# Submission to Regional Economic Development Review by the Lal Lal Environment Protection Association Inc.

On behalf of the Lal Lal Environment Protection Association Inc, I would like to submit to the Regional Economic Development Review. We thank those involved for giving us an opportunity to be heard.

The topics that could be covered by your terms of reference are extensive so I will limit this submission to one topic which impacts greatly on thousands of rural Victorians – that of the alarming impact of industrial wind energy facilities in rural areas.

Rural Victorians feel that we are very much collateral damage in the fight against global warming. It seems that we must be the ones to suffer for the good of all. However, we feel that with better planning guidelines in place, much of the negatives of the wind industry can be removed for the betterment of all.

Planners and politicians seem to think that rural Victorians are a minority and these industrial projects don’t affect many people. In our area, just 10 minutes out of Ballarat, the planned, but as yet unbuilt, Lal Lal wind project will affect thousands. It consists of 64 turbines located in two separate areas, around 12 kms apart. It was approved before there were setbacks in place between turbines and homes. The numbers of people we have living close to the project are:

Homes located less than 1km from the project: 51 (130 people)

Homes less than 2km: 229 (550 people)

Less than 3km: 411 (987 people)

Less than 4km: 623 (1,520 people)

Less than 5km: 953 (2,397 people)

We believe that a great number of local people will be negatively impacted in an enormous way if this project gets built.

## The Cooper Report

The recently released Cape Bridgewater Report, by Steven Cooper, is a landmark study that has proven a link between infrasound caused by turbines and sensations, such as headaches, heart palpitations and dizziness, experienced by residents living near turbines. It is now imperative that further studies are undertaken. Now that we know that turbines cause health issues in some people, it would be irresponsible, and in fact against the Government’s duty of care, to allow any more turbines to be erected until these studies are completed and relevant regulations put in place.

You can find the Cooper Report here <http://www.pacifichydro.com.au/english/our-communities/communities/cape-bridgewater-acoustic-study-report/>

## Planning Rules

As Australians, the concept that we can’t build a double story shed without a permit or place a factory in a rural setting is taken for granted. However these accepted rules do not apply to wind energy facilities. Wind development companies look for rural locations then are allowed to place industrial energy plants there, with no regard for what the locals want. So long as there is one landowner willing to get paid to host the turbines, there is nothing the rest of the community can do.

To make matters worse, the recently introduced planning amendment, VC113, now allows turbines to be built to any height and with any size turbine. Projects with existing permits that aren’t yet built can just now increase the size of the turbines to anything they like. This is ludicrous when part of the planning process is that noise evaluations had to be done in relation to the size of the turbines. For example, they might have had to show what the noise levels will be at 2kms from a 2MW turbine, but now they’re allowed to put up a 5 MW turbine. They say the newer turbines will be quieter, and that may be the case, however the larger the turbine, the more infrasound it creates. The turbines in the Cape Bridgewater study were 2MW. The infrasound created by 5 MW turbines that are over 200 metres high will be much greater.

Now Premier Andrews wants to reduce the setback between turbines and homes from 2 kms to 1km. Reducing the setback, while at the same time allowing the construction of these new mega-turbines, will create a multiplier effect. This will cross the tipping point. We will have thousands of people affected by infrasound as well as audible sound. Now that it has been proved that turbines affect some people, we cannot allow the construction of mega-turbines close to homes.

We also have an absurd situation where wind companies can approach neighbours and pay them to sign a contract saying they won’t complain about ill effects caused by the turbines. This is wrong on every level. Wind companies should not be allowed to offer money to people to suffer in silence. The very fact that the companies offer the contract is an acknowledgement that there will be problems. It is the responsibility of our Government to not allow people to be put into a position where money wins over health. If the Government believes that turbines shouldn’t be placed close to homes, then wind companies should not be allowed to pay people to ignore this advice. It’s immoral and wrong.

The rapid growth of the wind industry has greatly outpaced the growth of appropriate regulations. We urgently need better guidelines in place and they must include those aimed at protecting neighbours.

## Community Division

The community division that occurs when a wind energy facility is proposed to be built nearby is enormous. The community gets split between those who want the project and those who don’t. As it’s the host farmer who wants the project, and he or she is paid for doing so, the wind industry are quick to state that neighbours are jealous and it’s a case of the ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’. This is not the case at all. It’s a case of those who are happy to inflict an industrial situation on their rural neighbours and those who are not happy to have their land devalued and put up with noise, health and visual amenity issues. The very reason many rural Victorians live where they do is that they love the peaceful environment. Placing industrial turbines next door is in direct contrast to everything they desire their lifestyle to be.

## Compliance

The Clean Energy Council is responsible for ensuring wind projects are compliant to enable them to receive Renewable Energy Certificates. In a tale that reads like something from the dark ages, we learn that wind projects are being given their RECs before they are even finished being built, let alone have all noise testing and other requirements done.

Under the relevant regulations, eligibility for accreditation includes:

“the power station must be operated in accordance with any relevant Commonwealth, State, Territory or local government planning and approval requirements.”

A power station cannot possibly be operated in accordance with any requirements when it’s not operating at all. Even it was partly operating, that still doesn’t fulfil the requirements. The CER are not following their own guidelines and are certainly not looking after the wellbeing of rural Victorians. They are being grossly irresponsible by granting RECs to non-compliant wind projects. Not a single wind project operating in Victoria has been shown to be compliant, yet they continue to operate and to receive RECs. This is an atrocious abuse, and failure, of our planning system.

## Fire Risk

We are greatly concerned that homes that are close to the new mega-turbines will be at greater risk from fires as aerial fire-fighting equipment will have difficulty getting in and around the turbines to accurately put out a fire. They may have to wait until a fire leaves the turbine area before they can access it, thus letting the fire gain momentum.

At the planned Lal Lal wind facility, homes are as close as 600 metres to turbines. Pilots can’t be expected to fly close to turbines to save these homes when you consider the turbulence they create and the smoky conditions of a fire. The Aerial Agricultural Association of Australia state in their Windfarm Policy that “Windfarms and their preconstruction wind monitoring towers are a direct threat to aviation safety.”

Government bodies need to review fire-fighting strategies in relation to the height and blade sweep of the new mega-turbines. This is urgent, particularly in light of Premier Andrews’ threat to reduce setbacks between homes and turbines.

## Decommissioning

There is a huge gap in current planning guidelines when it comes to decommissioning turbines. Planning permits usually state that the wind company is responsible for pulling the turbines down at the end of their lives, however if the company is no longer in existence, the responsibility falls to the landowner.

We have heard many different estimates as to what it might cost to pull a turbine down, ranging from a few hundred thousand dollars to a million dollars. That’s per turbine. Imagine in 25 years that ABC Wind Farm is due to be decommissioned. ABC Wind Farm Pty Ltd works out it will cost them millions of dollars to remove the turbines. They stand to gain nothing from removing them. So ABC Wind Farm files for bankruptcy and leaves the non-operating turbines where they stand. The farmer hasn’t even earned enough per turbine to cover the cost of pulling it down, even if he or she had saved every cent earned from them.

As time goes on, more and more of our rural countryside will be covered in rusting, decaying turbines. If moving, operating turbines aren’t already industrialising rural landscapes then this surely will. The farms of today will be the junkyards of tomorrow.

Wind developers must be forced to put away sufficient funds to completely remove the turbines and all associated works at the end of each project’s operating life.

## Job Creation

The concept that wind energy facilities create jobs seems logical until you look at the figures. Yes, there are many temporary jobs created to build the facility but these are largely drive in/drive out jobs over a short period of time. The Lal Lal project estimates it will create 50 full-time jobs during this phase. Once the project is completed however, very few jobs remain. The huge wind facility at Waubra, with its 128 turbines, employs only 9 full-time people. That particular project has devastated the local community. Neighbours that have been friends for generations now no longer talk to each other. Families have abandoned their homes and left the district. The impacts on residents here have been huge and we doubt anyone would believe that 9 jobs are worth the loss of community and loss of homes.

Wind energy facilities have been shown to actually create job losses. A Spanish study showed that heavily subsidizing renewable energy in Spain lead to a loss of 2.2 jobs for every one green job created. You can find the study here : <http://www.juandemariana.org/pdf/090327-employment-public-aid-renewable.pdf>

Other studies have found similar results. A study in Italy found each green job displaced 4.8 jobs in the overall economy. Job creation is important to rural Victorians, but introducing wind projects is a big step in the wrong direction.

To summarise, we believe there are enormous problems in the wind industry that need to be rectified immediately. Better guidelines need to be put in place across the board. Due to the urgency of having to create ‘green’ energy, this industry has been allowed to forge ahead with scant regard for the impact it is having on those living nearby. As the problem is almost totally a rural one, we feel that we are left to cope with the mess while our city-dwelling counterparts have no idea what is going on.

Now that it has been proved that turbines do have negative impacts on people, Government has a duty of care to its constituents to ensure that the problems are fixed as quickly as possible and that no new turbines are built until they are certain they have the appropriate rules in place to protect rural Victorians.