

Speaking Notes for the Planning Assessment Commission hearing into the Rye Park Wind Farm - Boorowa - 30 March 2017

-Charlie Prell (representing the Australian Wind Alliance)

INTRODUCTION

Commissioners, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. I'm Charlie Prell, a family farmer from Crookwell, and one of six farmers who will host wind turbines on the Crookwell Wind Farm. I support wind farms for their ability to reinvigorate the agricultural economic base of regional Australia, and to make a substantial contribution to reducing Australia's carbon emissions. Wind farms have the ability to contribute to the economic and environmental well being of communities such as Rye Park, Boorowa, and Yass. Not just to the farmers who host the turbines, but to the wider community through neighbour agreements and community enhancement funding and road upgrades negotiated with local councils.

Today I am speaking to you on behalf of the Australian Wind Alliance. The Alliance is an advocacy group for wind power that represents the views of the community. We have about 800 members (many from this region) who are farmers, hosts, neighbours, wind workers, small businesses and environmental supporters. We are independent of industry. We are independent of Government. We support wind energy, not only for its environmental and climate benefits, but also for the economic benefits that wind farms can, and do, deliver to local communities, farmers, and to Australia's rural and regional economies.

We do not support all wind farms though. We support wind farms that are developed in close consultation with small communities and all stakeholders, including potential hosts, neighbours, and the towns, villages and communities they live in. We recently opposed a wind farm proposal south of Goulburn because in our considered opinion, the developer's communication and engagement with that community was inadequate.

We believe that the communication, community engagement and consultation from Tilt Renewables in the Rye Park-Yass-Boorowa region has been of a very high standard. To be clear, this need not mean that everyone in the community supports the project - obviously, that's not the case on this occasion - but the developer has to be fair, open and transparent. We are satisfied that Tilt has done this.

AWA SUBMISSION

The Department of Planning and Environment is recommending your endorsement of the removal of nearly a quarter of the wind turbines from a project on VISUAL AMENITY GROUNDS. 25 turbines is a small wind farm in itself so this is a huge change that shouldn't be undertaken lightly. Leaving aside the fact that the visual assessment by the Department is highly subjective, the assessment of wind turbines on a visual impact basis is a very dangerous precedent to set in planning law. If we (actually YOU) do decide to set this precedent then you need to do so in a very precautionary manner. In this context, the 16 turbines to the east of the village of Rye Park are more than 3 kilometres from the

closest residence in the village. Also, they are not on the closest ridgeline to the village. All visual assessments undertaken, apart from the one done for DPE, have graded the visual impact of the turbines on the residences in the village as low-to-moderate or moderate. It is therefore flawed for the Department to state that "the project would result in an unacceptable visual impact on the village"¹. "The Department considers this approach is consistent with the objective of maintaining the character of rural villages"² such as Rye Park. The presence of these 16 turbines, more than 3 kilometres from the village, and the Community Enhancement Funding these turbines will generate (approximately \$40,000/annum), will substantially increase the rural amenity of Rye Park, not decrease it.

The 9 turbines in the Intermediate Precinct, in the Blakeney Creek area, are also recommended for removal from the project on VISUAL AMENITY GROUNDS. Once again this is a highly subjective assessment and we believe that the Department's assessment of these turbines is subjective and flawed. There will be a transmission line running along the ridge where these 9 turbines are proposed and yet there is no discussion of the visual impact of this transmission line in the Department's assessment. This ridgeline is already predominantly clear of trees and the project has complied with directions from the Office of Environment and Heritage to consider environmental considerations.

It is very important to emphasise that all of these 25 turbines comply with the NSW Guidelines for Noise for Wind Farms, which are the most stringent in the world. In fact the whole project of 109 turbines must comply with these noise guidelines. This is not an argument about noise, birds, property values, or anything else. It is an argument about visual amenity and visual amenity is highly subjective. It differs according to the perception of the viewer. You have heard from many people today who are not frightened by the prospect of viewing a few wind turbines, in fact most people welcome the view of wind turbines into their landscape. Every study of the visual aspect of turbines in NSW (and Australia) confirms this.

For the first time in many years, maybe the first time ever, local people who have no vested interest in the wind farm are standing up and saying publicly that they want ALL of the turbines and the associated benefits they bring to this community. They have had enough of the fear campaign of the wind farm opponents and want their voice to be heard. You are duty bound to listen carefully to these people. They are the ones who live here!

If the project proceeds to construction this will be by far the largest economic boost to this region for decades, possibly generations.

- An estimated total investment of \$49 million into the local community and businesses will be put at risk if these 25 turbines are removed and the project doesn't proceed to construction.
- The proposed Community Enhancement Fund alone will contribute nearly \$275,000/annum to the community for much needed infrastructure upgrades which could include enhanced

¹ DPE State Significant Development Assessment of Rye Park Wind Farm (SSD 6693): Executive Summary, page 2.

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television, mobile phone and Internet connectivity. This fund will be reduced by \$62,500/annum with the removal of 25 turbines.

- If these 25 turbines are removed from the project that will be a loss of generation capacity that would supply about 30,000 homes with renewable energy.
- The recent heat-wave in NSW and associated near blackout reinforces the need for NSW to get serious about new generation capacity and renewable generation in particular.
- The shortage of gas for electricity generation makes it imperative that new wind farms and solar farms are built to manage this growing crisis.

The Australian Wind Alliance supports the Departments' recommendation to approve the project, but we challenge the conditions of consent imposed on the project which I've outlined above. Most importantly I question the recommendation to remove 25 turbines on the highly contestable grounds of visual amenity. If these 25 turbines are removed from the project this will increase the cost of electricity sourced from the wind farm substantially and seriously impact on the ability of the project to compete into a very competitive market for renewable electricity. The considerable financial benefits that should flow to the local community from this project are threatened by the changes the Department has recommended. There is absolutely no point in gaining approval for a project that may never be built. These turbines should be reinstated to the project and be approved for construction. You have the authority to make this decision.

Charlie Prell

NSW Regional Organiser

Australian Wind Alliance



