



# National Wind Farm Commissioner

## Best Practice Community Engagement - Some Observations

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[www.nwfc.gov.au](http://www.nwfc.gov.au)

# Role

- Commenced in November 2015 for a three year term to:
  - ✓ Facilitate the resolution of complaints from concerned community residents about planned and operating wind farms
  - ✓ Identify and promote best practices for industry and government to adopt in regard to the planning and operation of wind farms; and
  - ✓ Improve information access and transparency about proposed and operating wind farms.
- Draw on the work of the Independent Scientific Committee
- Independent role – reporting directly to the Minister of the Environment and Energy
- Commissioner's Terms of Reference at [www.nwfc.gov.au](http://www.nwfc.gov.au)

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# Achievements to date

- Extensive stakeholder engagement – government, community, industry and experts, along with wind farm site visits
- Complaint policy, systems and process implemented
- Office and staff established
- Independent web-site launched – [www.nwfc.gov.au](http://www.nwfc.gov.au)
- Handling a wide variety of complaints
- Identifying and addressing systemic issues
- Identifying and promoting best practices

## Some complaint statistics (as at 25 July 2016)

- Total complaints received = 74 complaints
- Total number of complainants = 100 people
- 42 complaints are from 9 operating wind farms (approx. 76 operating wind farms in Australia)
- 32 complaints are from 16 planned wind farms (approx. 65 planned wind farms in Australia)
- 25 cases closed, remaining 49 at various stages of our complaint handling process

## Types of Complaints

- Noise and annoyance from operations
- Noise testing process and noise standards
- Amenity and impact on views
- Economic loss (property & opportunity)
- Health impacts
- Set-back distances and spacing of turbines
- Disruption during construction
- Transparency of wind farm information
- Transparency of planning and permit information
- Bush fire risks and aerial spraying

# Life cycle phases for community engagement

- Initial development
- Planning/permit approval
- Construction
- Initial operations
- Mature operations
- Decommissioning

# Before Operations

- Invest early in community relations – don't wait until the permit phase
- Identify and work with key stakeholders across and beyond the community
- Be transparent with information about the development and permit process – regardless of minimum requirements
- Take a holistic and open approach to working with landowners and neighbours
- Ensure agreements (host and neighbour) are fair and reasonable, in plain English and allow parties access to legal advice
- Provide opportunities for community members to visit operational wind farms
- Use simulators to explain and provide noise experiences
- Establish a complaints process, system and register for community members to formally raise concerns
- Establish a community consultative committee (CCC) with appropriate membership
- Consult and communicate effectively on the construction plan

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# Operations - Engagement

- Use multiple channels for communication with the community – web-site, social media, SMS, newsletters, information sessions, CCC etc.
- Engage local staff to provide community relations and manage complaint response
- Be prepared to go above and beyond minimum permit requirements – use good judgment
- Hold regular information sessions with all of the community that address topics of interest and concerns that might arise
- Provide opportunities to visit the wind farm – such as an “Open Day”
- Ensure appropriate community involvement in the governance and management of the Community Fund
- Avoid rolling out community programs that are difficult to administer – use a common sense test



# Operations - Complaints

- Publish complaint policies and procedure – e.g. on web-site, newsletter
- Ensure process is followed! (May well be a permit requirement)
- Be transparent with the contact options for lodging a complaint (telephone, email etc.) – these should be clearly set out on the web-site, access gates, newsletters, fridge magnets
- Avoid repetitive, standard responses to complaints, particularly if the response will neither address the complaint or bring it to closure
- Process should include ability for complaint to be reviewed and escalated
- Ensure complaints are brought to closure and closure is documented
- Use complaint feedback as part of overall monitoring of the wind farm – neighbours can be effective “eyes and ears” on your operation

# Summary

- So far, complaints about wind farms are few in number – but they can be complex
- Effective community engagement – via best practice communications, consultation and complaints handling will improve industry's reputation
- CEC is an appropriate body to work with to promote best practices in community engagement and complaints handling
- Need industry to keep working with us to bring about positive resolutions to complex legacy cases

# Questions?

[www.nwfc.gov.au](http://www.nwfc.gov.au)

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