

Projects are now being assessed based on perceived public benefits rather than through a merit-based evaluation using established guidelines. The Planning Department, which is intended to operate independently and adhere to regulatory frameworks, appears to be compromising its impartiality by prioritizing the urgency of transitioning to renewable energy over a thorough and balanced assessment. This shift implies that any project contributing to renewable energy generation or facilitating the renewable transition is likely to receive approval, regardless of potential adverse impacts. Consequently, environmental, social, and economic concerns are being overshadowed by the overarching goal of accelerating the renewable energy rollout. This approach undermines the integrity of the planning process and raises questions about the true independence of the Planning Department in its decision-making.

Furthermore, this prioritization of public benefit over merit-based assessment risks setting a precedent where the long-term impacts on local communities, biodiversity, and heritage sites are not adequately considered. By not rigorously evaluating each project against established guidelines, there is a danger that significant negative consequences will be overlooked or minimized. This could lead to irreversible damage to ecosystems, a decline in property values, and a deterioration in the quality of life for residents.

The current assessment process needs a re-evaluation to ensure that it remains balanced, transparent, and genuinely reflective of both immediate public benefits and long-term environmental and community well-being. Independent, guideline-based assessments are crucial to maintaining public trust and achieving sustainable development goals without compromising essential ecological and social values.

The introduction of voluntary acquisition as a recommended mitigation measure by the Department poses significant concerns for all of regional New South Wales. If this practice becomes widespread, it essentially grants developers carte blanche to place turbines wherever they choose, undermining the regulatory framework designed to protect the interests of neighbouring property owners.

Under this model, the primary recourse for affected residents would be to either endure the substantial imposition of visual and noise pollution or be compelled to sell their property to the developer. This situation creates a coercive environment where the rights and well-being of local communities are subordinated to the interests of large-scale renewable energy projects.

Key Issues:

Erosion of Property Rights:

Residents would face significant pressure to relinquish their properties, effectively being driven from their homes and communities.

The loss of property rights and autonomy is particularly egregious, as it forces individuals to choose between their health and financial security.

Environmental and Social Impact:

Unchecked placement of turbines can lead to environmental degradation, affecting local wildlife and landscapes.

Social cohesion within communities may be disrupted as families are forced to move, weakening the fabric of regional life.

Health Concerns:

Prolonged exposure to turbine noise and shadow flicker has been associated with various health issues, including sleep disturbances and increased stress levels.

The mental and physical well-being of residents should be a paramount consideration in the planning process.

Economic Disadvantages:

Property values are likely to decrease due to the proximity to wind turbines, leading to potential financial losses for homeowners.

The appeal of the region to tourists and new residents could be diminished, impacting the local economy.

Lack of Regulatory Safeguards:

The absence of stringent rules and guidelines means there are no adequate protections for neighbours against the adverse impacts of wind farm developments.

Voluntary acquisition should not be used as a loophole to bypass necessary regulatory scrutiny and community consultation.

Recommendations:

Strengthen Regulatory Framework:

Reinforce the guidelines to ensure that the placement of turbines is subject to rigorous assessment and community input.

Introduce clear, enforceable rules that protect property owners from coercive acquisition practices.

Comprehensive Impact Assessments:

Require thorough environmental and social impact assessments for all proposed wind farm projects.

Ensure that these assessments consider long-term effects on health, property values, and community well-being.

Community Engagement:

Foster genuine engagement with local communities to understand and address their concerns.

Implement mechanisms for meaningful participation in the decision-making process.

Alternative Mitigation Strategies:

Explore and promote alternative mitigation measures that do not involve voluntary acquisition, such as strategic placement of turbines and enhanced noise reduction technologies.

The adoption of voluntary acquisition as a standard mitigation measure threatens to undermine the rights and quality of life of regional NSW residents. It is imperative that the Department reconsiders this approach and upholds a balanced, fair, and transparent planning process that genuinely considers the needs and voices of local communities. Protecting the integrity of regional NSW and its inhabitants should remain a central priority in the pursuit of renewable energy goals.

This project has shown how corrupt the government is. The department has change guidelines to the benefit of a private company for their benefit. They are allowing voluntary acquisition for land. I am disgusted that this is allowed. Once again, the landowners are not consulted. I would say someone is getting a handout while the owners of the adjacent properties and the surrounds are being ignored and forgotten.