

CORRECTED VERSION

ECONOMIC, EDUCATION, JOBS AND SKILLS COMMITTEE

Inquiry into community energy projects

Waurm Ponds — 5 December 2016

Members

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Mr Jeff Bourman

Mr Don Nardella

Mr Peter Crisp

Witnesses

Ms Vicky Grosser, Carbon Manager, Manage Carbon, and
Mr Pat Simons, Cleantech Jobs Coordinator, Friends of the Earth Melbourne, Renew Port Henry
Consortium.

The CHAIR — Well, may we start and welcome and allow me to read this formality before we start. Welcome to the public hearing for the Economic, Education, Jobs and Skills Committee Inquiry into community energy projects. All evidence taken at this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege. Any comments you make outside the hearing are not afforded such privilege. Hansard is recording today's proceedings. We will provide a proof version of the Hansard transcript so you can correct any typographical errors.

Ms GROSSER — Thank you.

The CHAIR — And before I ask to start I introduce my colleague Peter Crisp and Don will be with us shortly. You may, before we start, can you please state your name for the Hansard record and then allow us for some questions. Thank you very much.

Ms GROSSER — Sure. I'm Vicky Grosser, I'm a member of the Point Henry, Renew Point Henry Consortium from Manage Carbon and Community Activist.

Mr SIMONS — Good day. My name is Pat Simons and I am the Cleantech Jobs Coordinator, for Friends of the Earth Melbourne, and also a member of the Renew Point Henry Consortium.

The CHAIR — Thank you.

Ms GROSSER — So we make our opening remarks now?

The CHAIR — Yes.

Ms GROSSER — Great. Well, thank you very much on behalf of the Consortium for us having this opportunity to contribute to the enquiry and I hope we can assist with your fantastic big role and job that you're doing. Thank you for that. I'd like to acknowledge that we're on Wadawurrung country and pay my respects to Elders both past and present and really just to give a short intro to us as a Consortium.

We're a community initiated project that came out of local interest in participating in renewable energy and using an opportunity that is right here before us in the physical location of Geelong and Point Henry otherwise known as Moolapio and so very pleased that Friends of the Earth have been able to work with us in terms of the broader spectrum of the state wide perspective that we're linking to so I'll pass to Pat briefly and then talk a bit more about our local lines.

The CHAIR — Thank you.

Mr SIMONS — Yes. So Friends of the Earth has come on board to assist with this project kind of, you know, helping to link what's going on broadly state wide with how that can help out with local projects. So we're really encouraged by, yeah, just the number of communities throughout the state that are interested in participating in the renewable energy system and are really keen to see the Victorian renewable energy target. You know make strides for community renewable projects.

The other thing that we're interested in is the development of a sort of community developer partnership model which, you know, can sort of bridge the gap between the vision and skills of communities with the additional financial and technical expertise of developer and that's in part why we're participating in this project. So I will let Vicky fill you in a little bit more about the details.

Ms GROSSER — So locally I run a business called Manage Carbon. I am a carbon manager. I work with building energy efficiency on renewable energy projects. Community engagement as well and I am one of the initiators of the Consortium. I'm also a member of Geelong Sustainability and you'll be hearing from them after us and the community owned renewable energy project there. I've been active in that since it began.

I think what we're keen to do is to trial, to do a new model which is a very active rather than just engagement or consultation but effectively active partnership between community where communities in a leading role working alongside business. So we engage the partners that we have in our Consortium because of their expertise, because they're based locally and they're committed to growing jobs and to growing opportunities for renewable energy technology in the state as well.

We've had support from our local MP, Christine Couzens MP and Lisa Neville's office, MP's office,

has been informed too about our project and we also have support of the local Aboriginal community and registered a Aboriginal party as well as trade unions, some of the businesses that are currently situated on the Moolap or Point Henry location.

We particularly have an interest in that site because it's a very exciting opportunity for wind turbines and we can combine it, again a fairly unusual approach, with solar PV system either up to 100 kilowatt system to meet the needs of that area or bigger than that to meet further afield. And I think our strength is that already have an interest and an understanding and commitment from across the community and from Local Government as well.

We're really keen to also by taking forward this project into the State Government's Moolap Coastal Framework Plan and our proposals incorporated in the current first stages in developing that plan so we would like to be able to grow that in order to transition our local region as you know we have issues here in term of the closure of Alcoa and the Ford Manufacturing Plants as well.

So there is interesting jobs and interesting participation in technology development and Deakin University, where I know you've spent some time this morning and seen what work that they're doing, is interested in contributing to the project through research and development as well as is Melbourne University. So we think we're a perfect team to do something that takes community energy to a slightly different space and contribution not just to the region but more state wide.

The CHAIR — Anything further, if not I'll put the first question. How has your proposed project for Point Henry been received by the community and Alcoa please?

Ms GROSSER — At this point we've had interest from Alcoa and a contribution to their 575 submission for decommissioning and moving from that site themselves. We made a submission there. We've presented to local networks so the Aboriginal community, the trade union network through Geelong Trades Hall Centre and also Geelong Sustainability and had discussions with some of the other environmental groups and so far we've had interest and particularly an appreciation that this project can sit alongside some of the other proposals for the Moolap Coastal Framework Plan and directly contribute to them through using existing infrastructure to produce the power that will be needed there.

Mr CRISP — To ask about the development of the site, can you describe Alcoa's consultation process with the Geelong community regarding the development of the Point Henry site and what lessons can the Victorian Government take from the process for industrial sites that are decommissioned in the future?

Ms GROSSER — Great. Thank you. That's a wonderful question. Some of us from the Consortium participated in community consultation, workshops that were run by the 575 consultation processes. They prepared their plans and I went on behalf of our Consortium to the follow up once they produced the draft plan and was able to submit some further details particularly a copy of the map, the handout that, I think, you've all got a copy of there.

The blue map with the proposed siting of the turbines, wind turbines, and so I think they were able to see that in their decommissioning planning they would be able to contribute towards the community energy proposals by incorporating this in their plan. I don't know whether it will be finally, we're still waiting for the final process but I was interested that one of the key consultants and the officer on that project wanted to know more about the benefits from us and were also interested to hear where that might enable them to leave some infrastructure in place so reduce their costs in the future for decommissioning like the power lines that are there. Is there anything you'd add to that, Pat?

Mr SIMONS — I think you covered that pretty well, Vicky.

Mr CRISP — In presenting to Alcoa on this process did you put forward a governance structure for your project and where the funding stream is liking to come from?

Ms GROSSER — No, not in detail. We indicated that we have an opportunity to raise money through local community investment and there is already interest in local community investors. We had interest expressed by businesses on site to utilise the energy so to contribute in that way financially. But our governance is still in fairly early stages but we're all experienced businesses and community collaborators and we intend our next process is to develop our vision in more detail and our governance

as well.

But we'd use models that exist already, strong ones like Hepburn Wind and I believe that you've had an opportunity to go there and to talk to with Taryn Lane and to see the ways that you can develop both the community cooperative component interlinked with the skills and the needed necessary development process and capacity to raise fund at that kind of scale of project up, that we'd follow a similar model to them.

The CHAIR — Have renewable energy generation plants been developed on former industrial sites as well in Australia or overseas and how successful have they been?

Ms GROSSER — Okay.

Mr SIMONS — It's a good question. I'm happy to take that on notice. I believe that there are solar developments in New South Wales on former industrial sites in the sort of Newcastle Hunter region but I'm happy to provide further details on that at a later date.

The CHAIR — Thank you. Don, got any questions?

Mr NARDELLA — How far down the track are you with this?

Ms GROSSER — We've got——

Mr NARDELLA — Or is just still a proposal?

Ms GROSSER — It's a proposal but we have sat down and talked through the next stages that we want to go through. We're currently seeking finance to develop our governance and carry out detailed community engagement locally so to strengthen the broader collaboration of the community. And we've had support from Christine Couzens MP as I mentioned and also there is a strong reference to our proposal within the Moolap Coastal Framework Plan and so we're now basically progressing to the stage of formalising our plans.

And we'll be pleased to present those to anyone and follow those up for your enquiry as well afterwards if that's useful. So we haven't progressed faster than that at this stage because we're aware of the Moolap Coastal Framework Plan being about to be issued for the public response.

Mr NARDELLA — So are you looking at leasing the land or what would be your proposal?

Ms GROSSER — Yes, leasing rather than purchasing.

Mr NARDELLA — So you're going through this as planned development at the moment?

Ms GROSSER — That's exactly what we're doing now, yes.

Mr NARDELLA — And have you got any, I don't want you to name them, but have you got any good investors or is it just local, any sort of anchor investors that will be able to assist you with this?

Ms GROSSER — West Wind Energy have a number of investors that are committed to their future projects so I believe that they're interested in this project as well.

Mr NARDELLA — Good.

Ms GROSSER — Yeah. West Wind are deeply committed to this kind of approach. They're interested in a partnership with community and think their investors would support that.

Mr NARDELLA — You've got, being the old Alcoa site, they use a little bit of electricity.

Ms GROSSER — Yes.

Mr NARDELLA — You've actually got the raw basis of the infrastructure there.

Ms GROSSER — Yes.

Mr NARDELLA — You don't have to—

Ms GROSSER — No.

Mr NARDELLA — In essence install that which would be a real benefit.

Ms GROSSER — That's right. It's a really good complimentary use of existing infrastructure. There would need to be some technological changes.

Mr NARDELLA — Yep.

Ms GROSSER — But, yes, it's a great use of existing infrastructure.

Mr NARDELLA — So do any of these wind turbines hit households within the one K radius?

Ms GROSSER — No, they don't.

Mr NARDELLA — No.

Ms GROSSER — No.

Mr NARDELLA — And how have you been communicating and what's been the response from local people within, I suppose, the region?

Ms GROSSER — Within that actual location some of us were at the community workshop where there were local residents and businesses, people expressing a range of interesting activities that could develop from sports through to business on the site. And we didn't—I expected to receive some negative feedback but we didn't get any at all within that hearing and there must have been 30 to 35 people present. That was the Alcoa session.

Mr NARDELLA — Did you sign any up as shareholders?

Ms GROSSER — That's a great idea. We missed that opportunity.

Mr NARDELLA — Yeah.

Mr CRISP — I just need some clarification from a previous answer because a part of what your recommendations was that these are the only two planning regulations that prohibit wind farms in particular zones such as the Bellarine Peninsula within five kilometres of urban areas.

Ms GROSSER — Yes.

Mr CRISP — But then you said that yours are within a one K which is Point Henry is not on the Bellarine Peninsula or is subject to VC82?

Ms GROSSER — It is subject to the VC82, yes.

Mr CRISP — So you've got within five K's you've got to pick up some houses from Point Henry?

Ms GROSSER — Yes. Can I refer to you, Pat, to say a bit more about that planning?

Mr SIMONS — Yes, sure. So I believe that it's the Government's kept policy commitment to remove the no go zones for wind turbines through the state and, you know, we have very much welcomed that from the beginning of their term and as they roll out the Victorian renewable energy target that will be an important part of meeting that policy goal. So in part you know this is the real nature of the need to remove the no go zones. There are communities that want to build, you know, legitimate projects on the ground and that planning restriction is a barrier to that.

Mr CRISP — Other than that barrier are there any other barriers to the project that you're proposing?

Mr SIMONS — No. No, I don't think that there are.

Ms GROSSER — In fact there's an enormous amount of benefits and I think we would see ourselves as contributing to technology developments, for example, towards the potential for original microgrids

in the future and also one of the issues that I've certainly been actively a part of locally is how we involve community that, for example, can't have solar PV systems on their own homes either because they're low income or they're renters or a part of apartment blocks where they're not able to do that or the location is not suitable.

We've got expressions of a great deal of interest from people to be involved in clean energy or an alternative to use of brown coal for generating renewable energy in the future. So, for example, one of the PV systems we're looking at is the potential and it is again a developing model in Victoria of solar gardens which mean that the individuals don't need their own PV system but they can buy their electricity from us, a solar panel generation that is not on their location but would be Point Henry. So I think in terms of potential for jobs and technology contributing to future development of energy generation and distribution as well as the contribution to reducing greenhouse gas—

Mr NARDELLA — Jobs and growth.

Ms GROSSER — Yes, that's right. Sorry, I missed that one. What was that?

Mr NARDELLA — Yes. All right. I just had a brain snap, that's all right.

Ms GROSSER — Fair enough.

Mr SIMONS — I've just got one more point to make afterwards.

Ms GROSSER — Yes. So really that's we see ourselves as contributing a lot of benefits through this model.

Mr SIMONS — Just to follow up on your question, Peter. I would have to double check in terms of the restriction on this specific project but other sort of planning issues that, you know, the Government is looking into at the moment is PiLoR which is the payment in lieu of rates which affects community scale wind projects but I wouldn't give a specific answer for this project but happy to talk about it in the future.

Mr CRISP — Thank you.

Mr NARDELLA — The way that you've sited these turbines you're looking at both solar and wind.

Ms GROSSER — M'mm.

Mr NARDELLA — Are you going to have problems in overshadowing, shading, are you just looking at using the Point or going further back with the solar?

Ms GROSSER — Further back with the solar, yes.

Mr NARDELLA — Yes. So down to the—yeah, okay.

Ms GROSSER — Yes. For example, there are two waste areas from products waste materials from the Alcoa manufacturing process that I don't believe have been designated for what will happen with those sites afterwards and they're a really good example. Green Earth Electrical that is the local solar provider is currently doing a big project on a previous waste site. Installation of large scale solar so that's something that they would be keen to replicate on Point Henry.

Mr NARDELLA — Okay. Yes, so that's the reason that you're putting in both—

Ms GROSSER — Yes.

Mr NARDELLA — So whereabouts is that on the map?

Ms GROSSER — It hasn't been identified at a specific location.

Mr NARDELLA — It hasn't been identified. That's a secret location is it?

Ms GROSSER — It's an unidentified location as yet.

Mr NARDELLA — Okay. Good. Yes.

Ms GROSSER — No secrecy about it in the sense that we wait to hear about the feedback from the Moolap Coastal Framework Plan as well as what the decisions are for proposed designation of the land from the 575 commission report as well. I think the other thing I'd want to say in terms of investment, just a thought that came to me as well, is obviously you'll hear shortly from Geelong Sustainability from the community owned renewable energy project and their investors are very ready to contribute to local projects. Many people are wanting to invest in green energy as opposed to brown energy for the future and so we see—we do believe that we've got a lot of local interest in investment in the project as well.

Mr NARDELLA — M'mm.

Mr CRISP — Perhaps I might just take us on a slightly different take, energy efficiency and how the energy efficient measures are being incorporated into community energy projects?

Ms GROSSER — Generally in the region or in relation to—

Mr CRISP — We're looking, we're talking about the generation part but I think interested in your views on energy efficiency and whether they have a role in a community energy project.

Ms GROSSER — Yes, I think they do. One of the things is education and awareness and we would anticipate this project being attributed to that because often people think, well if I slap a five kilowatts solar PV system on my home or my business all my issues will be resolved but in fact comfort in a building and efficiency for a production processes are really impacted by addressing energy efficiency.

So there has been and there will continue to be in this region a lot of looking at ways that businesses and manufacturing can reduce their energy use than they are in the technology that's used for that process. But also had a help building owners and I developed central Geelong energy efficiency program for commercial buildings when I worked for Future Proof in Geelong and we won the partnership award nationally through City Switch for that because we enabled business to reduce their energy use before they looked at how they incorporated renewable energy.

So they were then using smaller PV systems or looking at different ways to save energy, lighting up grades and so on before they did that change. So it really helps people look at how what energy is, where it comes from and how it's utilised and the impacts and the cost reductions that can come through that as well.

Mr CRISP — Thank you. That's what it's all about.

The CHAIR — Anything further?

Mr NARDELLA — No.

The CHAIR — If not, on behalf of the Committee I'd like to thank you for your time and your contribution. Thank you very much.

Mr SIMONS — Great. Thank you very much. I really appreciate it.

Ms GROSSER — Thank you. I'll look forward to hearing—seeing the Hansard report.

Witnesses withdrew.