Australian Dairy Farmers Limited
Level 3, HWT Building
40 City Road
SOUTHBANK VIC 3006
Tel: +61 3 8621 4200
Fax: +61 3 8621 4280
www.australiandairyfarmers.com.au
ABN 76 060 549 653

31 January 2026

To:
The Hon. Minister for Planning
C/Department of Transport and Planning,
GPO Box 2392,
Melbourne VIC 3001.

Cc.
The Hon. Minister for Energy and Resources
The Hon. Minister for Agriculture
Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal
Elingamite, Ecklin, Glenfyne Community Incorporated

Planning Permit: PA2503700 | EPBC Ref: 2024/10068

Re: Mumblin Wind Farm – Agricultural Compatibility, Aerial Operations and Neighbouring Land Use Impacts

Dear Minister and other as addressed,

Australian Dairy Farmers (ADF) makes this submission to raise serious concerns regarding the proposed Mumblin Wind Farm and its interaction with intensive dairy farming operations in south-west Victoria.

Victoria's dairy regions are nationally significant food-producing landscapes and major regional employers. Decisions that constrain lawful farm operations in these areas have implications not only for individual farm businesses, but for regional employment, food supply and economic resilience.

While ADF supports the transition to renewable energy, wind farm siting and approvals must not impose unreasonable constraints on established agricultural land use or essential farm operations undertaken by non-host landholders.

Agricultural compatibility and cumulative impacts

The Mumblin Wind Farm proposal is located within a high-productivity dairy region characterised by relatively small landholdings, intensive pasture management and close proximity between farms. Unlike wind projects in sparsely populated areas, the cumulative impact of turbine infrastructure in this setting is materially higher.

ADF has direct experience with comparable matters currently including Garvoc-related cases. These matters demonstrate that wind farm buffer controls and third-party objection rights can materially interfere with ordinary and lawful farm development and operations, even where farmers are not host landholders.

The Mumblin proposal presents similar risks, including constraints on farm layout, future investment uncertainty and the ability of dairy businesses to operate efficiently over the long term.

Explicit VCAT decision tests

(a) Reasonableness of impacts on non-host landholders

Relevant VCAT test: whether impacts on third parties are reasonable, proportionate and acceptable in a planning context.

- The proposal imposes ongoing operational constraints on non-host dairy landholders who derive no benefit from the project.
- These constraints arise solely from proximity to turbine infrastructure, not consent or participation.
- Impacts include reduced operational flexibility, increased safety buffers, altered farm layouts, disrupted daily operations and loss of certainty for long-term business and succession planning.

VCAT relevance:
VCAT has consistently distinguished between impacts voluntarily assumed by host landholders and those imposed on neighbours. Where constraints materially interfere with lawful land use on neighbouring land, the Tribunal has treated those impacts as requiring strong justification and reliable mitigation. In this case, such justification has not been demonstrated.

The proposal exacerbates existing constraints on farm worker housing in the surrounding area. Dairy farming is labour-intensive, and access to on-farm or nearby worker accommodation is essential to attract and retain staff.

Wind farm proximity and associated planning controls can remove permit-exempt pathways for compliant farm housing or introduce third-party objection rights, even where housing is directly related to ongoing agricultural use. In practical terms, this limits farmers' ability to house workers and directly undermines farm viability.

(b) Off-site impacts and exclusion zones extending beyond site boundaries

Relevant VCAT test: whether off-site impacts are properly identified, assessed and managed.

- Turbine malfunction, blade failure and maintenance activities give rise to exclusion zones that may extend several hundred metres from the turbine base.
- Given the proximity of turbines to property boundaries, these exclusion zones are likely to extend beyond the project site onto neighbouring farmland.
- Off-site exclusion zones may prevent grazing, fodder harvesting, silage making, machinery operation and access to paddocks or laneways during critical periods.

VCAT relevance:
VCAT requires off-site impacts to be assessed with the same rigour as on-site impacts. The planning material does not adequately assess the likelihood, duration or operational consequences of exclusion zones extending onto neighbouring land, nor how such impacts would be managed or compensated. This represents a material evidentiary gap.

(c) Impacts on grazing, fodder production and routine farm movements

Relevant VCAT test: whether a proposal unreasonably interferes with lawful agricultural operations.

- Dairy farming relies on structured daily and seasonal activities, including rotational grazing, silage production and regular heavy-vehicle access.
- Turbine proximity and associated safety restrictions fragment paddock layouts and disrupt efficient livestock and machinery movements.
- Even short-term interruptions during critical periods (such as calving or silage harvest) can have disproportionate productivity and animal welfare impacts.

VCAT relevance:
Where a proposal disrupts core agricultural operations rather than ancillary or discretionary activities, VCAT has treated such impacts as significant. These operational effects go beyond amenity and directly affect farm viability.

Construction of the proposed wind farm will also require sustained use of heavy vehicles and oversized machinery on local rural roads that are already degraded and not designed for such loads.

Damage to road surfaces, shoulders and drainage during construction will restrict access for farm vehicles and pose a direct risk to milk tanker movements, with immediate consequences for animal welfare, milk quality and processor logistics.

(d) Biosecurity risks associated with third-party land access

Relevant VCAT test: whether mitigation measures avoid transferring risk to third parties.

- Environmental monitoring requirements, including bird and bat surveys, may require third-party access to land beyond turbine lease areas.
- Repeated or uncontrolled access to active dairy farms creates biosecurity risks, including disease transmission, weed spread and contamination of feed or effluent systems.
- These risks are borne by landholders who are not project participants and have limited ability to control or manage access.

VCAT relevance:
VCAT has placed weight on whether mitigation measures shift operational or safety risk onto third parties. Where compliance with permit conditions requires off-site access that exposes

neighbouring landholders to unmanaged biosecurity risk, this indicates incompatibility with surrounding land use.

(e) Mitigation certainty and enforceability

Relevant VCAT test: whether proposed mitigation is certain, enforceable and workable in real-world conditions.

- The proposal relies on discretionary measures such as turbine shutdowns to mitigate aviation and operational impacts.
- There are no clear, enforceable mechanisms governing notification timeframes, shutdown verification, compensation for disrupted farm operations or dispute resolution.
- Agricultural operations depend on narrow and unpredictable weather windows, making advance shutdown coordination impractical.

VCAT relevance

VCAT has consistently placed limited weight on mitigation measures that rely on discretionary actions, future agreements or operational coordination outside the control of affected third parties. Where mitigation lacks enforceable obligations and practical workability, residual impacts are treated as effectively unmitigated.

Additional Issues

Aerial application as an essential farm operation

A critical and currently under-addressed issue is the impact of the proposal on aerial agricultural operations, which are essential to dairy farming in this region.

The surrounding landscape is characterised by high rainfall and shallow water tables (approximately 10 metres), meaning that ground-based spraying and fertiliser spreading is frequently impractical or unsafe. As a result, dairy farms in this area rely on aerial application for:

- fertiliser spreading,
- pasture and crop spraying, and
- emergency response activities, including firefighting.

Evidence from Otway Helicopters, an agricultural helicopter operator with over 30 years' experience in the region, confirms that aerial application is not discretionary in this area. Any proposal that materially constrains aerial access therefore constrains normal and necessary dairy farm operations.

While proponents often suggest drone spraying as an alternative near wind turbines, this does not resolve the operational impact. Turbine-induced turbulence materially reduces spray accuracy and distribution efficiency for drones, compromising agronomic outcomes and increasing costs through repeat applications.

Groundwater and bore water impacts

A further critical issue is the potential impact of turbine construction and associated ground works on groundwater systems relied upon by dairy farms in the surrounding area. Dairy operations in this region depend on secure and continuous access to bore water for stock, milking sheds, pasture and dairy hygiene.

The project involves deep excavation, piling and ongoing vibration in areas with known shallow water tables. For all other forms of major ground disturbance in this region, detailed hydrogeological assessments, baseline monitoring and enforceable management plans are required. ADF submits that the same level of scrutiny must apply here.

Inadequate assessment of impacts on aquifers, groundwater flows and bore integrity creates an unacceptable risk. Any interference with bore access or water quality would have immediate operational consequences and, in some cases, would render dairy farming unviable.

Aviation safety and turbine-related risk

Independent guidance from the Aerial Application Association of Australia (AAAA), the national peak body for aerial application operators, identifies wind turbines as a significant aviation hazard for low-level agricultural and emergency aircraft.

Key issues include:

- collision risk for aircraft routinely operating below 500 feet above ground level;
- blade-rotation distraction and unpredictable turbulence;
- additional hazards created by associated infrastructure such as powerlines, meteorological towers and transformer yards; and
- constraints on emergency aircraft, which may be required to operate at any time, including in reduced visibility.

AAAA best practice guidance states that aerial application within a wind farm should only occur when turbine blades are locked in the “rabbit-ears” position. This requirement reflects the recognised risk created by rotating blades.

However, turbines typically begin rotating at wind speeds of around 11 km/h, and sometimes lower. Agricultural spraying commonly occurs between 3 km/h and 20 km/h. There is therefore a direct and unavoidable overlap between safe spraying conditions and turbine operation.

Inadequacy of turbine shutdown mitigation

Proponents often suggest turbine shutdowns as mitigation. Evidence from Otway Helicopters indicates that this approach is not operationally workable in practice.

In particular:

- turbine shutdowns require significant advance notice (often up to a week);
- spraying operations depend on narrow and unpredictable weather windows;
- shutdown coordination, verification and enforcement mechanisms are unclear; and
- the cost and risk burden is transferred to farmers and aviation contractors.

In practice, turbines would operate as de facto no-fly zones, rendering aerial application commercially and operationally unviable over affected farms. A mitigation measure that cannot be relied upon in real-world operating conditions should not be given significant weight in a planning assessment.

These impacts are ongoing and borne by neighbouring dairy businesses that do not benefit from the project.

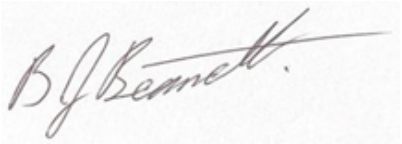
The Mumblin Wind Farm proposal introduces material and foreseeable conflicts with intensive dairy farming, particularly through its impact on essential aerial agricultural operations and aviation safety.

ADF submits that:

- aerial application constraints have not been adequately assessed or mitigated;
- reliance on turbine shutdowns is not practical or enforceable;
- the proposal would impose unreasonable operational constraints on non-host landholders; and
- these impacts are incompatible with the continued efficient operation of dairy farms in this location.

Unless the proposal is substantially redesigned with materially increased setbacks and enforceable aviation protections, ADF submits that approval would be inconsistent with sound agricultural land-use planning.

Yours sincerely,



Ben Bennett
President - Australian Dairy Farmers
Chair – Australian Dairy Industry Council

CC:
Elingamite, Ecklin, Glenfyne Community Incorporated
stopmumblinwindfarm@gmail.com