

# 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 PETER MATTEY, Mayor, Regional Council of Goyder

794 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. Mayor Mattey, over to you to make your opening comments.

Mr MATTEY: Thank you, Mr Chairman. First of all, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. There are a couple of familiar faces here, but you are a bit new to me, Mr Chairman. Firstly, I would like to make it clear that neither myself nor the Regional Council of Goyder are anti-development. In fact, I don't think there are too many country regions in South Australia that can afford to be anti-development; it is pretty hard for us to get development in the regions, so we are not anti-development.

I think a lot of the troubles with wind farms go back to the urgency of a former premier to establish them. The ground rules weren't set up properly. In the normal course of events, if planning procedures are to take place, they take place under a zoning system, and in each zone it is made pretty clear what you can do, what you can't do, and what you might be able to do if you present it the right way.

I cannot for the life of me understand how we went into this wind farm industry without having a good look across the state and determining where the no-go zones were and where the zones were that they would be acceptable. Not only would that have allowed for community debate before there were any proposals on the table, it would have also given a fair bit of certainty to proponents of these developments. I think, as a state, we lacked a fair bit of foresight in that area.

I realise there are some difficulties with it now we are down the track a bit, but I think, to be quite honest, we've got to work towards uniformity right across the nation. At the moment, we've got one set of rules in one state, we've got another set of rules in another state, and we've got another set of rules in South Australia. I don't see why there should be any great difference between the states. I realise states have a fair bit of a problem agreeing about anything, but I think it is something that should be worked towards; it may not be totally uniform, but it should be as close as it can be.

Some of the provisions that have been foisted upon us over the last couple of years—this two kilometre and one kilometre business; two kilometre from towns, one kilometre from homesteads out in the rural hinterland—I just can't understand why anybody can be treated any differently no matter where they live in this state. That, to me, is unbelievable. People on the land living on the homestead, isn't their hearing quite as good as people in the township area? I don't know, but it just seems to me to be quite ridiculous. I think we need to get away from that.

It was probably part of the things Mayor Aughey was talking about a while ago—  
SELECT COMMITTEE ON WIND FARM DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA Page 220

divisions in the community. While we had quite a few divisions in our communities in certain areas, in other parts of Goyder (which is a fairly large council area), we probably haven't seen that to the same extent. I think it probably has got to do with the density of the population to a fair degree: if you keep out of the more populated areas, there are probably less divisions.

One of the ways—mayor Aughey has touched on a couple of things here—that might be a means to heal the divisions is this. It just seems to me that those people who have turbines on their properties are getting a fairly good package out of it, but there is not much for those who are around. There needs to be some sort of way—and I am not sure how you do it—of a shading-in effect to actually compensate those people who are close to wind turbines but not actually receiving all these payments.

The provision of cheaper power is put up—well, I am perhaps talking more about the long-term capital values of properties that are close to wind farms but yet they are not benefiting from them. The properties that have the wind turbines on them, they are going up in value, but there is quite a fair probability in a lot of places that the ones that are adjoined that haven't got any turbines are going down in value. That in itself I think creates some of the divisions.

How you go about it, I am not quite sure, but it would seem to me that perhaps there should be some mechanism put in place to encourage the proponents to actually pay less lease on the turbines and make some sort of compensation to those who are clearly affected; possibly, I don't know, you would have to put a limit on it of a five-kilometre radius or something like that.

795 The CHAIRPERSON: So that would be a sort of sharing the love type approach.

Mr MATTEY: Well, it helps get the whole community on board. That's how I'm looking at it, rather than the severe opposition that certainly has appeared in a lot of areas across the lower Mid North of South Australia. Now, the biggest problem: acoustics. Nobody in Australia seems to understand fully the acoustics, the cluster effects and background noise and how that relates to what people are hearing.

I have to say that I was fairly sceptical when I first heard it, but I had the misfortune to get a flat tyre one day about 2½ kilometres from out in front of one of these whole rows of turbines. When I got out to change the tyre I could hardly hear myself think. It was just horrendous. I changed the tyre, and I was on a bit of high ground out in front of the turbines, not as high as they were, but on high ground. I drove about a kilometre towards them and I stopped again and got out and I could hardly hear anything. It is very difficult, certainly for a layperson like me, to be able to predict where you are going to get this whirring, roaring, horrendous noise. It is something that I think the industry, government and local government have got a deal with. You've got homesteads that are complaining and then other homesteads not very far away not complaining or not complaining as much because it seems to be wind direction, cluster effect, and how much background noise there is as to how much effect they get.

It would seem to me that there is room somewhere in the industry for a bit of innovation. Rather than actually start buying houses or bulldozing houses or whatever, it would seem to me that surely we can come up with some mechanisms to measure the noise at a homestead and then, while the wind is in that direction or while those prevailing climatic conditions persist, those wind turbines could be shut down. It would seem to me that that is a far more efficient way to go about it than to actually try to move everybody out of the area, which leads me to another problem with the noise.

The noise is measured and then it is averaged over an eight-hour period. That's not much help to a bloke at three o'clock in the morning if he can't sleep. There should be a limit, a decibel limit, at all times on the turbines. Where there is a problem, it needs to be measured and, as I said before, with a bit of innovation, you might be able to shut those turbines down and everybody might be able to live happily together. But the averaging over a period of eight hours is not appropriate in my view.

Another suggestion—and I understand, of course, going back to where I started, it wasn't made clear or it wasn't determined where they were acceptable and where they weren't right at the start of the industry. So, pretty clearly they set themselves up as much as they could as close to the wind as they could but as close to the existing infrastructure, and that makes sense if you are in business. It seems to me that we should be working towards a bias to encourage wind farms to develop in unincorporated areas, and by that I mean low population areas. I think the one out from Broken Hill is an excellent example of that, and I think that is the path we ought to be going down in South Australia.

think they have responded as much as they can to our request for measurements of wind turbine noise. When I say 'as much as they can', I think it needs to be addressed that, from my observations, the EPA is probably under resourced and I think that's something that needs to be taken forward into the future. That's about as far as I would like to go at the moment, Mr Chairman. I am quite happy to take questions on any aspects of it. I think we are a bit more balanced in Goyder than in Clare. We are not quite as protective. He's looking over my shoulder, I'll bet.

796 The CHAIRPERSON: He's still sitting.

Mr MATTEY: He's still sitting so I'm safe. I think we are probably a little bit more balanced in our approach to it. I would also have to say that wind farms have brought some benefits to our communities as well, and certainly economic benefit.

797 The CHAIRPERSON: Thank you, Mayor Matthey. You make some comment about the capital value of properties that don't have the turbines, and we've heard evidence or we've read in interstate newspapers where there have been some councils where residents have applied to have their rates reviewed because they believe that the capital value of their properties have gone down. Do you have any evidence in your council that you have definitely seen the value of properties decline?

Mr MATTEY: No, it's pretty difficult to answer that. Look, I think that has probably occurred in parts other than our council, but you have to understand the turnover of land in a council like Goyder is very slow anyway. It would be very difficult to measure it at this point in time, but, certainly, people view not only the turbines but the infrastructure that comes with them as an undesirable place to be.

798 The CHAIRPERSON: Your council hasn't had any request to review rates on any particular properties?

Mr MATTEY: Not that I know of but I am not in a position to be able to answer that, because if you want to have your valuation reviewed, you know as well as I do that you've got to go to the Valuer-General, and what case people put to the Valuer-General is their business, between them and him.

799 The CHAIRPERSON: For your benefit and for the rest of the gallery, we have the Valuer-General scheduled to be a witness at some future meeting in the city. With your proposal of sharing benefit around, it is your council's view that it is more appropriate to share it, perhaps with a sliding scale with neighbouring property owners, rather than a contribution to the community. Do you have a view on the proposition Mayor Aughey has put about increased rates and not having all the wind farms judged to be plant, but for some of it to be capital value?

Mr MATTEY: Yes, I think they are probably two different issues. If people's lifestyles and desirability of where they live is affected then I think the private individual, up to a certain limit, should be compensated. I think it is very unfortunate, given that the wind farm proponents, or the wind farm companies, do use our facilities and they do use our infrastructure, and I think it is unfortunate that we can't achieve more through the rating processes. If I put up a \$500,000 hay shed on my property, I would get rated on it, and yet these people are putting up billion dollar propositions and not paying any rates at all. It is one of the things, I think, that the community finds annoying and it is divisive in the community.

800 The CHAIRPERSON: Just quickly, you also mentioned that with the setbacks of two kilometres from towns, and one from homes, your view is that with a person living in a homestead, their rights are exactly the same as somebody living in the town. Does the council have a view on any particular distance, or do you think it would be better based on a noise measurement?

Mr MATTEY: I think this issue should be the same for both and, really, it ought to be—and this is not my council's point of view, I'm just giving you my point of view—I reckon a minimum of three kilometres. But, again, I would be prepared to be flexible in that view provided there were some measurements taken that would actually shut down the offending turbines when they exceed the 40 decibel limit, and not an average over eight hours but when they actually exceed it.

801 The Hon. R.P. WORTLEY: Mr Matthey, can you let me know your view of the public consultation process that went on with this from the very beginning until now?

Mr MATTEY: I think in our area the proponents went out and tried to sell it as much as they could. I think there are people in our community who believe that they probably were

not told the whole story, and I can't say whether that it is accurate or not, but they believe they didn't hear the whole story and, whether they actually did or they didn't, I can't say one way or the other.

With regards to the categories of these developments, I think that it is an absolute disgrace that anybody in the community can't make comment or make appeal with regard to them. They are something that affect the whole community. If you exclude the community from that then, again, I think that divides communities.

802 The CHAIRPERSON: Just one quick question: how many turbines are there in your council area, do you know?

Mr MATTEY: In excess of 100 anyway.

803 The CHAIRPERSON: And was it your council that had the Development Assessment Panel meeting in Burra? Is that right?

Mr MATTEY: That's correct.

804 The CHAIRPERSON: And that was for Stony Gap?

Mr MATTEY: That's correct. Our panel at that stage rejected that.

805 The CHAIRPERSON: And that was on the basis of health reasons?

Mr MATTEY: Health reasons, yes, and proximity to the houses.

806 The Hon. M. PARNELL: I want to pursue this issue that the Hon. David Ridgway described as 'sharing the love'. It is sort of shorthand for something that we've talked about with a range of people. You have very big structures, visible from a long way, can be heard, and yet the hosts get a direct economic benefit and the people who are in the neighbourhood say, 'What about us?' There are a couple of different approaches, and you talked a little bit about one, which would be direct compensation of neighbours.

I make the comment that that would be novel, I think, in South Australia because if someone has a piggery built next to them, or a foundry, road or railway, no-one ever gets compensated, so it would be novel. Another approach that has been suggested is the community fund approach. Again, there are two ways of looking at that. One is companies, wanting to be good corporate citizens, voluntarily put money back into the community, whether it is sponsoring the races, or whatever. Another approach would be to mandate it. In other words, as part of a development approval a certain sum of money per turbine per year must be set aside and put into some sort of community development fund.

So, I guess my question is: have you thought at all about that sort of an approach and would local government be the appropriate body to handle a community fund, or do you think we can just trust that companies will do the right thing and they will work with Rotary, Lions, Apex and hospital boards, and whatever? So, it is voluntary versus mandated.

Mr MATTEY: I would have to say that in Goyder at the moment there are small amounts of money made to small community projects as a result of these wind farms. It's a fairly token gesture. I think it would have to be mandated. I might sound a bit cynical here, but in my knowledge of business, business is there to make a profit, it's there to serve shareholders. At the end of the day, shareholders would put pressure on them not to make too many voluntary contributions. I think it would need to be mandated. In what form you do it I don't know.

I mean, you drew the analogy a while ago about: what's the difference between road infrastructure or train infrastructure? Quite a big difference. If you build a major road, you get some barriers, these days, put up to try to alleviate the noise problem. You have a look at all the new road developments that are going in now, there's quite a lot of stuff put in to try to eliminate the noise problem, or reduce the noise problem. I haven't seen anything done yet to reduce the visual impairment that these turbines create in our communities or anything done yet to try to reduce the noise.

807 The Hon. M. PARNELL: Yes. The example I gave, I used those too, but you could equally say other industry. In a previous life I was a lawyer working for residents groups who were tackling pollution problems coming from foundries, for example. You might have a foundry that was there for 100 years, four people working an eight-hour day, and all of a sudden it's now 200 people working around the clock. I was just making the point that the legal system doesn't recognise the right to compensation, it recognises that pollution authorities, like the EPA, should be insisting on

standards being met and, in theory at least, they could shut down an operation that doesn't meet those standards.

Anyway, it was just an example of whether or not there is likely to be an appetite for direct compensation of neighbours. I guess I'm just saying that I don't know if there would be an appetite for it because there's not a lot of precedent for it, yet there is precedent for more indirect community compensation because most wind farms, either generously or less so, do put money back into communities.

Mr MATTEY: Whatever you come up with there is always going to be somebody who reckons they missed out; you know that as well as I do. I think in a lot of cases, if there was compensation in some form or other, one, it would drive them away from township areas because, I mean, the compensation would be quite horrendous. So, it would reduce the divisions, I think, amongst our rural communities if there was a shading-in effect.

You've got to understand that rural communities are living with this infrastructure. They use a minimal amount of power compared to where the power is going. They see this as all going—let's face it, most Australians live in metro areas, that's where we use the power. They see it as an imposition placed upon them to provide power to the metro areas. A lot of people came to the country because they wanted peace and quiet. They didn't want a lot of background noise.

808 The Hon. M. PARNELL: I guess the only other thing is—you put your finger on it in terms of your evidence before—one of the difficulties with this whole system—and your changing the car tyre analogy was a good one—is that most of the guesswork, if you like, or the assessment of what the impact might be, is all done before it's built. Clearly, that is how it works. They do acoustic modelling, they get the landscape maps, they get the prevailing wind directions, they try and guess what the noise profile will be, which areas will be shielded, which areas might be noisy, and that's all done on computers, and they do that.

Once they have been approved, then the reality might turn out to be different to what was modelled. So I guess that then is the ball being hand-passed from local council, for example, that might have been involved in approving the wind farm, to the enforcer of standards, which is the EPA. So I guess that's part of the issue. They're not currently licensed separately. The EPA certainly does enforce general noise standards, but we don't have a sophisticated licensing regime for wind farms that has been specifically developed for that industry. Would that be an improvement?

Mr MATTEY: I think you're getting back to the innovation I was talking about earlier. At this stage it appears that even the best acoustics experts in the country can't come to an agreement on what the result might be prior to a wind farm being built. And you just said yourself that it is quite likely that on a lot of occasions it will be different once it's actually there and functioning. The innovation part is that they actually measure this. Where people have got a problem they measure it and determine which turbines are causing the problems, and shut them down when they do.

They don't cause a problem all the time. Often it might only be one or two nights a week. Again, it is dependent a lot on background noise, where the wind comes from. I don't think we are ever going to work that out properly to start with, so we've got to find something to make everybody live in harmony. That's the only way I can see, that wind farm proponents or operators have got to be prepared to accept that half a dozen turbines might get switched off for 10 hours occasionally because of a homestead. Does that answer your question?

809 The Hon. M. PARNELL: Yes and no. I am trying to imagine practically how it would work. Unless you had some sort of official monitoring at every nearby residence, it would effectively be that someone rings up and says, 'It's noisy, make them turn it off,' on the telephone versus some sort of official technical monitoring station where someone could remotely work out, 'Well, actually, you're right, it is too noisy; they should turn it off.' It's just the practicalities of it I guess I am interested in.

Mr MATTEY: If they can manage some of these wind farms, I understand, from Melbourne and switch them down when it's too windy, for them to be able use them effectively creates too great a risk, I can't see for the life of me why they can't monitor the noise levels and switch them off in that situation as well. Look, it probably is not going to happen in every homestead. If you set up a noise monitoring mechanism at a homestead, and over a period of six

months it's only invoked once or twice, well then, you probably allow them to remove it, but if it's getting invoked twice a week you certainly wouldn't. I think that's part of the cost the industry has got to bear if it wants to find sites for wind turbines and live in harmony with its community.

810 The Hon. M. PARNELL: Thank you.

811 The CHAIRPERSON: Mayor Matthey, thank you very much for your evidence today. As I said earlier, a copy will be sent to you to check for clerical corrections, but we thank you for your evidence today.

Mr MATTEY: Thank you very much.