

ERM

Stakeholder and Community Consultation Report

For a proposed wind farm at Black Springs, NSW

PREPARED FOR WIND CORPORATION AUSTRALIA PTY LTD

STAKE HOLDER AND COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The consultation component of the EIA process has comprised two elements:

1. Liaison with a range of government and other stakeholders; and
2. Liaison with the local Black Springs and Oberon community.

The consultation activities have both informed the community and stakeholders of the project and allowed any issues of concern to be raised at an early stage of the planning process and incorporated into the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA).

1.2 GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION

Consultation with Government agencies has been both formal and informal and has been used to refine the EIA and project planning. A Planning Focus Meeting was the focus of the formal government liaison. Ongoing, informal consultation has also been conducted with the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources (DIPNR). These interactions are discussed in more detail in the following sections.

1.2.1 Planning Focus Meeting

A Planning Focus Meeting (PFM) for the wind farm EIA was held on Friday, 3rd December 2004, and attended by representatives of Oberon Council and the following Government Departments:

- Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources;
- Department of Primary Industries;
- Department of Environment and Conservation;
- Country Energy.

A Planning Focus document was distributed prior to the meeting for discussion. The objective of the PFM was to firstly inform all relevant agencies of the wind farm proposal, and to highlight particular issues requiring assessments.

The issues raised by DIPNR and other agencies were outlined in the Director-Generals Requirements, prepared by the Major Assessments Branch of DIPNR.

1.2.2 State Government Agency Consultation

The following agencies were consulted about the project:

- Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA);
- Catchment Management Authority (CMA);
- State Forests (DPI);
- Department of Lands; and
- Fisheries (DPI).

1.2.3 Representatives of the Pejar People

Representatives of the Pejar Local Aboriginal Land Council were invited to provide input to the EIS process. This input included accompanying indigenous heritage specialists in the field work to inspect the site for items of cultural heritage significance.

1.3 COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

1.3.1 Overview of Strategy

A Community Engagement Strategy was developed to guide the community consultation process to meet the statutory requirements of the EIA and to ensure that the local landowners, residents and the wider Oberon Community had a range of opportunities and avenues to information about the proposed wind farm. The strategy also set out mechanisms for the community to provide comment the proposal and for these comments to feed back into the EIA process.

The objectives of the Consultation Strategy were:

1.3.2 Consultation Program

The consultation program was implemented during the period November 2004 – March 2005 and comprised the following activities:

- general information provision via 2 newsletters;
- a public information session at the Black Springs community hall;
- feedback forms provided at the information session;
- an advertisement in the local newspaper advertising the public information session;
- meetings with landowners whose properties are adjacent to the proposed wind farm, ie. those within 2km of the project boundary [as defined by the Council's draft DCP];
- receipt of and response to phone calls, faxes, letters and other submissions; and

- documentation of the stakeholder input into the Stakeholder and Community Consultation Report.

The following sections discuss these consultation activities in detail. Table 1.1 summarises the activities.

Table 0.1 Summary of consultation activities November 2004 - March 2005

Activity	Date Commenced	No. of inquiries/ Distribution/Attendance
Newsletter 1	Early November 2004	50 distributed, via letter box drop by Oberon Post Office Copies also left at Oberon Post Office and Library 4 copies posted with cover letter to agencies
Public Information Session	9 December 2004	29 attendees registered (estimated 45-50 attendees in total)
Feedback Forms	9 December	8 completed and returned at the session (no further forms received after the session)
Newspaper Advertisement in Oberon Review	3 December Issue	
Face to Face meetings with landowners	21 – 23 February 2005	11 landowners met with
Responding to inquiries	Ongoing throughout EIA process	2 e-mails 1 fax 7 phone calls 0 letters 1 other submission (delivered in person)

Newsletters

Newsletter One was prepared and distributed (via letter box drop) in early November to all houses within approximately 2kms of the then proposed wind farm boundary and all residences in Black Springs village.

Newsletters were posted with a cover letter to 4 local Agencies – Pejar Local Aboriginal Land Council, Burruga Agricultural Bureau, Oberon Plateau Tourism Association, and Black Springs Progress Association – and left at Oberon Post Office and the Library for collection by interested members of the wider Oberon community.

Newsletter One outlined both the wind farm proposal and the EIA process. It also contained a listing of ways interested community members could contact the EIA team for further information or to submit comments. The date and location of the Public Information Session were also included in the newsletter.

Public Information Session

A Public Information Session was held on 9 December at the Black Springs Community Hall. The session was held between 4.30pm and 7.30pm in order to maximise attendance. Twenty eight (29) people registered at the session, although an estimated 45-50 attended. A newspaper advertisement, with details of the date time and location of the information session, was placed in the local paper – The Oberon Review, a week prior to the information session.

The aim of the information session was to provide an opportunity for the local Black Springs and the wider Oberon community to obtain information regarding the proposed wind farm and the EIA process. The EIA Project Director, Project Manager and Community Liaison attended and were available to respond to questions raised, as was a representative from WCA – Suzlon.

Posters containing project information were prepared and displayed at the session, along with a model wind turbine.

A feedback form was made available at the session. People attending the information session were encouraged to complete the feedback form, to document their comments and/or concerns about both the project and the information session. Eight (8) feedback forms were completed and returned to the project team. In general, those who completed the feedback form seemed happy with the format and content of the information session, but raised a variety of issues. These issues are discussed below in section 1.3.3.

Face To Face Meetings

Face to face meetings were held with all landowners of properties adjacent to (within 2kms of) the proposed wind farm, who agreed to a meeting. This method was chosen to provide directly affected landowners with an opportunity to discuss in more detail some of the technical aspects of the EIA process and wind farms generally. The meeting was also used to define the role of the EIA team as independent assessors and provide landowners with an opportunity to voice their comments and or concerns to a member of the EIA team.

All properties within 2kms of the proposed wind farm were posted or delivered one of two introductory letters, requesting a meeting. The first letter was posted to those property owners for whom the wind farm proponent could provide contact details (ie. contact name, postal address, and contact phone number).

The second letter was hand delivered to those properties whose contact details were more difficult to obtain. This letter differed in the contact details only compared to the first. The recipients were asked to contact the EIA team if they were interested in scheduling a meeting. The recipients of the first letter were followed up with a phone call, and asked if they would like the opportunity to schedule a meeting.

In all, 10 meetings were held across 21-23 February, with a total of 11 property owners. ERM's EIA Community Liaison and a representative of Suzlon attended each meeting, which were held at the location of the property owner's choosing (mostly at their homes). In addition to free-flowing conversation, a set of questions were asked in the form of a semi-

structured interview of each of the property owners. The comments and feedback received via these meetings is discussed in more detail in Section 4.4.

Inquiries (Phone/Fax/E-Mail/Letter)

ERM established a dedicated community e-mail address and a 1800 number that were made available as community query or feedback channels for the EIA process. A fax number and reply paid address were also available channels.

The feedback and or queries received during the EIA process were as follows:

- 2 e-mails
- 1 fax
- 7 phone calls
- 0 letters
- 1 other submission (delivered in person)

When a comment or complaint was received via these communication methods a Record of Contact Form was be completed and an appropriate response undertaken by the EIS Community Liaison in consultation with the EIS Project Manager and the wind farm proponent as required. All questions or comments relating to issues outside the scope of the EIA were referred on to WCA for their further response as required.

There was a very low amount of contact from the local community as outlined above. The feedback received via these forms is discussed in more detail in Section 1.3.3.

1.3.3 Issues Arising from the Community Consultation

As is apparent from the above documentation of consultation activities, there was relatively little feedback from the local community regarding the wind farm proposal. However, while the number of representations was low in number, those residents who did make contact held some very strong concerns about the proposal.

The three most frequently mentioned concerns were:

- Property devaluation;
- Visual impact and disruption to the general amenity of the area; and
- Noise impacts.

Property Devaluation

Property devaluation has been identified both by government agencies as a matter for the EIS to address, and as an issue of great concern to local community members. In particular

this is a matter of concern to those local property owners immediately adjacent to the properties that are proposed as locations for the wind farm turbines.

Many of the property owners had heard 'stories' that property for sale near existing wind turbines eg. Hampton, had little interest due to their proximity to, and views of the turbines. As a result the value of the land has dropped.

Several property owners also indicated that they have plans to subdivide their land in the future, and have concerns the subdivisions will not be as saleable, given that the target market are 'city dwellers looking for a change in lifestyle', who would not want turbines near their 'country homes'.

On the other hand, one property owner felt that although the wind farm might devalue the property in the short term, over time the perception of the turbines would be similar to that of telegraph poles – part of the landscape – and property values would balance out.

Visual Impact And Loss Of Amenity

Visual Impacts and impacts on amenity are very closely related. The social context and relationship to amenity as perceived by the community are discussed here.

Many objections to the wind farm proposal that were raised through the EIS process were related to the visual prominence the turbines would have on the local landscape. Several of the property owners expressed concern along the lines of one comment, that the proposed turbine locations will "destroy our magnificent scenery and views that are a wonderful enhancement to the area". Others commented that quality of life would diminish.

A small number of local residents and property owners, including two residing on properties adjacent to the proposed wind farm, however, did comment that they are not worried by the visual aspects of the proposed wind farm. One commented that the turbines are 'no worse than the electricity towers'. In feedback from the public meeting, several respondents suggested solutions to making the turbines blend into the background – offering colour combinations and paint finishes so to minimise reflection and contrast.

Noise

Concerns amongst local residents that the noise generated by the turbines will carry, particularly on still days. For many of these residents, the quiet of the area is one of the reasons for relocating to the area, or staying in it.

Impacts On Community Identity And Cohesion

Wind farm developments have been recognised as creating a polarisation in views and opinions. The consultation component of the EIA process did reveal community discord, both implicitly in how local residents were speaking about other community members and explicitly in the recognition by some residents that the issue of 'to wind farm or not to wind farm' is dividing the community.

One resident gave examples of a neighbour fighting with the property owner across the road about his dog, but put the arguments down to the disagreement about the wind turbines, not the problem of the dog.

Another resident said 'the worst thing about it is that it divides the community'. He spoke of negative comment being made in relation to the three property owners considering turbines on their properties.

This discord, however, seems to be restricted to those properties and residents who are likely to be directly affected by the wind turbines i.e. between those considering the turbines (but will be compensated through lease payments) and those neighbours who are not considering the turbines but would be in view of or close proximity to the proposed turbines.

Other Issues Raised

Lack Of Voice For Objection – Distrust in the Planning Approvals Process

Several of the local residents expressed a feeling of distrust in the planning process, which would result in their lack of input to or say in whether the wind farm proposal is approved.

Several mentioned the process of approving the 550kV electricity line 15 years ago. Many local residents "put in a lot of time and effort and didn't succeed in our objections". Another resident said that based on past experience (with the 550kV line) he doesn't believe the EIS process takes enough account of community opinions, particularly their concern about property devaluation. He said, 'A little person cannot make a difference in this process if they object'. One resident mentioned that many people did not have time to fight about the proposal because of their other commitments.

Other residents were concerned that the decision about the wind farm has been taken away from the local council who are familiar with the region. Some also expressed concern that if the decision making process was given to the State Government, they will not listen to local objectors, where as the local Council would.

One resident was concerned that if there aren't enough local property owners willing to take turbines on their property, the government may make it legal to 'forcibly acquire easements' on privately owned land – "like what happened with the 550kV power line 15 years ago".

They felt the EIS process, and the consultation in particular, was premature. They felt that it is occurring when the community are not informed, they don't know enough to give informed feedback/valued judgements. They suggested that they need to know locations of turbines, and idea of visual and noise impacts first. A couple of residents felt the public information session was not satisfactory, one expressing the feeling that the EIS team were 'picking people off one by one' with the face to face meetings. Several local community members said they would like to see a public meeting where all those involved people can debate the issue and so every question can be addressed.

Electro Magnetic Radiation (EMR)

Several residents expressed some concern about EMR. Residents on one property close to the proposed wind farm were concerned that with the 550kV line running through their property and the proposal for wind turbines on another two sides, there might be health issues due to EMR. Another resident questioned the potential EMR levels from the wind turbines and their effect for local children long-term.

Another local resident was concerned that the changes in electricity along the 33kV line may interfere with her pacemaker, given that the current magnetic field already creates interference.

Other General Concerns

Other issues raised by residents through the consultation process include:

- Disruption to the area's natural springs
- Impacts on the family of wedge tail eagles and other bird life nearby
- The process for checking injured wildlife
- Increases to traffic during construction, wear and tear on roads and safety issues for children in Black Springs during the construction period
- Costs to Council because of wear and tear on roads
- Objections to use of private land for the wind farm when State Forests and other public land is nearby
- Wind farms are more appropriate for an area of larger lots, with less population
- Opposition is not to green power in general, but to a wind farm in Black Springs
- Concerns that wind tests have revealed inconsistencies in the wind velocity compared to coastal areas
- Concern that birds will be scared off by the turbines, which it was felt would remove a natural source of pest control, so requiring greater insecticide spraying, which could in turn lead to beef will need to be tested and farms being quarantined

1.4 EIS EXHIBITION

The original proposal was for an EIS that would have been lodged with DIPNR (now Department of Planning) as the determining authority. An EIS is normally placed on exhibition for a period of 30 days. Any person may inspect the document and make a submission on the proposal during the exhibition period.

1.4.1 Guidelines For Making A Submission

Submissions should include:

- the nature of the interest in the project;
- opinions on the project;
- suggestions about alternatives, or improvements to the project;
- additional measures considered necessary to adequately protect the environment;
- errors or omissions in the information presented in the documents;
- additional factual information (and its source); and
- other aspects that are relevant to this project and its determination.

So that matters raised in submission can be analysed and properly considered, it is preferable to:

- list points wherever possible;
- refer each point to the relevant section (or sub-section) of the Environmental Assessment;
- include details such as name, address and date;
- state whether an acknowledgment is required (all submissions received with details of a return address are likely to be acknowledged; and
- make the submission as legible as possible.

1.5 SUMMARY

The consultation activities have both informed the community and stakeholders of the project and allowed any issues of concern to be raised at an early stage of the planning process and incorporated into the EIA.

The consultation component of the EIA process has comprised two elements:

1. Liaison with a range of government and agency stakeholders, namely:

Civil Aviation Safety Authority; Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources; Department of Primary Industries; Department of Environment and Conservation; Department of Utilities, Energy and Sustainability; Department of Lands; Roads and Traffic Authority; NSW Health; Country Energy; Central West Catchment Authority.

The Pejar tribal representatives, from the local Aboriginal Community, were also consulted.

2. Liaison with the local Black Springs and Oberon community.

The community consultation program comprised various activities to engage and inform the local community, including newsletters, a publicly advertised information session, with feedback forms, meetings with landowners, and response to phone calls, faxes, letters and other submissions.

The most frequently mentioned concerns were property devaluation, visual impact, noise impacts, and disruption to the general amenity of the Black Springs area.

While contacts from the community regarding the proposal were low in number, those residents who did make contact voiced strong concerns about the proposal. .