



Report 08.622
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Committee Council
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Belmont Regional Park: Wind energy investigations

1. Purpose

To seek the Council's approval for a moratorium on any commercial scale wind energy development on Belmont Regional Park for a period of five years.

2. Significance of the decision

The matters for decision in this report **do not** trigger the significance policy of the Council or otherwise trigger section 76(3)(b) of the Local Government Act 2002.

3. Background

In 2003, Council approved a feasibility study for a wind farm development on the Belmont Regional Park (report 03.11) and later the same year funding was approved to allow investigations at other Council sites, namely Puketiro and Mount Climie (report 03.312).

Report 05.128 on these wind energy feasibility studies was received by the Council in May 2005. It indicated that investigations for both Puketiro and Mount Climie were complete but Belmont investigations had not been completed. Council resolved to consult with the public on the Puketiro site and decided not to proceed with wind farm development on the Mount Climie ridgeline site.

At about this time, the possibility of purchasing Waitangirua Farm (which now forms part of the Belmont Regional Park) was emerging. Wind farm investigations at Belmont and the development of the Management Plan were both put on hold while the farm purchase negotiations were in progress, apart from continuing to gather wind information. A final step in the purchase of the farm and registration of title is for the land to be reserved under the Reserves Act. This is the subject of report 08.686 before Council, which, if approved, will allow registration to be completed within the next few months.

The way is now open to reconsider wind energy development on the park.

4. Issues

A number of issues have arisen since Council first considered the Belmont wind farm proposal in 2003.

4.1 National wind farm developments

Wind farms are regarded by many in the electricity industry as part of the solution to a diversified generation mix, and an important contributor to the Government's target of 90% renewable energy generation by 2025.

A joint Ministry of Economic Development / Energy Efficiency and Conservation Authority study in 2005 suggested that wind could generate over 20% of NZ's annual electrical energy. This is likely to require up to 3,000 MW of wind generation, depending on what other types of generation are constructed.

Currently, operating wind turbines provide 322 MW of generating capacity and just over 2,000 MW of wind power projects have at least reached the consent application stage. It is possible that some of the projects reaching consent application stage will not proceed to completion, or may be completed with reduced capacity. The 2,000 MW figure does not include the proposed 360 MW Turitea wind farm near Palmerston North that Mighty River Power has recently applied for RMA "call in" by the Minister.

4.2 Local wind farm developments

When Greater Wellington first proposed using its land and land under its control for wind energy developments, the only wind farm that looked likely within the boundaries of the metropolitan cities was Meridian's West Wind development at Makara. Construction has now started on that 168 MW project.

This year Meridian made a consent application for a site in Ohariu Valley (Mill Creek) to generate about 71 MW. Mighty River Power is also considering a wind farm at Long Gully near the existing Brooklyn wind turbine.

It is known that other sites are being considered in the wider Wellington area in addition to the Council's own Puketiro site.

4.3 Renewable electricity National Policy Statement

A proposed National Policy Statement (NPS) for renewable electricity generation was released in August for comment. This proposed NPS has the objective of recognising the national significance of electricity generation from renewable sources to assist in achieving the Government's target of 90% renewable electricity generation by 2025. The proposed document includes

the requirement for local authority plan changes by March 2012 related to renewable electricity generation.

4.4 Cumulative effects

With the increase in wind energy projects in New Zealand, issues of cumulative effects on the landscape and visual aspects are starting to arise. Recently, the Environment Court requested a cumulative effects analysis of Meridian's proposed 630 MW Project Hayes in Otago with TrustPower's recently approved 200 MW Mahinerangi wind farm. At the nearest point, the two wind farms will be about 15km apart.

In the case of a potential wind farm at the Belmont Regional Park, wind turbines could be about 6km from wind turbines on Council land at Puketiro, or closer if the development includes wind turbines on private land south of Puketiro.

While the potential wind farms at Puketiro and Belmont would both be smaller than the two Otago wind farms, they would be nearer to each other. Visual simulations and other analysis can produce an appropriate appreciation of the visual impact and cumulative effects of these developments, however having one wind farm in place before another is consented would provide a more tangible way for the community to gauge any cumulative effects.

Porirua City Council commented in 2005 on possible cumulative effects within Porirua City as part of their submission on the Puketiro wind farm development, and particular reference was made to Belmont. In 2007, Porirua City instigated proposed District Plan Change 7 to deal with wind farms. This proposed plan change includes an amendment to Rule D4.1.4(vii)(1), which requires Council to have specific regard to "Cumulative effects, including a consideration of visual saturation". The plan change process has not yet been completed.

4.5 Land ownership and legal issues

The land comprising the Belmont Regional Park where wind turbines may be positioned is owned by the Department of Conservation (DoC), Hutt City Council and Greater Wellington. Preliminary discussions on wind turbines were held some time ago with the two other landowners, but no agreements have been put in place.

Legal advice received last year cautioned about placing wind turbines on land that has reserve status under the Reserves Act. Discussions with DoC though suggest a different point of view. In their view, a wind farm has to be assessed against the purposes of the reserve and the impacts on these purposes. DoC has indicated that they will process any application accompanied by a comprehensive assessment.

5. Discussion

A number of changes have occurred since a Belmont wind farm was first raised about five years ago. The potential generating capacity of wind farms either under development or proposed for the Wellington area has increased; the Government has released policies on renewable electricity generation; and concern over cumulative effects and visual impact has arisen.

The added complexity of multiple landowners at Belmont; legal issues that remain uncertain; and concern over cumulative effects, would make advancing the site to a stage where developers could be invited to submit proposals quite challenging at this point in time. However, there remains the continued desire of the Council to create a more sustainable region.

Taking these factors into consideration, it is suggested that the Council should not abandon the Belmont Regional Park for a potential wind farm, but put a moratorium on any wind farm development on the park.

A period of five years for such a moratorium is believed to be appropriate, since during that period wind farms in the Wellington area that are currently proposed or under development should have been completed, and many of the issues identified in this report are expected to have been resolved.

Wind monitoring at Belmont has been ongoing for a few years and is a valuable source of information for both potential site development, and research and investigations on the wind resource by others. Wind monitoring would continue and no new wind structures are required.

6. Other wind farm sites

There are other possible wind farm sites on Council land, including the Stoney Creek site in the Wairarapa, which is under contract for investigation. As each site has different issues, a moratorium at Belmont would not affect other possible sites.

7. Belmont Regional Park Management Plan

Should the Council approve a five-year moratorium on wind farm development at Belmont, then this would be included in the next draft of the Belmont Regional Park Management Plan. The draft plan would be considered by the Parks, Forests and Utilities Committee before it is released for consultation.

8. Communications

A media release should be issued advising that the Belmont Regional Park Management Plan process is continuing and there will be a five-year moratorium on any wind farm development on the park.

9. Recommendations

That the Council:

1. **Receives** the report.
2. **Approves** a moratorium on any wind farm development on the Belmont Regional Park until 1 October 2013.
3. **Notes** that wind information measurements will continue at Belmont during the moratorium period.
4. **Approves** continuing with the Belmont Regional Park Management Plan with inclusion of the moratorium on wind farm development.

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