

Submission on draft Tasmanian Renewable Energy Coordination Framework, ‘the Framework’.

By Bert Lawatsch



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Tasmania’s landscape is unique and special. To cover large parts of the state with huge wind farms and their transmission lines and substations, roads etc degrades this landscape. Environmental impacts are many including further pressure on threatened and endangered flora and fauna, noise and vibration, visual aspect, added roads and inevitably weeds. Other negative impacts include a turn-off for tourists and lower land and real estate values in those areas. The recently completed Granville Harbour wind farm is a blight on the landscape of North West Tasmania. The towers can be seen from many tens of kms away in what was otherwise a development free landscape. The new transmission line to Reece dam is also an ugly accompaniment to this project that also traverses what used to be a development free landscape. Does Renewables Tasmania really believe tourists would rather see wind towers and transmission lines instead of a development free landscape? Furthermore, the farm (and its transmission line) is located in an area where threatened species such as wedge tailed and sea eagles as well as migratory birds occur.

See media release from birdlife Tasmania:

25 June 2019 MEDIA RELEASE

Death by a thousand blades.

A boom in the number of wind farms proposed for Tasmania is posing massive risks for already Endangered species of birds, Birdlife Tasmania warned today.

“With at least 10 new wind farms either proposed or under construction, more than 500 extra turbines could be spinning over the Tasmanian landscape in the next few years” Birdlife Tasmania Convenor Dr Eric Woehler said.

“Add to all these turbines the associated infrastructure such as transmission lines and towers, and the cumulative web of bird hazards escalates dramatically.”

“Tasmania, like the rest of the world, needs a truly sustainable future if it is to make the most of its economic assets. Wind projects that create death traps for our birds should not be part of that future.”

The wind farms (listed below) would be built on Tasmania's west coast, across much of the far northwest coast, parts of the Central Plateau, and in the northeast. They add to existing wind farms already recorded as taking a deadly toll, particularly of Wedge-tailed Eagles.

"BirdLife Tasmania supports renewable energy, which is vital to address the climate emergency" Dr Woehler said. "But just because a project is offering renewable energy, it should not get a free pass to kill Endangered species.

"The time has come when there needs to be urgent consideration of the cumulative impacts of so many wind projects on birds in Tasmania," Dr Woehler said. "What is missing is a holistic, strategy for windfarms in Tasmania that includes critical no-go areas" he added.

The most worrying project is the looming largest wind farm in the Southern Hemisphere on Robbins Island in the far northwest of Tasmania, which would force radical changes in the surrounding ecosystem.

"When built, its turbines will threaten migratory Arctic shorebirds, some already listed as Critically Endangered, that make the Robbins Passage - Boullanger Bay wetland complex their southern summer home," he said. "The island is used by migrating Orange-bellied Parrots. Much of the 9,900ha island will be covered by the wind farm.

To reach the island for construction, a causeway and bridge system would be built over 1.4 km of free-flowing tidal wetlands.

These wetlands are the summer home to more than 10,000 migratory shorebirds. The Robbins Passage - Boullanger Bay wetland complex is the most important site for shorebirds in Tasmania, supporting more shorebirds than the rest of the State combined. It is a critical site in a global flyway that stretches from Australia through eastern Asia to north of the Arctic Circle in Siberia.

"it is an amazing spectacle to see flocks of these far-flying birds at home in this still unspoilt sea country," Dr Woehler said.

"The Robbins Passage-Boullanger Bay wetlands complex has been repeatedly assessed as being of global importance," he said. "It was assessed as clearly holding values that made it eligible to be listed under the international Ramsar Convention to protect wetlands of international significance. But this protection was denied after a campaign by local opponents".

Despite this setback, the area has been listed as an Important Bird Area in a worldwide network recognised by BirdLife International and the IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature), at a time when migratory shorebird populations have begun to crash on the East Asian-Australasian Flyway.

“This makes this Tasmanian refuge even more important as a barometer of how many birds are strong enough to make it to the far southern extent of the flyway.” Surveys by BirdLife Tasmania have tracked these numbers and their trends for more than 20 years.

“Our surveys show that the numbers of Eastern Curlew and Curlew Sandpiper in Tasmania have decreased catastrophically over that time. Our data has helped list both of these birds as Critically Endangered in Australia” Dr Woehler said.

Another three wind farms are planned along the northwest coast at Jim’s Plain, Western Plains at Stanley and Port Latta, as farmers seek further revenue streams. South of these, investigations are underway into wind farms at Hellyer and Guildford - remote from towns - but not from eagles. Another investigation is under way at St Patrick’s Plains on the Central Plateau, close to the Cattle Hill Wind Farm which is under construction.

The combination of turbines with more high tension transmission lines will pose a massively increased threat to Wedge-tailed Eagles, whose known deaths are growing across the existing network.

Just last year, TasNetworks alone reported that 29 Wedge-tailed Eagles were killed on its power lines. “Many other eagle deaths and injuries - reported and unreported - have happened at existing wind farms, and on power lines around the state,” Dr Woehler added. “Where is the wind farm strategy for Tasmania? Where are the sensitive and critical no-go areas for windfarms in Tasmania? Unless and until we have a strategy and make every effort to protect our wildlife from wind farms, the constant mortality of eagles and other birds undermines any claims of ‘sustainability’ by the renewable energy sector” Dr Woehler concluded.

List of wind projects proposed or under construction in Tasmania, as of June 2019:

1. Granville Harbour - under construction, 31 turbines
[<https://granvilleharbourwindfarm.com.au/>]
2. Guildford - up to 80 turbines [<https://epuron.com.au/>]
3. Hellyer - up to 40 turbines [<https://epuron.com.au/>]
4. Lake Echo/Cattle Hill - under construction, 48 turbines
[<https://cattlehillwindfarm.com/>]
5. Low Head - approved - 14 turbines [<https://www.lowheadwindfarm.com.au/>]
6. Port Latta - approved - 14 turbines [<http://portlattawindfarm.com.au/>]
7. Robbins Island + Jims Plains - c.150 turbines
[<https://robbinsislandwindfarm.com/>]
8. Rushy Lagoon/Waterhouse, under investigation, 50 - 100 turbines
9. St Patrick’s Plains - up to 80 turbines [<https://epuron.com.au/>]
10. Western Plains (Stanley) - 13 turbines [<https://epuron.com.au/wind/stanley-wind-farm/>]

Media:

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Image: Tasmanian Wedge-tailed Eagle with wind turbines in distance. ©Eric Woehler, BirdLife Tasmania: may be used with acknowledgement.

Clearly, it can be seen from this release that Birdlife Tasmania believes there is already a problem with the impact of current wind farms and transmission lines on birds in Tasmania. Will the framework consult bird experts such as Eric Woehler and follow his advice?

The framework should listen to what communities want – not what Guy Barnett or his government wants. There are alternatives to the large scale wind farms proposed by the government.

Offshore wind farms could mitigate many of the problems.

Obviously, Australia is a land of sunshine and more roof top solar in Tasmania and the mainland could easily achieve the renewable energy targets the governments are wanting. The state and federal governments should be encouraging more residential roof top solar via more attractive feed in tariffs and/or subsidies.

Other renewable generation options for Tasmania include wave/tidal power. If Renewables Tasmania believes Tasmania needs more renewable energy it could source this power from mainland renewable projects via the existing undersea cable. Any number of low environmental impact solar farms could be built on the mainland in many locations. Does Tasmania actually need more power? Where is the energy market study that answers this question? For Guy Barnett to merely say he wants to double Tasmania's renewable energy output by 2040 does nothing to answer this question.

The framework should consider all the available generation options in the state and not just large scale wind farms as seems to be the case. The different options need to be weighed up taking into account all factors to arrive at the best option. The best solution is the one that takes into account factors including community, environmental impact, tourism, cost to Tasmania and not just what the developer wants. The best solution may be to not build any new large scale generation projects in Tasmania and instead encourage people to invest in roof top solar both in Tasmania and on the mainland. Tasmania should not be giving away its land and wind resources to interstate and overseas owned companies that provide no return to Tasmanians. The jobs are few once the wind farms are operating since they are automated systems. It is inappropriate to establish Tasmania's renewable energy zones, as this framework seeks to do, until this work is under taken.

Communities should be consulted via meetings that are actively promoted and advertised by the government so that most people are aware of them – not just by expecting people to keep an eye on relevant websites. To date, this has not occurred. As a part of this advertising, there need to be regular announcements/advertisements on television inviting communities to have their say at meetings, in writing or via phone calls (to the coordinator mentioned in this framework, for example). Peoples' questions should be answered in a genuine and timely way and concerns addressed. Where in the framework is community consultation properly incorporated? The framework talks about industry best practice, not community best practice. The framework is clearly geared towards getting industry outcomes rather than community or environment outcomes. For example, the framework plans to review whether EPA approval is required for major renewable energy projects.

AEMO's identified potential of 9950MW of renewable power clearly equates to a ridiculous number of wind farms – roughly 68 the size of the Cattle Hill one. Even though this number of wind farms is unlikely to ever be built, it does still mean a large number of wind farms and their negative impacts on Tasmania.

It is obvious to me that Guy Barnett and Renewables Tasmania simply want to steam roll ahead with their grand wind farm vision for Tasmania, in a similar way that Eric Reece did with hydro power via the flooding of much of Tasmania's wild rivers and valleys in the pursuit of his ideology.