

## **St Patricks Plains Wind Farm Community Information Day**

A second Community Information Day was held at Miena on Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> February, organised by Epuron, the Sydney based company proposing to develop a wind farm with 67 turbines, 240m high (3 times the height of the Wrest Point Casino) between Bothwell and Miena. The session was attended by approximately 70 people from a range of locations including shack holders from Tod's Corner, Arthur's Lake, Miena, Penstock Lagoon, Hollis Banks, Wilburville and Shannon as well as from other parts of the State and some interstate visitors from NSW.

A short presentation was followed by the opportunity to ask the Epuron team questions and identify issues. Strong opposition to the location and extent of the project was evident. The high profile visual impact of the St Patrick's Plains development was a major concern due to the closeness of the turbines to world renown trout fishing lakes, residences (some within 2 kilometres) and to the Highland Lakes Road. The change of landscape would alter the heritage and scenic values of the area and be detrimental to tourism in the Central Highlands, it was considered. A representative from Penstock said that he and fellow residents were not against wind farms, that no one had opposed the nearby Cattle Hill Wind Farm development (even though its smaller 170m high turbines are visible at Penstock Lagoon and from places along the Highland Lakes Road) because he believed its site is appropriate because of its greater distance from settlements, lakes and major roads in stark comparison to the St Patrick's Plains installation.

Wind turbine noise will exist, is complex and is not fully researched, it will have a negative effect on the area's ambience, neighbouring residents, fishermen and visitors and was a further grave concern for stakeholders. Loss of territory due to landscape disturbance for wildlife and the threat of wind blade collision on birds, particularly the wedge tailed eagles was raised including the increased threat due to the cumulative effect of proximity to the nearby Cattle Hill Wind Farm. Increased fire risk was also highlighted as a serious threat to properties and residences near the wind farm boundary, with the proximity and height of turbines making helicopter access for water bombing dangerous or impossible in certain wind conditions.

Doubts were expressed as to the short-term benefits for the general community based on recent experiences involving Cattle Hill contract workers moving into the area during its construction stage, giving examples of accommodation, environmental and social issues. A Miena resident told the group that rental accommodation in the area had increased from \$150 to \$700 per week. This meant that her family and several locals had to move from their existing rentals and seek alternative downgraded options to stay in the area. Others had been forced out by the high rents, lack of suitable alternatives, no public housing and had left the area.

The Epuron team agreed there would be limited post construction opportunities for local employment, a small number of positions requiring specific technical and mechanical qualifications would be available. The Company, however, gave a commitment to establish a community fund towards identified projects in the region which is standard practice for this type of development. The funds would be managed by the Central Highlands Council with no guarantees that the areas most compromised by the wind farm would necessarily be the recipients.

Flyfishermen were well represented at the session. The Epuron team was informed of the recent World Fly Fishing Championships that were held at Wood's Lake, Penstock Lagoon and Little Pine involving 23 countries from all corners of the globe. There is a

widespread fishing fraternity who own properties, visit the area on a regular basis or have connections to this outstanding and famous world class trout fishery. During the fishing season the population in the area increases to the thousands. Fishermen want the lakes and surrounds to be preserved and protected, they will be an influential body of opposition to the Project.

Attendees were informed that if Epuron receives approvals, it will on-sell the project to a large power company with a strong possibility of foreign ownership. The distinct economic advantages of the location of the St Patrick's Plains site for developers, investors and mainland power users was evident, however, doubts were expressed about the benefits or advantages for the community or Tasmanians. Attendees were not convinced that claims of lower power prices would be a reality based on the high costs and unreliability of transporting energy to the Mainland. The sentiment was that there was significantly more to lose than gain. Epuron was asked to consider a solar installation as a less intrusive and less problematic renewable energy option on the site but no commitment was given.

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