

**Te Whanganui-a-Tara Rohe**

**In the Environment Court**

**I Mua I Te Kōti Taiao O Aotearoa**

Under the Resource Management Act 1991

and in the matter of the direct referral of an application for resource consents by

Meridian Energy Limited in respect of the proposed Mt Munro wind farm under section

87G of the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA).

**Meridian Energy Limited**

Applicant

and

**Tararua District Council, Masterton District Council, Manawatu - Whanganui  
Regional Council and Greater Wellington Regional Council (Councils)**

Consent Authorities

and

**s 274 Parties**

**Statement of Evidence of Christopher Paul Clarke Chairperson Hastwell Mount  
Munro Protection Society Inc.**

**I am writing as a 'local expert'**

**July 2024**

# **Social Impact Meridian's Proposed Mt Munro Windfarm**

## **1. Introduction:**

- i. My name is Christopher Paul Clarke. I am retired and live in the community of Hastwell, which sits at the foot of Mt Munro. My wife and I moved here in March 2020, choosing Hastwell because of its lovely scenery, views of Mt Munro, quiet rural scene and friendly community. We are great lovers of the outdoors, gardening and the outdoor rural lifestyle. This was for us, an ideal place to spend our retirement years.
- ii. I have a Bachelor of Arts in sociology and criminology, a Diploma of Counselling, a Post Graduate Diploma of Health Services Management and a Diploma in Biblical Studies. During my working life I have worked in a variety of roles in health, community and social work. These include working with youth, people with disabilities, in mental health, primary health care and in aged care. More recently I managed a specialist service providing counselling/therapy services to people of refugee backgrounds suffering severe trauma. Immediately prior to my retirement I was manager of Age Concern Wairarapa.
- iii. I am writing this not as an expert in the technical sense. Rather as a 'local expert' with some training, experience and knowledge of mental and social wellbeing. I am also writing in my capacity as chairperson, in support of the Hastwell/Mt Munro Protection Society Incorporated.
- iv. The Hastwell/Mt Munro Protection Society Incorporated (the Society) held its first meeting on the 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2023. It was established because of Meridian's plans to establish a windfarm on Mt Munro. The Society's primary purpose is to: *'Maintain and protect the amenity values and environmental quality in the district for present and future generations'* (Constitution p.2.). It has a membership of 35 and is comprised mostly of people living in the Hastwell and Eketahuna districts. A small number live outside the district but have a close association through family or formerly resided here.
- v. My wife and I live at 2420 Opaki Kaiparoro Road RD2 Eketahuna 4994. Our home is 1.3km from the proposed windfarm site.
- vi. I am taking this opportunity to highlight effects especially for myself and Society members living close (within 2km) to the proposed windfarm. It is my belief that Meridian's persistent refusal to complete a social impact assessment (SIA) and the cynical way they have engaged our community means that they have abnegated their social license.
- vii. Meridian failed from the very early stages, to engage with our community with transparency and good faith. Their process of engagement has been disorganised and their information incomplete, sometimes missing, at times inaccurate, and lacking in sufficient detail. Throughout this process our ability to accurately assess the windfarm proposal, its effects and mitigations has been compromised. For me and fellow Society members, this has led to significant breaches of trust and loss of confidence in Meridian, and its experts. Meridian states on its website:  
*"Addressing improvements for the planet can't be separated from doing right by people. Ultimately, the complexities of decarbonisation are best solved by humans coming together in a range of ways to make powerful, cumulative change".*

- viii. I refer to the following (by no means comprehensive) resources, outline in brief Meridian's own statements relating to its values, social licence and ethical responsibilities and our own experiences with Meridian, leading to serious concerns about the project and how it will impact on those of us living close to proposed windfarm.

## 2. The RMA and Social Responsibility

- i. Baines et al <sup>1</sup>in their article 'Social monitoring can contribute to ex-ante SIAs: a case of New Zealand wind farm planning' says:
- "Land-use planning in New Zealand is governed by the Resource Management Act (RMA) 1991. This legislation is intended to provide for good resource management that 'enables people and communities to provide for their social, economic and cultural wellbeing and for their health and safety while ... avoiding, remedying, or mitigating any adverse effects of activities on the environment' (RMA, s5(2))." ....*
- And in their concluding paragraph....
- "... if it is considered important to address issues of social responsibility in wind farm development and operation – and the land-use planning law in New Zealand implies that this is indeed the case – then those responsible for planning the development of wind farms should re-visit their approach to planning. .... This would involve incorporating social and social equity considerations into project planning at the **earliest stages** in order to determine, at least on a provisional basis, the spatial extent of a proposed wind farm's footprint and the reach of acceptable effects. Having done this, planning would then turn to the task of optimizing the proposal on technical grounds. Such an approach would build far more public confidence in the industry and its development intentions. **'Green' may be environmentally responsible, but it needs to be socially responsible as well**". (highlights are my own)*

## 3. NZ Association for Impact Assessment (NZAIA) in its Comprehensive Guide for Social

- i. Impact Assessment) states that social impacts are:
- "...the impacts of developmental interventions on human environment." .... (p1) Impact assessments are ..." the means to enhance equity, strengthen social inclusion and cohesion, promote transparency and empower the poor and the vulnerable in the design and/or implementation of the project" .... "A framework for dialogue on development priorities among social groups, civil society, grassroot organisations, different levels of government and other stakeholders." ... (p.23)<sup>2</sup>*
- "Social impacts include changes in people's way of life, their culture, community, political systems, environment, health and wellbeing, their personal and property rights and their fears and aspirations. "(p.5)*
- ii. *"The SIA ensures that the development interventions: (i) are informed and take into account the key relevant social issues; and (ii) incorporate a participation strategy for involving a wide range of stakeholders. "(p.6).*
- iii. *The "SIA is a process of analysing the impact of public/government intervention on the social aspects of the human environment. These aspects include:*
- *The ways people cope with life through their economy, social systems and cultural values.*

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<sup>1</sup> Baines et al 2012

<sup>2</sup> NZAIA 2006

- *The ways people use the natural environment for subsistence, recreation, spiritual activities and so forth.*
- *The ways people use the natural environment for shelter, making livelihoods, industry, worship, recreation, gathering together, etc.*
- *Organisation of the community, social and cultural institutions and beliefs*
- *Preservation of community identity.*
- *Art music, dance, language arts, crafts, and other expressive aspects of culture.*
- *A group's values and beliefs about appropriate ways to live, family and extra- family relationships, means of expression and other expressions of community.*
- *The aesthetic and cultural character of a community or neighbourhood its ambience."*

#### **4. Meridian's Statements:**

- Meridian on its website and in its 2023 Annual Report talks frequently of social licence<sup>3</sup>.

To quote a few:

- *"Clean Energy for a Fairer and Healthier World" (Website)*
- *"At Meridian We Value People" (Website)*
- *"No one experiences our generation assets like the people who live, work, and learn with our hydro stations and wind farms in their backyards (Website)*
- *We value the communities that surround our generation assets and it's important to us that they feel included as part of our Meridian whānau". (Website)*
- *"We value 'being gutsy', working together by 'being in the waka' and doing the right thing by 'being a good human'. (p.14; 2023 Annual Report)*
- *We have multiple measures in place to ensure we live our value of being good humans. (P.105; 2023 Annual Report)*
- *"Connected to Communities" - Looking ahead, we're planning to research our social impacts with the community. By gathering data from a range of sources, we hope to understand better how we're perceived and the impacts our activities are having. That feedback will shape our future engagement programme (p.107; 2023 Annual Report)*

- These statements and many others on their website give the very powerful impression that Meridian fully embraces and takes very seriously its social license.

#### **5. Analysis of Submissions Regarding Proposed Mt Munro Windfarm.**

- In March 2023 the Hastwell Mount Munro Protection Society on the advice of the Rural Support Trust approached clinical psychologist Kate Steadman of Second Nature Psychology Limited with the aims of collating submission themes (*Appendix 1*) and to help us identify ways to support Society members and neighbours. Kate who has experience living and working in rural communities undertook an assessment of all submissions (*73 in total - 63 were against, 3 neutral and 7 in favour of the windfarm*). Unfortunately, for personal reasons Ms. Steadman was unable to interview submitters and is unavailable as an expert witness.
- Steadman in her report to us wrote that:  
*"The submissions reviewed identified the level of uncertainty felt by individuals and the perceived negative impacts of this were high... "*

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<sup>3</sup> Meridian 2023/24

*“A significant difficulty is, that although there can be set limits on noise production, hours of operation, number of trees planted, water quality readings, and more. It is more difficult to assess psychological and social impacts as these can be impacted by individual factors in terms of perceptions of stress, tolerance to change and uncertainty, stress management practices, pre-existing mental wellbeing status, and individuals’ ability to act on their values/ partake in activities important for maintaining their wellbeing during and after construction. It is important not to gloss over the mention in the submissions of the concern that recreational activities will be negatively impacted through additional noise and traffic, but also that their ‘sense’ of peace and tranquility will be disturbed.... Everyone has a set of internal values that guides their decision making, drives them towards particular people activities, work, or places, and ultimately informs who they are as people. When these values are well aligned and executed, it enables people to achieve greater well-being and feel content and centered (Paul et al., 2023)<sup>4</sup> .... If individuals are unable (to any degree) to behave in a way that reflects their values, then their well-being can become compromised.”*

Steadman also makes reference (among others) to the following authors :

Hallan & González<sup>5</sup> noted that; *“As the number of applications for windfarms increases over time, so too will the need to refine a template for social engagement and mitigation at the very beginning of the application process” ...and....*

Freiburg et al<sup>6</sup> identified that; *“...individuals who live closest to windfarms are more negatively impacted...Uncertainty being a significant contributor to stress”.*<sup>7</sup>

## **6. The Hastwell Mt Munro Community - My Experience:**

### **A. History: 2009 - 2013:**

Based on notes I have from the former Hastwell-Waiwaka Landscape Protection Society Inc (set up in 2012 as a response to Meridian’s plans to establish a windfarm on Mt Munro) and verbal feedback from former Society members:

- i. Our community’s reluctant journey started with Meridian in 2009. A wind tower was erected on Mt Munro and the community discovered by accident that this was pre-empting Meridian’s plans to assess the maunga for a windfarm.
- ii. An Incorporated Society was formed, and efforts made by the community to communicate with Meridian and participate in the planning and resource consent process.
- iii. Documents from this time identified that it was difficult communicating with Meridian. Meridian’s consultation process was limited with 2 information days and individual meetings with some residents. Concerns expressed at the time strongly reflect current experience i.e. Lacking proper consultation, lacking detail in the resource consent application, lacking information c.f. *Letter to Meridian dated 06.12.2013 from the then Hastwell-Waiwaka Landscape Protection Society outlining concerns about their process (Appendix 2).*
- iv. Meridian withdrew their application in 2013.

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<sup>4</sup> Paul et al., 2023.

<sup>5</sup>Hallan & González, 2020

<sup>6</sup> Freiburg et al (2019)

<sup>7</sup> Steadman June 2024

**B. Current/2022 onwards:**

- i. After moving to Hastwell, my wife and I had heard about efforts to seek resource consent for a windfarm in 2012 however neighbours told us that the application had been withdrawn, therefore, news of a new proposal was a complete surprise. We found out about Meridian's new plans to build a windfarm after a visit from a neighbour and initially thinking it was Mercury Energy, I approached them. Mercury advised me that it was Meridian who were planning the new windfarm, hence my contacting Meridian by email on the 25<sup>th</sup> November 2022 (*c.f. Appendix 3*).
- ii. We then started talking to our neighbours about Meridian's plans, some we talked to expressed high levels of anxiety at the prospect of a repetition of 2012.
- iii. It became clear to us that Meridian's engagement with us, and our community has been uncoordinated and disorganised (other 274 parties will reflect this in their evidence).
- iv. After our approaching Meridian, a visit was arranged. Given Meridian's poor approach to our neighbours, I believe that if we had not taken the initiative and approached them ourselves, we would not have been contacted until much further along in the process (if at all).
- v. When Meridian representatives (Nick Bowmar and Rebecca Knott) visited my wife and I on Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> December 2022, they advised us that most of our neighbours supported the wind farm. In fact, most neighbours we spoke to after the meeting, told us that they were opposed to the windfarm. Also, most had had no contact with Meridian and those who had met with them were also told that most of their neighbours were in favour of the windfarm. At our meeting my wife and I expressed concerns about how they will engage with us. We felt that as residents living close to the windfarm and likely to experience significant effects, that Meridian needed to do more to inform and consult with us. We discussed with Messrs Bowman and Knott better ways of communication and working together. They advised us of an information day in Eketahuna on the 13<sup>th</sup> December, and a postal drop soon to happen. They said that a second information day and regular mailbox drops were planned. We attended the first information day and were unable to attend the second. Since the December 2022 meeting with Bowmar and Knott to date we have received 3 pamphlets in the mail.  
We expressed our concern that as affected parties, more effort was needed to engage with us and our neighbours. It was made clear to us that they were not in favour of public meetings, however they indicated that they were open to organising some workshops. We agreed that this would be a good start. Bowmar and Knott left us with the promise that they will follow up and get back to us, but we have not heard anything about this since. No workshops have been held.
- vi. Just after finding out about the windfarm and while attempting to engage with Meridian, we found out via a vis contacts associated with local Iwi, that discussions had been held with them for some time prior to our finding out. We were also very surprised to learn that the Pukaha National Wildlife Centre had been having discussions with Meridian.  
Other than the landowners where the proposed windfarm is to be built, we do not know of anyone else in our community who had been approached by Meridian in the very early stages.

- vii. As a result, as directly affected parties we felt marginalised and were upset that Meridian had not acted with transparency and had not made early contact with us. It appeared to us a classic case of divide and rule.
- viii. In early 2023, The Hastwell Mount Munro Protection Society Inc was established (as described earlier). A committee was elected, and I was appointed Chairperson. Our efforts are ongoing.
- ix. On the 7<sup>th</sup> April 2023, in my capacity as Chairperson of the Society, I emailed then Wairarapa MP Hon. Kieren McNulty who after a meeting with our committee approached Meridian's CEO for a meeting. A meeting was held with the Hon McNulty, his advisory staff, Meridian's CEO Neal Barclay, Messrs. Bowmar and Knott, and Society committee members, on Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> September 2023. At the meeting there was agreement on some issues (c.f. Appendix 4). A pop up, which was advertised, was held in Eketahuna in October 2023, but aside from this there have been no other public events. Mail drops have been sparse, and a quarterly newsletter has not happened. Meridian also agreed to meet quarterly, the next meeting for Meridian to confirm, was due in December 2023. Unfortunately, this meeting did not occur, however at Mr McNulty's prompting, a second meeting was held on Friday 19<sup>th</sup> April at Mr. McNulty's offices in Masterton. This meeting was highly charged and closed early.
- x. In his Statement of Evidence on behalf of Meridian Energy Ltd dated 24<sup>th</sup> May 2024, Mr. Bowmar (*sect 43 p14*) states that "Stakeholder engagement is a critical part of Meridian's project. He then goes on to write; (*sect 44 p15*) "...I understand that the process, engagement principles and approach in 2012 were similar to the engagement which has been conducted this time around."  
Given the former Protection Society's 2013 letter to Meridian (*c.f. Appendix 1*) I would have to agree!
- xi. On p23 (*sect 68* Bowmar writes: "Our initial engagement began with a phone call, text, or email to introduce ourselves and the project". Meridian did not in any way initiate contact with us. My wife and I had to initiate contact and I am advised by other neighbours that Meridian did not initiate contact with them either.
- xii. I have very real concerns that Meridian (in their Application and subsequent reports) overstate the level and quality of community consultation. For example, Mr. Bowmar in his Statement of Evidence on behalf of Meridian Energy Ltd dated 24<sup>th</sup> May 2024 cites Mr. Rawiri Smith of Ngati Kahungunu ki Wairarapa (*sect 60 clause 60b. p19*) who said that "Meridian has made serious attempts to reach out to all the neighbours living within a two-kilometer radius, including consultation on visual effects and traditional connections".  
When discussing this with other Society members, 20 who live within 2km of the proposed windfarm Mr Smith is not known to them. He has not visited us, nor spoken to us, so how he can be so 'assured' of this is incredibly puzzling.

### **C. Eketahuna Township**

- i. Eketahuna township comprises of a hotel with restaurant, bar and accommodation (10 rooms), a grocery store, café, petrol station, a Tararua District Council Service Centre and library, a nurse clinic, 2 rural supply stores, a barber, retail shops primary school, volunteer fire service, ambulance and a few small retail outlets.
- ii. Meridian has repeatedly overstated the distance of Eketahuna from the proposed windfarm to the media and in its documentation (8km later revising this to 5km) *c.f.*

*Appendixes 5 and 6.* The truth is that some parts of southern Eketahuna, are within 3k of the windfarm site.

- iii. Little has been made of the consented windfarm at Castle Hill east of Eketahuna. Yet should construction timeframes coincide, there will be significant increases in heavy and light traffic volumes accessing Eketahuna from both Castle Hill and Mt Munro.

#### **D. Employment**

- i. Meridian having identified Eketahuna as the host 'asset community' (while failing to acknowledge the more directly affected community of Hastwell), has highlighted jobs for local people.

During Meridian's Pop up in October 2023 it was reported to me by someone who visited that Meridian staff told them that there will be 'significant employment opportunities, that business will increase, and the hotel will have full occupancy'.

Yet an email from Mr. Bowmar to me as The Society Chairperson dated 08 June 2023 said:

".... Meridian typically engages a small number of main contractors, and in our agreement with them we stipulate the level of local employment that we require (in other words, we don't necessarily employ the locals directly..." *C.f. Appendix 7.*

- ii. There is no guarantee of local employment, in fact given the nature of the work, one assumes that specialist crews will be brought in by the contractors. I imagine most will commute to the windfarm site from other larger centres and will if coming from the north pass through Eketahuna on their way to work. Those staying in Masterton will not pass through Eketahuna at all.

#### **E. Those living within 3 km of the proposed windfarm (Hastwell, Old Coach and Faulkner Roads)**

- i. Hastwell to the southeast of Mt Munro is an established community. It is roughly 30km from Masterton or Pahiatua and 13km south of Eketahuna. **31 dwellings** in Hastwell and along Falkner and Old Coach Road roads are within 2 km and **24 dwellings** within 1.5km of the proposed wind site. A rough estimate by me calculates that over 75 people (including children/families) live within 2 km of the proposed windfarm. This does not account for the Hastwell subdivision and vacant sections yet to be built on.
- ii. The Hastwell community comprises a range of lifestyles, from small holdings of more than 50ha, lifestyle blocks, farms, and rural agricultural contractors. There is a farrier, a donkey breeding stud, a horse stud, a planned berry farm. There are also rental properties.
- iii. Hastwell also has a subdivision of over 150 sections (approx. 58 are within 2km of the proposed wind farm site) (*c.f. Appendix 8 Subdivision Example*). In 2022, 5 sections were sold. At the time of sale, the purchasers did not know that a windfarm was a possibility.
- iv. In 2022 I was informed by a neighbour who had been in contact with Meridian, that only one real estate agency, Harcourts, was advised by Meridian of the proposed wind farm. Eight of my new neighbours live within 2km of the proposed windfarm. Four who are members of the Society have since told me that if they knew of the windfarm they would not have proceeded with their purchase. Some of these properties were sold by other real estate agencies who I am informed had no prior knowledge of the windfarm.
- v. The plans for Old Coach Road in the Application appear to be based on older out of date maps.



Despite mitigations outlined to date, the effects on those living and working on this road are extensive, with substantial upheaval, road works, dust and noise, especially during the construction phase.

- vi. There was it seems little analysis of other options such as the nearby railway line and the possibility of mitigating traffic effects by incorporating Old Coach Road South.
- vii. Along with my wife and I, most of our neighbours have values that align strongly to a rural lifestyle with the associated benefits of a friendly supportive community, quiet lifestyle, outdoor interests and for many it is their workplace. We spend significant hours outdoors and not in our homes. We have a strong commitment to sustaining and improving our environment. For me this raises questions as to the validity of the methodology used in assessing effects and mitigations. Effects measured solely from dwellings or as they impact the dwelling indoors, are a very small part of the overall effect on our everyday lives. We frequently use and access our farm buildings, work in the surrounding paddocks (which are in full view of Mt Munro) and spend time relaxing outdoors.

#### **F. Social Interactions**

- i. Meridian has a small community fund, which communities can access. How it is applied across the district, and who it will benefit is unclear. There are distinct communities in our district and the Hastwell community as a rule does not use Eketahuna for social interactions.
- ii. Unfortunately, there has been dissention from a small group of Meridian supporters, characterised by the destruction of Hastwell/Mt Munro Protection Society signs, interference with farming operations and harassment. Oddly, this has deepened the social cohesion of our Hastwell neighbours.
- iii. Given the points made in the letter (*Appendix 1*) by the former Hastwell-Waiwaka Landscape Protection Society, the evidence suggests that Meridian has not learnt from nor taken on board the feedback provided in 2013.

#### **G. Social Impact**

To quote a local Eketahuna Health Centre nurse in her submission:

*“The impact of the proposed Mount Munro Windfarm has already caused considerable mental disharmony to many of the patients I see who live within the proposed vicinity of this windfarm, many of which are either semi-retired or elderly, or due to their ethnicity, feel that they do not have / nor have they been given the opportunity to voice their concerns thus far and thus feel they have been put in a powerless position in terms of ability to oppose this windfarm. Furthermore, as they are not financially affluent, nor will they profit from the development of this windfarm in their backyards they have no financial means in which to oppose it within the law courts. This has already caused ongoing worry, anxiety and sleepless nights to some of these, others it has already affected their mental and physical health. Their health has the potential to be further impacted in a number of ways particularly in relation to the physical impacts of noise, dust light and visual pollution – both during construction and on the completion of this wind farm and thereafter.”*

- i. During 2012 and post 2013, as ‘Appendix 1’ identifies, some who were significantly impacted health wise, left the community, others stayed. Since Meridian revisited the windfarm proposal in 2022, I have spoken to Society members who are experiencing

significant anxiety and distress due to the windfarm proposal and Meridian's treatment of them.

- ii. In his memo to Lauren Edwards of Horizons (22.02.2024) on Social Wellbeing and Assessment, Tom Anderson of Incite, says '...some submissions raised general concerns about social wellbeing... '(2. Para 2) – a classic understatement given the level of opposition and concern outlined in the 63 submissions opposing as against the 7 in support! Especially given the feedback received by the Society from clinical psychologist Kate Steadman on the submissions and Meridian's own statements as identified earlier.

Anderson on page 2 (*third to last para*) writes that; 'climate conscious members of the community who may appreciate the increased contribution to the growth in renewable energy input...'

This comes across as 'gaslighting' those opposing the windfarm and assumes that we are 'anti windfarms' and not 'climate conscious'. In fact, our opposition is not anti-windfarm as our signs 'Right Energy Wrong Place' clearly state. We are very aware of the climate crisis and supportive of attempts to slow its impact on the planet; however, of equal importance, we believe that sufficient attention has to be given to social wellbeing.

Anderson's statements reinforce my view that Meridian has no concern for social impact and the consequential effects for me and my neighbours.

- iii. To reinforce his position, Anderson falls back on a well-worn mantra that amazingly 100 to 150 new jobs will be created! I would like to have more information on how this will occur specifically for Eketahuna and its immediate surrounding communities. Can we hold Mr. Anderson and Meridian to this?

Mr. Anderson's contention (*page 3 para4*) that it is unlikely that 'tension' will endure in the community beyond the consenting and construction process, is presumptive, especially given that our community continues to experience social division because of Meridian's attempts in 2009/2013. He fails to acknowledge the depth of feeling me and my neighbours feel about what is happening to us.

In my opinion, this memo undermines Meridian's credibility when it comes to its own discourse. It is dismissive, patronising and displays a cynical disregard for me and my fellow residents.

- iv. Mr Halstead confirms in his Statement of Evidence on behalf of Meridian Energy Ltd dated 24<sup>th</sup> May 2024 that noise effects 'are not limited to those that breach wind farm standards'. He acknowledges there may be 'broader factors to consider' (*Sect 30 p9*). Nevertheless, he dismisses these as the subjective reactions of people depending on whether they support windfarms or not. While in a legalistic sense (that is if one accepts his assessments), standards may be adhered to, we cannot ignore that he dismisses the very real concerns that me and my neighbours share.

Mr. Halsted referring to the RMA, says that this assumes that 'noise is within the bounds of normal give and take expected of neighbours' (*sect 29 p8*). He does not appear to have taken into account the prevailing north westerly wind and its ability to carry noise, the potential for echo, the fact that there are no hills (there is clear air between the turbines and the wide Hastwell Valley beneath), the turbines are very large and if there are 20 with 14 on the main ridge, they will undoubtedly need to be clustered closely together (N.B. Unfortunately Meridian cannot tell us where their exact locations will be so it is difficult for us to properly assess effects). Halstead ultimately dismisses submission concerns based on his 'experience', 'that for those who did not oppose, it is

not an effect' (sect 44 p12). I imagine that like Mr. Anderson he assumes that my neighbours and I are opposed to wind farms. As stated earlier we are not. Our contention is that when placed so close to an established community (we are not isolated neither are we sparsely populated), there will be a cumulative impact of effects.

Halstead's report gives me absolutely no assurance that noise effects will be no more than other 'routine noises' in our community.

Given the substantive environmental changes they will indeed be large industrial complexes out of place and unfortunately not out of sight nor sound.

- v. Visual effects are considerably more than what is identified in a 'typical rural environment'. Mr Girvan in his Statement of Evidence on behalf of Meridian Energy Ltd dated 24<sup>th</sup> May 2024 contends that *'turbines will remain part of the underlying rural context, like other rural based infrastructure and utilities rather than imposing any inherent urban or industrial character through which rural landscape values may otherwise be diminished.'* (135 p.38) Most farm buildings are 1-2 stories high not 160m. Neither do they stand in a line of 14 close together across the main ridgeline with another six down neighbouring ridges. The effect of 160m high turbines, close together will be hugely dominant (how can they not be?), creating visual entities akin to 20 skyscrapers reaching into the sky, dwarfing Mt Munro and overwhelming the surrounding environs. A comparison is the current wind mast which I understand is 80m. I frequently look at this and try to envision 20 massive turbines twice its height looking directly down on me and my neighbours. They will clearly dominate the landscape, as it will be for those who live well beyond 2km of the windfarm. Contrary to Mr. Girvan's concluding paragraph 233 (p68), the turbines will be prominent from other viewpoints such as SH2 and Eketahuna – well beyond the 'small number of rural dwellings' he refers to.
- vi. Mr. Wright in his Statement of Evidence on behalf of Meridian Energy Ltd dated 24<sup>th</sup> May 2024. in *para 12d (p5)* states: "Aside from the aviation warning lights, the proposal does not include any lighting that is on throughout every night..." However, it appears that the CAA sees this differently:  
*"...Turbines 150m and 315m will require a secondary backup light and an array of 3 intermediate low intensity lights at a distance of half the nacelle height..."* (CAA lighting and Marking of Windfarm Turbines 5/2)  
I understand that these 3 low intensity lights remain on all day every day.  
Given the abovementioned, how can I really tell that lighting effects will "be less than minor"? (*Conclusions para 56. P11*).  
Lighting effects and their impact on the night sky are unclear, especially given the 160m height of the turbines and despite light shields being installed. I have frequently driven past turbines on the Tararua ranges at night and have been surprised at the brightness of the flashing aviation lights on the nacelles.  
Our enjoyment of the night sky is very important to us, and we often spend time looking at the stars, most especially the rise of Matariki. We are also aware that the Masterton District Council is applying to be part of the Dark Skies Reserve and the night lights will impose a negative effect.
- vii. Given the prevailing north-westerly wind there continues to be insufficient attention given to dust and noise – especially during construction on the ridgelines. Hawtwell which lies to the southeast will be in the direct line of any dust that blows off the tops. Despite expert responses to date, insufficient attention and reassurance has been given

to mitigations that will fully address actual and potential effects, especially if there is a prolonged construction period.

## **H. Fairness**

- i. There are major inequities simply because we do not have the expertise nor the resources to assess the huge amount of paperwork and details needed.
- ii. Meridian had access to submissions for a lengthy period before closing date and has had access to redacted material such as contact details.
- iii. For our community submissions were only available on the Horizon's website for a very limited period - 2 weeks, there were problems with downloading information, which meant that we had insufficient time to access and share a significant amount of information.
- iv. Disrespectful interactions by Meridian staff have undermined our confidence that we can deal with them in good faith and with integrity. We are certainly not to quote Meridian, 'in the same waka'.

Examples of disrespect shown (by no means comprehensive and as told to me by those who experienced them first hand) include: Being told by a senior Meridian staff member that they '...can't see what the problem is...'. Meridian visited my neighbours with no IDs. Being told that our neighbours agree with the windfarm. Unbelievably on one visit Meridian advised a neighbour that they had just met his wife 'down the road' and she told them she supported the windfarm. In fact, as co-owner of the farm, she was at that very time sitting in the room next to him. A Meridian staff told a neighbour to relocate their barbeque on the other side of the house. Visiting without an appointment including a very elderly pensioner and finding him having his daily bath routine.

## **I. Overview of Issues**

- i. Information: The Application process to date, has raised more questions than answers. Information is disjointed and incomplete, it comes in drifts and drabs. Matters are often referred to the 'detailed planning stage'. i.e. Even though we have been told there will be 20 turbines, we do not know this for sure. We do not know the precise location of the turbines on the ridgeline. Despite all the information pointing to them being 160m high, Meridian advises that the height of the turbines is yet to be fully confirmed. It lacks detail and sometimes inaccurate (i.e. old maps were used on Old Coach Road in the Application. Masterton's rainfall has been used for one expert's *report (Ridley and Dunphy Water Management Plan Effects Assessment Report 3.1-3.3)*, yet Mt Munro has significantly higher monthly rainfalls - as reflected in Mt. Bruce rainfall data produced by the Wellington Regional Council. A wind mast has been installed since 2009 yet unbelievably, especially given its volatile changeable climate, it appears that no records have been taken of rainfall on Mt Munro. Failure to provide accurate information prevents me from properly assessing effects and mitigations.
- ii. Construction: The effects of a prolonged construction time. Meridian wants ten years and if this is consented will mean that many in our community have lived on/off again with uncertainty for up to 25 years. We will be forced to live with ongoing uncertainty regarding the timing of construction if/when Meridian proceeds with the project?
- iii. Mitigations: While acknowledging that Meridian have agreed to some helpful mitigations (i.e. no heavy traffic on Opaki Kaiparoro Road from Mt Munro Road via Mauriceville to SH 2 and no heavy traffic on Faulkner Road from the quarry to northern access to SH2,

sealing of Old Coach Road), I do not believe that they are sufficient to address significant effects, especially over a long period of time.

- iv. Consultation: The cumulative effects of Meridian's poor engagement and consultation with us, the lack of (and oftentimes inaccurate) detail, and misleading comments by Meridian staff, have considerably undermined trust, increased anxiety, and created uncertainty.
- v. Future Expansion: There is uncertainty regarding Meridian's plans for windfarm expansion, especially given the rapid expansion witnessed on the nearby Tararua ranges. Despite Meridian staff telling me and my neighbours that they have no plans **currently**, the door appears open for future expansions. Also given the lack of capacity on the national grid, will batteries be added at a later stage, and if so, what will be the implications for me and my community?
- vi. Landscape Effects: Despite Mr. Girvan's 'opinion' on these matters, turbines will dominate the land scape, they will be a foreign entity in our rural environment, especially as they will be very close to homes. Environments change but wind turbines in the heart of our community will be an invasion of major proportions. They will bring an unwanted negative effect on the landscape and on our enjoyment of it. The installation of massive 160m industrial structures on Mt Munro will be in complete disproportion to the landscape and cannot in any way be compared to 'everyday farm structures'. Farm structures are considerably smaller, normally no more than 2 stories high and do not dominate the landscape.
- vii. Values: I am concerned that the poor process to date, lack of information and subsequent discourse by Meridian and it's experts, all serve to undermine our community and the treasured values we share; the natural beauty of the landscape, enjoyment of the night sky, peace and amenity of rural life, outdoor activities, and quiet enjoyment of our surroundings.
- viii. Hastwell subdivision: Future residences are not acknowledged, nor indeed is Hastwell as a growing host community. The Application ignores the Hastwell subdivision, the impact on landowners planning to sell their blocks, and the fact that a significant section of the subdivision sits within 2km of the proposed windfarm.
- ix. Growing pool of Literature: The idea that people 'adapt and get used' to windfarms is increasingly being challenged, especially as they become more common.

**All these factors continue to undermine my ability to assess the full extent of/implications relating to effects and mitigations.**

## **1. Conclusions:**

Doing Right: If Meridian considers communities as they say they do, then their actions need to match their words. Meridian's approach to date has been contrary their own stated values of 'doing right', and inclusion. Meridian's actions do not reflect the developing pool of literature stating the need to give greater regard to social impact and for more detailed social impact analysis to be an integral part of any major project – and at an early stage.

Community Engagement: Early engagement and meaningful consultation with communities are necessary components, especially given the large number of renewable projects now in process. Poor consultation processes, the lack of detail and difficulties with accessing information means that we have not been able to properly assess effects and mitigations.

Our ability to fully engage and most importantly understand the implications of what might happen on our doorstep has if anything, been undermined.

We find ourselves having to defend our interests and our values in the foreign and unfamiliar territories of officialdom, and through an expensive difficult Environment Court process.

For the sake of our community, and for many others now encountering renewable power projects on their doorstep, serious thought needs to be given to the location and development of renewables and how these initiatives impact on affected communities.

It is my hope that Meridian will take on board its own advice to research their social impacts with the community and to better understand how they are perceived and the corresponding impacts their activities are having. Given our experience to date they have a long way to go.

As Meridian says in its own discourse, isn't it about people?

To requote Baines et al:

*".... Green' may be environmentally responsible, but it needs to be socially responsible as well..."*.

Repeating Meridian's Own Words:

*"Looking ahead, we're planning to research our social impacts with the community. By gathering data from a range of sources, we hope to understand better how we're perceived and the impacts our activities are having. That feedback will shape our future engagement programme" (p.107; 2023 Annual Report).*

**Meridian's process to date has not provided sufficient detail for me or my neighbours to be able to undertake a proper assessment of effects and mitigations. When building so close to established communities early engagement, good consultation, and a social impact report are essential. Therefore, given the current situation, having a resource consent granted will be a significant travesty of justice.**

**Signed,**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris Clarke', with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

**Chris Clarke**  
**Chairperson of the**  
**Hastwell Mount Munro Protection Society.**

## **Bibliography**

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