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OPEN LETTER

Dear Premier Napthine,

I have been advised that after the opening of the AGL/NZ Government owned Meridian Energy Macarthur wind development 4 days ago, you met with some of the sick and exhausted residents who asked you to listen to them, and pleaded with you to help them.

The delegation included residents in your electorate from Macarthur, who cannot sleep in their homes at night, and cannot remain living or working in their homes, workshops and on their farms during the day, because of the intolerable and well documented symptoms and sensations associated with the audible and inaudible noise and vibration generated by large industrial wind turbines. They are exhausted, and they are sick. When they are away from the operating wind turbines, their symptoms consistently improve. This direct correlation of these specific symptoms with exposure to operating wind turbines is reported consistently around the world, in neighbours to wind turbines, including turbine hosts.

The residents told me you showed no concern for their situation, said there was “no evidence” of health problems, and said that it was “a Federal Government problem” and that there was “nothing your government could do”. It is untrue that there is “no evidence” and I have attached my statement to a recent VCAT case, which details just some of the existing evidence. That statement was sent to all Victorian members of Parliament recently, including yourself, as was the media release, also attached.

Please have a look at the following short video interviews, or victim impact footage, and you will start to get some idea of what your constituents at the Pacific Hydro Cape Bridgewater wind development have been living with, and trying to bring to your attention, since 2009.

<http://stopthesethings.com/2013/03/24/cape-bridgewater-sonia/>
<http://stopthesethings.com/2013/04/04/cape-bridgewater-melissa-and-rikki/>
<http://stopthesethings.com/2013/04/13/cape-bridgewater-brian-and-joanne/>

These are your constituents, Premier. How would you feel if it was vulnerable members of your own family in the position these constituents of yours find themselves in?

Some residents in your electorate have left their homes permanently because of the severity of the impact on them and vulnerable members of their family including young children. One resident worked on the wind turbines. I note that even one of the employees of Keppel Prince Engineering noted that “*it was not OK for people to be driven out of their homes by wind turbines*”, at the meeting which DLP Senator John Madigan hosted at Portland last year, where acoustician Steven Cooper shared his findings and knowledge with the local community including staff from Pacific Hydro and Keppel Prince Engineering.

The Keppel Prince employee is right.

It is not acceptable for these people to be driven out of their homes. Nor is it acceptable for them to be ignored by those charged with the ultimate responsibility for monitoring the noise pollution they emit and developing safe planning and noise pollution guidelines. Monitoring and regulation of noise pollution is not the Federal Government's responsibility, and nor are planning guidelines which are meant to protect the health and amenity of residents. They are responsibilities of YOUR state government. As Premier, you are now ultimately responsible, and your government has a duty of care to protect them.

The full spectrum of ages is affected by this health damaging acoustic pollution, including especially young children and the elderly. As you can see from the video victim impact footage, they didn't know what was happening to them. This was no nocebo or NIMBY effect, Premier, but the symptoms are characteristic of exposure to acoustic frequencies down below 200 Hz, in the infrasound and low frequency noise range. The residents also regularly describe excessive audible noise, always denied by the noise polluters.

Neither these low frequencies nor audible noise are currently being monitored independently of the noise polluters, rather the noise polluter's acoustic consultants collect and analyse the data and regularly have subsequent data or equipment "problems" on days when the neighbours say the noise has been particularly bad. The wind turbine noise guidelines are written so that it is impossible for an acoustician independent of the wind developer to determine compliance with those noise guidelines without the wind developer handing over certain data, which they of course consistently refuse to provide.

This creates a situation where it has become clear that some wind developers are knowingly emitting health damaging noise pollution, which they know cannot be independently detected and regulated. A particularly blatant example is Accoiona's Waubra wind development, which has never been issued with a compliance certificate from the Victorian Planning Minister despite being in operation for three and a half years (Acciona's Waubra wind development). The Minister has been given independent acoustic data clearly indicating that for the period of time measured the noise measured exceeded the guidelines.

Whilst there is no doubt your party inherited a mess from the previous Bracks and Brumby Labor governments, since your party came to power, it has done nothing to actively investigate the noise pollution or health problems at existing wind developments. Residents have reported wind turbine noise and associated health and sleep problems to the departments of planning and health since at least 2009. Two medical practitioners in the Victorian Health department admitted to Victorian residents that they knew there was a problem with wind turbine noise, in April 2011 and October 2011. Dr Stephanie Williams and Dr Simon Slota Kan have since left the Victorian Department of Health.

Unfortunately the current Chief Health Officer Dr Rosemary Lester declined the Pyrenees Shire Council's request for the Victorian Health department to conduct urgent investigations over a year ago, so there has not been the necessary "boots on the ground" research in order to document the serious sleep and health problems such a health impact assessment could have found. It would appear that as with your Labor government predecessors, the Victorian Coalition government do not wish to know.

Dr Bob Thorne, who is one of the most experienced and knowledgeable psychoacousticians internationally in this specific area of the impacts of wind turbine noise, approached Minister Guy, as the Minister for Planning, with a thoroughly developed study proposal, to investigate both the acoustic exposures of these residents publicly reporting problems, as well as gather basic data on their mental and physical health status. This study proposal was rejected by Minister Guy.

Dr Thorne subsequently conducted a much smaller self funded research project. His results were extremely concerning, and were submitted to the Federal senate inquiry in November, 2012 but were ignored by the majority senators, as was all of the other expert evidence from those health and acoustics experts researching this problem directly in the field. The political consensus of the majority Labor and Green senators decided "the nocebo effect" was to blame, thus effectively ignoring over 30 years research in acoustics and medicine relating to environmental noise and its effects on sleep and health.

Dr Thorne's data showed that the residents living next to these Victorian wind developments had worse health on every single indicator than population data from hospital inpatients. The data also confirmed the poor sleep and serious mental health problems identified by other researchers.

The VCAT Commissioners who heard the recent Cherry Tree case did take notice of this and other acoustics and clinical research, including public health physicians Drs Arra and Lynn's recent literature review, attached, which together show that sleep deprivation and stress are well known to be caused by exposure to low frequency noise, which wind turbines emit. On the basis of the evidence, the Commissioners have stated the following:

para 116

"There is evidence before the Tribunal that a number of people living close to wind farms suffer deleterious health effects. The evidence is both direct and anecdotal. There is a uniformity of description of these effects across a number of wind farms, both in southeast Australia and North America. Residents complain of suffering sleep disturbance, feelings of anxiety upon awakening, headaches, pressure at the base of the neck and in the head and ears, nausea and loss of balance."

para 117

"In some cases the impacts have been of such gravity that residents have been forced to abandon their homes."

para 118

"On the basis of this evidence it is clear that some residents who live in close proximity to a wind farm experience the symptoms described, and that the experience is not simply imagined".

The Commissioners went on to say that they were operating in a knowledge vacuum, as indeed they are. Premier, the NHMRC does not conduct research. It funds it. Not one cent has yet been spent on directly researching this problem by the NHMRC or Federal Government, despite the "urgent" research recommended by the first Australian Federal Senate inquiry in June 2011. The community has borne the cost of the independent acoustic field research, which your government has chosen so far not to conduct.

Your health department has a responsibility under the Public Health and Wellbeing Act to investigate and has failed to do so, despite two of its medical officers publicly admitting there is a problem, and despite a request from a local council (Pyrenees) with known serious problems (Waubra). Continued inactivity and attempted buckpassing by you and your government to the Federal Government is unacceptable.

What is now required urgently from your government is ongoing data collection:

1. **Basic population surveys** at all existing wind developments, to determine the extent and distance of the disturbed sleep correlating with exposure to operating wind turbines.
2. **Independent full spectrum acoustic monitoring** at all wind developments in Victoria where residents are reporting sleep and health problems, with the wind developers being instructed to hand over the data required in order to determine compliance on an ongoing basis, and where the wind developers are also required to conduct on – off testing.
3. **Replication of the survey questionnaire** data collection conducted by Dr Thorne to include all residents reporting adverse health impacts from exposure to operating wind turbines.
4. **Investigation at the schools and homes** where children are exposed during the night and/or day to operating wind turbines, involving both acoustic monitoring as well as a systematic evaluation of the impact on the health, wellbeing and learning / cognitive brain function of these children.

Premier, what is currently occurring is a fundamental abuse of human rights. It is disproportionately affecting those Victorians with the least capacity to move in order to protect themselves and their families from the well known effects of exposure to this type of environmental noise, which include severe sleep deprivation and chronic physiological and psychological stress, both of which are individually well known to cause serious damage to health. Together their impact can be catastrophic for health and well being over the longer term, especially if there is additional vulnerability because of underlying mental or physical illness, or individual noise sensitivity with conditions such as autism.

This serious cumulative damage to the health of rural residents is preventable, with proper regulation and monitoring of noise pollution, and truly evidence based guidelines for wind turbine noise pollution. These in turn will assist with better planning decisions which do protect the health and amenity of the community. Better knowledge of precisely which acoustic frequencies at which “doses” are causing damage to health will come with the sort of “boots on the ground” research which your government is in a position to start conducting immediately, by doing a comprehensive public health impact assessment and full spectrum acoustic assessment at existing wind developments where the characteristic pattern of health and sleep problems are being reported.

Such a systematic approach is enshrined in your state government’s current Policy and Planning guidelines for the development of wind energy facilities, dated July 2012. Clause 5.1.1 states the following:

*“Responsible authorities MUST assess the impact of a wind energy facility on **human well being** in a systematic manner”*

Premier, that systematic assessment of the impacts of wind energy facilities is long overdue. **The first medical practitioner** to report concerns to Premier Bracks, and Ministers Brumby, Delahunty and Thwaites, was **Dr David Iser, a rural GP from Toora, in 2004**. Unfortunately he was ignored.

Please, Premier, show some decisive, moral and compassionate leadership on this issue.

Ensure the proper multidisciplinary science is conducted, and transparent industry independent noise pollution monitoring systems are in place, and the problems will be fixed and future problems prevented. Ignoring these sick and exhausted residents will result in inevitable electoral and legal consequences for members of your government, in addition to the slow but sure destruction of the health and wellbeing of rural families, as is already happening at Macarthur.

Yours sincerely



Dr Sarah Laurie, CEO

Attachments

Statement of Dr Laurie to VCAT re Cherry Tree case

<https://www.wind-watch.org/documents/statement-of-dr-sarah-elisabeth-laurie/>

Waubra Foundation Media Release 10th April, 2013

<https://www.wind-watch.org/news/2013/04/10/vcat-commissioners-confirm-evidence-of-damage-to-sleep-and-health/>

Dr David Iser’s submission to the NHMRC

<https://www.wind-watch.org/documents/toora-wind-farm-health-effects-survey-2004/>

Drs Arra and Lynn Literature Review 2013

<https://www.wind-watch.org/documents/association-between-wind-turbine-noise-and-human-distress-literature-review/>