



## **Opening Statement to Senate Estimates Environment and Communications Legislation Committee – 8 April 2019**

### **Andrew Dyer – National Wind Farm Commissioner**

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before Senate estimates. This is my fourth appearance since commencing in the role in late 2015.

I have previously summarised my role for the committee and will assume the role is now well understood. For those members who are new to the committee, my terms of reference, role, and other documents that may be helpful are available on the commission's website, [nwfc.gov.au](http://nwfc.gov.au).

The role was recently renewed for a further three-year term, commencing on 1 November 2018, following a review of the role by the Climate Change Authority and acceptance of their recommendations by the government and the minister. Of note is that our scope has been expanded to now include large-scale solar and storage projects.

I would like to commence by updating the committee on our complaints statistics. Overall, wind farm complaints received are predominantly from Victoria, followed by New South Wales and South Australia, with small numbers of complaints from wind farms in Queensland, Tasmania and Western Australia. The clear majority of complaints received are about proposed wind farms, with a decline in complaints being lodged about operating wind farms.

As of 31 March 2019, the key complaint statistics since inception of the office are as follows:

- A total of 297 complaint matters have been received and 286 of these matters have been closed.
- Of the total complaints received, 65 were about operating wind farms, 199 matters related to proposed wind farms, 29 matters did not specify a wind farm, and four matters have been received about proposed solar farms.
- The 65 matters about operating wind farms relate to 11 operating wind farms. Seven of these wind farms are in Victoria, two are in New South Wales and two are in South Australia. Of these 65 matters about operating wind farms, 64 have been closed.
- The 199 matters about proposed wind farms relate to 53 proposed wind farms. Twenty-five of these proposed wind farms are in Victoria, 15 are in New South Wales, three are in Queensland, six are in South Australia, three are in Tasmania and one is in WA. Of the 199 matters about proposed wind farms, 190 have been closed.
- Of the total of 264 matters received that specified a wind farm, 170 were about wind farms in Victoria, 49 were from New South Wales, 36 were from South Australia, five were from Queensland, three were from Tasmania and one was from Western Australia.

Of note is that, for the 2018 calendar year, we received just eight complaint matters about four operating wind farms. All of these wind farms are in Victoria, and only one of those wind farms had been commissioned since we commenced operations. This result could indicate that, once a wind farm is built and operating and things have settled down post construction, there's a high degree of acceptance of the wind farm. It may also indicate that, with more being invested in effective community engagement and complaint resolution during the development stages, the likely of complaints post construction is low.

The dominant issues cited in complaints raised with our office in 2018 were amenity, community engagement, planning process, noise and environmental issues. Over the three calendar years of our operations, cited issues in complaints received that have dropped considerably include health, from 46 instances to 18; noise, from 55 to 38; and vibration, from 19 to zero. Cited issues that have increased over this time include visual amenity, from 24 instances to 57; lack of community engagement, from 15 to 41; construction, from seven to 14; and planning processes, from 26 to 42.

Moving on to engagement, we continued to place a heavy emphasis on outreach and stakeholder engagement. During 2018, I visited a number of wind farm and solar sites, and I have now visited approximately 52 sites across Australia. We regularly present and meet with community groups, including presentations to project community consultative committees. I'm a regular presenter and session chair at the Clean Energy Council conferences and will present at the CEC's wind and solar forums as well as the summit in 2019. We engage with media on a variety of topics as they arise. As an example, in 2018 I conducted two lengthy interviews in a series on ABC's *Australia Wide* program about wind farm topics of interest to the community.

At the state government level, we are in regular engagement with relevant ministers and departments, particularly in New South Wales and Victoria, where the bulk of our complaint activities occur. At the federal level, we have close working relationships with sister agencies such as the Clean Energy Regulator, the Clean Energy Finance Corporation, ARENA, the AER, AEMO and, of course, the department.

Finally, we continue to proactively engage with the significant and complex stakeholder network required for this role, which constantly changes as people move for whatever reason. Since commencing the role, I've met with over 1,200 stakeholders at all levels of government, community and industry.

I'd also like to mention some of the outcomes resulting from our advocacy and recommendations regarding best practices. These include:

- the introduction of independent audits for both pre-and post-construction assessment of wind-farm noise;
- a similar audit regime being adopted for aviation safety assessments;
- the requirement for transmission lines that connect wind and solar farms to now have a planning permit issued in Victoria;
- substantive updates to the Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council's revised position on wind farms and bushfire operations;

- material improvements to wind-farm complaint-handling procedures utilised by industry and compliance authorities;
- the hosting of roundtables to address specific issues, including transportation of longer blades;
- consistency of aviation safety lighting of turbines;
- the sharing of best-practice planning approaches across all state based agencies; and
- progressive adoption of various recommendations that we have made by state and local governments, as well as industry.

These outcomes and related recommendations are detailed in our 2018 annual report. Our office will continue to identify and champion improvements to the operation and governance of the industry, particularly arising from systemic issues.

Regarding transparency, I encourage committee members to view our website and let me know of any feedback. The site has come a long way from the temporary website that was initially set up back in early 2016. The upgraded site includes a wide range of documentation with links to improve transparency of information about wind farms, best practices and complaint handling. It also includes my annual report and links to presentations to various forums and community groups.

We're in the process of further revising the website to include appropriate information on solar and storage matters. My office is also constantly working with industry members to identify and encourage improvements in their websites, particularly around contact information, product information and how to lodge a complaint.

In closing, I trust this update has been helpful. I'd particularly like to thank the department for their ongoing support and assistance to our small team. I'd also like to acknowledge the strong support and encouragement we have received from state and local governments, where much of our efforts are expended in the pursuit of improvements and resolutions.

I'll now hand back to the chair.