

Dear Editor,

As a member of Woodend Integrated Sustainable Energy (WISE), I would like to respond to Caitlin Ryan's report on the Sidonia Hills Wind Farm (11/3/08). WISE is a local community organisation which seeks to achieve a carbon neutral future, and supports the uptake of all forms of renewable energy in the Macedon Ranges Shire (MRS), including wind, solar and biofuels, be they large, medium or domestic, as well as sustainable building design with respect to energy and water conservation.

In this day and age, we as a people need to think not only about impending climate change, but also the depletion, increasing expense and eventual disappearance of fossil fuels as an energy source. The MRS is a wind-rich area (Victorian Wind Atlas, 2004), blessed due to its own topography with wind resources equal to coastal areas. WISE asks: why not use this resource for our community's benefit? Large scale wind farms are only one form of wind power generation – communities and individuals alike should also be able harness our natural resources, creating ownership and control of our own carbon future. Denmark and indeed the United States, among others, have embraced community-owned wind power generation for decades, and have enjoyed the benefits flowing on from this, including a source of ongoing revenue for the community shareholders, and the proud feeling that comes from creating and using for themselves energy from a clean, renewable resource.

WISE respects the opinions of local community members concerned about the potential impacts on landscape, flora and fauna, but simply asks that this be considered in the light of reason and current understanding. The issue of bird strike is a particularly contentious one – just ask Ian Campbell, the former Federal Minister of Environment, whose cynical use of the Orange Bellied Parrot as a reason for blocking the Bald Hills Wind Farm was the beginning of his eventual decline. The fact is that detailed surveys conducted by various commercial and government agencies have concluded bird strike by wind turbine is a rare phenomenon, and that far more birds are killed by buildings and cars, not to mention the fate of these birds in an environment where climate and habitat changes continue unabated.

With respect to flora, the footprint of wind turbines is small, so that the impact on vegetation is limited. Further, productive agricultural land is being used right now in Victoria for wind farms, with the landholders enjoying annual annuities and leases on easements. This is at odds with the current Council position on using "productive agricultural land" as an exclusion layer for siting wind turbines. In the MRS, this excludes a huge area which may otherwise be used for clean power production for community benefit.

WISE supports John Letchford's comments on the positive benefits of wind power, and are heartened that the Council may be changing their current 'hands off' attitude. We particularly support community-owned renewable energy production, in the form of initiatives such as small-scale wind 'parks' (consisting of two to three wind turbines), which for example could provide enough household energy for both Woodend and Macedon, and assist in achieving a carbon neutral future for the Shire. The area would likewise benefit from other initiatives such as bulk purchasing of residential solar power systems, retro-fitting of existing buildings for energy and water conservation, and introducing planning provisions for sustainable buildings. The facts must be weighed with both reason and an appreciation of the bigger picture.

Regards

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On behalf of WISE