

Extract from Hansard
Senate Select Committee on Wind Turbines – 10 June 2015

FAINT, Mr John, Chair, Waterloo and District Concerned Citizens Group

GARE, Mr Clive Donald, Private capacity

GARE, Mrs Petrina Mary, Private capacity

MORRIS, Mrs Mary Louise, Private capacity

QUAST, Mrs Julie Ann, Secretary, Waterloo and District concerned Citizens Group

SCHAEFER, Mr Colin Russell, Waterloo and District Concerned Citizens Group

CHAIR: Welcome. Do you have any comments to make on the capacity in which you appear?

Mr Gare : I am a host of a wind farm.

Mrs Gare : I am also a host of a wind farm.

Mr Faint : As well as being Chair of the Waterloo and District Concerned Citizens Group, I am a farmer who lives in the area.

Mrs Quast : I am Secretary of the Waterloo and District Concerned Citizens Group.

Mr Schaefer : I am a farmer and a concerned citizen for our people in the Robertstown and Waterloo districts.

CHAIR: Could you please confirm that information on parliamentary privilege and the protection of witnesses and evidence has been provided to each of you. Yes? Thank you. The committee has your submissions. I now invite you to make brief opening statements. At the conclusion of your remarks I will invite members of the committee to put questions to you. Mr Schaefer, as you have to leave soon, we will start with you.

Mr Schaefer : Thank you very much for slotting me in where you have, and I will get to it straightaway. I am just wondering why our country is so hell-bent on having so many wind farms scattered over the country. I do make an exception about where these things are placed and what is best for the people. However, there seem to be double standards in this country—one for the multinationals and one for the common people. In our area the wind farm companies area allowed to do what they like, how they like. Yet when people want to use a small area of two designated cemeteries they are stopped because of so-called endangered native vegetation, when there is the same stuff growing on our road sides. Are our people in some instances less important than native fauna and flora and in other instances with the big multinationals the fauna and flora are less important? Why is that?

My second point is health issues. Health effects have been known in Holland for many years, according to two men from Holland living at Port Pirie who I met when I was in the Lyell

McEwin Hospital. I am sure these men could be contacted if they were still alive and tracked down to give their statements as to the effects of what those Dutch windmills cause.

My third statement is about the effects on wildlife. Jays in our area are moving away from the ranges out onto the plains. This has never happened before. My son is involved in an organised local farmers' fox shoot in the area, and when they did the Waterloo Range the members commented of that shoot that the area along there was absolutely barren of wildlife or anything else apart from farm animals.

Where is the common health and wealth for our people? And why is solar not being pushed a bit more? East of where I live there are thousands of acres that are of very low productivity, and it would impact on no-one. That is about it. If there are any questions I am more for you to ask me.

[Senator URQUHART:](#) Perhaps I could just clarify one point. I thought I heard you say jays were coming down—

Mr Schaefer : Yes. We call them black magpies.

[Senator URQUHART:](#) Right—black jays. Thank you.

Mrs Morris : Perhaps I could just point out that Mr Schaefer's house was one of the sites for the EPA testing. It is his house that is 8.7 kilometres away from the Waterloo wind farm. He also was signed up to be a host for the Robertstown wind farm, and together with his neighbours—this is in his submission—they refused to host the turbines. So, there is no Robertstown wind farm now. It is not going ahead now because the hosts refused to have it.

[Senator LEYONHJELM:](#) The 8.7 kilometre distance from the farm—and your farmhouse was tested for that—why were you tested? We have had hundreds of submissions, so it is a bit difficult for me to remember everything and know all the details. So, assume no prior knowledge. What were the circumstances that led to you having that testing done in your house? And has anything changed?

Mr Schaefer : It was the realisation that I was having a lack of sleep, and that was having an effect on my health. Unfortunately the doctors do not seem to want to accept that as an excuse, because, as you may have read in my submission, I was unfortunate enough to have a heart attack, and that led to serious implications. Fortunately I am back to good health now, but we have since moved to alongside Robertstown, where we can still hear them, but only to a minor extent compared with what we did where we lived at Brady Creek.

[Senator LEYONHJELM:](#) Take me through the circumstances in relation to your health that led to the testing in your house.

Mr Schaefer : It was mainly the lack of sleep, and also—

[Senator LEYONHJELM:](#) How long after the turbines went in?

Mr Schaefer : Yes. There were times when we would have a fortnight straight of wind noise, and that made me get very nervy, jittery and uneasy within myself. Strangely enough, it was

through a meeting that I was invited to at Waterloo that, all of a sudden, the penny dropped as to why this was occurring.

[Senator LEYONHJELM:](#) How long after the turbines became operational did you notice any effect on you?

Mr Schaefer : I cannot honestly say that exactly because, when you are not aware of why these things are occurring, you think, 'Oh, well, something's a bit wrong.'

[Senator LEYONHJELM:](#) Weeks? Months? A year?

Mr Schaefer : It was less than that. It would have been within months.

[Senator LEYONHJELM:](#) Thank you.

CHAIR: Would you like to continue, Mrs Morris?

Mr Schaefer : May I leave?

CHAIR: Yes, you may.

Mr Schaefer : Thank you very much for listening.

Mrs Morris : I will not go over what is in my submission too much. I was the person who was initially documenting residents' complaints around the Waterloo wind farm, and that is what led me to investigate it with the survey that I did, which the NHMRC accepted as evidence of health effects from wind turbines. Following on from that, the EPA decided they would investigate the noise concerns. I documented nearly all the houses in the area and provided them with a database of which houses are affected, and that is why they chose their six sites. I have a handout showing some of the noise graphs from the EPA testing.

The main thing is that I want to back up Colin Hansen's view that the conclusions drawn by the EPA from their results are not logical. They did 10 weeks of testing, which was fantastic. It produced heaps and heaps of data which should take probably a couple of years to go through, not a few months. I think they whacked their report out very quickly to get a predetermined outcome. They say that the wind farm is compliant with their guidelines, and, despite the fact that people are still complaining, cannot sleep and cannot live in their houses, they say that there is no need to review the guidelines. I think the one thing they cannot conclude from their study is that there is no need to review the guidelines, because people cannot live in their homes. I know those people and I believe them to be genuine. If you look at the graphs I have given you, there is a graph that has a blue line that dips. I think it is on page 8; I do not have a copy.

[Senator LEYONHJELM:](#) That is page 10.

Mrs Morris : Thank you. This top graph shows what is happening at the north house, where the two black arrows are. That is when the turbines have been turned off for 50 minutes and then turned on again. You can see that the infrasound level drops quite substantially, which, to me, says those turbines are producing infrasound and for the EPA to say modern turbines do not produce infrasound is quite clearly incorrect.

The other thing you notice about this graph is that it is in dBG, where they have applied a weighting to the noise levels. If they had used dB linear, which people are saying should be used for infrasound, those differences would have been much more marked. I have a question for the EPA: why didn't they express that in dB linear instead of dBG?

On the second graph down the bottom, this is outside a house, the south-east house—this is the house that the EPA acknowledged was the worst affected. Since then that farmer has sold his farm, because he cannot stand it anymore. So those ones down the bottom are the outside, and you can see that the levels drop really significantly and rise again. I think some comments were made this morning by acousticians that you cannot actually tell what contribution the turbines make to the environment. To me it is blindingly obvious as a layperson that there is definitely something going on there.

I have written quite a lot in my submission about what I think is wrong with the EPA study. It is great that they did it, but I think they have come to some really illogical conclusions.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Mr Gare : Thank you for inviting me to present my submission today. My submission deals with the impact on my health and lifestyle living in close proximity to a wind farm. Let me say from the outset that we were excited about the prospect of being part of the renewable electricity industry. I am a host to wind towers on my property, the nearest being about 800 metres away with three towers within approximately one to 1.5 kilometres away.

We were not made aware of the impacts of noise on our health or lifestyle. Fortunately, we had heard from others that they were quite noisy. Luckily, in our contracts we inserted clauses about the need for noise mitigation. I do wonder why though the wind tower operators inserted the following clause in all the hosts' contracts section 77C, which is on the memorandum of lease which I will table: 'The landlord acknowledges and agrees that it is adequately compensated for any noise or inconvenience caused as a result of the permitted use of the site or the land and that it will not seek any further compensation from the tenant in relation to such matters.' If the wind tower operators were confident of their impact studies, that clause would not be necessary.

After a short period of living with an operating wind farm, we had these products installed. I find that, because I work and reside in close proximity to the wind farm, I suffer sleep interruption, mild headaches, agitation and a general feeling of unease; however, this occurs only when the towers are turning, depending on the wind direction and wind strength. My occupation requires that I work amongst the wind towers during the day which means I suffer the full impacts of noise for days at a time without relief. The impacts are that we are not able to open our windows because of the noise at night and we are not able to entertain outside because of the noise.

In conclusion, if we did not have soundproof batts in VLam Hush windows, our house would not be habitable. In my opinion, towers should not be within five kilometres of residences, and I would personally not buy a house within 20 kilometres of a wind farm. Thank you.

Mrs Gare : Good afternoon Senators, and ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for letting me speak to the committee today. I would like to open my statement with the following: developers and construction. In the beginning, I was excited about the wind farm and of

course the financial security for our property and family. The process began with high-pressure consultations, negotiations for weeks on end, numerous phone calls and face-to-face meetings with the developers. We seemed to be under constant pressure to agree to their wishes and, if we wanted any changes, it took a lot of negotiation.

We had to try and foresee any problems that may impact on our lifestyle for the next 25 years plus. With little or no previous information to go on, this was a very taxing time. Having gone through this, I would like to see that a person or persons—probably with a legal background and well-schooled in wind turbine information—be contactable for future wind farm hosts for advice and even to help with negotiations with the development companies.

Construction was also a very stressful and challenging time. The landowners are up against not only the power company but also all the big contractors and civil works companies. Any meetings with the above parties had to be attended by both of us with me taking notes so that we had some kind of record of what was said and what matters needed to be addressed at the time.

We had a lot of erosion problems from the pads and roadways, which we had to chase up with the power company to get them to address. During construction there were lots of problems with gates left open, boxing up mobs of cattle which then took a full day of redrafting and settling back into their paddocks. We also had gates opening onto public roadways. We have a main bitumen road that goes past our property. This caused great angst as far as public liability is concerned, if our stock got out into the roads. We also had lots of rubbish scattered around the property. We witnessed one of our cattle eating a one metre by one metre piece of plastic sheeting.

Living with wind turbines. Our house is solid sandstone, built for the late Charles Hawker in the 1920s, with concrete internal walls and a steel roof. The house is surrounded by a lot of vegetation and trees. I have brought some photos to show the Senate. In the months after the towers started in October 2010, the noise was unbearable, especially when two towers became in sync. A loud thumping would radiate throughout the house. Even watching TV in the furthest room from the towers, you could hear them. Sleeping was most difficult. I use, and still do, an earpiece radio every night, which helps block out the noise to a certain degree. If they are really going I have to up the volume.

After some time, due to a very slow installer, the house was finally insulated: sonobatts in the ceiling cavity; all our outside air vents blocked; a special American glass called Vlam Hush, which is two sheets of glass with a special gel between, were installed in every door and window of the house. This has improved the situation for me considerably, but at times the noise still penetrates into the house.

Ongoing issues. Due to the house being sealed we have refrigerated air conditioning, because we cannot open windows because of the noise. A separate meter was installed on the wind farm operator's advice, so that they could pay the cost of the air conditioning usage. That went in over 12 months ago and we are still chasing payment. Another issue is the increase in our emergency services levy. The value of our property has increased by double, which has had a major increase in the levy. The power company pay council rates on the land that they lease, and we pay rates on the rest. We brought up the issue of the increased ESL with the power company, but they have not addressed it. We feel they should be responsible due to the

increase in our land value. I have the value difference here: I think it is about \$1.6 million increase. I quote from the contract, 6.1, rates and taxes, section B:

However, during each year of this lease the tenant must pay any increase in rates and taxes above the rates and taxes that were payable immediately before the start of the agreement to lease, if the increase is directly attributable to the works or the use of the site for the permitted use.

We also have ongoing problems with the cables which run across our property and connect into the individual towers to transport the power to a substation. There seem to be constant cable breakages, which have to be dug up and fixed. This, of course, happens all over the property. Having 19 towers, it has quite a big impact. Quite a large area is disturbed and then has to be recovered with sand or soil. We have asked for compensation concerning this, as we have numerous cable breaks on the property with disturbance to our pastures, which interferes with our stock grazing. This was discussed at a meeting back in August 2014. We are still waiting for compensation, which is agreed by the wind operators. As you can see, they are not fast movers.

The land owners need to know their rights in regard to their property and how it is treated during and after construction of towers. Land owners with residences close to towers need to be made aware of the noise impact and there should be discussion of how close towers should be permitted to their premises. In my opinion, towers should not be any closer than five kilometres to a dwelling. If we had to buy another property, it would not be within a 20-kilometre distance to a wind farm. I think that says it all.

We have a son who will come home in a couple of years, and I have concerns for him and a family that he might have in the future, with regard to any health problems that may arise. Having lived with towers now for five years, in my opinion future hosts should glean as much information as they can and find out their rights so they can fully understand what they are taking on.

[Senator XENOPHON:](#) I would just like to ask some questions to Mr and Mrs Gare. I think the fact that you are hosts of wind turbines and you are giving evidence is significant. How many turbines are there on your property?

Mr Gare : Nineteen.

[Senator XENOPHON:](#) How long have you had them there?

Mr Gare : Five years.

[Senator XENOPHON:](#) And when did you start complaining about the turbines in terms of the adverse impacts?

Mr Gare : Straightaway.

[Senator XENOPHON:](#) Is it AGL that you are dealing with?

Mr Gare : Yes.

[Senator XENOPHON:](#) You may want to provide us with any documents in respect of this. How did they deal with the process? Once you raised the issue, what happened?

Mr Gare : We had it in our contract that if we found there was a problem they would put in noise mitigation products. We said: 'You will have to do it. We cannot bear it.' Because it was in the contract they went along with it, but I am sure, Nick, that they would not have if they did not have to.

[Senator XENOPHON:](#) It is a contractual relationship so it is under the terms of the contract. Are you able to say—and you may not want to—what level of payment have you been getting? If you do not feel comfortable saying how much you are being paid for the 19 turbines on an annual basis, you do not have to.

Mr Gare : All up, in total, about \$200,000, so there is not a lot of advantage for us in coming here today.

[Senator XENOPHON:](#) When you experienced the noise, could you stay in the property or did you have to move out?

Mr Gare : If we did not have the noise mitigation products put in, we would have moved out.

[Senator XENOPHON:](#) Prior to the noise mitigation products being put in, how did it affect your sleep? Did you spend more time away from home?

Mr Gare : Fortunately, we have eastern rangeland country where I could go to get away from it. As I said in my submission, I am there 24 hours a day in amongst it. I had to go away to wind down. What was your question, sorry?

[Senator XENOPHON:](#) What period of time was it from the time the noise affected you until the time you had the noise mitigation—several weeks or several months? How long was it?

Mrs Gare : I reckon it took about 15 months or more. We had a very slow installer of the batts and things.

[Senator XENOPHON:](#) You are protected by parliamentary privilege when speaking out here today. Did AGL say to you: 'Sometimes this happens. It is just one of those things'? Did they give an explanation as to the level of disruption? Did they say, 'This has not happened before'?

Mr Gare : No. It was all glossed over right from the start. We were given no information. One of their little tricks is to take people right up to the towers and say, 'This is how noisy they are.' But that is not so. The further you get away from the tower the noisier they are. That is a funny thing, to a point I guess. When you are right underneath them and they are 80 metres up in the air there is very little noise. There is just a bit of wind noise. As you go away one or two kilometres it actually gets worse.

[Senator XENOPHON:](#) Before the noise attenuation or noise suppression in your home what was your quality of life like?

Mr Gare : Crap, to put it honestly.

[Senator XENOPHON:](#) You got a bit of sleep each night, didn't you?

Mr Gare : With earplugs, yes. I wore earplugs constantly—only while they are turning, mind you, and providing they are in the right direction and have the right wind strength. Frosty nights are the worst because the sound tends to travel so much clearer and further on a frosty night. But earplugs.

[Senator XENOPHON:](#) Anything else, Mrs Gare?

Mrs Gare : No. Pretty much what Clive has said.

[Senator XENOPHON:](#) Do you sleep okay now?

Mrs Gare : No, they were waking me up on the weekend. You wake up to the thumping. This is with all the soundproofing in the house. As I said, I sleep with the radio on every night. If they are really cranked up I have to turn the volume up, so I will probably just go slowly deaf.

[Senator DAY:](#) I just want to clarify something. Frosty nights are normally not very windy.

Mr Gare : That is a funny thing. Our country is very hilly, and they put wind farms on top of hills. It can be blowing an absolute gale on the top of the hills and you can have frost in the valley.

[Senator DAY:](#) It is just that we have heard evidence that, even when the blades are not turning, they do have a similar infrasound impact on people because of the effect of the wind across the blades, across the aerofoil.

Mr Gare : Yes, but if there is that much wind the blades are turning, aren't they?

[Senator DAY:](#) That is right.

[Senator LEYONHJELM:](#) If you had your time over again, would you host a wind farm?

Mr Gare : No, absolutely not. If I were a rich man, I would not have a wind farm on my property.

[Senator LEYONHJELM:](#) And you said it was \$200,000 over five years approximately?

Mr Gare : No, 12 months.

[Senator LEYONHJELM:](#) Per year.

Mr Gare : Yes.

[Senator LEYONHJELM:](#) That is a fairly healthy income.

Mr Gare : Absolutely.

[Senator LEYONHJELM:](#) In spite of that, you would say that you would not have them.

Mr Gare : Absolutely, if I were a rich man, but unfortunately I am a farmer and there are not many rich farmers around.

[Senator LEYONHJELM](#): What sort of farming?

Mr Gare : We are grazing, we can be cropping but we—

[Senator LEYONHJELM](#): Sheep or cattle?

Mr Gare : Mostly cattle.

[Senator LEYONHJELM](#): Has there been any effect on your cattle from the wind farms?

Mr Gare : No.

[Senator LEYONHJELM](#): Okay, thank you.

Mr Faint : Thank you for this opportunity. I am speaking on behalf and as the chair of the Waterloo and District Concerned Citizens Group, so I will speak broadly. I also have personal issues and I want to inform the committee that I have left the area. I now sleep and live in Kapunda but I still come up to the farm and work during the day. Like other people, I was having lots of sleep issues so we decided to move from Waterloo.

Obviously you have our submissions in front you, but I will add a couple of later things that we have done since we submitted them. We who live in the shadow of these enormous industries clearly have been impacted, and the consequences have been devastating. These include the splitting of the community, noise and health issues, and in four cases already families have been forced to leave the area. There is numerous environmental damage. It was mentioned before about the fox cull—in fact I conducted that fox cull—and we were alarmed at the loss of native birds and animals in the Waterloo wind farm area. There has also been a significant drop in property value.

The most serious thing now is the link between turbines and frost severity. Turbines cool the air and in our situation at Waterloo it is now causing a huge loss in food production and the viability of farms up to 10 kilometres and further away. We have been lobbying for a long time to have a setback of at least 10 kilometres from towns, farmhouses, frost-prone areas, cropping and vineyard land. Clearly changes have to be made and future locations carefully assessed. What is more important to Australia—the protection of our food bowl or the construction of costly and inefficient wind farms? I think the answer is obvious.

[Senator DAY](#): That is first time that we have heard the cooling of the air effect resulting in a decrease in crop production. Do you have any estimates of the percentage of crop production or productivity declines as a result?

Mr Faint : Yes. We did a survey together with Mary. Of at least nine farmers within a five-kilometre radius of Waterloo, collectively there was a 70 per cent loss in our average cropping. This has happened for three consecutive years in the Waterloo area, and this is since the commissioning of the wind farm. We are in a frost-prone area, that is acknowledged, but we have never had such severe frosting. Normally, we would expect an area probably 100 or 200 metres from a creek bed but we have had our whole paddocks

wiped out. After two years of frost damage we contacted the University of Adelaide to do a test. They were good enough to build a model wind farm and there they proved that turbines cool the air. They also established that the turbines at Waterloo were too close together—they are only 250 metres apart and they were in a continuous line—so this is causing a huge mass of cold air to form in the valley.

[Senator DAY](#): If you could provide us with any documentation or any of your results, both from the university and from your own local studies, that would be very helpful to the committee.

Mr Faint : We have related that.

Mrs Quast : I will keep mine very brief. We are very concerned about the health issues of people living in the vicinity of wind farms. Having experienced them first hand, we do not wish anybody else to suffer as we are. We feel that the guidelines set by NHMRC need to be addressed. I was fortunate enough to attend a forum there a few years ago and they were not really very interested so I am happy to see that they are at least taking some notice now. The EPA has done lots of testing in the Waterloo area—we acknowledge that, as Mary did—but the results were certainly circumspect and I think they need to be addressed and investigated properly. As I stated in my submission, they put turbines in the most stupid places—under trees and other things.

The health issues could all stem from sleep deprivation from the noise and from the infrasound. Also, I have two dogs who have both been affected by the turbines. I take them for walks and they will stop and they will look at the turbines because they are making so much noise. They also bark at night because they think it is thunder. It is very loud, my house is not insulated and over the TV you can hear it. It is like a jet engine coming but that never gets there. Unlike traffic and planes, it does not stop. It is continuous 24-hours a day. I have kept a health diary from day 1 of the operation of the wind farms, and I have stated in there that I felt the effects immediately, and it gets worse. It is now quite a few years on and I am a lot worse than I was when I first noticed them operating. We have property we cannot build on because we would be 1,200 metres from the nearest turbines in a line of 30. We are 2½ kilometres from the turbines in open farmland. I am glad to see that somebody is taking notice and we can maybe change some guidelines so that people do not have to suffer this. Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you, Mrs Quast. I will just say that we are right on time so we need to make it very quick.

[Senator URQUHART](#): I have two questions. I will try and make them very quick if you can make your answers really quick. Mr Faint, you talked about loss of native animals in the Waterloo area.

Mr Faint : Yes.

[Senator URQUHART](#): You can do it on notice if you like—you do not need to go through it today. Can you provide some details of what you are talking about and how that has been collated?

Mr Faint : Yes, I can do that.

[Senator URQUHART:](#) Mrs Quast, you said that you had been keeping a health diary since day 1. How long is that?—sorry, I missed the start.

Mrs Quast : Since September 2010.

[Senator URQUHART:](#) You mentioned that you had health issues. Have you sought medical—

Mrs Quast : Yes.

[Senator URQUHART:](#) You have? Do you have some confirmation from doctors, specialists or whatever to look at the causation link between what your health diary says and what you believe is the turbines?

Mrs Quast : I have not actually taken my health diaries to the GPs. They are not very interested I have to say.

[Senator URQUHART:](#) You have not taken them, or you have, and they are not interested?

Mrs Quast : No, I have not, but when I speak to them they are not very interested in my problems.

[Senator URQUHART:](#) So you have not actually taken your diary and shown them?

Mrs Quast : No, I have not. But I have serious health issues.

[Senator URQUHART:](#) Have you considered doing that?

Mrs Quast : Well, I can—yes. I have an appointment soon so I can take them, but they are reluctant to put their hands up and discuss it or put it because they are ridiculed by their peers if they do, which we have been told by doctors. You feel like you are batting your head against a brick wall basically.

[Senator URQUHART:](#) My initial concern is that if you have health issues—

Mrs Quast : I do.

[Senator URQUHART:](#) then you should have them looked at. It is quite sad that your doctor does not take it seriously. I suggest that you should enforce that on them.

Mrs Quast : I now have serious health issues—diabetes and quite a number of other things.

[Senator URQUHART:](#) Thank you.

CHAIR: There being no further questions, I would like to thank you all on behalf of the committee for your attendance here today.