

DO WE REALLY NEED THIS?

If I hadn't personally experienced what transpired at the so-called Chalumbin Wind Farm Ravenshoe 'Community Information Session' today (16th Sept 2021), I would not have believed it.

Meeting was scheduled for 3:00. A significant number of people were waiting on the footpath at 2:30. Amongst those in line were a sizable percentage of people of an age that courtesy would require offering a seat to. At 2:40 someone (gathered to be a representative of Epuron – the company behind the planned development), partially opened the door and rudely declared "The meeting starts at 3:00!". No offers to come in and sit down for those who needed it – nothing. This same person then proceeded to remove the Qld Govt. QR Covid scan in sign from the door of the hall, so she could put up Epuron's signs up (with no app.) We then watched in bemusement while she played Tetris with the signs, after realising, late evidently, that she should not have removed the QR sign in the first place. I tell you it didn't bode well for what was to follow.

3:00 the doors were opened, and we signed in. We climbed the stairs and were greeted by a large empty room with two medium sized tables. Not a single chair. As the first 30-40 people entered the room all looking similarly stunned, some attendees took it upon themselves to bring out some chairs from a side room. Just to be clear the entire time we were lined up in the street, Epuron didn't bother to bring in let alone set up a single seat! Whispers started flying through the ever-increasing crowd that Epuron were not going to make a presentation – were not going to address the crowd. 3:20 came and not a single word had been spoken from any Epuron rep. to the large gathering.

3:24 A Epuron representative – we'll call him John for now – as he refused – yes that's correct, - outright refused to provide his full name when asked, by an attendee. My 10 year old son pointed out his name was on his ID card on his jeans pocket. Of course, no-one could read that from beyond a couple of metres away, and no one knew his position within the company. From the card straining my eyes I believed his name to be John Salvo, the Epuron general manager of QLD development. A google search

of the company tells me his name is actually John Sadler. He very rudely refused to answer questions, and stated there would be no presentation, - it was simply an opportunity for people to pick up information brochures (a lot of which was pure company propaganda), from the tables, and to look at posters. There were 5 Epuron reps John stated who would answer questions only on a one-on-one basis. By now the room was in a stunned uproar and rightly so.

John's idea of providing community information was then to make a very hasty retreat to a side room where he effectively hid from the gathering. I was in such disbelief I took out my phone and photographed both the waiting crowd and him hiding. If I hadn't seen it with my own eyes, I never would have believed it!

Eventually he came out and in a condescending manner, after very serious questions were put to him – to some lame extent tried to answer a few questions – but he didn't. There was no microphone, no PA system so hearing anything was virtually impossible unless you were close by. That didn't help by John making no attempt to speak in a level beyond what was barely over a whisper anyway. He was asked if this meeting was an attempt at consultation or just for ticking a box. He said words to the effect of it was the start of 'consultation' and their were feedback forms available to be filled out. (Loaded forms I might add!)

Indigenous Elders connected to the land directly under threat by the development stated they had not had ANY consultation. They demanded to know exactly whom Epuron had consulted with in their name. He wouldn't answer the question. Personally, I developed the view John did not want to answer questions from the considerable number of Indigenous representatives – including Elders in the crowd. So much so I moved to the opposite side of the room. This was twofold. Firstly, I wondered if a white man with a large voice would get attention to have the Elders questions answered. Secondly, I wanted to talk to the Elders if the opportunity presented itself. I never used that voice to test the former. (I was very grateful that the latter transpired).

John spent the next probably up to 30+ minutes (I'm not sure of duration), talking to a handful of non-indigenous attendees over near a poster on the far side of the room. Multiple requests from different attendees to have him answer questions from those who had literally held their arms in the air for 15-20+ minutes went unanswered. In fact, it was suggested by some in the crowd that the Elders would need to re-locate to the poster to be addressed. It was an absolute disgrace.

Eventually a couple of questions were taken, one from an Indigenous attendee, the second from a caucasian man – incidentally 1 of the only 2 people who raised their hands in support of the development from the estimated 100 – 130 who attended!

I had attended the meeting planning to speak on vulnerable native species which the companies own Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act referral application states will likely have "a significant impact" on certain species. (See below*). I did not speak to this. If Elders trying to raise the issue of sacred sites not even being acknowledged, and their com-

plete rejection of the project on these sites wouldn't be heard – it seemed completely inappropriate to raise other issues.

There had clearly been no consultation with these traditional custodians with links to the actual land in question! (More to come on this at a later stage).

The disdain showed to attendees was palpable.

Epuron trading under Chalumbin Wind Farm PTY LTD clearly has no social licence to proceed with this site. They have failed in their duty to consult with traditional owners and have scant disregard to the environmental damage of this project, in a significant environmental area adjacent to the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area!

Epuron aka Chalumbin Wind Farm; if you proceed with this project you will face a fight you will not win, whilst sustaining irreparable damage to your companies reputation. Abandon this project, acknowledge your mistakes, and save the humiliation you will ultimately face.

*On the environmental side, and to select just one species outlined in Epurons own EPBC Act referral application. The impact on the "Northern greater glider (*Petauroides volans minor*)" states "As the project area is located in proximity to the northern extent of the species' range, it is considered that any population of greater glider within the Project area is part of an important population. The project contains a mixture of potential and critical habitat for this species. Northern greater gliders were observed on both properties during nocturnal spotlighting surveys".

"The project will involve the removal of 563.27ha of potential habitat and 56.59ha of critical habitat for the greater glider. Despite the extent of habitat remaining in the locality, coupled with the implementation of the proposed mitigation measures, the removal of approximately 56.59ha of critical habitat is considered likely to constitute a significant impact on the species".

"Despite the sensitive design measures and the avoidance, minimisation and mitigation measured proposed, the Project is assessed as having a potential significant residual impact on the northern greater glider".

Remember that's taken from the company's own submission – and is merely one of many species outlined in the submission.

Matt Lachlan MALANDA

GOT SOMETHING TO SAY?

Send us your letter today!