

SAVE CENTRAL



MEDIA RELEASE

Attention: News Editor

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100% Pure Vandalism: Meridian Energy's plan to destroy Central Otago for profit.

New Zealanders are being hoodwinked into sacrificing their iconic landscapes to self-interested energy corporations, said leading landscape artist Grahame Sydney today.

Sydney is spokesperson for the Save Central campaign, set to be launched nationwide with a full-page advertisement in the *Sunday Star Times* this weekend. The campaign will alert New Zealanders all over the country to the "environmental vandalism" Meridian Energy plans to exact on Central Otago - renowned for its spacious scenery - should its contentious Project Hayes wind farm be permitted.

"Meridian is building the Southern Hemisphere's biggest wind factory in what is commonly one of New Zealand's least windy locations, purely to serve its corporate interests," said Sydney, adding that the proposed site had been windless for extended periods of time throughout the year.

“We are being told we need vast wind farms because they’re sustainable and we need more power. The truth is they are an unacceptable environmental trade-off and any power they do manage to produce will not be going to power New Zealand homes.”

Save Central is backing an appeal before the Environment Court against Project Hayes, which will resume in Oamaru in two weeks.

“Project Hayes is clearly in breach of the Resource Management Act, because it will destroy a significant landscape, which the Act clearly prohibits,” Sydney explained.

“Meridian argues Central Otago is a wasteland: tell that to the thousands of families that ride the Rail Trail every year. The entire area is a national treasure.”

Sydney said the case is a major test of the ability of a self-interested state-owned enterprise, backed wholeheartedly by a complicit government, to run rough-shod over the Resource Management Act.

“If we don’t stop Project Hayes, it means Meridian and the Government can build whatever they want, wherever they want, regardless of what the law says.”

Sydney said Meridian’s insistence that Project Hayes would solve looming power crises was another example of its bald-faced spin.

“Project Hayes is not going to do a thing to ensure security of supply for New Zealand domestic customers. Instead it is going to increase the burden on those already struggling under the weight of their power bills, while the Government via its state-owned enterprise sells off carbon credits to fatten its own coffers – which is what this nonsensical wind factory is really all about.”

Besides generating carbon credits for the Government, Project Hayes is being driven by Meridian Energy’s deal with Rio Tinto, the multinational mining company that is guaranteed an uninterrupted supply of 15% of New Zealand’s total electricity output, at a very cheap price, to run the Tiwai Point aluminium smelter.

Rio Tinto, which threatened to close Tiwai Point if the Labour Government went ahead with its plan to charge polluters for their carbon emissions, is one of the world’s largest mining companies and has a long history of condemnation for its environmental, political, safety and labour relations records.

Sydney said Save Central is committed to raising public awareness of the unreliability of wind turbines, the high cost of the power they produce and the scale of destruction caused, details glossed over by Meridian.

“Project Hayes will line the pockets of a multinational mining company and generate a windfall for Meridian in carbon credits, all at the expense of New Zealand’s environment and taxpayers.”

“There is nothing in this for consumers: this a David versus Goliath battle and one that, if lost, will steal a very special part of New Zealand’s landscape and character from us all. We urgently need people throughout the country to wake up to what’s happening and support us.”

KEY FACTS

- If it proceeds, Project Hayes will be one of the world's largest wind farms.
- It will destroy 90 square kilometres of the Central Otago landscape with 176 turbines.
- Each turbine will be as high as the observation deck of Auckland's Sky Tower.
- Construction alone will cost \$2 billion of taxpayers' money.

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