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# Killing fields: ‘The general public has no idea of the enormity of what’s going on out there’

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## Killing fields: ‘The general public has no idea of the enormity of what’s going on out there’

From flattened echidnas to koalas ‘finished off with a hard, sharp blow to the skull’, the inexorable rollout of colossal green energy projects in Queensland hides a dirty secret few are talking about.

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Clarke Creek Wind Farm and Lotus Creek Wind Farm will form one continuous row of turbines along the entire length of the Clarke-Connors ranges in central Queensland. Picture: Steven Nowakowski

*From flattened echidnas to koalas ‘finished off with a hard, sharp blow to the skull’, the inexorable rollout of colossal green energy projects in Queensland hides a dirty secret few are talking about.*

The sun rises over green-grey woodland enveloping the biggest wind farm in the southern hemisphere (and Australia) on the western slopes of the Great Dividing Range in southern Queensland. Dozens of vehicles roar past at

speed in the early morning light, transporting workers and contractors to the MacIntyre Wind Precinct from their accommodation in the town of Warwick, 50km to the east.

In the motorcade's wake, the carcasses of freshly mown-down native mammals litter 5km of sealed road linking the Cunningham Highway to the wind farm entrance. A black-striped wallaby lies in the middle of the road; a joey in its pouch is also dead. A flattened echidna is a mess of crushed quills. A rufous bettong lies near a sign warning drivers to take care because koalas cross the road. Close by is another black-striped wallaby, a young male.

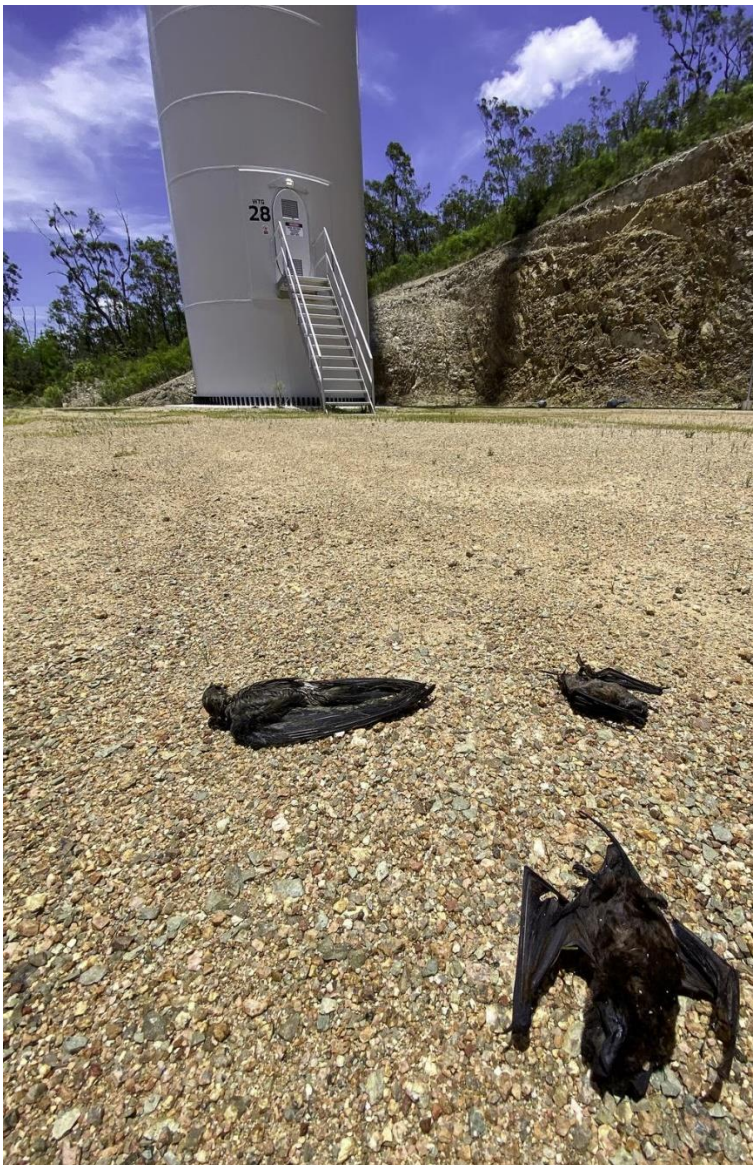
Drivers don't slow down. Later in the morning the carcasses are removed. If this happens every morning and the wildlife toll also rises along the highway from Warwick, as seems likely, the carnage overall might be substantial.

Welcome to the Green Revolution as Australia rushes towards its goal of [net-zero emissions by 2050](#).

'A new project pops up somewhere once a week'

A small Cairns-based conservation group, Rainforest Reserves Australia, is highlighting the environmental consequences of scores of renewables projects it is monitoring, with some projects affecting tens of thousands of hectares of native forest and woodland of high biodiversity value.

A decade ago, many of these projects would have met fierce opposition from environmentalists and the Greens party. Today their leaders are silent, believing the climate change challenge is of such urgency that effectively anything else is insignificant.



Dead bats and birds under turbines at Kaban Wind Farm in central Queensland. Picture: Steven Nowakowski

Species extinctions and loss of biodiversity, habitat and scenic amenity? Not so much of a high priority these days. Those questioning the merits of renewables are demonised and accused of being in the pocket of fossil fuel and nuclear power industries.

The Clean Energy Council's investment report for the last quarter of 2025 revealed nine large generation projects were commissioned with a total capacity of 2.1 gigawatts – more than the previous six quarters combined – while five more projects worth \$3.5bn reached financial close.

Rainforest Reserves Australia has compiled a register of 1237 proposed and operating projects – wind farm, solar farm, battery storage and hydro projects – nationwide. RRA vice-president Steven Nowakowski says: "A new project pops up somewhere about once a week, then another in the same area three months later, and eventually many are essentially connected to each other. It's happening so fast it's hard to keep track of them."

#### Land clearing for Mount Emerald Wind Farm

RRA is being joined by respected ecologists and natural history scientists in sounding alarm bells. Little thought or planning is put into sites for renewables as the net-zero push trumps other considerations, they say. The welcome mat is out for almost any company putting its hand up to develop a project wherever it wants. Federal and state environmental safeguards are of little consequence.

*Whether or not you believe Australia makes a meaningful contribution to reducing global warming by cutting emissions, net zero comes with a high and largely avoidable ecological price.*

Dubbed Big Mac and operated by Spanish renewables behemoth ACCIONA Energia, MacIntyre is in the process of commissioning 162 [fibreglass turbines](#), each 230m tall. The project size will be doubled by the planned 120-turbine Herries Range farm and 18-turbine Karara farm – and a battery energy storage system – across 36,000ha of largely well-vegetated land that is home to a wealth of threatened wildlife.



An artist's impression of turbines to scale at Wallaman Falls. The world heritage-listed Wallaman Falls, a major tourist attraction, will be framed by a line of 200-metre turbines on the horizon. Picture: Supplied

Along a 12km drive through Big Mac, rows of turbines stretch to the horizon in every direction, with most positioned in prime woodland habitat.

Forest glades in the Big Mac footprint are frequented by the beautiful and rare turquoise parrot. Two critically endangered species – the swift parrot and regent honeyeater – migrate in winter from southern states to the adjoining Durikai State Forest. Their flight paths now pass through turbines in woodlands that were once widespread in southeast Australia, but the habitat has been reduced to remnant patches by intensive farming and other development.

#### Wildlife casualties

Wind farm turbines overseas take a heavy toll on birds and bats colliding with rotating blades. Big Mac's Bird and Bat Adaptive Management Plan requires monthly reports of the results of carcass searches by consultants to be

provided to project operators. Federal and state governments are informed if a threatened species is found dead or injured. What happens then is not much, it seems.

Asked by Inquirer for details of wildlife casualties from turbines, a MacIntyre spokesperson says there is no federal government requirement for it to make the information public. So it won't. Federal Environment Minister Murray Watt declined to respond to questions about the wildlife casualties of wind farms. As for wildlife road victims, the company says speed limits on public roads are a matter for state and local authorities. Maybe ask staff to slow down in the early mornings when animals are out and about feeding? No comment.



Kaban Wind Farm is owned by French company NEOEN. The construction of haulage roads and fragmentation of forests has been alarming. Picture: Steven Nowakowski

Rose Unwins and partner Lindy Bennett moved from Victoria's Gippsland in 2012 in part, Bennett says, to "get away from wind farms". After acquiring a bushland property in the quiet backwater of Greymare, they were stunned to learn two years ago that Big Mac would be among their neighbours.

Says Unwins: "We woke up late one night to the sound of huge trucks roaring past transporting equipment. So a gigantic wind farm goes up in our back yard with zero consultation. We would not have moved here if we'd known."



Greymare landowners Rose Unwins and Linda Bennett have been caught off guard by the renewables march near their property. Picture: Greg Roberts

Farther north, Millmerran farmer Kim Stevens can see Big Mac's tall turbines from her property 45km away. Soon she will have turbines across the road from her farm. "In this region we've got eight wind farms and two solar farms on the go. They're all over the place. We have a deeply divided community, with some people taking up their offer to place turbines on their property (reported to be \$40,000 per year per turbine) and others who won't."

Many properties have signs, No Wind or Solar Here, on fences. Stevens's 82-year-old parents rejected offers by the Wambo Wind Farm near Jandowae, 140km to the north, to operate turbines on their property. Stevens says: "Their neighbours accepted. Now my parents wake up every morning with these monstrosities on three sides of their home. What can they do? Their property is worthless."



The Clarke Creek Wind Farm project.

'If famers did that, we'd be jumped on'

Kooroongarra grazier Steve Wakerley was horrified when 64km of transmitter tower corridor were cut through woodland to connect Big Mac to the existing Powerlink transmission line to Millmerran's coal-fired station, where the wind farm's power will feed into the grid. Wakerley says: "They put it straight through the best koala habitat, knocking down big old trees. If farmers did that, we'd be jumped on. These are all overseas companies making countless millions."

Anthony Albanese singled out the MacIntyre Wind Precinct and the Borumba Hydro scheme in the Sunshine Coast hinterland (see accompanying story) for praise in a 2024 address to the Queensland Media Club, saying they had the "right skills, supply chains and processes to get projects up and going".

A spokesperson for ACCIONA says the company is "proud to be a leader in sustainability and is committed to developing its projects to respect local biodiversity and the environment". An annual report would be published in accordance with federal guidelines detailing compliance with management plans. The company had engaged extensively with the local community for six years: "We understand communities expect to experience the benefits of hosting renewable energy developments and ACCIONA works hard to create local jobs and opportunities, while also delivering a dedicated program of community benefits."

#### Land clearing for the Lotus Creek Wind Farm

Queensland is ground zero for what is shaping up as a new environmental battlefield as concerns mount about sites developed for the renewables push.

RRA mapping shows a concentration of wind farms the length and breadth of the Great Dividing Range in Queensland, from high ridges to undulating foothills. The sites are largely clustered in areas identified as being of high biodiversity in recently released federal environment department mapping.

'Making climate change worse'

University of Queensland ecology professor and Biodiversity Council co-chairman Hugh Possingham says land-clearing for renewables is boosting carbon dioxide emissions, "making climate change worse". Mountain wind farms are of particular concern: "The highest concentrations of birds and mammals are in the mountains where these projects are. Areas of high value for biodiversity are being impacted and they should not be impacted."

Possingham says governments have no excuse: "We had a good idea this was coming 15 years ago. State and federal governments were told this would be big and they needed to get on top of it. They were warned but they failed to put proper planning processes in place. As a result, governments have not had the necessary expertise and many mistakes are being made."

Former Queensland government principal botanist Jeanette Kemp estimated in 2024 that 29,000ha of native vegetation would be cleared for wind farms in Queensland, with another 85,000ha degraded by weed invasion, erosion and other impacts.

Kemp says those figures are higher today as the project volume accelerates: "Laws like the state Vegetation Management Act are not being applied in ways they should be. The proponents get the go-ahead rapidly with everything fast-tracked. The last bits of undisturbed habitat are often in areas where projects are going ahead."



Koalas injured during clearing might be finished off with a "hard, sharp blow to the base of the back of the skull with a blunt metal or heavy wooden bar". Picture: Steven Nowakowski

She has documented the likely consequences for many endangered ecosystems: for instance, 30 per cent of what is left of the bloodwood/swampbox-on-basalt ecosystem is within the clearing zone of the Mount Fox Energy Park near Ingham in north Queensland.

*"The general public has no idea of the enormity of what's going on out there with renewables because nobody is telling them," Kemp says.*

"If they knew, things would be very different."

Northwest of Rockhampton in central Queensland, Squadron Energy, owned by iron ore magnate Andrew Forrest, is developing the Clarke Creek Wind Farm with the placement of 100 turbines completed and another 88 planned.

The project's biodiversity management plan indicates the loss of up to 1513ha of koala habitat. Its environmental impact statement raised eyebrows with the observation that koalas injured during clearing might be finished off with a "hard, sharp blow to the base of the back of the skull with a blunt metal or heavy wooden bar". Yet the company pledged "no animal or threatened species is harmed as a result of project activity". How this is guaranteed is unclear.

Farther north, inland from St Lawrence, Ark Energy's 46-turbine Lotus Creek Wind farm (now under construction and being operated by Vestas) was approved in 2022 by Tanya Plibersek, federal environment minister at the time. The project previously had been rejected by Plibersek's predecessor in the portfolio, the Liberals' Sussan Ley. Within the site boundary at the time, 101 koalas were recorded during surveys, with the threatened greater glider located at 131 sites.

Says the RRA's Nowakowski: "This is a place of wild beauty. Koalas, greater gliders, rufous bettongs, wedge-tailed eagles – they're always there. It will all go. The mountain tops are all being removed. They're dynamiting everywhere."

A recent video filmed by a drone shows a hilltop ridge at Lotus Creek being flattened by explosives for a turbine pad. Another video shows extensive areas of hilltop native vegetation being blown up by Ratch Australia's 53-turbine Mount Emerald wind farm, in one of the few remaining areas the threatened northern quoll survives.

#### Land cleared for the Boulder Creek Wind Farm

A lesson in flawed decision-making in addressing environmental dilemmas can be seen with DP Green Energy's 70-turbine Callide Wind Farm, west of Gladstone. The federal Environment Department approved the clearing of 340ha of greater glider habitat, 900ha of koala habitat and 407ha of habitat frequented by an endangered legless lizard, the collared delma.

To minimise harm to gliders, the developers are required to identify roosting hollows used by the animals before clearing and relocate them. How they are to relocate hollows high in the trees without killing the inhabitants is not explained.

Death from striking turbine blades whipping around at 350km/h is a serious concern. Nowakowski says he has found one to five dead birds and bats under every turbine at the Kaban Wind Farm near Ravenshoe in north Queensland – operated by French company Neoen – during early morning forays. He has been warned by police he faces trespass charges if visits continue.

Confidential bird and bat collision reports by wind farms rarely surface publicly but one leaked from the Mount Emerald farm showed 168 bat carcasses – including 105 northern freetail bats and an endangered spectacled flying-fox – along with 28 dead birds, including four wedge-tailed eagles, were found under 53 turbines in 2021. Many more victims would have been overlooked during surveys, removed by predators before surveys or died later from injuries.



A dead yellow-bellied sheath-tail bat at Kaban Wind Farm. Picture: Steven Nowakowski

If that kind of mortality reflects what is happening with thousands of turbines operating around the country, the death toll would be considerable, but since the information is not available publicly, nobody knows.

Tasmania's planned [Robbins Island Wind Farm](#), despite a good deal of hand-wringing, remains smack in the middle of the migration flight path of the critically endangered orange-bellied parrot, with fewer than 100 birds surviving in the wild. An unknown number of endangered Tasmanian wedge-tailed eagles have been killed or injured by wind farms.

Korea Zinc's 47-turbine St Patricks Plains Wind Farm in the central Tasmanian highlands was approved before Christmas by the federal government. Canberra's green light allows the operators to kill an extraordinary 132,426 birds and 69,480 bats across 63 years from when it begins operating. These include three migratory bird species protected under international treaties requiring Australia to protect them; two of these – the curlew sandpiper and far eastern curlew – are critically endangered.



Shown here are 100 wind towers at Queensland's Clarke Creek Wind Farm, with a further 94 to be erected in Stage 2. Picture: Steven Nowakowski

Tasmanian woodland birds whose populations are in decline are in the firing line: 1350 strong-billed honeyeaters and 360 dusky robins, among many others, can be killed each year.

If the number of fatalities of a threatened species reaches a set "trigger" level across a 12-month period, the federal environment minister can simply raise the level.

Meanwhile, 481ha of potential denning habitat for the Tasmanian devil – the wild population of which is struggling to overcome the depredations of facial tumour disease – can be bulldozed.

A 2025 report by consultants Ross Analytics to the federal Environment Department suggested that 196 of 722 bird species or subspecies it checked in Australia were at risk of wind turbine blade strike, as were 16 of 67 bat species. Overseas, the American Bird Conservancy estimates wind turbines kill 1.17 million birds a year in the US.

The University of Melbourne's Melbourne Biodiversity Institute director Brendan Wintle says detailed modelling to be released soon by the institute shows renewables could be placed farther west than existing sites in Queensland and NSW with much less environmental impact.

Wintle says while he supports net zero, many consequences are avoidable: "They shouldn't be happening in areas that are highly sensitive and have already endured a lot of habitat destruction. The industry is looking at the easiest pathway to an extensive rollout.

"The general story is that the further west you go, the lower the impact on nature and high-productivity agricultural land. We see governments that are desperate to transition, and that's fine, but at the same time they are throwing biodiversity under the bus."

A spokesperson for Watt defends the federal government's record: "Under the government's historic reforms to Australia's national environmental laws delivered last November, project proponents will now have to comply with clearer, stronger and more transparent environmental laws that deliver greater environmental protections.

"These new laws apply the same clear, consistent rules to all sectors, from resources to renewables, ensuring better outcomes for the environment and more certainty for business. Alleged breaches of the EPBC Act are taken seriously and assessed for potential investigation."