

# Turbines blamed for killing emu business

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The owners of Ocean Breeze Emu Farm say turbines have killed off their flock and their business. (FILE)

Ocean Breeze Emu Farm is no more.

Seven emus remain at the Gullivers Cove farm on Digby Neck.

“We’ll harvest them this week,” said Debi VanTassell, who owned the operation along with husband David.

Vibrations from nearby wind turbines have killed many of the birds, the couple contends.

The VanTassells began losing emus when five died during the winter of 2009, when a test turbine started spinning nearby.

But things looked up when they counted 27 new chicks last fall.

“We were so excited,” Debi VanTassell said Monday.

But the vibrating hum from the turbines seemed to have intensified recently, she said.

“Our birds became very aggressive. They were never like that. They were very docile.”

Emus always lie down at dusk. They just want to go to sleep, VanTassell said.

But the big birds were not sleeping. They were running in their pens night and day.

“We noticed they weren’t gaining any weight.

“Some of them were so skinny, you’d see the little backbones,” VanTassell said.

Barely audible or low-frequency vibrations from the turbines have done them in, she said.

The infrasound gets in your head and body and takes you over, VanTassell said.

During one period of about 14 days, they lost five birds.

“We can’t sit and watch the rest of these birds die.” said VanTassell.

Some remaining emus were trucked away Sunday — emus that cost \$3,000 a pair but were sold for \$100 each.

Seven remaining larger birds will be harvested this week.

The VanTassells farm is about 850 metres from the nearest turbine, it has been calculated, VanTassell said.

A ridge above them is where that turbine sits. There are four turbines in the vicinity.

Back in 2009, the VanTassells said they thought a test turbine on a nearby ridge was driving coyotes down from above.

The coyotes were coming into their yard like never before.

The VanTassells say they have been ridiculed for asking lots of questions.

But Nova Scotia Power called VanTassell on Monday morning, and Paul Warren, manager of hydroelectricity and wind energy, will meet the couple Thursday.

The provincial power utility learned about the emu situation Thursday, when the Municipality of the District of Digby contacted the company, said Nova Scotia Power spokesman David Rodenhiser, who said the VanTassells informed the municipality.

“That was the first we heard of their decision to shut down the farm.

“We take these types of concerns very seriously. It’s difficult when we don’t hear about them directly.

“We’ll work with them to see what we can do,” he said, without elaborating.

Rodenhiser said a community liaison committee in the Gullivers Cove area was established when the wind project was first under construction and remained in place for a full year after the park was up and running.

“We’d be interested to know whether there’s been any veterinary examination of the emus to provide any sort of scientific insight into what’s happening.”

The wind turbine facility on Digby Neck went fully online in December 2010.

It consists of 20 turbines generating 30 megawatts totally, enough to power about 10,000 homes, said Rodenhiser