

MINUTES

Collector Wind Farm Forum

Meeting: August 25, 2012 at the Bushranger Hotel, Collector

In attendance: Jenny Bell, Michael Coley, James McKay, Frank Ross, Tony Walsh, Nick Valentine, Anthony Yeates, Deborah Cameron (chair).

Meeting commenced: 10.30am

Meeting concluded: 12 noon

General discussion

These minutes serve as an account and a general record of the discussion at what was the inaugural meeting of the forum. This is not a verbatim record and is therefore not conclusive. These minutes also reflect the tone of the gathering as an introductory meeting.

After preliminary introductions, James McKay said that the forum had happened way too late and, though he did not want to pre-empt others, thought that it was a generally held view among those on the committee and in the community that there was a degree of caution about the Forum. We are between a rock and a hard place.

Mr McKay said that community engagement on the Ratch Wind Farm project had been shocking and a poor engagement model that had contributed to a sense of division in the community.

Mr McKay was followed by Mr Walsh who said that emotions in the community was such that agreeing to be a member of the Forum presented a dilemma. Damned if we do and damned if we don't.

Mr Walsh said that a key concern was how the members of the Forum were selected in the first place? And whether this was an exercise in allowing the proponent to tick a box?

Mr Walsh said that it was sad that a rural community had felt these effects. He illustrated this by saying that people from larger communities could choose their interest groups – but in a rural area you don't choose your community, you live in it.

Jenny Bell agreed with the description, a rock and a hard place, and said that the community had been part of a flawed process. Mrs Bell described stress and pressures from a previous project and said that has affected her family and so was not inclined to continue as a member of the Forum. She said that she had come to the inaugural meeting because it was important to explain her position personally.

All members, including Mr Ross, expressed interest in the project's financial model and there was general discussion about options for alternative arrangements, including community ownership of turbines.

Anthony Yeates of Ratch-Australia explained that the financial and business model for the project had been shaped by business and investment considerations and that it was required to comply with all of the requirements set out governing wind farm energy generators. Asked whether the company had signed a Power Purchase Agreement for Collector, he said that it had not done so as yet. The existence of the PPA would influence approval.

Nick Valentine, in response to Mrs Bell's criticism of community consultation, acknowledged that the planning mechanism that the company was involved with was imperfect and could be improved upon.

Mr Ross said that he was concerned that the Forum was not representative enough. He saw potential for more community engagement. Like Mr McKay and other members, Mr Ross thought that the Forum would need to form a Trust to administer to funds that will eventually flow to the community from Ratch.

Mr Coley, with his knowledge of the intersection between the community and the political and planning approvals process, contributed to a discussion on planning protocols and strategic decisions made by the State Government and their affect on local council and communities. He asked that the chair write to Council asking that Mr Coley be the council nominee to the Forum (assuming his re-election) and that this be done after the approaching Local Government election and prior to the first meeting of council on September 20.

Mr McKay said that the diversification of Australia's energy resources as expressed under the bipartisan Renewable Energy Targets was generally accepted by the Australian community. He said that the certainty of the wind supply in Collector meant that the town had rolled gold wind and that it should be possible to extract more value from arrangements between the community and the proponent.

There was general discussion about the financial arrangements at other wind farms, including where community share arrangements were in place. Anthony Yeates said that he was prepared to talk further about other models.

Actions arising from meeting:

- Chair to write to the Upper Lachlan Shire after the council election on September 9 asking that Cr Coley be appointed as the Council representative to the Forum.
- Chair to investigate and report back on the establishment of a Forum website.
- Forum to meet again on a date to be fixed before Christmas – possibly the end of November.
- Anthony Yeates to prepare a short briefing on the economics of the Collector Wind Farm to be presented at the forthcoming meeting.