



Council hears residents' pleas Newfield wind farm rejected

By **ALEX JOHNSON**

PLANS for a 300-hectare wind farm within sight of the Great Ocean Road near Port Campbell have been rejected.

All but one Corangamite Shire councillor rejected the application by Acciona Energy at yesterday's meeting in Camperdown.

The meeting heard impassioned pleas from landholders and councillors opposed to the 15-turbine development.

Acciona Energy representative Stephanie Rice told the chamber before the vote that the project would offset more than 70,000 tonnes of greenhouse gases and had "significant" local support.

A number of nearby residents expressed vehement opposition.

The company is expected to appeal against the decision at the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal.

Ms Rice described the decision as "disappointing" and referred *The Standard* to a spokesperson who was unavailable for comment last night.

In voting against the proposal Cr Steve Cumming said the project, which would erect turbines within three kilometres of 63 homes, would change Newfield residents' way of life.

"I don't believe there is wide support in our community for a site-specific wind farm at Newfield," Cr Cumming said.

Cr Matt Makin said the issue was not a debate about the merits of wind energy but about the need for greater community consultation.

He identified the issue of visual impact, shadow flicker and Acciona's "seriously flawed" social impact assessment which showed 61 per cent of landholders supported the project.

Cr Makin said it was "preposterous" to claim 61 per cent supported the project when about 90 per cent of those surveyed said they knew little about it.

He expressed concern approving the Newfield wind farm could set a precedent in the shire.

"I for one do not want every ridge line between Newfield and Cobden to be overcome by wind

turbines," he said. He added that the construction of two gas plants in the area had caused enough disruption to the Newfield environment.

"I actually think the residents of that area are already doing their bit to secure the energy needs of this state."

Mayor Ruth Gstrein welcomed the decision, saying the view along the Great Ocean Road was one "we should try to preserve at all costs".

Cr Jim O'Brien was the only councillor to support the proposal because, he said, he had not attended two "vital meetings" and therefore felt unable to make an informed decision.

Philip Van Rijthoven, who owns two houses within 650 metres of the proposed turbines, said nearby landholders were "relieved" by the council's decision.

He acknowledged Acciona Energy would probably take its application to VCAT.

"But they're on thin ice as far as I can see," Mr Van Rijthoven said.