

Wind company apologises for screeching turbines

SEAN McCOMISH The Standard, Warnambool, Victoria

Aug. 7, 2013



• Wind farm operator sends general manager door-to-door to apologise for irritating technical fault.

The operator of a wind farm in Cape Bridgewater, in south-west Victoria has issued a dramatic apology after residents spent nearly a year complaining about high-pitched screeching coming from the turbines.

Pacific Hydro says it is “embarrassed” over the technical fault that was first alluded to by residents in September last year.

The company had even gone as far as sending its Australian general manager Lane Crockett to make front-door apologies to homes surrounding the wind farm.

It issued a lengthy statement of apology yesterday after a public meeting at the coastal spot on Monday night.

“We are very relieved to have finally been able to find the noise, identify its cause and solve this issue,” Mr Crockett said.

“Clearly the noise has been distressing for some neighbours and we feel awful to have been causing this issue for them,” Mr Crockett said.

“We apologise to these neighbours.”

Residents had been subjected to the high-frequency noise that lasted up to a minute in low wind and was audible at distances 500 metres away from the turbines.

A number of the 29 turbines are close to homes because they were built before laws were introduced ordering a two-kilometre setback.

“We are embarrassed it took us so long to find the noise and identify its cause.

“While we had been investigating complaints when they were made, the specific wind conditions that the noise was audible in was not happening regularly.”

The company has also offered to pay for additional noise testing to be undertaken by the residents’ preferred acoustician.

Sonia Trist, whose home is 600 metres away from towers, described the sound as “a cocktail of noises”.

“It’s like a grinding but it’s more complicated than that,” she said.

Ms Trist, who lives at the property with her son, said the noise had caused her sleep deprivation and headaches.

“There’s a lot they have to do to restore our faith. I want a credible acoustician of my choosing and I want them to fund it,” she said.

A spokesman for the company said it had received no demands for financial compensation.

Pacific Hydro’s statement was also careful to separately mention that that sub-audible infrasound levels were at normal levels. Residents with health complaints living near wind farms often attribute their problems to infrasound.

Successive studies, including a summary report released by the Victorian Health Department this year, have found no evidence that turbines lead to health problems.