



**Report on the Community Consultation Committee Process
Bodangora Wind Farm – Wellington NSW**

**Report prepared by Committee Chair
Grahame Collier**

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Introduction and Purpose

This document provides a brief report on the progress made by the Bodangora Wind Farm Community Consultation Committee (CCC), since its inception in June 2012. This Committee was established by Infigen Energy in line with obligations outlined in the NSW Government's draft *NSW Planning Guidelines Wind Farms – A resource for communities, applicants and consent authorities* - in particular Appendix C. These Guidelines were released as a draft for comment, by the NSW Department of Planning and Infrastructure in December 2011. They remain draft Guidelines only.

Following the release of the Guidelines, Infigen moved to establish the Committee, by calling for applications for membership and appointing an independent Chair. Written advice was sought from the Director General of the Department concerning approval of the nominated Chair. In response the Department indicated that: *'The Department has no objection to the appointment of Mr Grahame Collier as the Committee Chair. However, pending the finalisation of the draft wind farm guidelines, please be advised that the Department does not currently have a role in appointing the independent chair, or community representatives. Members should be chosen consistent with the criteria within section 2.2 of the draft guidelines.'*

It needs to be noted that appointment of members, the role and actions of the Chair, and the conduct of all meetings, are in accordance with the draft Guidelines.

The fact that they remain draft is problematic for work in this area. Not only is there lack of certainty about communication and consultation issues, the benchmarks related to the operation of wind farms and the assessment processes to be used, for example the role of the Planning Assessment Committee, is confusing to the community.

Key Background Information

The Bodangora Wind Farm comprises 33 wind turbines (up to 120 MW installed capacity), a substation, tracks, cabling and associated wind farm infrastructure. The project is located approximately 20 km north east of the Wellington township. There are seven landowners involved in the project.

Over the last four years Infigen Energy has undertaken a comprehensive environmental assessment to help define the final layout for the project. A significant number of alterations were made to the project to account for environmental constraints and to address concerns highlighted through the community consultation process. It is noted that this project commenced its planning phase and sought approval, well before the establishment of the CCC. It was not possible to *'form the Community Consultation Committee early in the process.'* (Page 4 of the Guidelines) Hence the work of the CCC has only occurred

at the back end of the consultation process, prior to the approval of the project. This has had an impact on the work of the CCC.

The Planning Assessment Committee (PAC) undertook the assessment of the proposal between July and September 2013 and approval was granted on September 3rd 2013 and announced a few days later. It is important to state that the draft Guidelines do not provide detail about the process that the PAC would be using in its assessment and so part of the work of the CCC has been an explanation about the PAC process.

About the Community Consultation Committee

The Guidelines state that: *The Chairperson's role is the convenor, facilitator, mediator and advisor to the committee.* The chair's independence is essential and this aspect of the Guidelines has been fully adhered to, at times impacting upon members of the CCC and the proponent alike.

The role of the CCC is broadly to:

- Establish good working relationships between proponent, community and stakeholders
- Provide for ongoing communication of project information
- Discuss community concerns and review the resolution of community complaints
- Advise on the allocation of community enhancement funds in the community
- Improve interaction between the project and the community and discuss ideas to benefit all stakeholders.

Membership of the Committee

Mayor Anne Jones (Wellington Shire Mayor) replaced by Councillor Rodd Buhr (Meeting 4 December 2012)

Mr. Darren Honnery (Wellington Shire) replaced by Mr Michael Tolhurst (Meeting 2 July 2012) and Mr Tolhurst was replaced by Mr Peter Harlow (Meeting 6 January 2014)

Mr. Frank Barker (mid Macquarie Landcare)

Mr. Peter James (Bodangora Resident)

Ms. Lyn Jarvis (Neighbour)

Mr. Mike Lyons (Neighbour)

Mr. Bob Sewell (Wellington business owner)

Mr. Simon Barton (Host landowner)

Mr. Frank Boland (Proponent – Infigen Energy)

Since its inception the CCC has met on six occasions over a nineteen month period. It is noted that there was a longer than desirable gap between Meetings 5 and 6 while the assessment process was held. In part this was due to the limited availability of the Chair later in 2013. In saying this, the CCC has met on average every four months from the time of its inception. This is broadly in line with the draft Guidelines.

It is also of note that, all but the last of the meetings was held prior to the PAC assessment of the project and subsequent approval, with conditions. Only the recent meeting held on 28th of January 2014 was held when there was certainty about the project.

The timing of the consultation with regard to the project assessment process does have a significant contextual impact on the consultative process. Prior to approval, consultation is focused on information and individual¹ viewpoints about the nature, size and location of the wind farm. Understandably emotions ran fairly high at times, around these discussions. Even though the CCC has an advisory role, members insist on stating and advocating for their point of view, which is of course, their right. Equally though, it is the responsibility of everyone the Committee to treat others with respect, to listen and discuss issues as dispassionately as possible.

The Bodangora CCC decided at Meeting 1 to run meetings more informally than might be usual, but still in line with the draft Guidelines. The following quote from the minutes of Meeting 1 summarises this decision: [The] *'Chair explained options for meeting protocol followed by a group discussion. Vote: All [members were] in favour of a more informal discussion with voting to confirm all action items.'*

At Meeting 4, because meetings were challenging to manage, this decision was amended, as follows: *'The Committee considered the issue of the meeting progress and discussed two proposals raised by members. The first was to reduce the notes section of the meeting minutes but continue to work in a discussion/consensus manner, where votes would be taken if an issue was contentious. The second option was to move towards a more formal meeting process.'*

Motion: The Committee agrees to change its meeting protocol to a formal process of minute taking and discussion.

*Moved: Peter James, Seconded: Michael Tolhurst
Passed – unanimously'*

At Meetings 5 and 6 the following procedure was used – extract from Meeting 5 minutes: *'The Chair reiterated that based on the unanimously agreed motion in meeting four of the CCC, that this meeting will be chaired as more formal meeting.'*

The chair emphasised that wording accuracy in motions important and that proper meeting procedures would be followed. Under normal circumstances, for each item a period of open discussion would occur, followed by a call for motions. Motions would only be put if they were moved and seconded (those not seconded would lapse.)'

This change in procedure has meant that meetings have been managed more tightly. Formal processes are used to chair the meeting and draft minutes are produced by an independent minute taker, rather than the proponent. This, and the fact that the project is not an abstract concept anymore and that it will actually occur, has assisted the meeting process and extended the outcomes achieved.

¹ Note in the case of Council CCC members, these are Council viewpoints. In the case of Infigen Energy, these are company viewpoints.

Significant Outputs from the Community Consultation Committee Process

There is a range of outputs from the CCC. These need to be seen in the light of the discussion above.

Output 1. Ongoing commitment demonstrated by Wellington people across the spectrum of views about this proposal, to the consultation process, despite tensions and challenges.

Output 2. A better informed community in Wellington/ Bodangora about the project and its implications.

Output 3. The development of a range of suggestions for community benefits projects, which will be more fully developed and assessed, now that the project is to occur. Note the role of the CCC is advisory and so unless there is change to its terms of reference, it will not be making decisions about which particular projects are funded. Note also, that Infigen has taken up some of these ideas and implemented them, for example sponsorship of the Show Society.

Output 4. Advice provided in an ongoing way, about particular consultative mechanisms that Infigen should undertake. Some of these have been taken up, for example: the Newsletter. Some have not been: e.g. the Non-host landholder meeting.

Output 5. Input into some aspects of the project related to the responsibilities of the CCC. In particular the CCC has provided advice to the proponent and sought information about the proposed 'community turbine' aspect of the project.

Output 6. There is evidence that Council membership of this committee has provided benefits to the community, the proponent and to Council, although this has not extended to transparency in the Voluntary Planning Agreement part of the process. This has occurred without a process of community input.

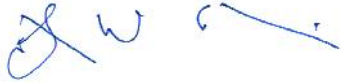
The Way Forward – Learning from the Process

The CCC will continue to meet through the construction phase of the project and the next meeting is set for March 12, 2014. Important areas that the Committee will focus upon into the future include:

- Keeping the community informed about progress and directions for the project.
- Drawing perspectives from the community and presenting these to Infigen as ongoing advice.
- Providing advice about the protocols and management related to the 'community turbine.'
- Identifying and detailing possible community benefit ideas/projects for consideration.
- Commenting on possible processes to be used to assess and determine community benefit projects.
- Encouraging the proponent to enhance consultation mechanisms at high need periods, for example prior to the commencement of construction of the project.
- Reporting to the community about progress, challenges and benefits of the project.

In addition, there is a need for committee members to undertake some training in effective consultation and communication processes.

The meeting will continue to be chaired formally, as indicated above.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'G. Collier', with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Grahame Collier
February 2014