



Submission template

REVIEW OF THE NATIONAL WIND FARM COMMISSIONER

The Climate Change Authority is an independent statutory body established to provide expert advice on climate change policy issues.

The Minister for the Environment and Energy, the Hon Josh Frydenberg MP, has asked the Climate Change Authority to conduct a special review of the role of the National Wind Farm Commissioner.

At the time the National Wind Farm Commissioner was established, the Government said it would review the role in 2018. This review responds to that undertaking. The Terms of Reference for the National Wind Farm Commissioner are attached. The Authority is asked to consider to what extent the Commissioner is fulfilling its Terms of Reference, the ongoing need for the role, its scope and possible models for funding. The Authority's Terms of Reference for this special review can be found on the Authority's website. More information on the role of the Climate Change Authority is available at www.climatechangeauthority.gov.au. Information on the National Wind Farm Commissioner is available at www.nwfc.gov.au.

Submission Instructions

Submissions are invited until 13 April 2018.

Submitting via email

submissions@climatechangeauthority.gov.au

Submitting via post

Submissions
Climate Change Authority
GPO Box 787
ACT 2600

Contacts

Should you require further information about making a submission, please contact the Climate Change Authority on freecall 1800 475 869 or via email at enquiries@climatechangeauthority.gov.au.

Overview

Submissions on the National Wind Farm Commissioner review are invited, ideally using this template to assist with the Authority's analysis of submissions. However, organisations and individuals wishing to make submissions should not feel constrained by the questions below and should feel free to provide any comments they wish. The Authority is also happy to accept submissions in other forms, including letters or emails.

Contact Details

Name of Organisation:

Name of Contact, Role:

Janet Collins

Contact Phone Number:

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Contact Email:

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Date:

8 April 2018

Confidentiality

All submissions except those made in confidence will be published on the Authority's website.

For submissions made by individuals, all personal details other than your name and the state or territory in which you reside will be removed from your submission before it is published.

Do you want this submission to be treated as confidential? Yes No

1. Have you interacted with the National Wind Farm Commissioner on a complaint about a proposed or operating wind farm? If so, please tell us about the nature of the complaint.

In particular:

- I. Did the complaint relate to an existing or proposed wind farm, or was it a general complaint?**
- II. What was your role in the process - were you the complainant or was the complaint made against you or your company?**
- III. If the complaint was about a specific wind farm, in what state and local government region is it located?**

I contacted the National Wind Farm Commissioner (NWFC) in relation to our complaints about the proposed Hawkesdale Wind Farm firstly, on behalf of the Hawkesdale community, and secondly, on behalf of my parents, Robert and Margaret Mc Cosh. The Hawkesdale Wind Farm is part of the Moyne Shire in south west Victoria.

As members of the local Hawkesdale community, my parents supported the Hawkesdale and District Development Action Committee in opposing the proposed amendment to Planning Permit 2006/0221 which sought to increase the wind turbine height from 129 metres to 180 metres tall. These turbines are sited 1 kilometre from the Hawkesdale community with a population of 432 people, a primary and secondary school and childcare centre. The initial planning permit was granted 10 years ago.

Secondly, my parents lodged a submission with Planning Panels Victoria objecting to the location of the Hawkesdale Wind Farm on the western and northern boundaries of the family farm with three turbines to the west and eight turbines to the north. In relation to the proximity of the proposed wind turbines to the farm homestead and worker's cottage, four wind turbines would be located just outside the one kilometre exclusion zone.

The family farm would also be impacted on the eastern boundary with the erection of three wind turbines as part of the approved Woolsthorpe Wind Farm of 20 wind towers. Of serious concern to my family is their capacity to continue to live in the family home due to the cumulative noise impact of Woolsthorpe Wind Farm and Hawkesdale Wind Farm which are located 500 metres apart and adjoin the three boundaries of the family farm.

2. If you have interacted with the National Wind Farm Commissioner on a complaint about a proposed or operating wind farm, would you like to comment on how the complaint process was conducted?

In particular:

- I. Were you provided with information about the process for dealing with your complaint?**
- II. Were you made aware that participation in the process to deal with your complaint by other parties (like state government agencies or wind farm operators) is voluntary?**
- III. Were you asked to provide information to assist the Commissioner in dealing with your complaint? Did you do so?**
- IV. Was your complaint progressed in a timely way?**
- V. Did the Commissioner work with wind farm proponents or operators and other bodies (like state or local government agencies) on the complaint?**
- VI. Were you satisfied with the process undertaken to resolve the complaint?**
- VII. Were you satisfied with the outcome of the complaint?**

We were informed about the complaint process involving the NWFC discussing our concerns with the proponent Union Fenosa and relevant state government agencies.

We provided detailed information about the nature of our complaints in a written report to the NWFC.

The Office of the NWFC contacted us to advise us of the progress of our complaint on an ongoing basis and were very helpful.

We invited the Commissioner to attend a community meeting in Hawkesdale as the keynote speaker with Roma Britnell, our local member of parliament.

More than 100 people attended the community meeting which proved very successful as the Commissioner was able to provide information about the development of the Hawkesdale Wind Farm to people in the community who were uninformed and rurally isolated. The NWFC also took the time to meet with my parents at the family farm to discuss our submission further and also met with a number of other concerned community members on their family farms as requested.

I have attached the agenda for the Hawkesdale Community Meeting for your information.

3. The Terms of Reference for the National Wind Farm Commissioner say that the Commissioner will lead efforts to promote best practice, information availability and provide a central, trusted source for disseminating information. Do you have any comments on this aspect of the Commissioner's role?

The impact of the invitation to the NWFC to speak at the community meeting in Hawkesdale was significant in terms of providing details to the local rural community of the Hawkesdale Wind Farm and answering questions at length about the Hawkesdale Wind Farm. The proponent had made little effort to consult with the community and information provided was not easily accessible. (The Union Fenosa website identified Hawkesdale Wind Farm as five kilometres from the township on its face page. This was incorrect. The Hawkesdale Wind Farm will be one kilometre from the township).

Until this meeting held on 22 September 2017, the proponent Union Fenosa had a very low profile in the community and people were not aware of the implications of the Planning Panel process which was held 49 kilometres away in Port Fairy. This was the first local community meeting to discuss the Hawkesdale Wind Farm with a keynote speaker who was able to answer the questions in an honest and informative way that was easily understood. As part of his presentation, the NWFC provided maps and charts in a power point presentation.

4. Do you think there is an ongoing need for the Commissioner? Do you see this changing in the future? If so, how?

We absolutely believe that the role of the Commissioner is vitally important as it is not in the best interests of the proponents to be transparent and accountable to the local communities, particularly with the negative publicity surrounding wind farms and the one-kilometre exclusion zone which allows for industrial wind farms to be located close to rural communities.

The NWFC is the gate keeper to the national wind farm debate. The Commissioner is actively engaged in seeking resolutions to complaints put forward by small rural communities in response to proposed and existing developments by large wind energy companies.

At a recent meeting with Global Power Generation who are responsible for building the Hawkesdale Wind Farm, the Community Relations Officer referred to her discussions with the NWFC on a number of occasions and considered the NWFC a valuable resource for keeping the large wind farm companies on track and transparent.

5. Do you think the Commissioner's scope, which is currently focused on proposed and operational wind farms is sufficient? Or should it be expanded to other large scale renewable energy projects, such as solar and storage?

The worldwide discussion around wind farms lends itself to major issues for rural communities and large wind farm companies that result from the development of industrial wind farms of up to 220 metres tall within close proximity to rural towns and rural dwellings.

The Commissioner is key to ensuring that the individual is heard and that their complaint is addressed. The NWFC is the impartial link between the rural communities and the wind farm companies. Without this role rural communities would have no voice.

The capacity of the NWFC to extend its reach to other large scale renewable energy projects would need to be independently reviewed by the relevant bodies in relation to whether there are sufficient resources attached to expand the role of the Office of the NWFC.

6. The Office of the National Wind Farm Commissioner is funded from the Commonwealth budget at a cost of approximately \$676,000 per year. Do you think the Commissioner's office should continue to be funded in this way or should other funding models (like cost recovery from industry) be considered?

The Office of the NWFC is a valuable role that needs to continue under the current funding arrangement as a way of ensuring that local people have a voice and have their issues addressed and resolved. This is an important priority for the Commonwealth Government in terms of getting appropriate and workable renewable energy models in place.

The Commissioner is also able to make objective recommendations based on his understanding of the issues at play in the renewable energy industry and this is vitally important to guiding future policy development.

7. Do you have any other comments about the role of National Wind Farm Commissioner?

The Commissioner is currently discussing with the State Minister for Planning Mr Richard Wynne his attendance at a community meeting in Hawkesdale to consider the cumulative impact of the Macarthur Wind Farm, Willatook Wind Farm, Hawkesdale Wind Farm and Woolsthorpe Wind Farm around Hawkesdale. Should the Minister for Planning not be available, the Commissioner will be seeking representation by his Deputy.

Without the intervention of the NWFC, these discussions would not happen.

Attachment: National Wind Farm Commissioner Terms of Reference

The negotiated settlement of the Renewable Energy Target in mid-2015 is expected to lead to increased construction of wind turbines in the next five years.

The Senate Select Committee on Wind Turbines, held during 2015, identified many issues of concern relating to the standards, monitoring and operation of wind farms.

The Government responded positively to the recommendations of the Committee's Interim Report, including creation of the role of a National Wind Farm Commissioner.

The Commissioner will work collaboratively with all levels of government, scientists, industry and the community to resolve complaints from communities about proposed and operational wind farms.

The Commissioner will refer complaints about wind farms to relevant state authorities and help ensure that they are properly addressed.

The Commissioner will work with stakeholders to identify needs and priorities for monitoring wind farms.

The Commissioner will lead efforts to promote best practices, information availability, and provide a central, trusted source for dissemination of information.

The Commissioner, supported by the Australian Government Department of the Environment, will report to the Minister for the Environment and provide an Annual Report to the Australian Parliament on delivering against these Terms of Reference.

The work of the Commissioner will not duplicate or override the important statutory responsibilities of other jurisdictions, such as those relating to the planning and approval of wind farms.

The Commissioner is to draw on the work of the Independent Scientific Committee on Wind Turbines.

The role of the National Wind Farm Commissioner will be established for an initial period of three years and will be reviewed by the Australian Government.