### Key findings

| 6.1 | Wind farm developments have evoked passionate responses from the community and proponents in Victoria. Proponents have described some opponents as vexatious, whilst opponents have described wind farm turbines as ‘monstrous toys’. Despite these extreme positions, limited surveys of community attitudes towards wind farms in Victoria and overseas show that 60–70 per cent of people find wind turbines an attractive element in the landscape, with the remaining respondents split evenly between undecided or disliking turbines. |
| 6.2 | The *Policy and planning guidelines for development of wind energy facilities in Victoria* provide limited guidance on community consultation. However detailed methodologies have been developed by the Environment Protection and Heritage Council and the former Australian Wind Energy Association. A certification system has been developed in response to the need for sound environmental and social management in the wind energy industry. A limited number of companies have applied to participate in the scheme to date. |
| 6.3 | Community groups and individuals expressed reservations about the efficiency of wind farm technology and greenhouse gas reductions achieved. The impact of turbines on property values; noise and health impacts, potential fire risk and impact on livestock were also common concerns. |
| 6.4 | The main concerns relating to the community consultation process, in the view of proponents, is the planning panel process – the length and substance of the hearings. |
| 6.5 | Local councils highlighted both the negative and positive impacts of wind farms on their area. Some of the significant benefits include the original and ongoing investment in the region. However wind farm and other major developments have also had an impact on local tourist industries, created accommodation shortages and social tension. |
| 6.6 | Community led approaches to identifying suitable sites for wind farms and the establishment of community engagement committees may address some of the negative social and economic impacts of wind farm developments on small communities. |
... Another impact has been from the tourist activity and the amount of people who go out there [to the wind farms in Wattle Range Council, South Australia] now. The locals drive at their normal pace; the tourist traffic tends to go even slower, even stopping at some places, jumping fences. I do not know why they do it, but they hug turbines, apparently.\textsuperscript{529}

Mr Frank Brennan, Chief Executive Officer, Wattle Range Council

... I am an objector, because I wish to protect my family’s health, assets – the assets include a heritage-listed house and garden, particularly the garden, which is listed as one of the 1001 gardens worldwide to see before you die; it is going to be destroyed – and a rural way of life from a proposed wind farm. The record says I will fail and fail spectacularly. But do I have a choice? This farm and historic property is now unsaleable. In fact my wife and I have had to leave because we just could not look at the vista every morning and know it was going to be destroyed. We are genuine refugees from a proposed wind project. Now my children are living there with their children but I really fear for their health. I am sure they will have to leave.\textsuperscript{530}

Mr Peter Mitchell, Western Plains Landscape Guardians Association

It is important to take note of what is the 90–10 rule: that less than 10 per cent of the wind farms get 90 per cent of the media. There are many wind farm projects in Victoria that have gone through the planning process where I could list the names of them and I would guarantee you have probably never heard of them because they were not controversial. Sure there were a handful of people who put in objections, three or four, and the last two projects I worked on had three written objections each. There were a couple of projects, particularly in Gippsland, which were very controversial and you think of those, but that is not a representative sample of the controversy wind farms have [created].\textsuperscript{531}

Mr Jonathan Upson, Project Manager, Infigen Energy

Introduction

Community acceptance of wind farms is an important prerequisite for successful project applications and long-term outcomes. Given that wind farms are increasingly large industrial facilities that extend across extensive sections of the landscape, the Committee believes that effective and thorough community consultation is vital. This chapter is relevant to part a) of the terms of reference relating to major obstacles facing investors in large-scale renewable energy projects in Victoria as some of the proponents have advised the Committee that they regard some community representatives as vexatious and lengthy planning panel hearings as a barrier to investment in renewable energy projects. Given that proponents lease land from landholders to site their turbines, local and wider community support is essential. Term of reference c) relates to opportunities to reduce risk and delays for investors including through streamlining appeals processes. The community’s opportunity to contribute to wind farm proposals through planning panels is discussed in this context. This chapter also relates to term of reference d) as the community’s desire to respond to the problems of greenhouse gas emissions and climate change is a significant future driver of renewable energy in Victoria.

\textsuperscript{529} Mr F Brennan, Chief Executive Officer, Wattle Range Council, Environment and Natural Resources Committee public hearing – Adelaide, 28 September 2009, transcript of evidence, p.232

\textsuperscript{530} Mr P Mitchell, Western Plains Landscape Guardians Association, Environment and Natural Resources Committee public hearing – Melbourne, 10 August 2009, transcript of evidence, p.94

\textsuperscript{531} Mr J Upson, Project Manager, Infigen Energy, Environment and Natural Resources Committee public hearing – Melbourne, 6 July 2009, transcript of evidence, p.5
At the outset of the chapter, the Committee noted that the sheer volume of documentation associated with wind farm applications is a barrier to community consultation. For instance, the summary of the Stockyard Hill Wind Farm project is 21 pages. Moyne Shire Council advised that the Hawkesdale wind farm application is a very large document: ‘It is not the biggest farm. It is just one of the ones that is about 60 towers. Volume 1 of the accompanying report was 486 pages, volume two was 210 pages and there was a supplementary volume that was another 234 pages. Physically even notifying the community and having copies for them to look at – even if they wanted to read 800 pages inside four weeks – is getting very difficult. It is too big and complex in that sense’. The Committee understands some of the frustrations and difficulties of communities trying to comprehend the details of such projects without the assistance of experts, as proponents have such access and resources. The Committee has made five recommendations it believes will improve community understanding of wind farms, the community consultation process and the social impacts of such developments.

This chapter examines community attitudes towards wind farms and the community consultation process. Community concerns regarding wind farm projects, both substantive and procedural, are then discussed. The perspective of proponents and local councils with regard to community consultations and the social impacts of wind farms are outlined. The community consultation process associated with the Challicum Hills wind farm near Ararat is provided as an example of sound and effective community consultation.

Community attitudes towards wind farms

The construction of wind farms in Victoria and other Australian jurisdictions has elicited passionate and contrasting responses from the community, as illustrated above. The level of support for wind farms in Victoria and other jurisdictions depends on a number of factors including the size and profitability of properties and land use. As the Secretary of DPI explained: ‘In general terms it seems that the most successful proposals are ones where they [proponents] go not necessarily to the state’s best wind resources but where you have reasonably large properties, so relatively low density population, normally working farms rather than amenity properties…’. In such instances the impacts on neighbouring properties may be minimised and those most impacted on receive the financial benefits of lease payments.

Some submissions to the inquiry explained that the projects cause substantial community division and stress. The submission prepared by the Shires of Moyne, Southern Grampians, Glenelg, Corangamite and the City of Warrnambool stated that ‘the social and economic aspects of major projects have lasting impacts on local communities. In some instances these are very direct and pit neighbour against neighbour where one sees a financial benefit from a lease for example, and another gains no financial benefit and sees only negative impacts from vegetation removal, visual

532 Origin Stockyard Hill Wind Farm, Summary guide, December 2009,
533 For example refer to: Mayor M Braes, Wattle Range Council, Environment and Natural Resources Committee public hearing – Adelaide, 28 September 2009, transcript of evidence, p.230
534 Mr R Bolt, Secretary, Department of Primary Industries, briefing to the Environment and Natural Resources Committee – Melbourne, 22 June 2009
535 For example refer to: Mr B Keen and Ms H Barker, submission no.14, p.3, Macarthur-Hawkesdale Landscape Guardians, Environment and Natural Resources Committee public hearing – Port Fairy, 8 September 2009, transcript of evidence, p.191
intrusion ...'. Wellington Shire Council advised that unfortunately its experience with the local community has shown a generally negative reaction towards wind energy facility development.

On the other hand, in Hepburn Shire, central Victoria, a cooperative has been established to develop a four megawatt wind farm to supply enough electricity for most of the 2,300 households in Daylesford and Hepburn Springs. The cooperative has experienced difficulties raising the required capital but expects to finalise contracts with the turbine supplier, electricity grid operator and electricity retailer in early 2010. This project illustrates strong support for wind farms within that community. Another area of strong community support for wind farms is Ararat in the state’s south west. Mr Eoghan McColl, Planning and Building Manager at Ararat Rural City Council explained that:

> Having worked in Ballarat and shifting further west ... I think the concept of what the farming area is and what it is actually meant to do is different. Recognising the Grampians and Mount Langi Ghiran, you have got some clear iconic vistas and views but land that the farmers use is there to be used to produce something. I think the idea of a wind farm works within their concept ... I think the other advantage ... of the Challicum Hills site was that it was and has been shown to be in an area that had relatively low conservation flora and fauna values ...

Perception studies show that in many Australian and overseas examples that between 60-70 per cent of people find wind turbines an attractive element in the landscape, with up to 15 per cent of respondents undecided and 20 per cent disliking wind farms. A number of localised surveys have been conducted to gauge community sentiment regarding wind farms in Victoria. Environmental Resources Management Australia (ERM) found that although community consultation is undertaken as part of the planning process for wind farms, this consultation is mostly qualitative in nature, in that it seeks the views on a number of aspects of the wind farm development from specific stakeholders, including the local community, and those further away, as well as the views of special interest groups, government and local government agencies involved or impacted by the development. Furthermore this information is primarily anecdotal and is not rigorously documented.

The findings of the three Victorian studies, contained in the Mortlake wind farm proposal, are set out in figure 6.1. The surveys highlight that community support for wind farms is greater than 60 per cent. This is consistent with community perception studies conducted overseas.

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536 Shires of Moyne, Southern Grampians, Glenelg, Corangamite and the City of Warrnambool, submission no.24, p.17
537 Wellington Shire Council, submission no.19, p.1
538 Mr E McColl, Planning and Building Manager, Ararat Rural City Council, Environment and Natural Resources Committee public hearing – Ararat, 24 August 2009, transcript of evidence, p.117
539 Environmental Resources Management Australia, Mortlake wind farm: preliminary landscape assessment, August 2007, p.4
540 Environmental Resources Management Australia, Mortlake wind farm: preliminary landscape assessment, August 2007, p.4
Figure 6.1  People’s perception and response to wind farms in Victoria’s landscape

Wind Farms on Coastal Headlands (Kantos and Quint for Department of Natural Resources and Environment, 2000) – participant response

Nirranda wind farm respondents attitudes to wind farms. A visitor survey was conducted in 2002 on the possible visual impacts of the proposed wind farm on the Bay of Islands viewing platform, located adjacent to the Nirranda site in the Shire of Moyne. When presented with a proposal from a scenic coastal lookout (Bay of Islands) the support for a wind farm at the location declined and opposition increased.

Level of support for potential wind farms at Yaloak and Crowland sites (2004).

Source: Environmental Resources Management Australia, Mortlake wind farm: preliminary landscape assessment, August 2007, pp.5–6
The Committee requested information on surveys conducted or commissioned by government departments on community attitudes towards wind farms. Mr Peter Naughton, Acting Executive Director, Energy Sector Development Division, Department of Primary Industries advised that:

*I am not aware of any DPI or other department having commissioned a formal survey of this kind.*

The Committee also asked local councils who had approved wind farms whether community surveys had been conducted. Corangamite Shire Council, Ararat Rural City Council, Wellington Shire Council and Hepburn Shire Council advised that community surveys had not been conducted. Although Corangamite Shire in partnership with Warrnambool Council is planning to assess community attitudes through a review of its rural lands policies and anticipates feedback on the suitability of places for wind farms through this process.

In Victoria, there has been criticism of the community consultation process by both wind farm proponents and opponents. Community consultation by proponents for some of the early wind farm projects was to some extent unsatisfactory and constrained by the investment climate and policy settings. As Mr Mark Wakeham, Campaigns Director of Environment Victoria explained to the Committee at a public hearing:

*... we obviously need communities to be comfortable with renewable energy project development. I think that a lot of the issues that have arisen, particularly around acceptance of wind farms, have been a result of having very low federal renewable energy targets for so many years. From 1999 to 2007 we had a 2 per cent or 9500 gigawatt hour renewable energy target nationally. Basically that meant that the first 30 or so projects [Australia wide] that got through the door got up under that target. That meant that proponents had to rush their projects and rush their engagement with the community to ensure that their projects got financed under that federal renewable energy target. If we have a long-term target which is significantly higher, it allows a developer to know that they can spend as long as it takes – whether it is 12 months, two years or three years – to talk with the community and make sure they are comfortable with the proposal while knowing they are not going to miss out on the market mechanism to deliver the finance for their project.*

Conversely, some opponents to wind farms projects have been described as vexatious. The Committee has concluded that there are opportunities to improve the community consultation process from both the public and the proponents’ perspective.

### Community consultation

Both the Department of Primary Industries and the Department of Sustainability and Environment emphasised to the Committee, the importance of sound community consultation on wind farm proposals. The departments also advised that community consultation is the responsibility of proponents. However, the government has identified a need for community education on renewable energy and the need to define community consultation by proponents.

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541 Department of Primary Industries, personal communication, 2 February 2010
542 Corangamite Shire Council, personal communication, 19 January 2010
543 Mr M Wakeham, Campaigns Director, Environment Victoria, Environment and Natural Resources Committee public hearing – Melbourne, 10 August 2009, transcript of evidence, pp.70–71
Chapter 6: Community consultation and the social impacts of wind farms

The 2006 Victorian Government Renewable Energy Action Plan (REAP) outlines a series of objectives including to ‘build informed and engaged communities’. One of the key challenges for the Victorian Government in relation to facilitating investment in renewable energy projects in Victoria, identified in the government’s submission, is to ‘continue to develop, communicate and engage key stakeholders and the community in relation to the Government’s renewable energy strategies, policies and initiatives’. According to the most recent of these policy documents – the Victorian Climate Change Green Paper – the government already provides a number of information and education programs to help Victoria to adapt to climate change. ‘However, as the demand for information about climate change grows, the Government may need to expand investment in information, education, community engagement and behaviour change initiatives and place an even greater emphasis on making sure that information is locally relevant, practical and easily accessed’. The Committee believes that a comprehensive review of the extent to which the 2006 REAP objective has been met would be timely. The findings of such a review would assist in defining future strategic and regulatory priorities.

**RECOMMENDATION 6.1**

The Victorian Government evaluate and publish the outcomes of its 2006 Renewable Energy Action Plan objective to ‘build informed and engaged communities’.

In 2007 Sustainability Victoria released the publication *Wind energy: myths and facts*. The publication was prepared ‘in a bid to make Victorians aware of how wind energy can supply our state’s energy needs in the future’. It ‘dispels’ myths relating to greenhouse gas reductions, reliability, costs, community benefits, noise, birds and livestock, community support and location (including impacts on property values) and safety. The number of wind farm projects in operation and that have been granted approval, has increased exponentially since the release of the publication. Many of the myths addressed in the publication continue to be perpetuated by opponents to wind farm projects. The Committee believes that the document is useful and informative but the publication would benefit from revision and wider circulation. The revision could tap into the wealth of local knowledge and experience that has been gained from the many wind farm projects that have been subsequently developed in Victoria. Accordingly the Committee recommends that:

**RECOMMENDATION 6.2**

The Sustainability Victoria publication *Wind energy: myths and facts* be revised to reflect local experiences of wind farms and widely distributed.

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544 Victorian Government, submission no.21, p.6
545 Victorian Government, submission no.21, p.21
546 Department of Premier and Cabinet, *Victorian climate change green paper*, June 2009, p.82
The main guidance from the state government on consultation with the community is set out in the 2009 *Policy and planning guidelines for development of wind energy facilities in Victoria*. The section entitled *Pre-application consultation with community and stakeholders* is new. The previous version of the guidelines contained only one sentence on the issue. Despite the title referring to the pre-application phase, the guidelines recommend that proponents develop a community and stakeholder communication and consultation plan, which the Committee understands would be revised and relevant for the life of a wind energy project. The Committee concluded that the guidelines are basic and contain sparse detail and direction to proponents on the complex process of community consultation on wind farm projects. Proponents are referred onto the very detailed but generic DSE *Effective Engagement Kit* and *Best Practice Guidelines for Implementation of Wind Energy Projects in Australia* developed by the former Australian Wind Energy Association.

More detailed guidance has been developed on community and stakeholder consultation by the Environment and Protection Heritage Council. The draft National Wind Farm Development Guidelines were released in October 2009 and contain a technical appendix describing:

- five principles which should be employed by wind farm developers when planning and delivering participation activities – focus, inclusive, responsive, open and transparent provision of information and timely feedback and evaluation;
- considerations for planning stakeholder participation programs, including preparing and delivering Communication and Consultation Plans and making an early commitment to stakeholder participation in the development process;
- a recommended methodology for planning and delivering stakeholder participation activities associated with the various stages of a wind farm’s development; and
- requirements for stakeholder input into the assessment and management of key technical study areas (i.e. noise, landscape, birds and bats, shadow flicker and electromagnetic interference).

The level of stakeholder participation recommended is set out in table 6.2 below:

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548 Department of Planning and Community Development, *Policy and planning guidelines for development of wind energy facilities in Victoria*, September 2009, pp.17–18
Table 6.2 The level of stakeholder participation recommended for various stages of the wind farm development process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Level of community participation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Site selection</td>
<td>Inform: to provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project feasibility</td>
<td>Consult: to obtain feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning application</td>
<td>Involve: to work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>Consult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operation</td>
<td>Consult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decommissioning</td>
<td>Involve</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


While the methodology has been prepared to provide guidance to proponents, it can also act as a tool for stakeholders to understand:

- when participation in a wind farm development may commence and occur;
- how participation may occur; and
- what developers should do to support stakeholder participation in the wind farm development process.

A more detailed methodology of stakeholder participation by project stage is set out in figure 6.3.
### Figure 6.3 Stakeholder participation methodology by project stage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site Selection</th>
<th>PLANNING</th>
<th>CONSULTATION</th>
<th>TECHNICAL AREA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S1 – Site Selection (Regional)</td>
<td>Conduct background information on local areas, including wind development history (if any)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2 – Site Selection (Local)</td>
<td>Prepare a preliminary Communication &amp; Consultation (C&amp;C) Plan to accompany site selection investigations only</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S3 – High Level Risk Assessment</td>
<td>Prepare Project Communication &amp; Consultation Plan (to be implemented at next stage, if decision to progress investigations occurs)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Feasibility</td>
<td>Implement Project C&amp;C Plan</td>
<td></td>
<td>Bird &amp; Bat: Information sought from relevant government agencies (Department of Sustainability and Environment, Natural Heritage and Environment Victoria)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PFI – Wind Monitoring</td>
<td>Key milestones: - Establish dialogue with identified stakeholders - Inform stakeholders of project details and progress - Consult with stakeholders to receive feedback and input</td>
<td></td>
<td>Landscape: Information and advice sought from local planning authority on community landscape values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PF2 – Preliminary Technical Studies</td>
<td>Review feedback received from community &amp; stakeholders, incorporate feedback prior to progressing to planning application</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning Application</td>
<td>Review and advise Project C&amp;C Plan where necessary</td>
<td>Continue to implement Project C&amp;C Plan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PA1 – Detailed Technical Studies</td>
<td>Revise feedback received from stakeholders and incorporate into design where possible, Prepare Report of consultation conducted to date &amp; outcomes</td>
<td>Key milestones: - Continue seeking feedback and input from stakeholders to understand concerns and opinions and where possible, incorporate into project design - Community Information Events</td>
<td>Noise: Provide background noise results to stakeholders (see P55)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PA2 – Planning Application</td>
<td>Review and advise Project C&amp;C Plan, Incorporate into project design, Ensure inclusion of complaints handling process</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PA3 – Planning Hearings</td>
<td>Provide assistance with coordination of Planning Application Submission &amp; Hearing with approval body, where required</td>
<td>Inform stakeholders of PA lodgement and public hearing, Facilitate community involvement in hearing process</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>Review and review Project C&amp;C Plan, Ensure inclusion of complaints handling process</td>
<td>Implement revised Project C&amp;C Plan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C1 – Finalisation of Management Plans</td>
<td>Co-ordinate appropriate signage and public information access points (e.g., web, local building)</td>
<td>Seek input from stakeholders in final design plans</td>
<td>Noise &amp; Shadow Flicker: Develop noise, shadow, and vibration mitigation plans, +/− 250 metres.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2 – Construction</td>
<td>Continue to implement Project C&amp;C Plan</td>
<td>Key Milestone: - Communicating construction activities</td>
<td>Noise: Loggers placed at identified stakeholder properties to conduct noise monitoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operation</td>
<td>Prepare Operational C&amp;C Plan, Consider opportunities for community access to facility</td>
<td>Implement Operational C&amp;C Plan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O1 – Operation</td>
<td>Key Milestone: - Announce commencement of wind farm operation - Communicating outcomes of monitoring</td>
<td></td>
<td>Noise: Monitor mitigation with affected parties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O2 – Monitoring (Compliance)</td>
<td>Birds &amp; Bat: Reporting to relevant government agencies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O3 – Monitoring (Confirmation)</td>
<td>Shadow Flicker: Monitor mitigation efficacy with affected stakeholders</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decommissioning</td>
<td>Prepare Decommissioning C&amp;C Plan, Consider opportunities for community involvement in rehabilitation</td>
<td>Implement Decommissioning C&amp;C Plan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D1 – Decision</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D2 – Decommissioning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D3 – Redevelopment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: Environment Protection and Heritage Council, Draft National Wind Farm Development Guidelines, October 2009, p.54
The Victorian Government’s submission describes public involvement in the planning approvals process as follows:

*Victoria’s planning system is robust and comprehensive and provides an appropriate assessment process for land use and development proposals, including renewable energy projects. A fundamental part of this process is the opportunity for all stakeholders’ views to be considered and resolved with a high level of public involvement and acceptance. Victoria’s planning system provides for extensive public involvement. This includes notification and appeal rights for permit application, independent planning panel hearings where the Minister is [the] responsible authority or where an application is called-in by the Minister, or review by the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) where the local council is the responsible authority*. 550

Mr Keith Jackson, Regional Director, Grampians and Barwon south west regions, DPCD, outlined the public consultation process for a wind farm proposal at a public hearing in Port Fairy:

*With regard to [the] community consultation process, including the role of planning panels in the south-west region, DPCD encourages proponents to effectively engage with relevant stakeholders, including government and statutory agencies, councils and local communities, while they finalise their proposals and before a formal application is lodged. The formal public notice process undertaken as part of the planning permit application process usually allows a period of six weeks for lodgement of submissions and provides the affected persons the opportunity to make a submission and to be heard in support of this submission by an independent panel that comprises professional experts appointed from Planning Panels Victoria’s members list. The hearing conducted by the independent panel provides a structured forum for the review of the issues raised by submitters, including the proponent, and the merits of the proposal. What is important there is that there is a formal mechanism that indeed allows [the] community to present to that panel, to have direct input, to influence or to provide information that needs to be considered around the decision making process.* 551

DPCD also advertises planning applications in newspapers and notifies people within a radius of up to five kilometres of the proposed site.

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550 Victorian Government, submission no.21, p.11
551 Mr K Jackson, Regional Director, Grampians and Barwon south west regions, Department of Planning and Community Development, Environment and Natural Resources Committee public hearing – Port Fairy, 8 September 2009, transcript of evidence, p.205
Case Study: Community consultation for the Challicum Hills wind farm

The consultation process for the Challicum Hills wind farm, near Ararat in western Victoria reflects many of the ‘best practice’ principles set out above. The wind farm comprises 35 turbines with a capacity of 52 megawatts. Planning for the project commenced in 2001, predating the codification of any Victorian or national wind farm policies and guidelines.

The Committee believes that a number of factors have contributed to the success of the community consultation process. The starting point of Pacific Hydro – the proponent – was a commitment to the local community for the life of the project. As Mr Terry Teoh, Executive Manager Development, explained: the community engagement process ‘was driven by a sense that our social licence in the long-term had to be prepared on those foundations. It was not just about permitting it as a transaction; it was about looking across the project being there for 20 years’. The company also drew on international practice for permitting wind farms and ‘adopted all the thresholds and rigour that were found internationally in regard to flora and fauna and heritage and compatibility with existing infrastructure’.553

The consultations were broad and included the local council, local community and various state agencies that had de facto responsibility for the environmental and social parameters of the proposed project. As Mr Teoh explained:

Along the way through there was a strong emphasis on explaining wind farming a new activity, both to agencies and to the community. Obviously the decision makers, the agencies and the community were comparatively unfamiliar with wind farming, so we felt it was very important to provide as much information as possible that everyone would be brought up to speed with their understanding of what the project entailed … In terms of process, it was a case of going out to the community and engaging at a really broad level with Landcare groups, environmental concern groups, all the quadrants of the community that we could find either through representation or as individuals.554

552 Mr T Teoh, Executive Manager Development, Pacific Hydro, briefing to the Environment and Natural Resources Committee – Ararat, 25 August 2009
553 Mr T Teoh, Executive Manager Development, Pacific Hydro, briefing to the Environment and Natural Resources Committee – Ararat, 25 August 2009
554 Mr T Teoh, Executive Manager Development, Pacific Hydro, briefing to the Environment and Natural Resources Committee – Ararat, 25 August 2009
[The public education process] started by [Pacific Hydro] bringing props, turbines, all sorts of things into town. I think nearly every school child in Ararat or the municipality at that stage had the opportunity to come up with their family or their friends, close and personal, to touch, look, feel and see and demystify what this whole wind farm process was about. I think it cannot be underestimated how powerful that was in informing people, not based on fear but based on fact …

Challicum Hills happened at a time before there was a lot of mainstream coverage of wind in particular as an energy source. The community in this area made up its own mind. Council facilitated a really strong consultation process. The community had its own look at it, and council as the planning authority for that project did not get a single objection. I think there would be other communities in the state where you would get a much different outcome, but I guess there was not some of the media hysteria around wind farms then that there is now …

Ararat Greenhouse Action Group concurred with the Council and advised that Pacific Hydro ‘pretty much set the benchmark [regarding community engagement] for anyone else who comes in’.555

Pacific Hydro pioneered the concept of a Sustainable Communities Fund in Australia, whereby the company provides grant funding to the local community for various projects. Pacific Hydro has contributed a total of around $250,000 of grants to the local Ararat community over the last five years. Such funds spread the financial benefits of the wind farm project beyond the immediate landowners who receive annual payments of $7,000 to $9,500 per turbine on their properties.

The Committee noted that Pacific Hydro lists on its website, the Sustainable Communities Fund recipients for projects throughout Victoria.556

Despite the low conservation value of the wind farm site, there is ongoing evaluation of the project’s impacts on avifauna such as the wedge tail eagle and the native vegetation offsets established in conjunction with Landcare.

The Committee spoke to two of the landowners with turbines located on their property – Mr and Mrs Maconachie. Mr Graeme Maconachie advised the Committee that the five turbines on his property did not disturb his livestock, including sheep and horses.557 Noise, shadow flicker and soil erosion were not a concern and his property value has increased due to the turbines.

Community concerns regarding wind farm developments

Substantive concerns of the community

All of the concerns regarding wind farm projects raised in written submissions and evidence to the inquiry by individuals and groups, such as the Landscape Guardians, are reflected in recent planning panel reports on wind farm proposals. Most of these issues are addressed by the Sustainability Victoria publication Wind energy: myths and facts.558 Each of these concerns is outlined below.

555 Mr R Pearse, Chairman, Ararat Greenhouse Action Group, Environment and Natural Resources Committee public hearing – Ararat, 24 August 2009, transcript of evidence, p.129
557 Mr G Maconachie, Challicum Hills land-holder, briefing to the Environment and Natural Resources Committee – Ararat, 25 August 2009
558 Sustainability Victoria, Wind energy: myths and facts, May 2007
Greenhouse gas reductions and efficiency

Submissions to the inquiry \(^{559}\) questioned whether wind farms contribute to greenhouse gas reductions and the reliability and efficiency of wind farms in generating energy. Ms Kathy Russell advised the Committee of data from operational wind farms in South Australia as follows:

\[
\text{All wind farms in all regions produce a common-characteristic output. This output is characterised by extreme variability, extreme unpredictability and extreme intermittency. Their output is typically somewhat less than one-third of installed capacity on average. The wind industry and its academic supporters concentrate on reporting average outputs only. They fail to report these other, negative performance aspects. Indeed, it could be inferred that they do their best to cloak these aspects in a veil of secrecy.}^{560}
\]

According to Sustainability Victoria, every unit of wind energy cuts greenhouse gas emissions with each megawatt hour of wind energy generated, avoiding the production of one tonne of greenhouse gas emissions, on average. The efficiency of wind farms is estimated in Victoria to be typically between 30 and 35 per cent. However the Committee understands that most of Australia’s current coal-fired electricity-generating plants are of a conventional design, with typical efficiencies of about 33 to 35 per cent.\(^{561}\) Sustainability Victoria also note that as an intermittent energy generator, wind energy forms part of a broad mix of energy supply technologies.

Property values

The Residents Against Turbines of Tooborac, the Western Plains Landscape Guardians Association, the Grampians Glenthompson Landscape Guardians and Macarthur-Hawkesdale Landscape Guardians expressed concerns about the impact of wind farms on property values.\(^{562}\) Ms Kathy Russell advised that: ‘The noise and visual impacts of these monstrous toys have profound effects on the value of the property assets of the same neighbours. In many instances, properties are rendered worthless, being unsaleable’.\(^{563}\)

According to Sustainability Victoria, while no formal studies have yet been carried out in Australia, studies in the USA and Denmark have found there is little to suggest that wind farms impact negatively on the value of neighbouring properties. Since the release of the Sustainability Victoria publication, the NSW Valuer General has produced a \textit{Preliminary assessment of the impact of wind farms on surrounding land values in Australia}.\(^{564}\) The assessment investigated eight wind farms

\(^{559}\) Mr H Cumming, submission no.4, p.1; Mr T Le Roy, submission no.5, p.4; Ms K Russell, submission no.8, p.3 and Mr B Keen and Ms H Barker, submission no.14, p.2

\(^{560}\) Ms K Russell, submission no.8, p.3


\(^{562}\) Residents Against Turbines of Tooborac, submission no.38, p.1; Mr P Mitchell, Western Plains Landscape Guardians Association, Environment and Natural Resources Committee public hearing – Melbourne, 10 August 2009, transcript of evidence, pp.94, Macarthur-Hawkesdale Landscape Guardians, Environment and Natural Resources Committee public hearing – Port Fairy, 8 September 2009, transcript of evidence, p.200; Grampians-Glenthompson Landscape Guardians, Environment and Natural Resources Committee public hearing – Ararat, 24 August 2009, transcript of evidence, p.134

\(^{563}\) Ms K Russell, submission no.8, p.4

\(^{564}\) NSW Valuer General, \textit{Preliminary assessment of the impact of wind farms on surrounding land values in Australia}, August 2009,
across varying land uses using conventional property valuation analysis. Six of these wind farms are located in Victoria – Waubra Wind Farm, Challicum Hills Wind Farm, Cape Bridgewater, Toora Wind Farm, Codrington Wind Farm/Yambuk and Wonthaggi Wind Farm. The assessment was constrained by the small samples of sale transactions available, but the main findings are:

- wind farms do not appear to have negatively affected property values in most cases. Forty of the 45 sales investigated did not show any reductions in value. Five properties were found to have lower than expected sale prices (based on statistical analysis). While these small number of price reductions correlate with the construction of a wind farm, further work is needed to confirm the extent to which these were due to the wind farm or whether other factors may have been involved;
- results also suggest that a property’s underlying land use may affect the property’s sensitivity to price impacts. No reductions in sale price were evident for rural properties or residential properties located in nearby townships with views of the wind farm; and
- the results for rural residential properties (commonly known as lifestyle properties) were mixed and inconsistent. There were some possible reductions in sale prices identified in some locations alongside properties whose values appeared to not have been affected. Consequently no firm conclusions can be drawn on lifestyle properties.\(^{565}\)

**Noise and health impacts**

The sound produced by wind turbines occurs from their internal operation and as the turbine blades pass through the air.\(^{566}\) The Committee was advised that the noise, both audible and low frequency, emitted from wind farms makes people sick and that the noise standards are outdated and unenforceable.\(^{567}\) According to Sustainability Victoria, advances in technology mean the mechanical sound from modern wind turbines has practically been eliminated. Noise is assessed using the New Zealand Standard NZS6808 and the planning process ensures that noise from all turbines is determined before the wind farm is built to ensure it is within the acceptable range. The Committee understands that WorkSafe Victoria, the Environment Protection Authority and the Department of Human Services is examining issues raised by some residents regarding sub-audible noise allegedly generated by the Waubra Wind Farm.

The draft National Wind Farm Development Guidelines acknowledge that there are risks that people living near a wind farm will be impacted by noise from the turbines and the impacts may relate to the volume, timing and/or character of the noise produced.\(^{568}\) There is also the potential for cumulative noise impacts should a new wind farm or an extension to an existing wind farm be proposed in close proximity to the existing wind farm. The draft guidelines ‘are intended to provide an effective way to

\(^{565}\) NSW Valuer General, *Preliminary assessment of the impact of wind farms on surrounding land values in Australia*, August 2009, p.2


\(^{567}\) Ms K Russell, submission no.8, pp.1–2; Western Plains Landscape Guardians Association, submission no.15, p.3; Mr A and Ms H Lyon, submission no.18, p.2; Grampians-Glen Thompson Landscape Guardians, Environment and Natural Resources Committee public hearing – Ararat, 24 August 2009, transcript of evidence, pp.133, 137–138; Mr B Rogerson, Grampians-Glen Thompson Landscape Guardians, Environment and Natural Resources Committee public hearing – Ararat, 24 August 2009, transcript of evidence, p.133

reduce noise impacts consistent with current environmental legislation’. An Australian standard – Acoustics: measurement, prediction and assessment of noise from wind turbine generators – is expected to be finalised soon.

Fire

Ms Annie Gardner from the Macarthur-Hawkesdale Landscape Guardians expressed concern that wind farms pose increased fire risks. She advised the Committee at its Port Fairy hearing that:

I did a big submission to the Macarthur wind farm panel on fire and was denied any hearing basically because it said it was not an issue. That was generally overlooked as AGL continued to deny any additional risk from the proposal and that there is no greater risk with fire and wind farms. AGL then called the Country Fire Authority region 5 community safety officer, Paul Hill, to address the panel on the Macarthur wind farm, who claimed there was no more risk of fire on a wind farm than a normal working farm. That is total rubbish.

The Grampians-Glenthompson Landscape Guardians argued that the Victorian wind energy guidelines are totally remiss in relation to the fire risk of wind farms. The draft national guidelines state that similar to other facilities where there is electrical equipment and flammable material, there is a risk of fire associated with wind farms. Although the risk is considered to be low, proponents should consult with local and regional fire authorities to ensure an appropriate fire management plan is in place to respond to a potential fire prior to the development of a site.

Livestock

Ms Annie Gardner from the Macarthur-Hawkesdale Landscape Guardians also highlighted her worry regarding the impact of a wind farm proposal on her livestock. Sustainability Victoria advise that there have been no reports of decreased production from farms as a result of having wind turbines on the land and animals graze normally around the towers without any discernable impact. Ms Gardner stated in her evidence that:

One of the main concerns with the proximity of the turbines to our property is the effect of the low-frequency noise on our business and our sheep. In our shed we have 400 jacketed sheep, which is a highly intensive industry for the Italian high fashion. We breed our own replacements in the paddocks. The sheep are very low micron. They are very highly strung and have an extremely sensitive nervous system, so we do feel that this development will affect our paddock enterprise ...

This contrasts with the information provided to the Committee by farmers associated with the Challicum Hills wind farm.

569 Environment Protection and Heritage Council, National wind farm development guidelines – public consultation draft, October 2009, p.19
570 Ms A Garner, Macarthur-Hawkesdale Landscape Guardians, Environment and Natural Resources Committee public hearing – Port Fairy, 8 September 2009, transcript of evidence, p.201
571 Mr B Rogerson, Grampians-Glenthompson Landscape Guardians, Environment and Natural Resources Committee public hearing – Ararat, 24 August 2009, transcript of evidence, p.133
572 Environment Protection and Heritage Council, National wind farm development guidelines – public consultation draft, October 2009, p.22
573 Sustainability Victoria, Wind energy: myths and facts, May 2007, p.10
574 Ms A Garner, Macarthur-Hawkesdale Landscape Guardians, Environment and Natural Resources Committee public hearing – Port Fairy, 8 September 2009, transcript of evidence, p.192
Procedural concerns of the community

Individuals and the Landscape Guardian groups were critical of the consultation process. The main issues raised were:

- lack of community consultation in the project planning phase, particularly when proponents are gauging landowners interest in participating in a wind farm development and negotiations regarding leasing of land for the proposed development commence;
- not enough time is allocated at planning panel hearings to consider their views;
- difficulties procuring expert witnesses to assist them with presenting their case;
- perceived lack of transparency and mistrust of the planning approvals, including Planning Panels, process;
- wind farm proposals are not rigorously evaluated; and
- the sense that there is limited capacity for the community to make a difference regarding proposals.575

Proponents and wind farm consultations

Consultation process

The community consultation processes undertaken for wind farm projects by two proponents – AGL Energy and Renewable Energy Systems Australia – were described to the Committee. Mr Nigel Bean, Head of Generation Development for AGL Energy explained that:

We carry out a community consultation process, and have been doing so over a number of years. The structure of our community consultation is in line with the recommended best practice guidelines for wind projects. We essentially have an expanding profile of community consultation, initially starting with the owners we have contracted with to place equipment on their site, the neighbours in the immediate region and then the broader region. We would roll out a program which would typically include letter drops, media presentations, 1800 [phone] numbers and open days. We are committed to community consultation, and we can show and demonstrate that we have done that on all our projects, be they renewable or commercial in generation.576

Renewable Energy Systems Australia is in the process of developing its wind farm application in the northern Grampians and Ararat region. Mr Chris Sweatman, Chief Operating Officer, stated that:

The approach we have taken to [community consultation] is to identify and approach all residences within 5 kilometres: in the instance of current development we chose 5 kilometres as the relevant area. There would be house-to-house visits within that area and for anybody who was not around during that period we would leave some literature so that they were aware we had called and we would invite them to get in contact. We then went ahead with two open days, one at the initial announcement of the application process and a subsequent one shortly before submission, to show

575 Refer to Ms K Russell, submission no.8; Mr B Keen and Ms H Barker, submission no.14; Mr P Mitchell, submission no.15; Mr P Mitchell, Western Plains Landscape Guardians Association, ENRC public hearing – Melbourne, 10 August 2009, transcript of evidence, pp.93–97; Macarthur-Hawkesdale Landscape Guardians, Environment and Natural Resources Committee public hearing – Port Fairy, 8 September 2009, transcript of evidence, pp.191–202

576 Mr N Bean, Head of Generation Development, AGL Energy, Environment and Natural Resources Committee public hearing – Melbourne, 27 July 2009, transcript of evidence, p.54
that status of the development and what it was we are seeking to apply for. We advertised the open
days locally and through radio interviews. We also did two letterbox drops just to make absolutely
sure that everyone in the vicinity was aware of the application and of course provided contact details
asking people to contact us if they had any comments, queries or general observations. Naturally,
within our website we have an area dedicated to particular developments.577

Mr Sweatman also explained the capacity to make changes to the design of a wind farm as a result
of the community consultation process. He advised that to some extent it depends on the total size
of the wind farm, for example with a 75-turbine wind farm site (approximately 150 MW), some of
those turbines could be removed and the overall viability, from an economic perspective, maintained.
However if changes were made reducing the tip points or hub heights or diameters, then it was more
likely to make the project unviable. Mr Sweatman stated that:

There is absolutely room for change as a result of feedback – and it is essential, especially
somewhere like Victoria where there are no appeals. We cannot just say no and appeal it later. We
know that if someone has a strong, scientifically based argument for making a change to the layout,
then it is in our interests and the project’s interests to go ahead, because ultimately it is in the
community’s interest that such a change is made. We certainly do not design a wind farm then
notionally consent, go out and consult on it. It would not be a useful approach for us.578

Industry has also been proactive in developing guidelines on community consultation and wind farm
developments. In 2002 and 2006 AusWind (now Clean Energy Council) released the Best practice
guidelines for implementation of wind energy projects in Australia. The guidelines contain
information on communicating and consulting with stakeholders at each project stage. A certification
system has also been developed ‘in response to the need for sound environmental and social
management in the wind energy industry’.579 Participants will be audited, allowing an independent
assessment of their wind farm planning processes or operations against best practice, as defined by
the Certified Wind Farms Australia specification and Clean Energy Council Best Practice
Guidelines.580 Four companies have applied to participate in the scheme – Roaring 40s, Pacific
Hydro, Wind Power Pty Ltd and Wind Prospect – and their certification status will be updated on
attainment of certification following a process of independent audit.581

Concerns of proponents

Many of the concerns proponents expressed regarding community consultation relate to the
planning panel process. For example ‘excessive’ submissions from stakeholders resulting in lengthy
public hearings was identified by AGL Energy as a problem.582 As Mr Nigel Bean, Head of
Generation Development, AGL Energy explained to the Committee at a public hearing: ‘A lot of the
issues which have been aired are essentially about aesthetics – some people like the look of wind
farms, some do not. Whether you have one day of hearings or two weeks of hearings, you are

577 Mr C Sweatman, Chief Operating Officer, Renewable Energy Systems Australia, Environment and Natural
Resources Committee public hearing – Ararat, 24 August 2009, transcript of evidence, p.146
578 Mr C Sweatman, Chief Operating Officer, Renewable Energy Systems Australia, Environment and Natural
Resources Committee public hearing – Ararat, 24 August 2009, transcript of evidence, p.150
582 AGL Energy, submission no.6, p.1
unlikely to bridge that gap’. Mr Ken McAlpine from Vestas Australian Wind Energy Technology advised that:

... quite often planning panels that are considering an application for a permit for a wind farm will keep dealing with the same questions that other panels have dealt with in the past.

It is quite odd if someone is seeking to build a 20-turbine wind farm somewhere out in regional Victoria that the panel considering the application will also consider submissions and debate on the economics of wind farms, for example, the impact on birds and every other argument against wind farms that are constantly thrown up. These are not local issues; these are issues that have been tested by panel after panel in the past, and there is research out there that the state government should and could be aware of. It could instruct panels on things such as the impact of wind farms on cutting greenhouse emissions from the energy market.

That stuff should have been decided long ago rather than being open to panels to re-litigate [sic] again and again, because every time you re-litigate an issue it is another day – or maybe four or five days – in a panel hearing... The government could play a role here by having its own process to determine its policy on these particular issues and then explaining it and setting further guidelines for panels as to what they can and cannot hear.

The Committee has recommended in chapter 5 that Planning Panels Victoria document and publish the planning decisions that have been resolved and benchmarks set by panels on wind farm projects including bird and bat kills, shadow flicker, noise, electromagnetic interference, land values, the effectiveness of greenhouse gas abatement and landscape value impact. The Committee also believes that some planning issues have been resolved and further deliberation by planning panels is not warranted including greenhouse gas abatement and the efficiency of the technology.

Accordingly the Committee recommends that:

**RECOMMENDATION 6.3**

The *Policy and planning guidelines for development of wind energy facilities in Victoria* identify issues that are exempt from consideration by Planning Panels including greenhouse gas abatement and the efficiency of the technology.

On a related matter, proponents also expressed dissatisfaction with the nature of submissions and objections received in relation to wind farms. WestWind Energy recommended that petitions, pro-forma and pro-forma like applications, objections with insufficient detail and irrelevant and unclear objections be rejected.

WestWind Energy also expressed concern at what it described as ‘blanket public notice requirements’, for example three to five kilometres from a wind farm boundary. WestWind Energy would prefer a ‘logical and consistent assessment of landowners who may have the potential to suffer material detriment’. The Committee did not receive evidence on this matter from other proponents or witnesses and therefore has not made a recommendation on this issue.

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583 Mr N Bean, Head of Generation Development, AGL Energy, Environment and Natural Resources Committee public hearing – Melbourne, 27 July 2009, transcript of evidence, p.54

584 Mr K McAlpine, Government Relations Manager, Vestas Australian Wind Technology, Environment and Natural Resources Committee public hearing – Melbourne, 27 July 2009, transcript of evidence, p.48

585 WestWind Energy, submission no.30, p.5
Local councils and the wind farm consultation process

A number of councils advised the Committee of their reservations about wind farms, but also the benefits such projects bring to their region. Ararat Council made the observation that the planning approvals process is complex and that ‘For Joe Public – or the community – there is confusion about which aspect of this process they are engaging in’. The Council described the tension between wind farm proponents desire for flexibility around project design and the community’s need to understand where individual turbines are to be located to estimate potential impacts. The Council is not currently the responsible authority for a wind farm project, as Mr Clyde Humphries, Economic Development Manager explained: ‘So our council is taking the attitude that if we are not the decision makers, we will be the facilitators. Part of that facilitation is to check out the possibilities with the proponents on sites, access and community involvement …Council’s role has been to help the proponents meet the public’.

The initial and ongoing economic benefits wind farm projects bring to a region were also discussed at public hearings. Mr Clyde Humphries stated that:

With our facilitating we try to coordinate the integration of the public feeling and the business feeling and see where there are any economic benefits we can capitalise on. For Challicum Hills and other ones it runs from hundreds of thousands to millions of dollars. When Challicum was built one of our local motel operators had fully occupied rooms for nearly 18 months during the week, then on weekends they were able to rent those rooms out again. There are definite benefits. One of the operators said the workmen who were on site became like family. It is not just the roads graders and concrete workers and what have you; there is that side benefit. They had to be fed, have their clothes cleaned and so on, so there is a multiplier effect going through our community with the economic benefits in that …

Ararat Rural City Council estimated that the annual economic benefit of the Challicum Hills wind farm for the area is approximately $500,000.

The economic impact of wind farm projects on the Shire of Corangamite community has been mixed. As Ms Sophie Segafredo, Manager Strategic Planning and Environment explained:

Some of the issues related to it are a changed workforce and opportunities that are provided for the local communities. That has pros and cons. The workforce has become more unionised, which has not been the case in the local area. It also took away some of the skilled labour to those major projects where the opportunity to earn salaries of a much higher level was on offer, so other services were left somewhat in the lurch. Again, it is offering a good level of income for our local skilled labour.

There is often the feeling, particularly during the construction time, that the new workforce takes over the small town and a feeling, I suppose, of somewhat squeezing out of their own places. I think that social implication is not really well understood at all during the assessment process

[There is also] conflict with tourism businesses where, particularly on the coastal areas but in others, accommodation that would have serviced tourists is taken up for lengthy periods of time during the
construction, which is good in terms of the take-up of the accommodation being guaranteed for those people operating that, but it means that the opportunity for tourists are reduced, and so there is potential for our long-term tourism market to decline. But it also means that for other businesses in the town that are reliant on tourists spending their dollars there are not necessarily the customers there. The workers do not spend their money in the same fashion as the tourist would. Other businesses are impacted as well.590

Accommodating the workforce associated with the construction of wind farms and other major projects was also identified by Moyne Shire Council as the most pressing impact on the region.591

The negative social impact of wind farms and other major projects, including the gas plant projects, in the Shire of Corangamite was also described to the Committee by Ms Segafredo:

One of the most significant [impacts] is the social impact these sorts of projects have on local communities, and the breakdown in those rural communities, pitting even family against family. It is not just within towns but is often in the rural landscape; there is a significant problem that arises, through these sorts of major projects which may not ever be healed. When you are looking at populations that need each other to operate in terms of the footy team and the whole community fabric, projects like this – and these are not the only things – have a significant impact on that social cohesion. I think it is accentuated with the linear nature of the wind farms in particular, but in our experience the gas plant projects have had a similar impact as well.592

Ms Segafredo highlighted the need for understanding what the community’s expectations are for the shire and the types of developments the community thinks are suitable.593 Ms Segafredo also advised that proponents seem to be quite reluctant to take on board localised issues. The Committee was interested to learn that the Shire of Corangamite in partnership with Warrnambool Council is planning to review its rural land policies. The Land Suitability and Decision Making Framework will provide guidance on the most appropriate and publicly supportable uses of land across the rural landscape.594 The Councils expect to receive feedback on the suitability of locations for wind farms through this mechanism.

A community led approach to identifying suitable sites for wind farms also occurs in Germany, according to NewEn Australia. This means that ‘every community has determined their own dedicated areas especially for wind farming’.595 This approach is in contrast to the current approach in Victoria where proponents investigate and determine suitable sites, subject to planning approvals. The Committee believes that the proactive approach warrants investigation as it may potentially minimise the social dislocation that has been created by some wind farm projects and proposals in Victoria. The findings of such research could inform local and state wind farm planning approvals processes.

590 Ms S Segafredo, Manager Strategic Planning and Environment, Shire of Corangamite, Environment and Natural Resources Committee public hearing – Port Fairy, 7 September 2009, transcript of evidence, pp.165–166
591 Mr R Guest, Manager, Strategic Planning, Moyne Shire Council, Environment and Natural Resources Committee public hearing – Port Fairy, 7 September 2009, transcript of evidence, p.155
592 Ms S Segafredo, Manager Strategic Planning and Environment, Shire of Corangamite, Environment and Natural Resources Committee public hearing – Port Fairy, 7 September 2009, transcript of evidence, p.165
593 Ms S Segafredo, Manager Strategic Planning and Environment, Shire of Corangamite, Environment and Natural Resources Committee public hearing – Port Fairy, 7 September 2009, transcript of evidence, p.167
594 Shire of Corangamite, personal communication, 19 January 2010
595 NewEn Australia, submission no.17, p.4
Accordingly the Committee recommends that:

**RECOMMENDATION 6.4**

The Department of Primary Industries investigate proactive, community led approaches to identifying suitable sites for wind farms and the findings be incorporated as an addendum to the wind farm atlas.

Moyne Shire Council advised that ‘... it is very apparent that small, well-knit longstanding, local communities have a strong reluctance to object to what neighbours are doing, even if they are not happy. They are very reluctant to come to public meetings, et cetera. I do not blame them at all for that because they have to live there.’ Moyne Shire Council also highlighted the positive outcomes from establishing a community engagement committee framework. Three committees, one for the Mortlake power station, one for the Hawkesdale wind farm development and one for the Santos gas power station development have been established. The Committees meet once a month and produce a community newsletter. It has facilitated greater public access to and involvement in the construction process, for example, with large 130 metre trucks transporting equipment for the Mortlake power station project and concrete pours.

The framework is a formal mechanism where there is feedback between the proponent, community representatives that are on the committees and the elected councillors. As the Chief Executive Officer of the Council explained: ‘... some of the rumour-mongering is taken out of what is proposed and what will happen. It is an opportunity for free flow of information. It enables issues to be raised, rather than being swept under the carpet, and to be worked through with responses’. The Committee believes that the establishment of such a mechanism, with the assistance of grant funding from Regional Development Victoria, and the employment of a Major Projects Community Liaison Officer by the shire, adds to the effectiveness of the community consultation process. On the basis of the positive experience of Moyne Shire Council the Committee recommends that:

**RECOMMENDATION 6.5**

Regional Development Victoria fund local councils impacted by wind farm and renewable energy projects, to establish community engagement frameworks.

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596 Mr R Guest, Manager, Strategic Planning, Moyne Shire Council, Environment and Natural Resources Committee public hearing – Port Fairy, 7 September 2009, transcript of evidence, p.161
597 Moyne Shire Council, personal communication, 25 November 2009
598 Mr B Stonestreet, Chief Executive Officer, Moyne Shire Council, Environment and Natural Resources Committee public hearing – Port Fairy, 7 September 2009, transcript of evidence, p.153