

SENTINEL-TIMES COMMENT

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Shire, state must act on turbine noise

ON SUNDAY night this week, the 'thumping' noise from the Bald Hills Wind Farm turbines was so loud in the home of Noel Uren that between 1am and 6am he couldn't get any sleep.

"I turned the radio on to try to cover the thumping but it didn't make any difference," he said.

"It's a common occurrence when the wind is like this and the conditions are relatively still."

Up until now though, no one has believed him or them, his fellow neighbours at Walkerville.

For more than two years those whose health and wellbeing has been seriously compromised by the unreasonable proximity of the turbines to their homes have respectfully raised their legitimate concerns with the responsible authority, the South Gippsland Shire Council, and received no support and little consideration.

Following request after request for help and finally legal action in the Supreme Court, the shire came kicking and screaming to the decision that it needed to appoint an independent investigator, by its own assessment, "a highly experienced independent public health consultant", James C. Smith and Associates, to undertake the in-

vestigation that they themselves had botched earlier, further insulting the injured parties by denying there was any nuisance.

It's Erin Brockovich all over again.

Now this highly experienced investigator has come out with the conclusion that there is indeed a problem, a big problem.

"... on 24th and 25th July 2018 wind farm noise was clearly audible in the Zakula and Jelbart dwellings, with windows and doors shut, between the hours of 6.50pm and 9.40pm and 7.40pm and 8.40pm respectively. In the case of the Jelbart dwelling the noise level increased to a point where it intruded into conversation between investigators and Mr and Mrs Jelbart thus, corroborating that wind farm noise was clearly audible in dwellings and, at times, intrusive. It seems likely then that such noise could be heard over a television, or radio as had been recorded in some noise logs, and reported in discussions with Mr and Mrs Jelbart, and Mr Uren."

And this despite the fact that a noise mitigation strategy was in place at the time, with a select number of turbines operating in "reduced sound mode".

But instead of accepting the um-

pire's decision, for which we the ratepayers have paid \$33,000, the shire has offered the operator of the wind farm right of reply for two weeks.

It's bound to start a ping-pong match involving the aggrieved property owners' lawyers, the shire's lawyers, the operator and the state government but what needs to happen is this:

The shire council must finally acknowledge that the neighbours of the Bald Hills Wind Farm, their own ratepayers, have a legitimate gripe under the Public Health and Well-being Act and support them in their attempts to get redress from the operator and the State Government.

And the State Government must finally admit that it allowed the turbines to be sited too close to the existing farm houses for them not to cause a noise nuisance.

Unfortunately, having been told all the way through the approvals process and beyond that the turbines were too close, the government, the shire and possible us the ratepayers are going to have to pay through the nose for the mistake.

It's a stuff up of monumental proportions, with wide ramifications, the fallout of which can only be guessed at the moment.