

## Wind farms compliance audit

This document outlines some of the frequently asked questions that have been received since the announcement of the NSW Government's wind farms compliance audit in February 2012.

### **WILL THE FULL SOUND SPECTRUM, INCLUDING INFRASOUND, BE MEASURED AS PART OF THE WIND FARMS COMPLIANCE AUDIT?**

The audit will include measurement and analysis of all noise within the audible sound spectrum, including "low frequency noise" even though this type of noise is not specifically covered by the conditions of consent of these wind farms.

Low frequency noise is also covered by the department's draft *NSW Planning Guidelines: Wind Farms* document (draft wind farm guidelines) which was recently exhibited for public comment.

"Infrasound" is below the normal limit of human hearing, typically with a frequency lower than 20 hertz. It is not covered in the consent conditions and is outside the scope of this particular audit.

Further work is, however, likely to be undertaken by the NSW Government on this issue.

### **WILL THE WIND FARM COMPLIANCE AUDITS INCLUDE MEASUREMENT OF SOUND AND VIBRATION INSIDE AND OUTSIDE HOMES?**

The audits will measure impacts from wind farm noise at a number of pre-determined monitoring sites close to existing residences. These sites have been chosen to enable the best possible analysis of the wind farm's compliance with its specific consent conditions.

The consent conditions for each wind farm being audited do not include reference to internal noise and vibration issues and, as such, these particular factors will not be measured as part of the audits.

### **WHAT SELECTION CRITERIA WERE USED TO CHOOSE THE INDEPENDENT NOISE CONSULTANT?**

An independent noise specialist was selected by a formal tendering process and has now been engaged to undertake the necessary noise measurements and analysis as part of the audits.

This tendering process has been undertaken in a manner that prioritises and ensures absolute probity.

Importantly, the successful tenderer has not previously carried out monitoring or assessment work on the three wind farms that are the subject of these audits as it is essential that auditors do not review their own work.

Nor has the company ever done any work for either of the wind farm operators involved in the audit – Infigen Energy and Origin Energy – on any other facilities.

The department required the successful tenderer to have the necessary expertise and experience in measuring and analysing noise measurements from wind turbines as this is critical to achieving credible findings.

The successful tenderer is Renzo Tonin and Associates Pty Ltd. This company has specialist noise monitoring and analysis expertise and has previously conducted wind farm noise monitoring for both community groups and wind farm operators.

### **WHAT PROCESSES WILL THE DEPARTMENT FOLLOW TO ENSURE THAT THE WORK IS GENUINELY CREDIBLE AND INDEPENDENT AND THEREFORE ABLE TO BE TRUSTED BY ALL PARTIES?**

The audits will be conducted in accordance with the minimum Australian and New Zealand conduct and

## Frequently Asked Questions

quality standards (ISO 14001:2003). This is the standard covering environmental auditing.

While this standard does not recommend peer review of audits, the department's technical specialist on noise will closely oversee the noise monitoring component.

The Environment Protection Authority, the state's environmental regulator, will also be involved in the audit as a formal observer, as will the relevant local council.

The department is confident that these measures will ensure credibility and independence of the audits and allow the community to have confidence in the findings.

### **WILL THE WIND FARM DEVELOPERS KNOW THAT THE AUDITS ARE TAKING PLACE AND WHEN THE MEASUREMENTS ARE BEING MADE?**

Consistent with good and established practice, the department has an obligation to ensure that all concerned parties are aware of the conduct of the audit. This means consulting with both the wind farm operators and neighbouring property owners.

Concerns expressed that some operators may see this as an opportunity to reduce operational capacity (and therefore associated noise impacts) are acknowledged by the department and will be discussed at length with the successful tenderer. Appropriate strategies will be adopted to ensure noise measurements are taken under normal wind farm and turbine operating conditions.

In order to ensure the most stringent analysis of compliance with consent conditions, the measurements will also be scheduled to take place at the times and under the conditions that typically produce worst case noise impacts from wind farms.

### **WILL AUDIT REPORTS BE AVAILABLE ON THE DEPARTMENT'S WEBSITE?**

Yes, the final wind farm auditing reports will be made publicly available on the department's website. Hard copies of the reports will also be available upon request.

### **IS NSW HEALTH INVOLVED IN THE AUDIT?**

The analysis of compliance with each wind farm's conditions of consent will be undertaken by the NSW Department of Planning and Infrastructure, in consultation with relevant independent consultants and other government agencies such as NSW Health and the Environment Protection Authority as appropriate.

However no specific auditing activities are required to be undertaken by NSW Health in order to ascertain compliance with the existing consent conditions.

The draft wind farm guidelines also cover a number of health-related issues and identify important roles for NSW Health.

### **IS THE AUDITOR GENERAL OR NSW AUDIT OFFICE INVOLVED IN THE AUDIT?**

The Audit Office of New South Wales is the independent auditor of the New South Wales public sector. It reports directly to the parliament on the NSW Government's financial statements and use of public money.

The Auditor General does not have a role in the conduct of these audits either as participant or as overseer.

### **WILL OBSERVER STATUS BE GRANTED TO COMMUNITY MEMBERS?**

The department is keen to involve residents in the audit process. It is doing this by inviting all residents within 4km of the wind farms being audited to complete a survey questionnaire on compliance-related matters. These residents will also have the opportunity to meet with the auditors if they wish to discuss any wind farm compliance-related issues.

The questionnaire is specifically designed to relate to the consent conditions for each relevant wind farm and will inform the audit process.

It also represents a new approach to including community members in a compliance audit of this kind.

While formal observer status will be limited to technical experts in government agencies – in particular the relevant local council and the Environment Protection Authority – the audit process has been established in such a way as to ensure every opportunity is given to ensure resident concerns are incorporated into the audit.

### **HAS THE DEPARTMENT EVER ATTENDED OR TAKEN MEASUREMENTS AT A SITE WHERE A COMPLAINT HAS BEEN MADE?**

Yes. The department's compliance unit has undertaken noise monitoring at Capital wind farm and has also reviewed the Capital wind farm operator's noise monitoring report. The department has not found instances of non-compliance through this work.

### **WHEN WILL THE DRAFT WIND FARM GUIDELINES BE FINALISED?**

The draft wind farm guidelines are currently being finalised based on the feedback received during the recent public exhibition period with the final document due to be released around the middle of this year.

The audits are expected to be completed around August.

### **FURTHER INFORMATION**

Department of Planning & Infrastructure website:  
[www.planning.nsw.gov.au/windfarmsaudit](http://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/windfarmsaudit)

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