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MEDIA RELEASE

VCAT Commissioners confirm evidence of damage to sleep and health from operating wind turbines

“Victorian Civil Administrative Tribunal Commissioners, Mr M Wright QC and Mr A Liston have made the following remarks in orders given on 4th April, 2013.¹ Paragraphs 116 -118 of their orders state the following:

para 116

“There is evidence before the Tribunal that a number of people living close to wind farms suffer deleterious health effects. The evidence is both direct and anecdotal. There is a uniformity of description of these effects across a number of wind farms, both in southeast Australia and North America. Residents complain of suffering sleep disturbance, feelings of anxiety upon awakening, headaches, pressure at the base of the neck and in the head and ears, nausea and loss of balance.”

para 117

“In some cases the impacts have been of such gravity that residents have been forced to abandon their homes.”

para 118

“On the basis of this evidence it is clear that some residents who live in close proximity to a wind farm experience the symptoms described, and that the experience is not simply imagined”.

The Commissioners have made a pragmatic and carefully considered decision to wait until more information is available about the damage to sleep and health from the larger wind turbines similar to those being proposed at Infigen’s Cherry Tree Wind Development, and will reconsider the available evidence in six months time” stated the Waubra Foundation’s CEO, Dr Sarah Laurie. “They are obviously taking the health concerns very seriously, as they should be”.²

“AGL & New Zealand Government’s Meridian Macarthur Wind Development in Western Victoria provides the latest example of large industrial wind turbines negatively impacting on nearby residents’ sleep,

health and quality of life. Reports coming directly from residents at Macarthur already show adverse impacts on citizens of all ages,³ including infants, and at distances out to at least 6km from the 140 VESTAS V 112 3MW turbines. The wind development will be officially opened on Friday 12th April, 2013.

At least one family from Macarthur has completely abandoned their home due to sleep disturbance from wind turbine noise and several other neighbours take refuge away from their homes on a regular basis to prevent the cumulative impacts of turbine noise on sleep quality from completely destroying their health. These impacts were entirely predictable and the inevitable consequence of siting large industrial wind turbines too close to homes and workplaces”, she said.

Predictably, when asked about the damage to human health from wind turbines, the VESTAS CEO Ditlev Engel on ABC radio’s PM program stated in his interview with ABC journalist Sarah Clarke “we have never seen any evidence that that is true”.⁴ These comments are reminiscent of the denials of “Big Tobacco”, James Hardie, and the pharmaceutical company, which manufactured Thalidomide. The senior executives of all these corporations had evidence of the harm their products caused, but disputed it until the end.

VESTAS CEO Mr Engel is well aware of the evidence for damage to health from low frequency noise emitted by his company’s turbines, and the problems this poses for the wind industry globally. Indeed Mr Engel was instrumental in successfully lobbying the Danish Government Minister for the Environment to weaken the proposed guidelines regulating low frequency noise, to “protect Danish jobs”, which comes at the direct expense of the health of Danish citizens.⁵

This outcome provoked a very pointed public response from Professor Henrik Moller,⁶ a well respected Danish Acoustician, whose peer reviewed published research⁷ two years ago showed definitively that larger turbines emit more sound energy proportionately down in the lower frequencies. This predictably causes known sleep and health problems for the neighbours, just as is being reported at Macarthur and Waterloo wind developments in Australia, where VESTAS 3MW wind turbines have been used.

“This ongoing denial of the existing evidence of damage to human sleep and health is destroying the global wind industry’s social licence to operate”, said Dr Laurie. “We commend the VCAT commissioners for adopting a precautionary approach, just as the National Health and Medical Research Council advocated, based on the limited but compelling evidence of serious damage to long term physical and mental health.

“The Commissioners have clearly taken notice of the recent case series of Dr Bob Thorne,⁸ who found that neighbours to two Victorian wind projects after two years exposure to operating wind turbines had health indicators worse even than hospital inpatients. Some of those residents had abandoned their homes, because of the severity of their health and sleep problems.”

“We call on all respective State and Federal Governments, to take notice of this important recent legal development, and urgently facilitate properly conducted research, recommended by the first Federal Senate inquiry ⁹ nearly 2 years ago, so that the VCAT commissioners and other planning jurisdictions do not continue to operate in what the VCAT Commissioners have described as a “knowledge vacuum”.

“The suffering of the residents at Macarthur and all the other wind developments where serious health damage is being reported must be fully and directly investigated objectively, with full spectrum acoustic measurements and concurrent clinical investigations, such as “in home” sleep studies.”

“The global wind industry is well aware of NASA research from 1985 ¹⁰ documenting the presence of wind turbine generated infrasound out to at least 10km”, Dr Laurie stated. There is no evidence that chronic exposure to these infrasound and low frequencies generated by large wind turbines is safe, despite the claims of the VESTAS CEO, and more engineering and health professionals speaking out publicly. ¹¹ If this were a pharmaceutical, adequate safety tests would have been done before it was released onto the market. *Why are the rules relating to the health safety of the public different for the wind industry?*

References

1. Orders given by VCAT Commissioners Wright and Liston, on 4th April, 2013, in the matter of the proposed Cherry Tree Wind development. Orders can be accessed from: <https://www.wind-watch.org/documents/six-month-adjudgment-order-to-study-health-effects/>
2. Dr Laurie's statement of evidence to the Tribunal can be accessed from: <https://www.wind-watch.org/documents/statement-of-dr-sarah-elisabeth-laurie/>
3. See for example the following footage and links relating to Macarthur residents:
<http://www.castlemainian.com/new2/wind-farm-report-on-the-project/>
<http://stopthesethings.com/2013/02/13/a-voice-from-the-wilderness-of-macarthur-wind-farm/>
<http://stopthesethings.com/2013/02/10/open-mind-changed-mind-changed-world/> For footage of residents describing what it is like to live beside a poorly sited wind turbine development too close to residents elsewhere in Victoria, Australia, see
<http://stopthesethings.com/2013/03/24/cape-bridgewater-sonia/>
<http://stopthesethings.com/2013/04/04/cape-bridgewater-melissa-and-rikki/>
4. Interview between ABC Journalist Sarah Clarke and CEO of VESTAS Ditlev Engel on ABC radio's PM program, 9th April, 2013 <http://www.abc.net.au/pm/content/2013/s3733248.htm>
5. The successful lobbying letter from VESTAS CEO Ditlev Engel to the Danish Minister for the Environment, Karen Ellemann which resulted in a win for the wind industry at the direct expense of the health of Danish citizens <http://www.wind-watch.org/documents/letter-from-vestas-worried-about-regulation-of-low-frequency-noise/> . See also the following for further background: <http://www.epaw.org/media.php?article=pr6>
6. The reported comments of Professor Henrik Moller concerning the changes to the Danish regulations: <http://www.epaw.org/echoes.php?article=n71>
7. Moller & Pedersen "Low Frequency Noise from Large Turbines" J Acoustical Society America 2011 129: 3727 – 3744 <http://www.wind-watch.org/documents/low-frequency-noise-from-large-wind-turbines-2/>
8. Dr Bob Thorne's case series from two Victorian wind developments comprised his submission to the second Australian Federal Senate inquiry, and can be accessed from the following weblink directly: <https://www.wind-watch.org/documents/wind-farm-generated-noise-and-adverse-health-effects/>
9. The seven recommendations from the first Australian Federal Senate inquiry are reproduced in the orders from the VCAT Commissioners in the Cherry Tree decision at <https://www.wind-watch.org/documents/six-month-adjudgment-order-to-study-health-effects/>
10. Willshire, William 1985 NASA " Long Range Downwind Propagation of low frequency sound" <https://www.wind-watch.org/documents/long-range-downwind-propagation-of-low-frequency-sound/> For recent acoustic data from modern upwind turbines showing infrasound and low frequency noise propagation out to 8km see Fig 11 of Steven Cooper's report at <https://www.wind-watch.org/documents/are-wind-farms-too-close-to-communities/>
11. List of concerned professionals: <http://www.epaw.org/documents.php?article=ns53>

10th April, 2013