

Opinions on the Blueskin Wind Project

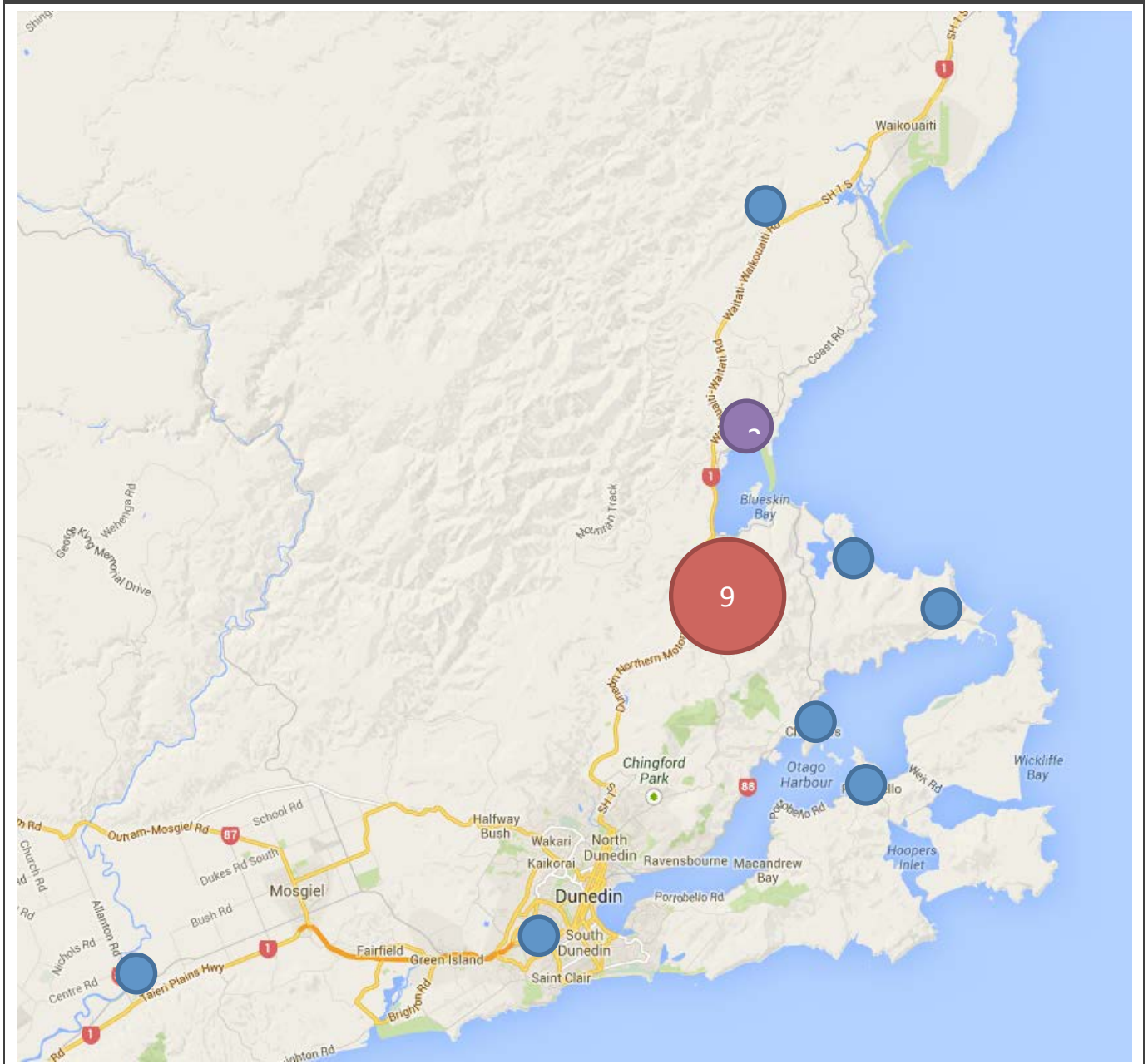
Quotes from householders

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Introduction

In October, 2013, a visiting researcher at the Centre for Sustainability at the University of Otago (CSAFE) conducted 18 interviews, most of which were with residents of the settlements around Blueskin Bay (Figure 1).

Figure 1 – A map of the Dunedin region, showing the location of interviewees' houses. Numbers in the circles represent the number of interviewees in particular settlements



Participants in the interviews were recruited from the Blueskin Resilient Communities Trust (BRCT) 'solar' contact list – a list collated of people who were interested in finding out about solar photovoltaic technology developments in the area.

All interviewees were not only on this contact list, but also:

- Provided an email address
- Were not involved in a previous piece of research by CSAFE researchers
- Were willing and able to participate in an interview in mid-October, 2013

The purpose of the interviews was primarily to investigate why interviewees were interested in solar PV technology. After an initial discussion with the BRCT Project Manager, Scott Willis, additional questions were added to the interview 'topic guide'. The first asked if interviewees were aware of the Porteous Hill wind turbine development. The follow up question aimed to capture their opinions of this project.

Nearly all interviewees were asked these questions – some were not due to low knowledge of activities in the local area, or due to lack of time. Thirteen responses to the questions (and additional quotes concerning the wind development) are recorded below for the benefit of Scott Willis at BRCT.

Quotes

A:

I: And are you aware of the potential wind development on Porteous Hill?

M: [Nods]

I: OK and what's your opinion on that project?

M: If it's feasible I think it's a great thing. I definitely see it as a step in the right direction. I've been to some talks in wind and you do have to be careful as to where they are located. Things along coastlines can be delicate areas for birds and things like that. So there are a lot of considerations with wind, and a lot more maintenance with wind too.

B:

M: Yes, I get the regular emails about it. I think it's a good idea. I don't know about the location. I don't know if they have a good location to do it. They might actually be better looking at putting multiple small turbines in, to produce their own grid system. One big turbine sitting up here somewhere, and you've got to have lots of cables going everywhere – big cables – getting it from here to here. If that has a failure, whatever it is, they'll still be tied back to the main grid. Whereas if they had multiple small systems they can all link together.

C:

I: Are you aware of the potential wind development on the hill in Waitati?

F: Yeh.

I: And what are your views on that, do you think it'll be a successful project?

F: Yeh, I think so. It seems to be a bit of a debate about how it's going to be run. Like, does it come directly down here, or does it come via a power company? That's going to put a lot of people off.

I: If it's via the energy company?

F: Yeh. And they take their cut. I don't think that's going to be very popular. It sounds like that might be the way it goes.

I: How would you like to see it run?

F: I'd like to go back to the old power board days.

I: How would that work?

F: We had our own little power board here, in this surrounding area. It was like a little council. And they did everything, they fixed the lines, and even had some of their own power stations, like the Waipouri power station. Then the government changed it, and our council had to sell it because they weren't allowed to generate their own power. That's a bit wrong. So I don't know what's going to happen up there. I think that's why they had to go via a company.

D:

F: I think that's a great idea. To bring in power for the wider community, I think it's pretty innovative.

....

I: But you're generally supportive of that project?

F: Yes. I'm not deeply involved in it, but I've been reading a little bit about it.

I: What kind of benefits do you think that project might have?

F: I think it hooks people in to what's capable, and what we can do as a small community to reduce our use of mainstream energy. And perhaps a bit more reduction on having to use massive dams, and hydro power, and nuclear, and whatever they're suggesting!

E:

I: ... are you aware of the potential wind turbine development in Blueskin Bay?

M: Yes.

I: What are your views on that project?

M: I don't know much about it. I know Scott and I know a couple of people working on it. I don't think they'll have enough wind up there to make it economically viable. I'm happy to be proven wrong. Certainly, in my experience, if you're under New Zealand conditions, in the New Zealand market scenario, you're going to have to produce wind energy that competes with the grid supplied power. And that has to be ultimately what you are looking against. Then you've got to have a very good windy site. Although it's close to the sea, which provides a reasonable amount of wind at all times, you've got to get up to an average of 10m/s, which is pretty windy. So I have my doubts as to whether it will be viable from that point of view. However, you've got a specialist group there who are environmentally activated, rather than commercially activated, and on that basis they could dig up enough finance from grants and other sources to make something happen.

F:

F: It's a cool project. I'm interested in what will happen. And I'm very pleased that it's been initiated by the community. And I'm just keen to see it go ahead.

...

F: I don't think I have decided [solar PV is] a bad idea. But I'm sort of at a waiting phase where I don't actually have masses of money to invest in it right now, because I bought a second house. And I think I'm sort of interested in seeing what happens in Waitati with the wind turbine concept. Because if that's going to generate power then I think that's a better option than using photovoltaics, because photovoltaics require some earth resources to make the cells in the first place, right? That age old problem of: what do you use in resource terms to get what back? So I don't see it as something to immediately jump into when there are alternative energy schemes being set up in the vicinity I guess. They haven't yet come into fruition but that doesn't mean that they won't soon. And I'm interested to hold fire and see what happens with that.

G:

I: What about the potential wind development here on the hill in Blueskin? Is that something you're aware of?

M: The hill straight across there?

I: OK, so is it going to be a big part of your view then?

M: Look... I love wind turbines! I don't have a problem with it, and I think New Zealanders are compulsive whingers. I lived within a half kilometre of large turbines in [previous country of residence] and you don't hear them, and you don't know they're there, and I think they're beautiful, going round and round. So, all these people talking about wind farms ruining their view, I think they're just hypocrites, really. It doesn't worry me at all.

I: So, in terms of the project and the logistics of it, are you supportive of what they're trying to do?

M: I am. I'm waiting to hear more details about how they're going to manage the power, and how individuals can have a say, some control, and get some benefits from it. I'm a bit nervous about the fact that it's going to be hijacked by a large organisation, who are then going to dictate dramatically how that power is going to be used and how much they're going to pay for it. So I have some concerns about that.

H:

M: It's a great idea.

F: I think it's really cool but I can't see... I think it'll just be local people generating power for the grid.

I: As technology gets a bit better with batteries or setting up your own community power system, I think that will happen.

F: Because they'll just be using the grid as a battery. I don't know why they've barked up that tree quite so enthusiastically but it is

cool and I think it would be great if it works. Are they going to get us all to buy shares in it or something?

I: Possibly, I don't know.

F: Well that would be alright. But that's just like a wee business model because they started out trying to be really community based but I think they ended up going with the business model.

I:

F: I think it's a good idea. I think it's also something that will help feed the grid. And anything that's sustainable. I think it's good diversifying, having different options available. If you don't have wind, you might have sun, or the other way around.

M: The only pity with wind is, it sort of becomes an old technology, and it also requires quite a bit of maintenance. Essentially you have moving parts. If you have moving parts you have to maintain them. A solar panel, basically, you have to clean the glass in front of it and that's the end of it.

J:

F: I've decided that the wind power is not suitable and I wish they'd [BRCT] put a lot more concentration on solar power to start with. The wind power is going to be far too expensive and as the whole basis of buyback is completely diminishing, it doesn't seem to me to be a plus.

I: So this is the potential wind development on Porteous Hill?

F: Yes. I was very much in favour of it to start with. But as it's gone by I've become less and less excited about it. The idea was that perhaps we could sell back the power but what we would be paid for it is getting less all the time. And that will continue until think at one stage there will be no buyback. It wouldn't surprise me at all. Perhaps I am being a bit of a pessimist but it seems to be the way that's it's going.

...

F: In this area, I don't know who else has done it. I know a lot of us have investigated it seriously. And I think probably we're on hold. I know at least two others of my friends who live in this area have decided that they would prefer solar power to wind power. Having investigated it and looked at what's happening with it. My own feeling is that project probably has grown to be too big for the community to sustain financially.

I: The solar one or the wind one?

F: The wind one. I mean I don't want to damn it, I think it's great – the work and research that has gone into it. Our population here is a bit small I think. And also this whole business of producing it and selling it. And coming back to the community through power discount, I don't think that is going to work as well as it would have when the project was first set up because the power boards have cut back on what they're paying per unit. But where does all

this information come from? I read the articles when they were printed I suppose. Some of them stick in my head, some don't.

K:

F: ... we've got a project that you probably know about with wind turbines, just north of Warrington here on Porteous Hill. And I'm really very interested and keen on that idea. Particularly on the initial stages when it seemed possible that that wind power could be put into the Waitati substation. And now that's not going to be possible, and it's not quite such a direct impact benefit. But I'm still very happy that there's going to be wind power here, for sure.

I: Do you see any other benefits then, if it's not going to go into the substation? What benefits will there be?

F: The benefits will be that it will be quite a money making venture. We'll have to set up some kind of company for that, and it will generate quite a lot of money. So it will go into the national grid, and there will be income from it. And it will be that local initiatives can apply to the trust for funding. So we can put it back into the community. We're not going to get cheaper power bills unfortunately, from having the turbines there, so there is a bit of disappointment around that.

I: But there'll be money for other kinds of initiatives?

F: That's right.

L:

I: And I know you're not a resident in Blueskin but you may have heard about their plans to build a wind turbine on one of the hills.

M: Yes.

I: What are your views on that project?

M: Wind turbines are good. But you're only going to get power while the wind is blowing. If you can feed that back into the national grid it's good. But I'm not keen on batteries because batteries only have a five to eight year life and you're up for a couple of thousand dollars to replace your batteries. And they are a maintenance thing. Unless people are fully equipped with the knowledge they won't be able to maintain them properly. So it's not something that the general public could use.

M:

I: And do you know about the potential wind turbine development in Blueskin?

M: Yes.

I: What are your views on that project?

M: It's a pity that the project can't just supply electricity to the Blueskin community. They're putting these turbines up and they'll be feeding into the national grid. I'm not anti... but I would be more pro if they were just for Blueskin. So that you can see the turbines over there and you know that it's feeding this community

here. Instead, it isn't, it's getting hooked up to that national grid which means that if there are major power cuts or any problems, then Blueskin's going to have a power cut. And yet if people put money into that system, you're not actually getting the benefits in that way. Monetary maybe if you can sell that electricity to which ever company... I think they have to sell the electricity to the power companies... And I'm not really that keen on selling locally produced electricity to the power company. I mean sure if we did it ourselves here at home we would be selling it on. We saw the wind turbines go in when we were living in [town] up north . And they were huge, they were monstrous things. I'm not a hundred percent sure what size they're going to be over there. Porteous Hill is over on the far side there so we will be looking at them. I mean I'm very proud of Blueskin Bay – one of the reasons we moved here was because we knew these sorts of initiatives were going on in the community. But looking into it further, I'm not sure about selling electricity back to these big companies. I think we should be moving to smaller companies not larger. Smaller, local, rather than the large power companies.