will be a long term benefit for the current residents and all future residents of the town.

The work required on local roads, which will be funded by the developer as part of the project, will both improve the local roads and be a great benefit for the local councils in the area. These externally funded road improvements would, I expect, free up council funds that would otherwise have to go into maintaining those roads.

So either more roads will get improved in the area or the councils will be able to divert the money saved into other areas for the benefit of the whole community.

I am happy to expand on my submission if requested.