



PO Box 310 Broadford, Victoria 3658

Web: www.beam.org.au

Email: beam.inc@hotmail.com

***"To protect and care for our natural environment
for a sustainable future."***

Cr Bill Melbourne, Mayor
Mitchell Shire Council
113 High Street
BROADFORD VIC 3658

RE: CHERRY TREE WIND FARM PROPOSAL

The following is provided as a formal response to the recent decision by Mitchell Shire Council to reject Planning Application number P306963/12 to develop a wind farm at Cherry Tree Hill in the Shire's north east. BEAM Mitchell Environment Group supported this proposal and we are extremely disappointed with the decision by Council. Below is an outline of our concerns in relation to this decision.

Advice to Council

Council received a range of advice in relation to the proposed development, including a very detailed report from the Council's own planning department following input from both individuals and groups such as BEAM. Both BEAM and the Mitchell Shire Council Environment Advisory Committee provided detailed written submissions addressing the known environmental concerns and how they could be adequately addressed within the planning process, as with many other large developments. None of this advice was referred to or acknowledged in the responses provided by Councillors prior to voting. It appeared that Council was willing to ignore credible, factual advice in favour of a more populist approach to decision making. Some of the issues raised by Councillors in their statements included:

Concern for Flora and Fauna

We believe the concerns for flora and fauna outlined by some councillors were overstated. Most of the land around the site is bare paddocks and even the remnants of bushland along the road are heavily grazed. Road design would limit the impact of the construction phase and fencing and plantings would actually enhance the qualities of the roadside for wildlife in the longer term. Most wildlife would not be directly affected by the turbines. The only species at risk are those that fly - birds or bats.

DSE's List of Threatened Vertebrate Fauna in Victoria includes some wetland species, but not the raptors such as Whistling Kites and Swamp Harriers as mentioned at the meeting. The wetland species move along the Goulburn Valley and occasionally visit Horseshoe Lagoon. They would not pass near the turbines on top of the hill.

Wedge-tailed Eagles are "protected" (like all other wildlife in Victoria) but are not "threatened". Some birds may be killed by the turbines but research shows that eagles mostly avoid turbines. Moreover, removal of food sources would reduce the interest eagles might have in visiting the turbine sites.

Wetlands and waterways were also described as under threat from the development. With suitable barriers and pondages controlling runoff, this threat can be eliminated.

Impact on local roads

Road access was identified as an issue. VicRoads did not object to the development, but reserved judgement until it received more information. The Council briefing notes stated: "VicRoads has advised that they are not in a position to provide approval to the proposed route and requests the applicant provide further information specific to how the developer will seek to maintain the condition of the roads that its construction / delivery vehicles will use during the construction period of the development". Similarly, we would hope that the Council would ensure the local roads are maintained. These were not the subject of the planning application so were irrelevant to the meeting.

Fire Risk

The Victorian Country Fire Authority (CFA), in its 2007 *Emergency Management Guidelines for Wind Farms*, notes that the potential for fire from wind turbines is "less of an issue in comparison to normal power generation sites as power transmission is located within the towers and underground to the transformers." (p.3) As with any large industrial facility though, there are still inherent risks, and so all wind energy facilities are required to develop a fire management plan. As outlined in our original proposal, we believe the fire risk could be further lowered through ongoing management of the site through grazing.

Health Issues

We refer Council to the National Health and Medical Research Council, which in 2009 conducted a rapid review of current scientific literature to determine whether there was a link between wind turbines and adverse health effects. The review considered the potential health impacts of infrasound, noise, electromagnetic interference, shadow flicker and blade glint produced by wind turbines and concluded that, at the time of writing, there was no published scientific evidence to positively link wind turbines with adverse health effects. A systematic literature review is now being undertaken, with the NHMRC due to release an updated statement on wind turbines and human health early in 2013.

Visual Impact

Wind farms do have an impact on the landscape. To many people, wind farms are a blight on the landscape. We do not share this attitude. We believe the wind farm would be well sited on already cleared land that is some distance back from the edge of the escarpment at Trawool. Like many people, we find them an interesting and attractive addition to the rural landscape and an icon for the technologies of the future.

Furthermore, we see opportunities to get good outcomes for the land and biodiversity of the area, as well as benefits for local business and employment and the broader benefits in reducing carbon emissions. We support the conclusion of Moir Landscape Architecture in the Proponent's Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment that: "the social, environmental and economical benefits of the proposed wind farm far outweigh the visual impacts".

Mitchell Shire Council Vision and Strategy

Support for the development of the Cherry Tree Wind Farm is in line with the vision for a sustainable future outlined in the recent Mitchell 2020 Community plan. This key Council vision statement, developed with significant community input, acknowledges both climate change and peak oil as significant challenges for our communities in the next decade and beyond. Council's role in responding to the challenges of climate change and peak oil is clearly articulated in the various

sections of the Mitchell 2020 Community Plan, with the document emphasising providing leadership and wisely using its planning powers.

The Mitchell Shire Council's Sustainable Resource Management Strategy, endorsed by Council in 2011, outlines the Council's proposed internal response to climate change and peak oil. Once again it recognises the need for leadership on this issue. "Council is aware of the latest science. We know we have to demonstrate leadership in our community and make a difference through our actions. Most importantly, we know we have to move fast." (p.2)

This was a perfect opportunity to provide strong leadership on one of the biggest challenges for our time, in line with the many shire residents who provided input to the development of the 2020 plan. Concerns about the location of the wind farm should have been weighed up against the benefits of reducing carbon emissions locally. Our question to Council then, is "if not there, then where?" If Council accepts climate change and peak oil as key challenges, what is your plan for responding to these issues locally? What renewable energy projects will you support and where?

In conclusion, we believe that the benefits of the proposed wind farm far outweighed the negative impacts. Although Mitchell Shire Council has acknowledged the real need to transition to renewable energy sources in response to declining resource availability and climate change, a key opportunity to provide leadership and put strategy into practice was missed. Credible evidence and advice was ignored while myths and community divisions were reinforced.

Instead of creating further division, Council could have listened to a wider cross-section of the community and played a role in minimizing division through strong supportive leadership which respected people's concerns while promoting facts and enhancing knowledge about renewable energy. We would suggest that Council looks at the wider issues, focusing on shared goals and positive, local solutions to climate change which will bring the community together rather than divide it.

We look forward to working cooperatively with the new Council and Council staff to progress this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Caroline Morris
President- BEAM Mitchell Environment Group

cc Rebecca McKenzie, Chief Executive Officer