



## Office of the National Wind Farm Commissioner

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### Bulletin

### Wind Farm Complaint Handling

20 June 2016 (Updated 17 August 2016)

Since commencing the role in November 2015, the National Wind Farm Commissioner has observed a wide range of practices by wind farms in their handling of complaints.

This Bulletin sets out a number of practices that the Commissioner encourages industry to consider and adopt, for both planned and operating wind farms. These practices may be in addition to the minimum requirements prescribed by the planning permit for the wind farm.

#### 1. Transparency

Our review to date of information made publicly available by wind farm companies suggests transparency is mixed. A number of wind farms are difficult to find on the internet and many that can be found do not readily display essential information. It is crucial that information about a wind farm is transparent and accessible to the community. Measures should include:

- **Website:** The wind farm should have an easy to find and easy to use website that is well maintained and kept up to date. The website should clearly display the contact methods and contact details for the wind farm.
- **Complaint procedure:** Most planning permits require a wind farm to have an endorsed, documented complaint handling procedure in place. This document should be available for all of the community to review and access via the website and other channels.
- **Contact methods:** A wind farm should have in place (at a minimum) a toll-free number, email address, and mailing address for community members to be able to make contact with the wind farm.
- **Hard-copy:** Recognising that not all community members may have ready access to the internet, the wind farm should also distribute contact details and other information to community members in hard copy. A 'fridge magnet' can be an effective method and/or a business card that lists the appropriate details.
- **External signage:** The wind farm should display contact details on signage at relevant locations around the wind farm, such as entry/access gates and at the entry to the site office.
- **Media:** There may be opportunities for contact and other information to be displayed in local media, such as business directories in the local newspaper.
- **Information:** In addition to contact information, the website should include clear details about the company responsible for the development and/or the operation of the wind farm, along with other material facts, including the number and size of turbines, turbine manufacturer, location of the wind farm and date it commenced operation.

## 2. Complaint Handling

We have found a variety of practices related to the handling of complaints by wind farm developers and operators. The following are practices that we have observed and consider best practice:

- **Complaint process:** The wind farm website should clearly state the telephone contact number and other options for making a complaint or reporting an incident or emergency. The website should also provide the wind farm's complaint procedures that will be used to handle the complaint or incident. Finally, wind farms should ensure that their own procedures are properly followed in handling a complaint.
- **Reporting a complaint:** Community members should be able to report complaints via telephone (including emergencies), e-mail or regular mail. In the case of reporting a complaint by telephone, the service should be available 24 hours a day. If the service is unable to be staffed 24 hours a day, the caller must be able to leave a detailed voice mail to report the complaint. These messages should be monitored as soon as possible.
- **Complaint response:** For non-emergency complaints, a reasonable expectation would be for the wind farm to respond by the end of the next business day to acknowledge the complaint and to discuss next steps in handling the complaint. Emergency complaints should be escalated and handled in line with the nature of the emergency. The wind farm should also provide the complainant with a written acknowledgement of the complaint, a reference number and details of how it proposes to handle the complaint.
- **Complaint recording:** The wind farm should use an appropriate complaint management system for recording information and supporting the complaint procedure, including managing all documentation related to a complaint.
- **Complaint handling – operational:** For complaints related to the operation of a wind farm (such as noise complaints) – these may be best handled, when practicable, by visiting the complainant's property immediately and experiencing the issue first-hand. Having staff on-site that are able to attend the resident's location can greatly assist in assessing an operational complaint. Noise complaints related to mechanical issues may require the turbine(s) to cease operation for a period of time until the issue is diagnosed and resolved.
- **Complaint handling – other:** For complaints related to other matters, such as commercial matters, amenity, economic loss, health concerns etc. – these may be best handled, in the first instance, through a discussion to fully understand the issues and perspectives of the complainant. In many cases, matters may be able to be resolved by providing factual information and/or addressing legitimate concerns through solutions that arise from an effective dialogue between the wind farm and the complainant.
- **Closure:** Complaints should be brought to closure, preferably in writing, summarising all of the steps taken to investigate and resolve the complaint and the final outcomes.

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