



SUBMISSION TO THE INDEPENDENT PLANNING COMMISSION
REGARDING VALLEY OF THE WINDS WIND FARM – SSD-10461

Introduction

I am a very concerned resident, primary production land manager and business owner in the Coolah district. Our house is referred to as Dwelling 138 and is positioned to the east of the Mount Hope cluster of the Valley of the Winds project, 4.7km from the nearest turbine. It is pertinent to mention we are also located less than 8km to the south west of the Liverpool Range Wind project.

The Big Picture

The race to renewables seems to be coming about because of the need to meet government policy regarding emission targets and with the premise that it will reduce the cost of electricity.

The true cost of renewables is extraordinary and these projects would never be commercially viable without the large subsidies being paid out to developers.

It is well known that the emissions generated in Australia is minimal on a global scale. Our hasty efforts to transition to renewables is not going to have much impact on global emissions, yet it is making drastic and irreversible changes to the Australian landscape and way of life. All seemingly with little regard to its residents, particularly those in rural areas where these 'power factories' are being proposed.

As careful stewards of country, my family are taking steps to reduce our carbon footprint, choosing to live off-grid and following regenerative farming practices in order to benefit our landscape. These farming practices include such things as zero till, cover cropping, planned

grazing management, very minimal chemical and herbicide use, riparian zone management and rehabilitation and tree planting initiatives. These practices have measurable positive benefits to the landscape by increasing carbon sequestration and storage. I feel that widespread adoptions of such practices will have a greater positive impact on our environment than any so-called green renewable energy project will ever have.

There has been claims made, mostly by hosts, that these developments will 'drought-proof' the region and bring economic benefits to the community. May I just point out that the only landholders standing to benefit are those who are agreeing to host infrastructure on their land and the neighbours who are being paid to accept the impacts it will have on them. A few measly dollars injected in local towns is not going to have lasting benefits to the region in my opinion.

Cumulative Impact of Projects

I feel the cumulative impact of the multitude of proposed renewable energy projects has not been fully taken into consideration. There are many projects already on the table and how many more to come? Impacts on the local area, the entire region of CWO REZ, and indeed the state of NSW, need to be fully addressed, for example infrastructure, emergency services, roads and traffic, social and economic changes. I request that the commission hold off on a decision on the Valley of the Winds project until such time as the full impacts are understood and can be assessed.

Visual Impact

Overview

The Department's Assessment report states that "The Department is satisfied that the project would not fundamentally change the broader landscape characteristics of the area or result in any significant visual impacts on the surrounding non-associated residences."

This statement is completely false. The district is renowned for its pristine natural landscapes and scenic agricultural vistas. It has been this way for a couple hundred years.

I have over the years enjoyed photographing the natural beauty of the landscape around Coolah. I have produced several calendars containing some of these which have been sold locally in places such as the Coolah Visitor Information Centre. My photographs have been thoroughly enjoyed by other residents, tourists and people who grew up or once lived in the district who appreciate the scenic landscape.

Contrary to the Department's statement above, industrialization with wind turbines and associated infrastructure is absolutely going to have significant visual impacts to the entire area, including many non-associated residences.

Dwelling 138

It has been assessed that our residence will have two 60-degree sectors of turbines with potential visibility of 33 turbines (12 at tip, 21 at hub) which has been assessed as 'low'. Turbines will be visible from EVERY window in our house. I understand visual assessment is made at the residence, but I would like it noted that as farmers, we spend the majority of our days outdoors on the property 7 days a week, not at our house. From some parts of the property, I have calculated it is proposed to have turbines visible for about 270 degrees and I estimate visibility of about 125 turbines at a minimum (cumulatively across the Liverpool Range and Valley of the Winds projects). To say the visual impact is low is absolutely ridiculous!!

Our house affords us wonderful views of the surrounding hills from every room, so vegetation screening is not an option we would choose. Therefore, I would like to request further reduction in the number of turbines in the Mount Hope Cluster to mitigate our visual impact from this project.

To my knowledge, the developer has never contacted or visited our residence and/or offered a photo montage from our residence and I didn't know this was an available service. As a residence that is recognized as one of the 8 within 8km of each project, it is unbelievable that such an assessment has not been carried out here. Therefore, I request a photo montage be provided so that visual impact can be duly assessed before a decision is made and the commission is also welcome to attend our property.

Second Dwelling

There is a second dwelling on the property that has been in existence for approx. 20 years, located near the site of the original homestead that burnt down. It doesn't appear that this dwelling has ever been identified and assessed in any way. I request that proper assessment of all criteria be carried out for this non-associated dwelling.

Shadow Flicker

The assessment for shadow flicker indicates that there would be zero hours per year at our house. This seems inaccurate given our proximity and the direction of turbines to the west. Again, we do not sit inside our house all day, so I feel this assessment should not be limited to the dwelling location.

What research has been conducted on the effect of shadow flicker to livestock and native animals in the area?

Noise Impact

The Noise Assessment indicates less than 30db at our residence. There is minimal unnatural noise of any kind heard at our residence, save the occasional traffic which can be heard travelling along the Black Stump Way in certain conditions. This is the way of life we have chosen and any noise from the construction or operation of this project at our residence is not acceptable. I am concerned that the background low frequency noise from operation will be a nuisance, disrupting our way of life and perhaps affecting our sleep.

I request that baseline noise monitoring be undertaken at our residence and then monitoring during construction and operation to ensure there is no impact.

Biodiversity

Wedge-Tailed Eagles

The Department acknowledges in the Assessment report that the Wedge-tailed eagle has a moderate risk of bird strike. Our property alone is home to at least 2 pairs of Wedge-tailed eagles who have nests here and we have watched them hatch and raise young over the years. I am not aware of the developer performing any sort of population measuring at our property.

What research has been done by the developer to record the current populations of these birds and indeed other impacted species? And will they be required to conduct regular monitoring of species during construction and operation of the turbines? And will there be trigger points for when certain impact limits have been reached?

Box Gum Woodland

The Department has estimated around 2000ha of Box Gum Woodland will be cleared across the CWO REZ. This is not an acceptable environmental sacrifice, to make way for temporary infrastructure that will have a minimal impact on reducing carbon emissions at best.

I note that the developer of Valley of the Winds has been requested to secure 282ha of BGW in accordance with biodiversity offset requirements. I don't agree that this is an answer to the clearing involved in the project. Not only is this putting more Australian land in the hands of foreign ownership, it has the potential for the land to be mismanaged.

I request that conditions be placed on the offset to ensure the land is managed holistically and regeneratively, not just 'locked up', so that it remains a thriving ecosystem and not a harbour for feral pests and a fire hazard.

Property Valuation

Whether concrete evidence is available or not, there are plenty of reports of people experiencing difficulty selling properties in proximity to proposed wind and solar projects. I strongly believe the Valley of the Winds project will have a negative effect on property value. I request that some condition be placed on the developer to obtain independent pre-construction property valuations in the area. There would need to be some assurance that should a landowner have difficulty selling a property or be forced to sell for a much lower value, that the developer would compensate the landowner for such a shortfall in sale price.

Water

Underground water is a valuable asset for primary production in the area. We hold both stock and domestic and irrigation licences and I am concerned about the usage of underground water by the developer and whether the water table will be affected. I request that water table be tested before construction for level and quality. I also request that all bores are metered no matter the dimensions and that usage be reported to the department regularly. The developer should also be made responsible for any damage to water table or contamination of underground water.

Accommodation Camp

The combined proposed accommodation camps of 400 (VoW) and 800 (LRWF) will have a massive impact on local services and community. The population of Coolah from the 2021 census was less than 800 people. This means the localised population of Coolah is going to be more than doubled. That's not taking into account other accommodation camps across the CWO REZ. Further to this, we have witnessed in other towns that workers are largely FIFO and foreign workers who do not fit into the existing community fabric.

I request for the cumulative effect of these camps to be properly assessed before a decision is made on this project.

Decommissioning

Decommissioning conditions require all above ground infrastructure to be removed and the site to be covered with soil or rock. I feel this is insufficient for the rehabilitation of the site. Ideally, all underground infrastructure should also be removed. I request that the word 'rock' be removed as an option and the site must be covered with fertile top soil with sufficient depth for growth of native vegetation and it be revegetated with grasses and shrubs suitable

for the area. And that this work should be completed in an appropriate prescribed timeframe after decommission.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I am deeply concerned about this project and question whether its impacts have been adequately assessed and whether the region is being properly compensated. I feel it would be negligent to make a decision on this project or any others before a full CWO REZ and statewide cumulative impact assessment is undertaken. Overall, I believe this project will contribute to a drastic change to our way of life and take away our ability to enjoy our home and property.

Krystal Leven,
Coolah