

# South Australian Parliament

## SELECT COMMITTEE ON WIND FARM DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Held at Clare Country Club, White Hut Road, Clare  
Wednesday 17 July 2013 at 1:45pm

### MEMBERS:

Hon. D.W. Ridgway MLC (Chairperson)  
Hon. M. Parnell MLC  
Hon. R.P. Wortley MLC

### Testimony of JULIE QUAST, and JOHN FAINT, both of Waterloo and District Concerned Citizens Group

857 The CHAIRPERSON: Welcome to the meeting. The Legislative Council has given the authority for this committee to hold public meetings. A transcript of your evidence today will be forwarded to you for your examination for any clerical corrections. Should you wish at any time to present confidential evidence to the committee please indicate and the committee will consider your request. Parliamentary privilege is accorded to all evidence presented to a select committee; however, witnesses should be aware that privilege does not extend to statements made outside this meeting. All persons, including members of the media, are reminded that the same rules apply as in the reporting of parliament. Thank you for coming. We will hand over to you to make some remarks.

Mr FAINT: My name is John Faint. I am a resident of the Waterloo area. I am co-chair of the Waterloo and District Concerned Citizens Group, and Julie, here, is our secretary. On behalf of the Waterloo and District Concerned Citizens group we welcome the opportunity to address you, the Select Committee on Wind Farm Developments in South Australia, and strongly recommend that changes be made into the locations of future wind farms.

Our group at Waterloo was formed not only because of the impact on the community and environment but also by the frustration of having our concerns overruled by decisions made elsewhere. Now we are seeing firsthand a community divided and a precious and unique environment destroyed forever by an industry which we consider corrupt and inefficient. Why has this happened? Because of lack of research and the power of money. I have divided my statement into two categories, social and community, and environment, and I will summarise with what we think needs to be changed. Our secretary, Julie Quast, will present issues on noise and health and the community disaster that this has caused.

First, social and community: this once close-knit community is now divided by spitefulness and anger, not only to neighbours but also between family members. Community members who have raised concerns to the wind farm proponents have been treated with intimidation and contempt. For example, phone calls not returned, issues raised not addressed, and continually lied to regarding noise and tower location, road use, clearance of vegetation, protection of the environment, etc. In real terms, they have done what suits them not us. Through submissions, surveys and public discussions, there has always been strong opposition to the Waterloo location basically because of lack of interaction with locals and the failure of those in authority to intervene when necessary.

Environmental issues: massive destruction of natural trees and rock formations, hills levelled, and gullies filled in resulting in permanent scarring and now extensive erosion. When these matters were raised with relevant government departments, like the NRM and the Department for Environment and Heritage, the answers were always the same: 'There is nothing we can do under the current guidelines.'

There has been serious loss of habitat for native birds and animals, especially eagles and raptors, and also other rare bird species have disappeared and nests abandoned. The so-called independent environmental studies were hastily done by persons employed by the proponents. Tourists complain that this once beautiful, peaceful and unique area has been ruined. There were thousands of tonnes of non-renewables used, like steel, cement and gravel. Bulldozers were used to push aside trees and rocks, and now for hours on end, and even days, when the wind is not blowing the turbines stand idle, producing no power at all.

What we think needs to be done: there are many areas, but I will highlight three of them. Changes certainly must be made. Guidelines, locations and rules of engagement should be made by local government and local residents in respect to local conditions and issues. Distances from farmhouses and towns must not be less than five kilometres—in fact, further under certain topographical situations. If this change were made then most of the concerns and impacts that I have just spoken about would become irrelevant. Thirdly, cost versus efficiency studies, together with social and environmental studies should be done by totally independent bodies and organisations.

Finally, we trust that you will recommend and insist on significant changes to this industry, keeping in mind that it is government's responsibility to first protect communities and the environment above all else. Even though we appear opposed, we are not against renewable energy generation: solar and sea power are far better options. Thank you. I will hand over to Julie.

Ms QUAST: Do you want to ask questions first?

858 The CHAIRPERSON: Mr Faint, I think I heard earlier that you were involved with the community liaison group—

Mr FAINT: Yes.

859 The CHAIRPERSON: —and you resigned.

Mr FAINT: I resigned.

860 The CHAIRPERSON: Can you explain your involvement and what led to your resignation?

Mr FAINT: Yes. We were invited by the TRUenergy liaison group to have a representative on that committee and I was chosen or volunteered. Probably every second month there was a meeting, so I think I went to five. I was frustrated by, when we made concerns, how things were overruled.

861 The CHAIRPERSON: How do you mean 'things were overruled'?

Mr FAINT: The issues we raised probably stated it: where were the facts regarding what was happening? I was always concerned about the community and the environment, and I raised issues about the locations of eagles' nests and the locations of the turbines. Initially, we were informed that there would be no turbines within 600 metres of an eagle's nest, etc. They finished up within 80 metres of the turbines, so it became frustrating for me as a representative of a concerned group to try and reason with them.

They would always say, 'We are working under the existing guidelines.' After probably the last meeting that I went to, there were continued lies about what they had promised and what was done, and I wrote a letter offering my resignation because I wasn't going to be part of a program like that. It's below my morals to be involved in lies to the community. That's basically it. There were other people there in the group who I think were only on this committee because they saw an opportunity to get some money out of the proponents, but that failed to eventuate.

From an environmental point of view, a person who was employed by Hydro Tasmania, as it was then, on the bird population, I could not believe what she was saying about the so-called non-impact of wind farms on the environment. She certainly was a doctor, but she was covering for the industry and she was employed by them, so that was frustrating to try and reason with her. It was always about the guidelines. 'We are operating under the current guidelines,' so there was very little that we could do.

862 The CHAIRPERSON: So it would be fair to say you felt the whole community liaison group approach was flawed?

Mr FAINT: I think it was flawed. It was an attempt to communicate, but they had their agenda, and I was told by them that it was all about wind and powerlines and money. The company said, 'We're in this business to make money,' and I thought, 'Well, okay, if that's the way it is, then what are your concerns about the community and the environment, really?' They had very little. They had never done the research, and it was frustrating seeing our beautiful area, where we've lived and worked all our lives, changed forever.

863 The Hon. M. PARNELL: I would just like to explore that a little bit more. They had clearly already spent an awful lot of money, so their agenda was never going to be to close or shut down. I'm just wondering what you expected you might be able to get from them when you first joined up, given that they were clearly there to stay?

Mr FAINT: I was happy that, if there were going to be future wind farms under their supervision or whatever, the distances from all the birds and animals would be respected, that the issues that we as a community were continuing to raise would be properly addressed. They said they would, but nothing was ever done, and it got to the stage where I felt that we were just being completely intimidated by them. We were a nuisance to them being there, and that to me is very disappointing because we consider ourselves normal, decent citizens of the district and it is our right to protect our business.

864 The Hon. M. PARNELL: One of the issues that we are going to have to grapple with is, obviously, planning rules and how those rules are best configured. Your suggestion was you thought five kilometres sort of made sense to you.

Mr FAINT: A minimum regarding the topography of the area.

865 The Hon. M. PARNELL: Yes, and you also said that in some cases you would need more than that, but part of the dilemma that we have got is that there would be some situations where five kilometres would be more than enough. There would be some areas where you would never ever under any circumstances be going to hear it at five kilometres, depending on hills in-between and all sorts of prevailing winds. Have you got any thinking about how a planning system might be a bit more flexible? In other words, if five kilometres is not needed and you could crib a little bit, but if more separation was needed—you are not here as a planner, I understand, but given that you put to us that you think five kilometres—how might that work do you think, in practice?

Mr FAINT: Okay, yes, as I mentioned about the topography of the area, I would agree that perhaps in some situations—and I think Snowtown or whatever may become prevalent—there is not the problem there. Waterloo is unique because there are the three ridge lines and two valleys. The valleys are trapping the noise and in our situation and where I live—I am 4.3 kilometres away from the turbines—I would sooner live closer to the turbines than where we are because what is happening is the sound is dragged down into the valley and if the weather conditions are right and the wind conditions are right, the pounding of the turbines is very relevant to distances, in our case, nearly five kilometres.

That is why we consider that in an area like Waterloo it needs to be at least five and possibly more. If there was a single ridge line or if the turbines were on a plain, then maybe the situation would be different and it would not be required to have that distance. I know that is an issue, but in situations like Waterloo, to me, it is essential that they are not close to these residents. Just going on from that, I think the Liberal Party might have said that maybe two kilometres from farmhouses and five from towns, but what is the difference between a farmhouse and a town? There are people living there and they are impacted the same, so I think the distance needs to be uniform.

Ms QUAST: I would perhaps suggest that some strict testing of each area would help with the guidelines situation because I know we keep saying independent testing, but a lot of it is not independent and that would probably help with the guidelines.

866 The Hon. R.P. WORTLEY: You are saying a distance of five kilometres from the development of the wind turbines to a residence or a home. Would there be many circumstances in areas that could happen five kilometres from a residence? Would there be any situation where you could put a farm?

Mr FAINT: Well, there would be if you went out into the open pastoral areas or things like that. There would not be homes within five kilometres.

867 The Hon. R.P. WORTLEY: So, like the outback?

Mr FAINT: That is right, the more far-reaching areas. In Waterloo's instance there are 75 families or residences within five kilometres of the turbines, so it is quite significant.

Ms QUAST: I wish to thank the committee for allowing us a voice. We, as rural residents, are getting sick and tired of being treated as second class citizens and collateral damage to the greater good. In Waterloo many residents have become sick with heart problems and stress, high blood pressure, vertigo, swollen neck glands, ear popping and severe sleep deprivation. There are different symptoms for each individual. Some experience weird and bad dreams. Some have

had to leave their homes on advice from doctors. I myself live in a weatherboard house which is 2.5 kilometres from the turbines in open farmland and I personally suffer severe sleep deprivation, swollen glands and ears popping and waking some nights with my heart pounding to the rhythm of the turbines. It has been explained to me that this is a fight and flight reflex. This happens to quite a number of people, I believe. On really bad nights you just want to knock yourself on the head to get some relief. TV and radio reception seem to be affected, depending on where you live.

An acclaimed acoustician has done testing in the area and at our home. His finding has shown the house vibrates to the rhythm of the turbines. Some nights, although the turbine noise is not very loud, your head pounds to the turbine rhythm. Since the turbines started operation, I've recorded a health diary. Having just been away for a month, I've realised after three days I'm back to the tired, grumpy person I was before. I have noticed people tend to become supersensitive to noise anywhere after living near this wind farm. Not everyone is affected by the noise or the infrasound, and that's a good thing.

The topography of the area seems to be an integral part of being affected by noise and vibrations. One resident, a turbine host, has moved from a transportable house two to 2.5 kilometres from the turbines situated in a dip in the land to a brick house four kilometres away, slightly higher, and can now hear the turbine noise much more there.

The effect on the community as a whole is devastating, as even families have been split, and you have to be very careful who you talk to and residents are afraid and not able to verbalise their concerns or problems in public. We as a committee are trying to give them a voice and not let this situation happen elsewhere in Australia. There has been extensive testing done at our home and several around the area. Some correlation to the annoyance of the wind turbines felt by the residents and the noise produced by the turbines has been recorded by the uni of Adelaide.

868 The Hon. R.P. WORTLEY: Why is the community split in Waterloo? Why would people support it when there's no monetary value or no visual aesthetics for them? Why have people split from those who don't want it? Why would it be a problem?

Mr FAINT: Of course, it doesn't all relate to money because a lot of people would sooner prefer the community and environment are protected, and I think that's caused some of the split because they are unhappy that this has occurred in a once peaceful area.

Ms QUAST: I think families are split because, say, one brother hosts turbines on his property and the other brother didn't want them there and they've gone ahead. So that affects them. And there are neighbouring farmers who didn't want it to go on their land and the neighbours have allowed turbines to be built on their land, and it becomes very heated.

869 The Hon. R.P. WORTLEY: What about in the town of Waterloo itself? We had evidence from a person, well back, saying that their neighbours turned on them, and all sorts. Can you understand why that happened?

Ms QUAST: Sleep deprivation wouldn't help, because people get very irate when they are deprived of sleep.

Mr FAINT: I think, also, with the health issues, some people are affected and some are not, and those who are affected, of course, look to their neighbours and say that, 'It's happening to us and so we are unhappy with the situation.' I don't think it's to do very much with jealousy. It's just the disappointment of this wind farm in a very close-knit community. It's got to the stage where we can't get people to stand on committees any more for fear of reprisals. The wind farm subject is basically not discussed at all anywhere. It's caused a real split.

I guess our lack of communication was another area. We certainly couldn't get our voice across to the authorities and the decision makers—the development approval panel was made up of members from well outside the area. We all think it's a good idea, renewables, but the reality is quite different.

Ms QUAST: I think the way the company handled the community and the process did not help things, either.

870 The CHAIRPERSON: Can you elaborate on that, Julie?

Ms QUAST: People locally were probably ignored, unless they were host families. We have land up on the ridge, level with the turbines, and, as an example, it took us six months to get an answer from them regarding what the turbine placement would be and what they were going to look like because we had said that, no, they couldn't put wires or Stobie poles on our property. We had researched before we even moved to the area, and we were very concerned about the health aspects. I think that the company, unfortunately, picked the wrong people to be dealing with the public; they were very arrogant. Even with meetings we had with the company after it was built, they were madly trying to repair the community feeling; they were basically rude, and we just didn't matter.

871 The CHAIRPERSON: You mentioned the health aspects; the headaches and all of the symptoms you experienced. I think that Mark Parnell has raised before. We have heard that from a number of people, but we have not had actually had any doctors come and give evidence to say, 'I have 10 patients, and these are the symptoms they have.'

Ms QUAST: They probably don't want to stand up and put their hand out, because they would probably be knocked very hard by the companies.

872 The Hon. R.P. WORTLEY: But why would a company—

Ms QUAST: Because money talks and, say, funding might not be available for a certain medical thing, or they would be hounded down by the community and by people who are for wind farms.

873 The CHAIRPERSON: I am sure you have explained your symptoms—as have the other people you know. I assume that you have been to your GP to explain the problems you have had.

Ms QUAST: Yes.

874 The CHAIRPERSON: I am surprised that we have yet to have one who is prepared to come and say, 'Yes—'

Ms QUAST: They would have to be very brave and very tough.

Mr FAINT: And be disciplined.

875 The CHAIRPERSON: I am not disputing what you're saying.

Ms QUAST: I know that, and I know that there are several people in Waterloo who go to the same doctor I do, and I would say that he would have to be very tough and very strong to stand up against—

Mr FAINT: My doctor has indicated, when I have raised problems, that, at this stage, there is no proof or no written documents in their medical thing to say that wind farms are detrimental. They're getting lots of evidence, but nobody is actually standing up for the community's health. There is no doubt that there are people in our area affected; the survey conducted two years ago indicated that at least 38 per cent of the community was either moderately or seriously affected with health and noise issue.

876 The CHAIRPERSON: Thirty-eight per cent?

Mr FAINT: Thirty-eight per cent.

877 The Hon. R.P. WORTLEY: Where was this from?

Mr FAINT: This was from the survey that was done through our group and with the help of others in the community. Also, another survey was done by a totally independent student from the University of Adelaide, and he was hammered because he was telling the truth.

878 The CHAIRPERSON: He was still around the same percentage, the independent one?

Mr FAINT: Yes, exactly the same percentage. The question was asked of the Waterloo community within a 10-kilometre radius, 'Do you want further wind farms?', and 80 per cent said no.

879 The CHAIRPERSON: Eighty per cent said no?

Ms QUAST: Yes.

880 The CHAIRPERSON: And everybody responded in that—

Mr FAINT: Yes; I think there was a high percentage rate. There was an over 70 per cent response, which is fairly high for a survey, I understand.

881 The CHAIRPERSON: So, 70 per cent of the community residents within a 10-kilometre radius—80 per cent of those respondents said that they didn't want any further wind farm development?

Ms QUAST: Unfortunately, Clare is our council. We probably don't exist to them.

882 The CHAIRPERSON: Well, your mayor was here earlier. I think that you do exist.

Ms QUAST: We do now.

Mr FAINT: Yes. I think that our mayor has been quite sympathetic.

Ms QUAST: When you go and put in an application to build something and they ask you, 'Where's Waterloo?', it is pretty disgusting for a council. So, it is no wonder they allowed us to have the wind farm because they don't really care about the people over there.

883 The Hon. M. PARNELL: I am interested in the Waterloo community because that's what you have talked about a bit. I guess there are people who have lived there their whole life, there might be people who come and go. Some of the evidence we had earlier was that some time ago (I don't think that the witness gave the date), every second house was empty. Then there was a period when where most houses were occupied and it was thriving again, and now we are in a period of decline again. I do not pretend to know your community at all, but there are no businesses still operating, or shops or service stations or anything. I am just wondering about employment opportunities. When we spoke to the wind farm people this morning, I think they talked about the equivalent of seven full-time equivalents, most of whom live in the area—not in Waterloo, I don't think, but within 15 minutes or so, some of the blokes I spoke to.

Ms QUAST: There isn't anywhere 15 minutes of Waterloo; there is nowhere.

884 The Hon. M. PARNELL: Okay, but they are in the district, if not—

Ms QUAST: They said that when they built the original wind farm, and they were coming from Brighton.

885 The Hon. R.P. WORTLEY: I spoke to one of them; he came from Point Turton.

Ms QUAST: There was nobody employed locally.

Mr FAINT: That's the whole thing, Mark. There have been no jobs created locally, and there has been a big debate about 'local'. We have debated that ourselves, even at the community liaison committee. We thought that five kilometres was the local community; well, they don't talk about five kilometres, it's all over Australia. Even when the construction took place there were trucks and vehicles from Queensland and New South Wales; contractors. As a result, there has been no real local opportunity for permanent employment.

886 The Hon. M. PARNELL: I guess what I am getting at, as well as that point, is in terms of the ebbs and flows of local communities. People put signs on their fences saying why they have left, so I don't doubt those people, but it does seem that in communities like this, especially once services go—I guess in country towns it is the bank and then the school, and things go one by one—are there likely to be factors other than the wind farm that have led to the decline of the local population?

Mr FAINT: No. Farms have become bigger, so if the farms have been sold they are usually bought by the neighbours, so families are lost that way. That is probably common all over the state. But the only other industry in Waterloo has been a quarry. That employed a few locals, but that has been leased out to a company called Fulton Hogan, and they are not operating there at the moment because they are a big company and they go where the work is. There is probably one permanent person there and a casual, and there would have been perhaps 20 people there at one stage. That would have helped the local community, but that is probably it, the main thing. However, as I said, the wind farm has not created any.

887 The Hon. R.P. WORTLEY: I need to go back. I don't like harping on about this, but it will be something we will be talking about when we deliberate on this: what can this energy company do or hold over a doctor from coming out and saying, 'This is a real health issue here. A lot of my patients are suffering'? He wouldn't have to mention anyone's names. It just seems that there is something missing. What can they do to frighten a doctor to not—

Mr FAINT: The wind farm proponents will say, 'Well, there's probably only two or three people complaining.' That has been their answer all the time, and they write that in their documents and their propaganda.

888 The Hon. R.P. WORTLEY: But if a doctor came out and said something, people would believe a doctor over a wind farm.

Mr FAINT: They should.

889 The Hon. R.P. WORTLEY: Most of the time they would. I still don't know why there is no doctor who will come out, on behalf of their patients, and say, 'There is an issue here and it should be looked at.'

Mr FAINT: I guess that is a question for the doctors themselves, in some ways, isn't it? We are not medical people. If I were a doctor I certainly would say something to the general public or to the decision-makers about a problem, because it is so real for so many people.

890 The Hon. R.P. WORTLEY: Thanks very much for that.

891 The CHAIRPERSON: Thanks very much for your evidence; we appreciate you coming in, and thanks for coming a few minutes early; it just meant we could continue on. As I said, a copy of your evidence will be forwarded to you for checking for clerical corrections.

Mr FAINT: Thank you for this opportunity.