

**BOARD OF INQUIRY
HAUAURU MA RAKI WIND FARM PROPOSAL**

In the matter of the Resource Management Act 1991

And

In the matter of resource consent applications by Contact Wind Limited
In respect of the Hauauru Ma Raki Wind Farm proposal

BRIEF OF EVIDENCE OF LESTER WRIGHT

1.0 Introduction

My name is Lester Wright, I hold a Bachelor of Agricultural Science (Honours) Degree and am currently employed as General Manager of Rimanu Farms Limited. Rimanu is the management company responsible for Sunset Station at Port Waikato, but is essentially in common ownership to the “Land Owning Company” Sunset Views Limited; the beneficial owners are Christopher, Michael and Howard Spencer. As part of my role I supervise the management of Sunset Station that is located between the Northern Boundary of the proposed Windfarm and Port Waikato township.

Rimanui is a private farming company with eight farms at five locations throughout New Zealand. I have worked for the company for nine years, and have prior experience in General Management and as a Farm Management Consultant. I have been employed in the management of rural land for 25 years.

Sunset Station is a large-scale sheep and beef cattle breeding proposition. The property comprises a total area of 3400 ha, with a grazing area of approximately 1,800 ha the balance being in forestry, scrub and bush. There is a large area of regenerating bush (approximately 700 ha) adjacent to the coast, some 300 ha of forestry together with pockets of native bush and scrub across the property. The Spencers have been involved with the property since 1981.

Four permanent staff are employed and live on the farm with their families. Howard Spencer is a regular visitor and maintains a house on the farm.

2.0 Summary of submission

The company has had lengthy and cordial negotiations with Contact Wind over a period of years. These negotiations focused on Sunset Stations participation in the Wind Farm. When the Sunset owners elected not to participate Contact Wind assumed the owners would have no objection to the development on adjoining land and were not consulted as an affected party of the proposed development.

It is our submission that the presence of the turbines in such close proximity to the boundary will result in unacceptable environmental effects on Sunset and on the surrounding land. We request the removal of all Group A turbines and a 1.0 km separation distance of Group C turbines from the Sunset boundary.

3.0 Dealings with Wind Farm Group

The company was originally approached by Al Yates of Windfarm Group (WFG) in 2002 and agreed to allow them to conduct wind testing on the property. A met mast was installed and subsequently upgraded to a larger mast. Throughout this time WFG contractors and employees have been regular visitors to the farm, at times accessing neighbouring properties over Sunset land. No compensation has ever been offered for the use of the land. WFG continue to occupy the site and to collect data without any form of agreement or compensation. We understand that it would be normal for landowners to be compensated for providing access in this manner but Contact wind have steadfastly refused.

In 2007 Contact Wind offered a wind farming agreement to locate turbines on Sunset Station. The owners considered this proposition at length and professionals were

employed to assist their deliberations. In assessing the proposal the owners weighed the potential revenue stream from the turbines against the loss in amenity value of the land. In the final event the owners elected not to participate because of the hugely invasive nature of the turbines and their impact on the long-term value of the land. This decision was conveyed to Contact Wind personnel. In his evidence Mr Gregohan expresses surprise at the Sunset opposition to the project. I was not personally involved with discussions with Mr Gregohan but he discussed the proposal with Michael Spencer on several occasions. The companies concerns were conveyed to him as is obvious from the following extract of an email of 28th April 2008 from Mr Geogohan to Mr Michael Spencer;

“You also mentioned that you feel that land use in the area may change over the medium to long term and that the possibilities for future development might outweigh any current returns that are contemplated by the wind farm which would effectively preclude the use of that land for other purposes that were incompatible. “

This email was also copied to Al Yates. In his evidence (P24, point 107) Mr Yates expresses surprise at Sunset opposition to the wind farm but the same concerns were conveyed to Mr Yates by the writer as the companies reason for electing not to participate, why else would the owners choose not to?

4.0 Consultation as an affected party

The close proximity and scale of the wind farm mean that the affects of the proposal on Sunset Farm are large. Despite this all of the discussions with WFG and subsequently Contact Wind concerned Sunset Stations participation in the wind farm. Contact Wind assumed that the Sunset owners were happy for the project to proceed on adjoining land but never bothered to ask.

At no time were we consulted about the specific locations of turbines on adjoining land. Wholesale changes to the wind farm layout over time and changing details of participating land owners mean that draft layouts prepared some years ago might bear little resemblance to the notified consent.

All landowner negotiations were conducted separately and we were only aware in general terms of other participants in the project (with the exception of Limestone Downs). It was not until the consent was notified that we were able to confirm the participation of neighbouring properties.

After the wind farm application was notified I contacted Al Yates and expressed alarm at the location of turbines on adjoining land. We asked to obtain photomontages of the wind farm from locations on Sunset so as to determine the impact of the proposal. Mr Yates said that this would not be possible and referred us to the resource consent application to find other sites that might be similar. A computer simulation was provided but was totally unrealistic. It was therefore difficult to gain an accurate picture of the affect of the wind farm on Sunset.

In preparing for the hearing we were advised that photomontages would be necessary and approached Contact for aerial photography to assist with their preparation. At that stage Contact offered to have their consultant prepare the

photomontages at their cost and these were received a few days before final evidence was submitted on March 31st. In the mean time we have had independent images prepared that we believe provide a more realistic representation of the site in a range of conditions.

5.0 Turbines on adjoining land

A number of turbines are located very close to the boundary and will result in visual and noise effects and may impede operations such as fertilizer application and aerial spraying. Sites C004, C005, C006 and C009 appear to be located right on the boundary and C007-C013 are located within close proximity.

In addition to the removal of Group A there should be a minimum separation of at least 1.0 km from the boundary of any turbines. This separation distance will mean that the environmental affects of the wind farm are largely contained within its boundaries.

During our negotiations with Contact Wind they advised us that where turbines are located close to a boundary the revenue arising from the turbine is shared between neighbouring properties in recognition of the negative effect of the turbines on adjoining land. However, despite a number of turbines being located close to the boundary we received no offer of compensation from Contact. When I raised this issue with Mr Yates in December 2008 he indicated that they would pay compensation where the blades come across the boundary, but there has been no further discussion or agreement on this.

If the turbines are approved by the commission then Sunset Station should be compensated for all turbines within 1 km of the boundary. Such a buffer zone around the project is considered appropriate and is consistent with other projects such as at Turatea in Palmerston North.

6.0 Turbine site selection

In his evidence Mr Yates points out the number of turbines that have been removed from the project. The implication of this is that the sites has already been substantially reduced. However, irrespective of any other consideration 81 of the 105 sites identified for removal on the plan relate to Sunset land that is not available for the project. Only 18 sites have been rejected from available sites and shows a very small rejection rate. Imposing a more stringent threshold of compliance could greatly change the number of qualifying turbines.

The request to grant a 100 m area on which to place turbines is much too flexible and totally inappropriate for properties on the boundary of the scheme. In this landscape a movement of 20-50 m can mean an equivalent change in elevation and vastly change the appearance of the structure. For turbines in the middle of the project this may be of little consequence but for neighbouring properties it is unacceptable. The board of Inquiry is being asked to approve a structure without knowing where that structure is going to be.

7.0 Assessment of visual effects

The applicant's assessment of visual on Sunset is largely based on the houses. Whilst the house views are an important component of the assessment it is much too narrow when applied to a farming context. Farm owners and their employees choose a farming career for a variety of reasons, not least for providing a "farming lifestyle" for themselves and their families. The presence of the turbines in such close proximity will diminish the quality of the work and lifestyle environment on Sunset. Shadowing, flicker and noise will all be at unacceptable levels when experienced closer to the boundary and will not be contained within the boundary of the consented land. This can only be addressed by removing the turbines from the boundary. The reduction in quality of the environment will also detract from the wide range of recreational users of the property as outlined below.

8.0 Restriction to future land uses

An important consideration of the owners in declining the Contact Wind offer to lease land was the detrimental effect of the turbines on future land value. Under the Franklin District Plan and plan change 14 there is potential to subdivide the land to create 20 additional sites through the creation of bush reserves. The greatest potential for these sites is on the coast block adjacent to the Whareana and Ramsden blocks. The presence of the Wind farm will detract from the value of these sites. The proximity of the turbines to these sites is expected to breach normal standards for noise, shadowing and flicker.

9.0 Impact on recreation and tourism

The assessment of effects on recreation and tourism in the consent is very narrow. In his evidence Mr Tonks (P20, pt 93) concludes the Wind Farm will be of little consequence because of the lack of recreational and tourism activities in the area. Again Sunset Station received no consultation about potential affects of this aspect of the project.

The properties proximity to Auckland has resulted in a wide range of use, that in my experience is unique. Groups using the property include:

1. The Port Waikato camp uses the farm for overnight camps and day walks, abseiling and the like.
2. Waikato and Auckland universities visit the farm annually on geology field trips.
3. Counties Honda use of the farm for an annual motorbike rally.
4. Auckland orienteering club annual event, (site of 2008 champs).
5. The unique land forms have been used in movie background, including the lord of the rings shot locally.
6. The great NZ horse trek passes thru the property.
7. Onewhero horse riding club.
8. Team building activities e.g Hyundai New Zealand.
9. Finishing point of Special Stage II of the World Rally.
10. A commercial operator has been granted a license to use the farm for ATV excursions.
11. Pig hunting, deer stalking and fishing are popular pastimes with farm staff and visitors.

The majority of these activities are concentrated in and the Coast Road that will be most directly affected by the presence of the wind farm. The close proximity of the turbines to these activities will detract from the visitor experience in this area. The district also attracts a surprising number of tourists. Local attractions include the Lord of the Rings sites and limestone Caves.

10. Size of the proposed development in perspective

The size of the proposed project is some 540 MW and it is implied by the applicant that a reduction in the scale would affect the viability of the proposal. To put the size in perspective using data from the New Zealand Wind Energy Association web site, New Zealand's eight operational wind farms have an average capacity of only 40 MW and the average size of proposed wind farms is only 161MW. The Wai wind farm is over three times this size the removal of a small number of turbines would be of no significance to the viability.

11. Period of consent

The applicant has sought a ten-year window to undertake construction rather than the normal five. This creates considerable uncertainty for the local community. Inevitably the possibility of construction starts to be factored into decision making on issues such as roading. The vast size of the project means that the development is likely to occur in stages and be stretched out over several years in any event. Increasing the consent window only adds to the uncertainty.

12 Implications for residents

Construction of the wind farm has important implications for Coast Road residents and the management of the farm. Under the proposal only the minimum amount of upgrade is proposed to the road. The current road has a formation of only 5 meters and can barely support the current load let alone any increase.

Reliable and safe use of the road is a key concern for farm staff and their families. Staff are required to transport their children to and from school twice daily and the property is serviced by a wide range of contractors.

Farm staff use the road on a regular basis for access and for stock movement. The minimalist approach to road improvement means that increased traffic loads will compromise reliable use of the road. The consent application makes no provision for management of dust either from the road or from construction areas during construction.

13. Remedy Sought

Lack of consultation about the location of turbines on land adjoining Sunset made it difficult for the owners to properly assess the full affects of the proposal at the time that the consent was first notified. With the benefit of our professional advisors we have now been able to formulate a more considered opinion as follows:

1. Group A turbines are environmentally unacceptable both in the context of Sunset and the wider community. They restrict the development potential of Sunset and should be removed.
2. Group C turbines should be removed at least 1 km from the boundary. At a minimum Sunset should be compensated for their presence.
3. The consent envelope of 100 m on turbine locations should be removed where the wind farm abuts land not included in the project or any other sensitive area and site locations specified.
4. The consent period should be restricted to five years to provide some certainty for the district.