

2 CONSULTATION

2.1 Community Consultation Plan



Gullen Range Wind Farm, Community Consultation Plan

This plan includes what **ng**h environmental consider the key community consultation issues associated with the proposal and strategies to deal with these.

The format of this plan is:

1. Decision statement – what decision will the community be engaged around?
2. Issue management – what specific issues need separate risk management?
3. Project based activities – what vehicles will be utilised to engage the community?

1. Decision statement

It is worth acknowledging that due to the nature of wind farm development in Australia, while there is limited scope for the community to be involved in making decisions about this proposal, it is important for the community to be informed and have input where possible. Accordingly, the community engagement process will focus on areas where the community can contribute to the project. Essentially, there are two stages, the two-way information transfer between the proponent and the community, and secondly the use of provided information in shaping the development.

From Epuron's point of view the decision statement is:

How best to design and site the wind farm to meet technical, legislative, financial, social and environmental constraints.

From the community's point of view, the decision statement is:

How to assist Epuron with the identification and mitigation of impacts important to the community, within the context of the wind farm development (ie. amid technical and other constraints).

This statement requires the identification of community impacts, prioritisation of these impacts, provision of context and suggestions for mitigation. It also relies on the community understanding the process of wind farm development and specific issues of interest to the community. The focus of the consultation plan will be on providing this understanding and engagement.

2. Issue management

Several issues have been identified below. These issues pose potential risks to the effective identification and mitigation of impacts important to the community, potentially resulting in a damaging community backlash against the development and a less than optimal final project. Mitigation strategies have been developed below, specific to the identified issues. These have been incorporated into the Project-based Activities, in Stage 3.

Issue	Risks	Mitigation strategies
<p>a) Distrust in wind farms</p> <p>A lot of misinformation is available about the pros and cons of wind farms.</p> <p>The reasons behind wind farm development are complex and not easily reduced to simple facts.</p> <p>Complex issues can be difficult to communicate to a wide audience.</p>	<p>Oversimplification of issues.</p> <p>Confusion of issues (i.e. cases at other wind farms may or may not apply to this project).</p> <p>Appear to not be giving sufficient weight to issues important to the community.</p>	<p>Dissemination of issue-specific information; i.e. not lumped with other issues; i.e. a FAQ format</p>
<p>b) Distrust in approvals process</p> <p>The complex approvals process can be difficult to communicate to a wide audience.</p> <p>Previous efforts by individuals trying to have input may have gone unrewarded so a feeling of futility can exist.</p>	<p>Perception that the process is too difficult to become involved in.</p> <p>Suspicion that input will not be valued.</p>	<p>Clearly illustrate approvals process.</p> <p>Clearly define opportunities for community input including what is required and when it is required.</p> <p>Communicate back, identifying where input has been used.</p>
<p>c) Distrust in wind farm developers</p> <p>Epuron seen as overseas company.</p> <p>Epuron seen as a city based and focused on solving city problems at the expense of rural areas.</p> <p>Perception that the development is an external influence of change over which they have no control.</p>	<p>Anger and resentment.</p> <p>Distrust of impact id. and mitigation.</p>	<p>Establish credentials of the developers.</p> <p>Outline motives and previous projects.</p> <p>Focus on community benefits.</p> <p>Listen to community and demonstrate having taken on board concerns.</p> <p>Focus on maximising use of regional resources.</p> <p>Mitigate as per a) and b).</p>
<p>d) Distrust in environmental assessors</p> <p>Consultants not seen as independent and credible.</p>	<p>Distrust of impact id. and mitigation.</p>	<p>Establish credentials.</p> <p>Outline previous projects.</p> <p>Listen to community and demonstrate having taken on board concerns.</p>

Issue	Risks	Mitigation strategies
<p>e) Fear of unknown impacts</p> <p>Large volume of technical material to digest.</p> <p>Complex issues difficult to explain to people when they are distressed.</p>	<p>Exaggerated fears.</p>	<p>Layman explanations of issues delivered in concise, digestible amounts.</p> <p>Dissemination of issue-specific information.</p>
<p>f) Staging of the project / involvement potential</p> <p>By the time the sites are chosen there is little role for the community</p>	<p>Apathetic or against proposal due to lack of involvement.</p>	<p>Acknowledge the scope for input is limited and thereby reduce the potential to raise expectations unrealistically.</p> <p>Clearly outline areas for community involvement.</p> <p>Actively invite input within this scope.</p>
<p>g) The 'articulate irate'</p> <p>As those most against the proposal will be dominating responses, the consultation may reflect one-sided view point.</p>	<p>Vocal opponents are generally not interested in contributing to the proposal, they oppose the principles of wind farm development.</p> <p>Heated meetings will further deter engagement of the broader community.</p> <p>Interested sections of the community may be "overpowered" and may be marginalised.</p>	<p>Ensure community is engaged in a forum that minimises risk of vocal opponents dominating face to face public consultation.</p> <p>This can be achieved via the 'drop in' or open house sessions, face to face liaison and by using focussed meetings with specific groups invited ie. bird group, neighbours.</p> <p>Meet with vocal opponents and demonstrate listening to their concerns.</p>
<p>h) Unified message</p> <p>Many points of contact exist for the community, including Epuron, consultants, Dept. Planning.</p>	<p>Differing messages may create confusion and distrust.</p>	<p>Stay 'on message':</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ we are investigating the impacts thoroughly, ▪ we will develop mitigation measures to make them as acceptable as possible, ▪ we will seek the community's input into id. and mitigation measures ▪ we will communicate back, identifying where input has been used.
<p>i) Unequal distribution of benefits</p> <p>Residents close to the development are likely to feel more strongly. These people should have a greater say in the development.</p>	<p>These individuals will be more concerned and require more contact with the company.</p>	<p>Consultation should target these people preferentially.</p> <p>Consultation should separate local and broader engagement activities.</p>

Issue	Risks	Mitigation strategies
<p>j) First impressions Once an individual has formed an opinion, it may be difficult to relay opposing information.</p>	<p>That individuals will discount any benefits of wind farms if their first exposure is one being proposed nearby.</p>	<p>Present a positive image of wind power as early as possible.</p>
<p>k) Exposure Need to get information out to a wide range of people, not just neighbours and vocal groups.</p>	<p>Inadequate consultation if not getting information out to broader audience.</p>	<p>Use established social (and media) channels in dissemination of materials, ie. sport clubs.</p>

3. Project-based activities

The following table outlines the different project stages and associated community consultation objectives and activities. For each stage, the level of consultation sought is also indicated:

- Inform: one way transfer of information, promote awareness and educate, or
- Consult: two way transfer of information, seek input and feed-back.

This plan has a focus on editorials (up to 6 are currently proposed) and newsletters (up to 6 are currently proposed) for the delivery of the message, as this allows us to state clearly the facts and provides something people can keep and refer back to. We can also solicit feed-back in this way.

General 'open house' forums are minimised (1) in preference to more focused 'drop in' sessions (at least 1) on key issues identified by the community. The 'drop in' session is the same format as the 'open house', allowing for one on one conversations rather than presentations. It simply refines the focus of the day to one or two key issues and makes sure that resources are on hand to address about these issues. Furthermore, the audience may also be targeted. For example, if the issue is bird and bat strike, local naturalist groups may be invited. This strategy is designed to be responsive to concerns raised by the community and will allow complex issues to be dealt with more thoroughly on their own rather than amalgamated with other topics. The format and schedule of the focused drop ins will have to be determined after the first general 'open house'.

Finally, closer contact with the nearby properties owners is recommended. This may involve one-on-one meetings. Addressing the concerns of these people proactively allows the best chance of greater acceptance of the proposal by the broader community. Broader and local activities are separated in some of the project-based activities that follow.

Project stages	Community engagement activities
<p>Identify sites for turbines and easements</p> <p>Obtain landowner agreements</p>	<p><u>1) Local:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact made with local residents (one-to-one meeting for landowners 0-3km from turbines; phone call with follow-up newsletter for landowners 3-5km from turbines; newsletter only for landowners 5-10km from turbines). • Phone number provided for one-on-one contact (nghenvironmental to field calls related to impacts). <p><u>2) Broader:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Editorial on need for sustainable energy sources and specifics of wind power (local papers). • Editorial on the assessment process and stage of the project.
<p>Design site layout (concept design)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newsletter (to 15km) to explain site variables, assessment process, what the public can influence. Indicate Open House will be coming soon. Distribute through varied channels, i.e. sports, schools, clubs, Landcare groups. • Open House to provide information, identify and talk through issues and establish contacts for further information (advertise in newspaper, through local groups, call nearby landowners). • Open House resources: issue specific hand-outs provided, AusWEA fact sheets. • Web pages made available to establish credentials of the Proponent and sub-contractors. • Follow-up with focused 'drop in' session(s) to deal with specific issues in detail (targeted audience i.e. Bird and bat impacts – local naturalists; Noise impacts – landowners 0-5km). • Face to face briefings as required (Council, neighbours, interest groups). • Editorial to broader community indicating some of the issues identified and strategies being employed to overcome them.
<p>Pre-submission</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Copies of assessments available in strategic locations (libraries, council, general stores). <p><u>1) Local:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact made by phone or letter with local area, indicating location of drafts, providing summary information, asking for concerns. • Follow-up with focused 'drop in' session(s) to address specific issues in detail (if required). <p><u>2) Broader:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newsletter summarises findings in lay terms, indicates timeline for assessment and exhibition time lines. • Feedback sought on summary, further concerns.
<p>Submission</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newsletter and/or editorial.
<p>Public exhibition period</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newsletter and/or editorial inviting feed-back to be sent to Dept. Planning.
<p>Dept Planning decision made</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newsletter and/or editorial.