



## Summary Report

Conclusions from Futureye research based on community consultation undertaken in 2011

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# Conclusions from Futureye research on impacts of Coopers Gap Wind Farm

## 1.1. Introduction

In August and September 2011 Futureye conducted a desktop review of submissions and telephone discussions with local residents regarding the potential impacts of the proposed Coopers Gap wind farm at Cooranga North, Queensland, on behalf of AGL.

This is a summary of the findings of the Futureye research prepared by AGL at the request of the Coopers Gap Community Consultative Committee.

## 1.2. Issues raised

The key issues raised by stakeholders in the EA submissions and the telephone interviews included:

- Health Impacts
- Noise
- Property Values
- Trust and Responsiveness
- Visual impact (including shadow, light flicker and blade glint)
- Fire and Aviation
- Community Infrastructure Classification and Approval

## 1.3. Summary of Findings

Below is a summary of the key issues raised in the desktop review of the submissions as well as the telephone interviews with several local residents.

### 1.3.1 Health Impacts

Members of the local community are concerned about the proposed development of the Coopers Gap Wind Farm because of the high levels of uncertainty about the links between turbines and health impacts. AGL, the Clean Energy Council and the National Health and Medical Research Centre have released public statements confirming there is no published scientific evidence to support adverse health effects of wind turbines on health. The Waubra Foundation's Dr. Sarah Laurie and US-based Dr. Nina Pierpont have made submissions to the Australian Federal Senate Inquiry into the Social and Economic Impacts of Rural Wind Farms which claim there are direct links between turbines and health. When scientific authorities send the public conflicting messages, uncertainty increases.



### 1.3.2 Noise

Noise produced by wind turbines is a primary concern for a majority of the local community members who have made EA submissions. The concerns are about noise impacts on lifestyle, livestock and fauna. The key concern raised is about the certainty and sophistication of noise modelling (including the impact of tonality) and the fairness of exceeding the Queensland Environment Protection (Noise) Policy 2008 and committing to noise policies of other states such as South Australia or Victoria.

### 1.3.3 Property Values

A majority of stakeholder EA submissions expressed concern about AGL's discredit of the impact of the proposed Coopers Gap Wind Farm on their property value. Considering many of the properties in the area are lifestyle properties, stakeholders claim the proposed wind farm will not encourage would be buyers to pay attention to the current valuation.

### 1.3.4 Trust and responsiveness

There is an expectation within the local community that AGL will be accountable and highly responsive to all concerns raised in response to the proposed wind farm development. To date, there have been concerns about AGL's information and approach to modelling not being trustworthy or accurate. Some stakeholders feel their comments are not being taken into account or responded to by AGL project managers and commitments made by companies involved in the proposed site prior to AGL's acquisition have left local community members with a perceived lack of control and voluntariness as to what eventuates at the site.

Community stakeholders have expressed their fear AGL employees are not senior or credible enough to manage their concerns and future employees and contractors are likely to use local properties inappropriately such as not closing fences during construction and operation.

### 1.3.5 Visual impact (including shadow, light flicker and blade glint)

Some members of the community are concerned about visual impacts of the proposed Coopers Gap Wind Farm (including shadow, light flicker, and blade glint) causing a significant shift in the landscape character. From a visual amenity perspective, the AGL Initial Assessment Report submission included a number of photographs as well as descriptions of the locale which a number of EA submissions claimed were inaccurate portrayals of the area and the likely visual impact and that AGL was 'not acting in good faith' by presenting these images.

Local community members also mentioned the unfamiliarity with shadow, light flicker and blade glint and the potential for this to further impact on community members with existing medical conditions (i.e. diagnosed migraine headache sufferers). The physical size of the turbine poles and blades are considered to be a major visual concern for raising animals as part of a farm business and may present a risk to employees and children working with animals which fear the turbine presence.



Telecommunication is critical for rural communities to manage health and education. It is perceived by some highly critical stakeholders any interference with television, internet or radio may have significant local impacts.

### 1.3.6 Fire and Aviation

Fire risk to people, property, business and biodiversity from wind turbine failure is a serious concern of some local community stakeholders. EA submissions cited fire risks at other sites in Australia (i.e. Cape Jervis) as well as the vulnerability of the area's landscape to fire.

Highly concerned stakeholders want a fire break of at least 600 metres from the boundary of properties to ensure they do not lose their pastures and believe it is unfair for turbines not to have such a standard. Stakeholders are also concerned the proximity of wind turbines, towers and major power lines to any potential fires means there will be limited accessibility for air-based fire fighting to be used.

### 1.3.7 Community Infrastructure Classification and Approval

AGL is proposing the Coopers Gap Wind Farm is community infrastructure and therefore exempt from local council (Western Downs and/or South Burnett) planning requirements. Some community stakeholders are questioning this request and claim this proposed development should be assessed and approved by local council due to its rural nature. According to South Burnett Regional Council's (SBRC) EA submission, the original wind farm proposal was assessed at a local level by SBRC with input from Western Downs Regional Council.

The Deputy Director-General (Energy) of the Queensland Government Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation (DEEDI) has raised concerns about the proposed wind farm's eligibility as community infrastructure under the Sustainable Planning Act 2009 and Community Infrastructure Designation without authority for power generation or proof it meets the public benefit test of the Act. These local and state government as well as community uncertainties about the project classification, assessment and approval present a high risk to project approval.