

SAVE CENTRAL



Before the Environment Court:

David v. Goliath Energy (Art v. the Philistines)

This week Grahame Sydney and Brian Turner, among other expert witnesses, will testify as to the cultural significance of the Lammermoor landscape, traversed by the historic Old Dunstan Road, that Meridian Energy proposes as the site and route for Project Hayes wind farm.

Sydney was awarded the Order of New Zealand Merit in 2003 for Services to Art; Turner is a recent New Zealand poet laureate, celebrated for his meditations on land, stream and sky. Together they are arguably the foremost contemporary cultural icons of Otago. A Sydney masterpiece, 'Hinterland III', which captures the flowing landscape character typified by the Lammermoor Range, in replica form now widely adorns the living rooms of Otago romantics. The poet and artist's submissions to the Court will attest the centrality of Otago landscape in New Zealand culture, from wind-chapped colonial fossickers to Colin McCahon.

The Resource Management Act states clearly in section six of 'purposes and principles' that matters of national importance include the protection of historic heritage and outstanding natural features and landscapes from 'inappropriate subdivision, use and development'. Both the consent authority's commissioned Landscape Architect Ben Espie and Planner David Whitney thought so, suggesting formally that Project Hayes should be declined. Barrister John Matthews, who chaired the Hearing panel and issued a dissenting decision recommending that Hayes be turned down, thought so too. Yet the All-of-Government submissions in support of Hayes evidently held sway, for Project Hayes was

given consent in November 2007, with the decision 'owned' by Central Otago District Council.

The Old Dunstan Road, which Meridian proposes to widen to twelve metres with road-cuts of up to twenty metres to accommodate the proposed 176 giant wind turbines, is the last remaining colonial road of its type. It travels a heritage landscape in which stone huts, sluicings and chinese rills can still be found, and is celebrated by colonial balladeers like David McKee-Wright. The remote Lammermoor range, a flowing labyrinthine grassland with skies that interrogate the complacencies of day-to-day reality, is a testament to the vitality of the word 'outstanding'. A string of Conservation Lands punctuated by semi-grazed hinterland, it is also vulnerable to exploitation, eyed by not only wind generation companies but also modern-day goldmining corporations.



Hinterland III

The beauty of the landscape would make this region immune, one might suppose, to the rampant exploitation proposed by Meridian Energy and others. Despite the evident falseness of claims to the tune that the area is not iconic (indeed little more than a 'wasteland' and 'hell-hole' in the words of departing Meridian CEO Dr Keith Turner), the Government's panic-driven drive to reduce its forecast Kyoto debt and be seen to be doing something about energy supply has resulted in it expressly adding enormous political pressure to shape the judicial process.

Will art, culture and love for a landscape triumph over political might and the corporate dollar? Or will the Government have its way with the Lammermoor-Rock-and-Pillar upland, and immoderately distort the gist of its own adopted child, The Resource Management Act, to systematically convert the heartland of Sydney, Turner, Marilyn Webb and others into the largest wind farm in the southern hemisphere?

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