

# Speaking Notes for the Planning Assessment Commission hearing into the Biala Wind Farm - Crookwell - 02 February 2017

-Charlie Prell (representing the Australian Wind Alliance)

## INTRODUCTION

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. I'm Charlie Prell, a family farmer from Crookwell, and one of six farmers who will host wind turbines on the Crookwell Wind Farm. I support well designed wind farms, their ability to reinvigorate the agricultural economic base of this area and to make a huge contribution to reducing Australia's carbon emissions, while contributing to the well being of this community.

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

## AWA SUBMISSION

I have been working with the Australian Wind Alliance part-time for the past three years as a regional organiser. In this role I have spoken to many people from this area who you will not hear from today. The people who make up the "silent majority". The people who can't understand the virulent opposition to wind farm developments. The people who are too busy, or don't want to appear before you today; who can see the benefits of wind farms and see them as part of a contemporary landscape, not a scar on the landscape. They see the threat of climate change as being very real and understand that we need to do something to wean us off our addiction to coal.

Like them, I want to see NSW begin to really ramp up our building of wind turbines to capture the enormous wind resource we have in this state, particularly in this region. This area is overwhelmingly agricultural. It's farmland. It also has a very reliable and harvestable wind resource. Farms and wind turbines have a natural synergy. Grazing and cropping farms continue their work uninterrupted after turbines are installed. Despite their visual presence, they have an insignificant footprint on the farmland that hosts them. Wind farms make very little noise, especially when you consider the amount of electricity that they produce. They increase the viability of individual farmers and the community as a whole. In addition, the Community Enhancement Fund from this wind farm, along with the neighbour agreements that have been negotiated, will make this area a place people will want to move to.

Local small businesses and contractors will be able to take advantage of the increase in economic activity from the wind farm, particularly during the construction phase. Many of them are quietly supportive of the proposal, but are not inclined to participate in the sometimes vociferous debate about the merits of it.

I have read most of the objections to this and other wind farms. Often I think that the opponents make up fanciful stories and sometimes they tell outright lies to frighten people into opposing the project. This scandalous behaviour needs to be called out for what it is; blatant scaremongering.

Small landholders are being told that their properties are going to be unsaleable if the wind farm is built. The facts, and several years' experience in this area, don't support this accusation. A cursory look at land values around the recently constructed Taralga and Gullen Range Wind Farms shows compelling evidence that property prices have actually increased faster since the wind farms have been built, than they did before the wind farms were there. A NSW government-commissioned report released last year failed to find any discernible evidence of negative impact on property prices.

There are many reasons to support this wind farm, but one of the most compelling is the fact that the wind farm will not use any water as it generates clean energy. Water is becoming an increasingly scarce resource as the effects of climate change take hold and the Grabben Gullen/Biala area is highly vulnerable to this variability in the weather. Unlike coal, gas and nuclear power plants, wind turbines don't use any water. Please remember this as you deliberate on the merits of this wind farm.

Erosion, water management, traffic management, and all other aspects of the proposal have been considered in the approval with stringent conditions imposed on the developer. There are 47 conditions imposed as part of the consent. Experience with other wind farms constructed in this area shows that these conditions will be stringently monitored by the relevant authorities, particularly during the construction period.

There have been comments made today about the de-commissioning of wind farms. The Crookwell 1 wind farm is next door to my property. Its operating licence will expire in the next 18 months. This will be the first commercial wind farm in Australia to be de-commissioned or re-commissioned. I know the hosts of the wind farm are currently negotiating with the operator to renew their lease agreement and understand this process has been complex. However there is no prospect of this wind farm being "left to rust" and scar the landscape into the future. Like any complex commercial negotiation it may take some time for it to be completed, but it will be. There is also ample evidence of wind farms all across Europe and Britain being re-commissioned, or re-energised, with no evidence of turbines being left to rust and be a "blight on the landscape".

It is pleasing to see that the Department has approved a micro-siting allowance for the turbines of 100 metres. This allowance is critical. The ability to site the turbines in the best possible location gives the developer the flexibility to micro-manage environmental and logistical issues on the ground, has comprehensive safeguards built in, and must be retained as part of the approval.

It is also pleasing to see that despite the Department's recent interest in the visual aspect of wind farms, they have allowed all proposed 31 turbines in this project. There is no question that wind turbines are large structures but whether people like the look of them or not should not be a barrier to the benefits for communities and the environment I referred to earlier. Appropriate new wind farm projects need to be allowed to be built at sufficient scale to be viable and we are concerned that an overzealous approach to policing of so-called 'visual impact' could endanger future projects.

## IN SUMMARY - AWA Supports this project, but there is a better way.

The Australian Wind Alliance has always supported the concept of shared benefits and negotiated agreements in relation to wind farm developments. This approach to agreements with neighbours should not be based on 'compensation' for perceived impacts. We prefer a model that goes beyond a 'compensation' model and takes equitable outcomes as its starting point. Such an approach would still include landholder lease agreements and community enhancement funds but would engage with surrounding landholders more as stakeholders than as impacted residents, offering them a chance to invest in projects in their immediate surrounds.

In this spirit, we recommend the Proximity Rent Model outlined in a report recently commissioned by the NSW Government on Benefit Sharing Models for Wind Farms<sup>1</sup>. Payments are made to all landowners within a specific distance from turbines including landowners who host turbines and their neighbours. Some of this model's strengths are:

- It is conceptually simple and expressed in common terminology (\$ per hectare). It is therefore easy to communicate to all stakeholders,
- Income is distributed according to a profile that benefits those closest to turbines,
- The model scales well and is equally effective for larger and smaller wind farms,
- There is potential to enhance land values of properties neighbouring turbines,
- The 'foundation rent' is a bilateral contract and it is reasonable that this be a confidential lease. However, the proximity rent applies to all landholders, including those with turbines, with a known formula that is negotiated with the eligible landholders (preferably as a group). This minimises community division, which is a particularly negative side effect of landowner lease payments.

This is not a concept that can be, or is likely to be, imposed by planning authorities. It is an initiative that has been repeatedly raised with the Upper Lachlan Shire Council, by me and others, over many years. I urge the local council representatives here today to reconsider this approach and act on behalf of this community to represent the best interests of this community and get the best possible outcome for it.

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<sup>1</sup> [Strategic options for delivering ownership and benefit sharing models for wind farms in NSW](#), Ernst & Young, (September 2014) p24