

January 2014 to March 2015

Report on the Community Consultation Committee Process

Bodangora Wind Farm – Wellington NSW

Report 2. Prepared by Committee Chair

Grahame Collier



Introduction and Purpose

The Planning and Assessment Commission approved the Bodangora Wind Farm, with conditions, in September 2013. In the period prior to and following this approval, the Bodangora Wind Farm Consultation Committee has been functioning to promote consultation and communication about the project.

This purpose of this document is to provide a report on the progress made by the Bodangora Wind Farm Community Consultation Committee (CCC), in the period January 2014 to March 2015. This is the second report on the functioning of this committee. It should be considered in the light of the first report, which was completed and provided to the Department of Planning and Infrastructure in February 2014.

By way of background, Infigen Energy established the CCC in line with the structure outlined in the NSW Government's draft *NSW Planning Guidelines Wind Farms – A resource for communities, applicants and consent authorities* - in particular Section 2.2 and Appendix C. These Guidelines were released as a draft for comment, by the NSW Department of Planning and Infrastructure in December 2011. They remain draft Guidelines only. It needs to be noted that appointment of members, the role and actions of the

Chair and the conduct of all meetings, are in accordance with the draft Guidelines – see further commentary below.

About the Community Consultation Committee

The role of the CCC is broadly to:

- Establish good working relationships between proponent, community and stakeholders
- Provide for ongoing communication of project information
- Discuss community concerns and review the resolution of community complaints
- Advise on the allocation of community enhancement funds in the community
- Improve interaction between the project and the community and discuss ideas to benefit all stakeholders.

Membership of the Committee has remained stable as at March 31 2015; it is as follows:

Mr Peter Harlow, Wellington Shire Council (appointed Meeting 6 January 2014)
Mr. Frank Barker (mid Macquarie Landcare)
Mr. Peter James (Bodangora Resident)
Ms. Lyn Jarvis (Neighbour)
Mr. Mike Lyons (Neighbour)
Mr. Bob Sewell (Wellington business owner)
Mr. Simon Barton (Host landowner)
Mr. Frank Boland (Proponent – Infigen Energy)

As Identified in the first report, Mayor Anne Jones (Mayor of Wellington Shire Council) also attended the first three meetings of the CCC. When he became the Mayor, Councillor Rodd Buhr attended Meeting 4 (December 2012). Since that time no elected representatives have attended the CCC.

In the period January 2014 to March 2015, the CCC met only on three occasions; January 28th 2014 [also mentioned in Report 1], March 12th 2014 and August 6th 2014. At the time of writing of this report, Meeting 9 was scheduled for May 26th 2015 and was held on this date. This will be reported upon in Report 3, but it is noted that Mr. Peter Harlow, the Wellington Shire Council Representative, had left Council prior to this meeting and that for Meeting 9, Mr. Ashoor Khan represented Council. He became the fourth Council representative in the life of the CCC.

The draft Wind Farm Guidelines state that: *The Chairperson's role is the convenor, facilitator, mediator and advisor to the committee.* The Chair's independence is essential and this aspect of the Guidelines has been fully adhered to, at times impacting upon members of the CCC and the proponent alike. For example, the Chair has not voted on any matter put before the Committee, including some matters where specific members of the CCC demanded that a casting vote was 'required' in the case of tied vote.

The Sticking Points

Over this period there have been two major issues that are beyond the control of the CCC and the proponent that have severely hampered the consultation process.

1. The Renewable Energy Target

The failure of the Commonwealth Government to secure a negotiated Renewable Energy Target - RET [with the Labor opposition and the Greens] over a long period of time has resulted in funding uncertainty in the renewable sector. For the Bodangora Wind Farm, this meant that while the project had been approved, funding could not be guaranteed and so the project was essentially on hold. Because of lack of progress, CCC meetings were postponed and consultation processes ceased. This unfortunate reality has significantly hampered the process and had an impact on the outputs generated by the CCC, see below. It has also had an impact on some inter-personal relationships between CCC members.

The recent agreement to a target of 33000GWh, provides the opportunity for the project to move forward again, although it is noted that some sticking points remain in moving legislation through Parliament.

2. The Draft Wind Farm Guidelines

It is inconceivable that the Guidelines remain in draft form since 2011. This has hampered the processes of the CCC to some extent and had an impact on communication with the community. While this issue has less impact on progress than that of the RET, it remains important. Concerns were raised about this matter in Report 1 and there has been no progress.

A final set of Guidelines that set definitive benchmarks for noise, visual amenity and health impacts, as well as many other issues, is imperative. The NH&MRC findings on the health impacts of wind farms are important and should lead to a more up to date and endorsed set of Guidelines as soon as possible.

With specific regard to the functioning of the CCC, the fact that the Guidelines remain in draft form has specific impact on relationships and functioning of the Bodangora CCC. Without them, members and the community can down play the process of consultation and the role of the CCC. People on the Committee hold differing views about the Wind Farm project and express these vigorously at meetings. While this is of value, this Committee has been more focused on discussion of the project per se, rather than some of the important roles of the CCC including: *Improving interaction between the project and the community and discussing ideas to benefit all stakeholders and establishing good working relationships between proponent, community and stakeholders*. The absence of final Guidelines has not assisted in the management of the process. A final set of Guidelines with the imprimatur of Government will enhance and mandate the credibility of consultation processes.

Significant Outputs from the Community Consultation Committee Process

During the period and despite all of the issues raised above, the CCC has achieved the following:

Output 1. Provided an open and transparent opportunity for people in Wellington to state their views about this proposal despite tensions and challenges.

Output 2. The CCC process resulted in a better informed community in Wellington/Bodangora about the project. Questions raised and opinions given by the CCC have been discussed openly and fully. While not everyone is in agreement on all issues, there has been substantial information flow

Output 3. The development of a range of suggestions for community benefits projects, which will be more fully developed and assessed, now that the project is to occur. Note the role of the CCC is advisory and so unless there is change to its terms of reference, it will not be making decisions about which particular projects are funded. Note also, that Infigen has taken up some of these ideas and implemented them, for example sponsorship of the Show Society.

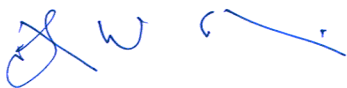
These outputs may be seen by some as being at a lower level than might have been expected from the process, but the lack of certainty about the project over the last 15 months, has had a significant input.

The Way Forward - Learning from the Process

It is to be hoped that the Wind Farm project and the CCC can move forward from this period of hiatus. It is clear that once the project recommences, the CCC will continue to meet through the construction phase of the project. It should have a significant impact on driving quality information sharing and communication processes. Important areas that the Committee will need to focus upon into the future include:

- Informing the community about why the project has been delayed and what is the time-frame for the future.
- Encouraging the proponent to enhance consultation mechanisms at high need periods, for example prior to the commencement of construction of the project.
- Reporting to the community about progress, challenges and benefits of the project.
- Keeping the community informed about progress and directions for the project.
- Drawing perspectives from the community and presenting these to Infigen as ongoing advice.
- Providing advice about the protocols and management related to the 'community turbine.'
- Identifying and detailing possible community benefit ideas/projects for consideration.
- Commenting on possible processes to be used to assess and determine community benefit projects.

In addition, there is a need for committee members to undertake some training in effective consultation and communication processes and this is an important task for the future. Members of the CCC are to be congratulated for their work and commitment to date.



Grahame Collier
May 2015