

WOOLNORTH WIND FARMS

Mt Fyans Wind Farm Community Consultation Report

May 2017



WOOLNORTH
WIND FARMS



**MT FYANS
WIND FARM
PROJECT**

Executive summary

Woolnorth Wind Farms endeavours to make a positive contribution to the development of the local community and economy in locations where it operates.

After a decision was made to proceed to the formal planning stage of the Mt Fyans Wind Farm (MFWF), Woolnorth commenced a community consultation program in the Mortlake district in early 2017. The objective of the program was to provide preliminary information about the project to local residents and to establish lines of communication between Woolnorth and local stakeholders.

Residents in the Mortlake region are familiar with wind farms due to numerous similar development activities in the region. Woolnorth found there is a range of views in relation to wind farm development with the majority of dwelling-owning neighbours and people in the broader community supportive of the MFWF.

Woolnorth's community consultation activities have included face-to-face discussions with immediate neighbours of the proposed wind farm, meetings with the Moyne Shire Council and staff, distribution of newsletters and letters, establishment of a project website and stakeholder database and delivery of an informative public display held over two days in Mortlake. A number of residents expressed their appreciation of Woolnorth's communication efforts during this formal planning stage.



Olivine Café, Mortlake, 6 May 2017

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1. Introduction

This report outlines Woolnorth Wind Farms' community consultation activities undertaken between January and May 2017 to develop the Mt Fyans Wind Farm (MFWF) and its subsequent findings. This report has been prepared to support the application to the Victorian Government Minister for Planning to decide if an assessment is required under the *Environmental Effects Act 1978* (EES).

This report outlines:

- a brief history of Woolnorth and the MFWF
- community consultation activities to date
- key findings of the consultation process
- introduction of a Neighbour Participation Agreement, and
- planned activities going forward.

1.1 About Woolnorth Wind Farms

Woolnorth Wind Farms is a joint venture between Hydro Tasmania, a Government of Tasmania business enterprise; and of Shenhua Clean Energy Holding, a subsidiary Guohua Energy Investment Corporation. Woolnorth is one of Australia's largest wind energy producers and the company operates three wind farms in Tasmania: Musselroe, Bluff Point and Studland Bay. Together, these three wind farms generate a capacity of 308 Megawatts or 9 per cent of Tasmania's energy requirements.

1.2 Mount Fyans Wind Farm

The proposed MFWF is located at the centre of Victoria's western plains, approximately 5 kilometres (km) north of Mortlake. The Mortlake-Ararat road runs through the centre of the site and the Hamilton Highway forms part of its Southern boundary. Mount Shadwell creates a geographical barrier between the town and the wind farm.

The MFWF has been at a preliminary planning stage for several years. The site was chosen because of strong and reliable wind resources, proximity to the high voltage interconnector and Mortlake substation low density housing, and proximity to state highways and the. Land Access Agreements have been established between the 13 adjoining properties. The properties consist of privately-owned grazing and farm land.

The final design and layout of the site has taken into consideration many factors including:

- location of adjoining dwellings
- land topography
- noise level standards for neighbouring dwellings and houses within the site, and
- locations of environmental and heritage value.

There are 48 dwellings surrounding to the proposed site, owned by 43 entities (including both individuals and companies).

<i>Turbine distance from dwelling</i>	<i>No. of houses</i>
0km – 1km	0 (as per Victorian Government regulation)
1km to 2km	15
2km to 3km	33

An anticipated 81 turbines on the site will generate approximately 250 megawatts of energy.

1.3 Aims and objectives of the MFWF community consultation program

Woolnorth would like to contribute to the community in a manner that has long-term positive outcomes for t Mortlake and its surrounding communities. Woolnorth is committed to:

- providing accurate, relevant and up-to-date information regarding Woolnorth activities during the development and construction phases of the project,
- ensuring its processes enable the community and stakeholders to make their views and concerns known, and
- building trust and respect between Woolnorth and the local community.

2. Introducing a Neighbour Participation Agreement

Building a wind farm requires significant planning, research and stakeholder engagement. Generally, the first stakeholders consulted in the early stages of developing a wind farm are the landowners, whose properties are well situated to host turbines. Over time many of these landowners will support the development and allow access to their land as they have been well informed, heard, have had the opportunity to influence the project and are able to agree the terms of payment.

Wind farms have the potential to create conflict within communities, partly due to the disparity created between those that benefit financially and those that do not.

Woolnorth recognises that the nearby dwelling-owning neighbours and the broader community also have a legitimate stake in the development of the wind farm. Beyond general community engagement, Woolnorth will need to continue to communicate with neighbours to address:

- initial reactions which may be based on feelings of powerlessness and loss of control of environmental surrounds to an unknown business entity;
- a lack of information about the project which may heighten concerns and/or stress around health, noise and impact on property value;
- no perceived direct benefits for them, despite proximity to turbines, while often absent neighbours benefit financially and do not have to bear any 'inconveniences' generated through the construction phase (such as increased traffic); and/or
- opposition from people who made the deliberate lifestyle choice to relocate to a rural area that they believed would not be subject to such developments.

To work towards addressing these factors Woolnorth are developing a Neighbour Participation Agreement (NPA) to provide immediate dwelling-owning neighbours (whose homes sit within 3 kilometres of proposed turbines) a small payment in return for communicating with Woolnorth about any views or concerns they may have.

The NPA encourages open dialogue and communication between the two parties and does not infringe on the rights of residents to object or participate in the approval process. Woolnorth have discussed their intention to offer participation agreements with neighbours and the concept has been very well received by these residents.

3. Engagement activities

As previously mentioned, Woolnorth recognises that there are a number of local and regional stakeholders of the MFWF. Key stakeholders for the formal planning phase of MFWF were identified as:

- immediate dwelling-owning neighbours to the project (defined as living within 3km of proposed turbines)
- the Mortlake township and surrounding communities, and

- the Moyne Shire Council.

Woolnorth have focused their communication and consultation efforts on these key stakeholders with previous and current activities listed below.

3.1 Immediate neighbours

Between February and May 2017 neighbours within 3km of proposed turbines were visited in person with the purpose of introducing the project and answering any immediate questions. Those neighbours who Woolnorth were unable to contact were sent a letter inviting them to contact Woolnorth for more information. Of the 43 immediate neighbours that were contacted, six neighbours did not respond and one family did not want to have a discussion with Woolnorth about MFWF.

Immediate neighbour consultation activities

Engagement activity	Date	Comments
Contact via phone	February-April 2017	Residents were identified from a title search, the local directory or via neighbours. Staff introduced the project over the phone and arranged face-to-face meetings where possible.
Face-to-face meetings	March-May 2017	Staff visited neighbours in their home to explain the project, display a map of the wind farm and present residents with a specific individual map which showed their home in relation to proposed wind turbines. Email, phone numbers and mailing addresses were collected. Follow-up information was provided.
Letter to neighbours who could not be contacted	May 2017	Where staff were unable to contact a neighbour, a letter was sent introducing Woolnorth and inviting residents to contact Woolnorth for more information regarding the wind farm and the proposed NPA. 1,000 letters were sent out were also sent out to residents in the area.
Mail out of NPA	June 2017	If/once approved, the NPA should be sent out by 30 June 2017.

In discussions with neighbours, Community Engagement staff encountered mixed views on MFWF especially from those who had not previously heard of the project. Some initial concerns, such as impacts on the landscape and noise generated from the turbines, were generally mitigated during these early discussions. Neighbours were also grateful that they were informed of the project prior to a public announcement, giving them the opportunity to think and discuss the project between themselves and with staff prior to a public display.

3.2 Moyne Shire Council

The Moyne Shire Council and staff have accumulated significant knowledge concerning wind farm development. Their perspectives provided valuable input during this first phase of public consultation. The aim of engagement with the Council was to introduce Woolnorth, build lines of

communication between the MFWF project and council staff, and develop an understanding of best practice for community engagement and project management going forward.

Moyne Shire Council engagement activities

Engagement activity	Date	Comments
Preliminary project briefing with the Council	7 February 2017	Woolnorth General Manager, Stephen Ross, and senior staff presented MFWF to the Moyne Shire Council. The Council asked numerous questions regarding construction plans, road use, turbine specifications, employment opportunities, community investment programming and decommissioning plans.
Discussions with Council staff	Ongoing	Meetings have been held with Council’s Major Project Officer and Planning Staff every 3 months over the past 18 months to provide an informal update on the project. Further meetings with Council staff are to be arranged as the project progresses.

3.3 Public display: 5-6 May 2017

A public display was held in Mortlake on 5-6 May 2017 at the local café, Olivine. An invitation to the display, as well as a newsletter, was sent via mail to the local community a week prior. A media release was also sent to the Mortlake Dispatch and an article titled ‘Seeking feedback on wind farm’ was on the front page of the community newspaper on Thursday 27 April 2017.

The purpose of the public display was to inform Mortlake and its surrounding communities of the MFWF and introduce Woolnorth. The café was open between 10.00am and 3.00pm with staff available to answer specific questions and take notes on areas of community interest.

The display content included:

- An overview of Woolnorth, wind power and why Mortlake was selected
- Site map showing the layout of the project, including breakdown of neighbouring properties
- Building a wind farm: description of key phases
- Environmental impacts/considerations on flora, fauna and cultural heritage
- Photomontage of turbines to demonstrate visual impact over varying distances (1.5km to 10 km)
- Community Engagement: Contact details and next steps.

3.4 Attendees

Sixty-six adults attended the display over two days. Generally, attendees were supportive of the MFWF the majority believed that the wind farm would have a positive impact on the local economy and community.

Breakdown of attendees MFWF Preliminary Public Display 5-6 May 2017

Stakeholder	Attendees
Landowner (turbine hosts)	5
Nearby landowners	25
Community/townships	21
Local interest groups	4
Business owners and service providers	6
Services	3
From out of town	1
Media	1
TOTAL ADULTS	66

Twenty-five neighbours (within and greater than 3km of the project site) attended the display and asked specific questions about MFWF, including:

- the application and construction processes
- the size and location of the wind farm
- transmission line installation from the wind farm to the Mortlake substation, and
- road access points to the wind farm.

A small number of these neighbours expressed their intent to make submissions against the proposal during the approvals process. However, Woolnorth received positive feedback from stakeholders about its communication efforts to date and attendees were satisfied they could attend the display to speak directly with project staff.

During the meetings with neighbours and the public display in Mortlake many people expressed views about the importance of personal, face-to-face discussions as the project progresses.

4. Key themes

The key themes from our consultation activities were primarily drawn from discussions with immediate neighbours to the MFWF project¹; and from commentary received by attendees of the first MFWF public display.

- There was a range of community views in relation to the MFWF:
- The majority of residents were supportive of the MFWF and positive about renewable energy projects in general.
- A small number of people living close to the project did not want the wind farm “in their neighbour’s backyard.”
- A large number of people said that the project represented an opportunity to grow and support the local economy and residents were interested in employment and contracting opportunities.
- There were positive reactions to the potential for Woolnorth to support local initiatives
- Significant discussion around the financial disparity between landowners receiving payments to host turbines hosts versus the neighbours who receive no direct financial benefit, and the potential for this to cause community division.
- Some people close to the project were concerned that that wind farms will likely impact their visual amenity. More information on the scale and visibility of turbines was requested by many of these people.
- A very small proportion of neighbours were concerned that wind farms may have harmful impacts on their health and on the environment.
- While a majority of community members were interested in learning about the science behind wind technology, a small number of people were wary of such technical communication. These people believed that there was enough “anecdotal information” to discredit traditional scientific reporting.

In addition to the key themes identified, the Woolnorth team were able to correct a number of rumours about the project, such as why people may be eligible for a payment and traffic control/road usage.

4.1 Multiple Wind Farms

There are a large number of wind farm developments in South Western Victoria and consequently residents are familiar with projects at different stages of development. Wind Project development has brought investors, consultants and scientists to Moyne Shire and these people have had varying amounts of contact with local residents. A number of residents in the region have signed contracts to host turbines on their land with a range of international wind companies.

The Moyne Council and some people in the community were concerned about the impact a major wind project constructed in 2009 had on local roads. Most people believed that the Mt Fyans project

¹ Defined as living within 3km of proposed wind turbines

has good access to major state roads and a coordinated traffic management plan that could avoid traffic problems.

Several residents expressed their frustration at the lack of communication other wind farm companies have had with the local community and were appreciative of Woolnorth's open communication of the MFWF project.

4.2 Neighbour Participation Agreement

As previously discussed, the vast majority of neighbours were open to the concept of the Neighbour Participation Agreement (NPA) that would offer a modest payment to house owners within 3km of turbines in exchange for their continued open communication with the project team through the life of the project.

While potential NPA recipients view the payment as modest and calculated to favour people with houses within 2kms of the turbines, the Agreement was viewed as a genuine means of improving communication and understanding between the wind farm proponents and neighbours.

5. Outline of future activities

Woolnorth anticipates that planned community consultation and engagement activities will change and evolve in response to community and other stakeholder feedback.

The next phase of the project will focus on the communication mechanisms favoured by the neighbours and community, including face to face meeting and regular public displays as the key means to create dialogue with the community and stakeholders.

Woolnorth acknowledges that attitudes and levels of interest in the project may change over the course of the MFWF development and seeks to continue a frank and open discussion with all interested parties in the project. Through the Planning Approval phase of the project, these consultation activities will include:

- face-to-face meetings
- channels to receive feedback and questions, including the 1800 number and email contact
- maintenance of a stakeholder database including detailed records of all communication between interested stakeholders and Woolnorth staff
- provision of public displays on specific issues of community interest and the key planning issues associated with the project,
- communication with the community through multiple forms of media including: newsletters, updated website information and email notifications
- (if approved) communication to facilitate the administration of the Neighbour Participation Agreements.

Following a decision by the Minister in regards to the planning approval process, the scope and program of future consultation activities will be finalised.