What is the issue? – The establishment of a wind farm across a 30 km wide site in the mid-north of South Australia, a region predominantly based on cereal crops and other primary industries.

What is the conflict? – The establishment of wind farms in broad-acre cropping districts has been divisive in some parts of Australia. One key concern of stakeholders has been the potential impact of wind turbines on the normal activities of adjoining farms, especially aerial agriculture operations intended to control pests and diseases.

What was the resolution? – Trustpower1 worked closely with the potentially affected landowners (both on and adjacent to the proposed site) and local community to ensure that the impacts of the construction of the turbines were kept to a minimum, the community and relevant stakeholders were kept well informed and the community were supported and there were social, economical and environmental benefits from the development.

Snowtown is a town located in the Mid North of South Australia, 145 kilometres north of Adelaide. The local Snowtown economy is predominantly based on cereal crops and other primary industries such as wool growing, livestock production and salt mining at the nearby Lake Bumbunga saltworks. Snowtown is also a service centre for the local area, providing various essential services for the district as well as for motorists travelling on the Augusta Highway (the section of Highway 1) past the town.

In 2002, Tilt Renewables started investigating a site five kilometres west of Snowtown on the Barunga and Hummocks Ranges (a number of low-lying ridgelines running north-south) for a proposed wind farm.

Following extensive consultation with the community (and after obtaining the necessary approvals from the State Government and the Wakefield Regional Council), construction commenced on the first stage of the wind farm in 2006.

Stage 1 of the Snowtown Wind Farm was jointly developed by Wind Prospect and Tilt Renewables and was commissioned in September 2008 with 47 Suzlon 2.1MW turbines. Final approvals for Stage 2 of the Snowtown Wind Farm were secured in August 2012 to install a further 90 Siemens 3.0 MW turbines with an output of up to 270MW, which were installed in June 2014. Further information on the Snowtown Wind Farm can be viewed at Tilt Renewables’ website (http://tiltrenewables.com/assets-1/).

1 On 31 October 2016, Trustpower Limited separated into two new listed companies – Trustpower Ltd and Tilt Renewables. Tilt Renewables now holds all Trustpower’s Australian and New Zealand wind generation assets and its wind and solar development projects; for the purposes of this case study, the company will be referred to as ‘Tilt Renewables’.)
Multiple uses

Snowtown Wind Farms 1 and 2, which run independently of each other, dot the Barunga and Hummocks Ranges along for almost 30 kilometres and are located on the properties of 24 landowners. The landowners with turbines on their land are able to continue farming as normal and the wind farm operator works extensively with the landowners to ensure wind farm activities are adequately managed to minimise or remove any potential impacts.

Project benefits

The combined Snowtown Wind Farm project required a total investment of $A660 million and with the completion of Snowtown Wind Farm 2, the total output was increased to 370MW, making it the biggest single wind farm in South Australia and second largest in Australia. It produces a total combined average annual output of approximately 1,232GWh (enough to power 200,000 South Australian homes) and equivalent to 10 per cent of South Australia’s total electricity consumption, confirming South Australia’s commitment to being a leader in the efficient use of renewable energy.

During the construction of Stage 2, state and local contractors and consultants benefited from an estimated local spend of $85 million for goods, services and companies. More than $2 million is injected annually directly into the local community through local services, direct landholder payments, staff payments and the community fund.

Origin Energy purchases 100% of the electricity generated by Snowtown Wind Farm 2, under a 15-year power purchase agreement. It also purchases 89% of the electricity produced by the Snowtown Wind Farm 1.

Community involvement and engagement

The community has been supportive of the wind farm since the beginning of the proposal. However, the relationships Tilt Renewables fostered with landowners and local community groups was fundamental to the project’s success.

Extensive consultation with both the general public and other stakeholders commenced in early 2003. The consultation targeted all interested and potentially affected parties. Information on the proposed development was provided to all stakeholders and people were invited to provide any comment, information or guidance in the course of the project development. Stakeholders included the local community, landowners and
farmers, government agencies and authorities, councils, agricultural bodies and groups, business groups, regional development boards and progress associations, electricity companies, environmental and heritage groups, Aboriginal groups, aviation authorities, emergency services and the media.

Engagement involved:

- **Holding landowner meetings**, (approximately 40 of the landowners involved with the proposed wind farm attended), and subsequent dedicated direct consultations. The meeting served to answer many common questions regarding the wind farm project and allow discussion of issues relating specifically to project landowners.

- **Face-to-face contact** with many neighbouring property owners within approximately 3 km of the wind farm site. The residents were provided with information on key points of the wind farm proposal, Issue #1 of the Wind Farm newsletter and contact details for any further information if requested. In the event of the home owner being absent, a package containing the relevant information was provided at the main door.

- **Meetings with the staff of the Wakefield Regional Council.** Consultation with the Wakefield Regional Council continued throughout the development process.

- **Newsletters** were distributed and placed at public places within the local community including shops and hotels in the townships of Lochiel, Snowtown, Redhill, Bute and Balaklava.

- **Advertisements in local and regional newspapers** (Snowtown View, Plains Producer, Yorke Peninsula Country Times and Northern Argus), as well as on the regional GTS/BKN television station. A press release was issued to both regional and Adelaide based radio, TV and print media contacts. In addition, wind farm exhibition flyers were posted to local businesses for display in Lochiel, Snowtown, Redhill, Bute and Balaklava.

- **A public information day for the proposed Wind Farm at the Soldiers Memorial Hall in Snowtown.** Residents of the Mid-North region were advised of the exhibition by way of advertisement within the two weeks leading up to the exhibition. The public information day displayed provisional details of the proposed Wind Farm, including its likely appearance, illustrated by means of plans and photomontages and video footage of wind turbines under construction in Germany, and an operating wind farm in Queensland. Copies of the first and second issues of the Wind Farm Newsletter were made available.
Correspondence continued during the later project planning stages prior to construction and throughout the life of the project. Tilt Renewables ensured there was always early and honest discussions with relevant landowners and community groups and was willing to reach compromises to maintain good relationships with the community. As a result, only two submissions under the Development Act were received for Stage 1 and one of the key issues (access for hang gliders) was resolved through agreement. No objections were submitted for the Stage 2 amendment application.

Tilt Renewables’ long established commitment to both Snowtown and the wider community through the Lend a Hand Foundation community fund (https://www.trustpower.co.nz/getting-to-know-us/community-involvement/lend-a-hand-foundation) supplies goods to the local school and kindergarten, upgrades community facilities and provides support for local community projects, charities, schools and individuals when they need it most. This initiative annually contributes $45,000 to the Foundation alone.

Other local community support initiatives supported by Tilt Renewables includes the sponsorship of the concrete for the Snowtown skate park (co-sponsored by Catcon, the civil contractors for stage 2) and contributing towards the installation of underground irrigation for Snowtown Primary School’s school oval.

Tilt Renewables also supported production of an award-winning training video in preserving Aboriginal heritage, a practical step-by-step visual guide covering the whole process, from identifying who to talk to, negotiating agreements, site surveys, heritage monitoring and protection.

Local club and community sponsorships, native vegetation planting and cultural heritage initiatives, as well as coordination with the County Fire Service has all enabled the company to gain a genuine understanding of the local community and how it can work alongside them.

The Native Grassland Significant Environmental Benefit vegetation offset program of 104 hectares resulted in improved native grasslands biodiversity, improved land productivity, habitat protection for the local pygmy blue tongue lizard population and a native tree and shrub planting program.
Employment

The development of the wind farm has provided an economic boost to the regional economy. At the peak of construction, 240 contracted staff were on the site, with an average of 160 full-time employees working on the project. Following the completion of Stage 2, 15 permanent full-time employees were employed to maintain the wind farm. This is in addition to the six full-time employees already employed looking after the Snowtown Wind Farm 1.

Landowners

The 137 turbines in Snowtown Wind Farm 1 and 2 are hosted on the properties of 24 landowners over the Barunga and Hummocks Ranges. Landowners are paid a royalty per turbine. Although some landowners acknowledged that their farming activities were affected during construction of the access tracks and turbine pads (for approximately 18 months), the company engaged continuously with the landowners to ensure that the impacts were kept to a minimum. Some landowners deliberately reduced their stock numbers during construction to reduce these impacts but once the project had been completed, there has been very little indication or situation where the operations of the wind farm impacts on the farming enterprise.

The official opening of the Snowtown Wind Farm (photos courtesy of Tilt Renewables and Siemens)
How the *South Australian Multiple Land Use Framework’s* guiding principles apply to this case study

- **Accountability** – Tilt Renewables engaged early and continuously with all stakeholders and landowners in and near the windfarm footprint to ensure that any impacts during the construction stage and ongoing operations were kept to a minimum.

- **Best use of assets** – Landowners are able to continue farming as normal and the wind farm operator works extensively with the landowners to ensure wind farm activities are adequately managed to minimise or remove any potential impacts. Negotiations with the local hang gliding club on suitable alternative launch areas enabled the club to continue using the ranges after construction.

- **Co-existence** – Aboriginal groups were included in on-site surveys and Tilt Renewables agreed to exclude areas of high heritage values from development early on in the project which cemented a strong and collaborative relationship throughout the project. Local club and community sponsorships, native vegetation planting and cultural heritage initiatives, as well as coordination with the County Fire Service enabled Tilt Renewables to gain a genuine understanding of the local community and how it can work alongside them.

- **Efficient processes** – Tilt Renewables engaged early with all stakeholders and landowners, provided information about the project, considered potential impacts, made relevant amendments to the proposal to alleviate these impacts and maintained regular communications throughout the project and ongoing operations. This ensured everyone was aware of the proposal and had the opportunity to provide input into the project as it progressed, ensuring that not only did the project have community support but it met its proposed delivery timelines.

- **Environmental sustainability** – Snowtown Wind Farms 1 and 2 produces a total combined average annual output of approximately 1,232GWh (enough to power 200,000 South Australian homes) and equivalent to 10 per cent of South Australia’s total electricity consumption, confirming South Australia’s commitment to being the nation’s leader when it comes to providing efficient renewable wind energy programs.

- **Equity** – Tilt Renewables ensured there was always early and honest discussions with relevant landowners and community groups and was willing to reach compromises to maintain good relationships with the community, such as avoiding areas of high heritage values and reducing access during certain times of the year to reduce impacts to landowners.

- **Participation of all stakeholders and Shared commitment** – Stakeholders included local affected landowners, local community and businesses, the Snowtown Lions Club, the Wakefield Regional Council and State government authorities. Stakeholders were invited to have their say on the proposal and representatives of Tilt Renewables participated in community events to allow as many people to have their say as possible. As a result of ongoing participation, the Snowtown community and Tilt Renewables have developed a shared commitment to the continued operation of the project and the creation of economic and social benefits to the region.
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