

Chris

Hastwell-Waiwaka Landscape Protection Society Inc  
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EKETAHUNA

6 December 2013

The Chief Executive Officer  
Mr Mark Binns  
Meridian Energy  
P O Box 10840  
The Terrace  
WELLINGTON 6134

Dear Mr Binns

#### MOUNT MUNRO WIND FARM APPLICATION WITHDRAWAL

The Hastwell-Waiwaka Landscape Protection Society would like to thank Meridian for withdrawing the consent application for the Mount Munro Wind Farm.

Now that there will be no hearing for us to voice our concerns over some aspects of the application process, we wish to raise some issues we found disturbing and unacceptable in the hope that something may be learned and the approach taken by Meridian towards rural communities might change. The lack of consideration and thorough meaningful consultation from both Meridian and the landowners caused untold anxiety and stress and damaged relationships. It was clear Meridian aimed to 'divide and conquer' this community.

There are guidelines for 'best practice' in wind farm development in regard to consultation and the need for robust and thorough assessments on landscape and noise effects. This is something Meridian should have taken very seriously. Considerate consultation should have been an integral part of a project such as this, particularly with the most affected community (who were largely ignored). In contrary to best practice this was not the case. Meridian chose to focus on Eketahuna and ignored the rural community surrounding the proposed windfarm. There was a feeling of complacency and arrogance from the Meridian consultants. Meridian visited affected residents briefly (at most only twice in 2011) before the application was lodged. The community has had no further contact with Meridian or their consultants in the two years since. This is a clear illustration of Meridian's ignorance as to how rural community's function and how to build good and lasting relationships within the rural communities in which its projects are based. Do you believe it is appropriate to treat those most affected by a proposal in such a manner?

The landscape and noise assessments contained many misleading statements, conclusions and contradictions. It was disturbing to read an email obtained under the Official Information Act in which stated Meridian had requested the focus be on Eketahuna. This township is five kilometres from the proposal. Our community has many residents directly below the project site well within two kilometres who would have had significant adverse effects imposed upon them and had not been identified in Meridian's initial assessments. This information confirms that there was a deliberate

intention to ignore and play down the effects of this proposal in the hope of bulldozing it through the consent process.

Any development should respect the environmental values a community regards as important. Meridian showed no respect or appreciation towards Pukaha Mount Bruce Reserve, the value and identity it adds to the wider environment. It is an iconic destination recognised worldwide. It is inappropriate to place an industrial development with the potential to harm in the vicinity of a restoration project aimed at increasing birdlife. Native kaka, kereru and falcon are all seen well beyond the reserve.

This is not about being anti wind farm, it is about wanting a fair and honest process with the values the community share about their environment recognized and respected and the actual effects properly considered. Good relationships are a rural community's greatest asset and to make a deliberate attempt to divide a community in order to weaken any opposition is unacceptable. At a minimum the community would have expected a company like Meridian to:

- Identify the affected parties to the proposal at an early stage and consult with them;
- Provide those parties with the information that they need to appreciate the impact that the wind farm will have on their lives, properties and community;
- Keep effected parties regularly updated about the wind farm application progress, what to expect etc;
- Discuss this openly with those communities and to focus on early identification of key community concerns (such as Pukaha Mt Bruce, visual effects and on rural water supplies);
- Provide in-depth assessment of the effects raised and make this information available as well as entering into discussions with the community as to alternative routes/ mitigation/ solutions with less impact.

Meridian failed to do any of these things. This resulted in a great deal of stress, worry and anxiety within the community. Valued members of the community who feared the effects of the wind farm on their way of life have moved and left the community for good; those that stayed have put their lives "on hold" while the wind farm proposal hung over them; those owning properties that would be severely affected have put off plans to develop their homes and businesses due to the proposed wind farm and have struggled with what will happen to their environment as a result of the proposal.

The divide created by Meridians "confidentiality agreements" with those whose properties, which formed part of the project site, effectively drove a wedge between those landowners standing to benefit from the wind farm and their badly affected neighbours. This is not how rural communities function. Rural communities are based on cooperation. Meridian has caused irreparable damage to those relationships; being a rural community these relationships are often multi-generational between families that have farmed the same area for decades.

One example of this is a member of our group (their property badly effected) who left his job with a landowner involved in the project due to the difficult situation it placed him in. There was no consideration of the effect the project would have had on his property or others in the community. There was no attempt made by the landowners to talk about concerns. This lead to a stress related illness, a lack of trust and complete breakdown of the relationship. Another is the breakdown of community relations with some families no longer talking to others. In a small community based on honesty, cooperation, helping your neighbours and open communication the effect of this is significant.

It is recommended that in the future Meridian hire consultants and development coordinators who are part of rural communities and understand how these communities function and that Meridian adapt its consenting style to better suit the community which it is seeking consent in. We realize Meridian's treatment of the Mt Munro community is not unique in this regard and that Meridian's actions have had a similarly devastating impact on the Taihape, Martinborough, Mill Creek and Makara communities. While some of the environmental effects of advancing wind farm applications cannot be mitigated, the damage that Meridian has done to these communities is unnecessary and entirely avoidable. We urge Meridian to adopt a better approach.

The way in which this community was treated was appalling and we believe an apology is deserved for the stress, anxiety and expense this community has endured.

Yours faithfully

Francine Ramsay   Merryn Osborne   Gavin Osborne  
On Behalf Of   Hastwell-Waiwaka Landscape Protection Society