The community cost of consultation: Characterising the qualitative social impacts of a wind energy development that failed to proceed in Tasmania, Australia

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ABSTRACT

Energy developments affect communities in a range of ways. Impacts on communities can be caused by changes to landscape amenity and access, disruptions to community cohesion, increased or decreased income streams, effects on property values, and population changes. These changes are ideally captured in the social impact assessment (SIA) process, where proponents outline in a formal statement the balance of benefits and burdens on local communities, and measures that will be taken to minimise negative outcomes for the community. In SIA practice there is a tendency toward quantitative socio-economic impacts, such as changes to demographics, income, and land values, with some qualitative assessment of amenity impacts. While the academic literature promotes inclusion of changes to the community itself, such as impacts on community cohesion and social capital, these qualitative changes are not consistently evident in SIA practice. Additionally, SIA practice assesses the impacts of the project, i.e. how the development of wind turbines or other energy infrastructure will affect the community. Because the consultation process around a proposed project typically commences prior to the characterisation and assessment of any associated social impacts and the finalisation of the SIA process, the potential impacts of this consultation are rarely, if ever, evaluated. Here, we examine a case study of an Australian wind energy project that did not proceed to implementation. Through this case study we are able to analyse the anticipatory impacts of the proposal; those stemming from the consultative process rather than the development of the project itself. We present these qualitative social changes, and outline the pathways through which the social changes manifest in two overarching social impacts: a divided community and future development capacity. We discuss the implications of this analysis in the context of good engagement practice and energy governance.

1. Introduction

Understanding and managing the social impacts of wind energy developments is a complex undertaking. Project proponents are required to make significant investments to assess the viability of resource development opportunities (Martin and Rice, 2012), and are responsible for providing financial returns to their shareholders. Stakeholders, and particularly communities which neighbour resource developments, negotiate with proponents to limit negative impacts and promote benefits resulting from the project (Barrow, 2010). These negotiations occur through multi-stage processes including consultation (Johnston, 2010), contestation (Colvin et al., 2015b), and cooperation

(Lacey et al., 2017) with project proponents.

To satisfy major development regulations in Australia, project proponents must outline the anticipated social impacts of proposals, how negative impacts will be mitigated, and how positive impacts will be maximised (reflecting Esteves et al., 2012; Larson et al., 2013; Harvey and Bice, 2014). This is then evaluated by regulators in a Social Impact Assessment (SIA) who decide if the impacts and mitigation strategies are acceptable (Franks, 2012). SIA is recognised as an important tool in sustainable and equitable development of resources, and as being beneficial to regulators, proponents, and communities (Vanclay and Esteves, 2011). The SIA process is defined as 'analysing, monitoring and managing the intended and unintended social consequences, both

positive and negative, of planned interventions (policies, programs, plans, projects) and any social change processes invoked by those interactions' (Vanclay, 2003, p.6). In this way, social changes are considered as neutral phenomena (e.g. local population growth), and the positive or negative consequences are interpreted in the local context to determine the nature of the resulting impacts, and whether these are positive or negative (e.g. population growth leading to demand for housing, decreasing affordability) (Lockie, 2001; Vanclay, 2002).

While SIA is accepted as making an important contribution to managing the impacts of projects, the full potential of the SIA process is not currently being realised (Vanclay and Esteves, 2011; Witt et al., 2017). SIA tend to be enacted as a small element of a broader environmental impact assessment (EIA) (Esteves et al., 2012; Elliott, 2014; Parsons and Moffat, 2014), and the SIA process generally is weighted less than the economic and environmental counterparts of project evaluation (Esteves et al., 2012). The practice of SIA has been critiqued due to limitations on the appropriateness of the measures used to report impacts (e.g. Arce-Gomez et al., 2015). Additionally, the SIA process is expected to be supported by community and stakeholder consultation (Vanclay and Esteves, 2011; Glucker et al., 2013), which necessitates engagement with communities ahead of any formal regulatory oversight of how this process will be managed. In this paper, we explore these two complications for SIA before considering the implications of SIA practice in a case study of a wind energy proposal in King Island, Tasmania, Australia, which did not proceed to implementation. Through this case study we are able to apply qualitative analysis to draw out the complex social impacts that arise from the consultative process. We then discuss what these qualitative social impacts arising from the consultative process mean for good practice SIA.

1.1. There are limitations in measuring social impacts: quantitative and qualitative social impacts

A complication in identifying, reporting, and managing social impacts arises from the measures used and how they are chosen (Witt et al., 2017). Social impacts are often reported as predicted changes against baseline measures (Elliott, 2014). This promotes the use of indicators that capture quantitative socio-economic impacts, such as employment and economic growth, at the expense of qualitative impacts such as changes to culture and community character (Lockie, 2001; Arce-Gomez et al., 2015; Mancini and Sala, 2018). Understanding these qualitative impacts, however, is increasingly recognised as essential to achieving both procedural fairness and socially just outcomes in the SIA process (Vanclay, 2002; Domínguez-Gómez, 2016). Vanclay (2003) outlined the following ways in which social impacts can manifest in communities facing resource developments, many of which reflect the qualitative social impacts highlighted by Arce-Gomez et al. (2015) as critical to 'best practice' SIA (.

Methodological issues present challenges here. While the quantitative, usually socio-economic, measures can be obtained through surveying of communities or the use of available secondary data, gathering appropriate data on the complex qualitative social impacts requires the application of research methodologies which are significantly more time and resource intensive (Moon et al. *under review*). For example, in efforts to include the broad spectrum of social impacts in an evaluation of an Australian region, Larson et al. (2013) employed a surrogate measure of social cohesion that was the percent of a region's population who volunteer. While this moves toward integration of factors such as social cohesion into SIA, a quantitative measure such as rates of volunteerism can only ever provide a small window of insight and could equally be correlated with changes other than those caused by the project of interest. Such figures cannot adequately describe the level of disruption to a local way of life, community cohesion, or culture that a project can bring (Lockie, 2001); for example increased frequency or intensity of arguments between family members with different views

about the project, the level of trust between community members, or the stability of and pride in the local place identity.

While leading practice SIA increasingly requires an understanding of core concepts such as culture, community, power, place, identity, resilience and livelihoods (Vanclay, 2002; Esteves et al., 2012), project proponents may be reluctant to invest in the SIA process the additional resources that would be required to undertake in-depth and sophisticated research to understand the qualitative social impacts in communities. Nevertheless, a better understanding of how these complex social impacts – such as changes to local culture and community cohesion – manifest will assist with anticipating and therefore managing social impacts beyond the collection of quantitative baseline data.

1.2. Anticipation and consultation, not just the project, cause social impacts

The SIA process is in concept and practice closely related to stakeholder and community engagement, and should facilitate meaningful participation in decision-making processes (Blahna and Yonts-Shepard, 1989; Burdge and Robertson, 1990; Webler et al., 1995; Lockie, 2001; Becker et al., 2003; Arce-Gomez et al., 2015). Typically, this involves early engagement with potentially affected communities and participatory processes for identifying social impacts and appropriate social impact management strategies (Lockie, 2001). This must occur ahead of finalisation of the SIA submission in order to incorporate community concerns and ideas (Clean Energy Council, 2013a), with ongoing participation throughout the development process (Blahna and Yonts-Shepard, 1989; Burdge and Robertson, 1990). In addition, SIA should contribute to the reduction of conflict (Larsen et al., 2018), both in terms of conflict-ridden regions (Vanclay and Esteves, 2011) and conflict that arises in response to the project (Webler et al., 1995; Barrow, 2010; Glucker et al., 2013). Such 'procedural justice' is essential to good practice in energy governance, along with (and deeply connected to; Gross, 2007; Walker and Baxter, 2017) the fair sharing of benefits, i.e. 'distributive justice' (Gross, 2007; Sovacool and Dworkin, 2015). As the need to attain the social licence to operate becomes more critical for wind energy developers seeking to minimise business risks (Esteves et al., 2012), these forms of justice that underpin the social licence become only more essential to effective SIA (Vanclay, 2017; Jijelava and Vanclay, 2018) and the successful development of wind energy facilities (Lacey et al., 2017; Bond et al., 2018).

While the provisions negotiated and accepted through the SIA process may mitigate conflict and minimise negative impacts following project implementation, the necessity of consultation ahead of finalisation of the SIA process means that the social impacts of the project *proposal*, as distinct from the development of the project itself, have no statutory requirement for anticipation, avoidance, management, or mitigation.

Social disruption resulting from development proposals can occur well ahead of project implementation. Considered 'anticipatory impacts', fear, uncertainty, and social upheaval can be heightened ahead of project development itself (Walker and Baxter, 2017). For example, concerns about a proposed project can catalyse the formation of local opposition groups that mobilise in opposition to the proposed resource developments (Colvin et al., 2015b; Howard, 2015; Grubert and Skinner, 2017; Larsen et al., 2018). Jacquet and Stedman (2014) argue that it is fear, anxiety, and the risk or threat of future changes which motivate community groups to mobilise in opposition to proposed resource developments. Such mobilisations routinely lead to community conflict, manifested either as conflict between community members and project proponents, or conflict between supportive and oppositional groups within the community (Yasmi et al., 2006; Barrow, 2010; Larsen et al., 2018; Ransan-Cooper et al., 2018). In the case of concern in response to a resource development proposal, social conflict may be catalysed by the proposal, but exacerbated by socio-political factors, particularly in dichotomous issues where pro- and anti- project interests compete in the public arena (e.g. through media engagement, public

demonstrations) in order to rally support for their preferred project outcome (Colvin et al., 2015a).

As a key anticipatory effect, conflict about a proposed resource development can be mitigated, at least to some extent, by good engagement practice (Lacey et al., 2017). The potential benefits of good engagement justify the investment of time and resources into engagement, and the promotion of good practice by industry bodies and governments (e.g. Clean Energy Council, 2013a; Australian Government, 2016). This means that even before development of the SIA – the process which makes proponents responsible for the social disruptions they may cause – proponents are engaging with communities and potentially causing anticipatory social impacts for which they are not formally accountable.

The fact that social conflict can arise in response to a project proposal emphasises that the act of proposing, as distinct from the act of developing, can be sufficient to cause social impacts which may disrupt the communities that SIA processes are designed to protect. Through disentangling *proposal impacts* from *project impacts*, an understanding of the 'social cost' of community consultation can be gained. Such an exploration would not challenge the SIA process, but rather contribute to it. As Vanclay et al. (2015) write on good practice SIA for the International Association for Impact Assessment (IAIA), SIA considers the consequences of an intervention, but also any social change process caused by the intervention in the local social system. Vanclay and Esteves (2011) show that a limitation of SIA practice is where SIA processes fail to limit harm to communities, raising the question of whether SIA thinking needs to begin ahead of the proposal stage, considering those impacts that result from consultation and anticipation, rather than focusing on the impacts of the project itself.

This research presents two new contributions to the SIA literature though analysis of a wind energy proposal in Tasmania, Australia that did not proceed to development. First, a qualitative study of how social impacts, such as changes to social cohesion, manifest in affected communities is presented. This provides evidence of how changes in communities manifest in qualitative social impacts. Second, the consequences of these findings are discussed in terms of managing the anticipatory social impacts which occur as a result of the consultative process (as opposed to the actual development of the project), and which occur ahead of the project's formal SIA. The article concludes with remarks on the relationship between community consultation and the SIA processes, and the implications of this for fair and effective SIA.

1.3. Social impact assessment in Tasmania, Australia

Though standards of good SIA practice have been advanced internationally (Vanclay et al., 2015), there are jurisdictional differences in mandated requirements for practice, and therefore in SIA practice itself (Pope et al., 2013). As such, before we discuss how the SIA process interacts with the recognition and understanding of social impacts in the present case study, it is first necessary to understand the requirements placed on project proponents by the relevant jurisdiction: Tasmania, Australia. The Tasmanian Environment Protection Authority (EPA) (Tasmanian Environmental Protection Authority, 2013) manages environmental (EIA) and social impact assessment processes, an institutional arrangement which reflects the situating of SIA as a subset of EIA (Elliott, 2014).

The Tasmanian EPA requires project proponents to submit a notice of intent (NOI) for project development, which the EPA uses to determine whether a more extensive Development Proposal and Environmental Management Plan (DPEMP) is required. A DPEMP is required in most cases, and certainly for major or substantial projects, and it outlines the project's social impacts and relevant mitigation measures (Board of the Environment Protection Authority, 2014). Project proponents develop the DPEMP with some guidance from the EPA. When the proponents have prepared a draft DPEMP, the EPA and relevant Tasmanian Council (local government authority) will provide comment to guide proponents toward the finalised DPEMP. Proponents may, but are not required to, make the draft DPEMP available to the public at this point. Once the DPEMP is finalised, it must be opened to the public, and submissions from the public are invited. The EPA then evaluates the DPEMP, considering public submissions and potentially requiring changes in response to the submissions, and provides a decision regarding approval and any conditions to be placed on the project.

The DPEMP must include a range of technical details regarding the project, including a site plan. This necessitates the expected siting of all features of the project (for example, locations of wind turbines), however these details are not required to be finalised. With regard to the social impacts, proponents must describe the local population (particularly in terms of demographics), and identify any factors that would make the local population especially vulnerable to negative impacts of the proposal. The potential social impacts of the proposal are required to be outlined in the DPEMP in terms of "socio-economic issues", including community demographic impacts, land values, and qualitative assessment on social amenity and community infrastructure. This includes impacts "through all stages, including construction, operation and closure" (Tasmanian Environmental Protection Authority, 2013). For major projects, which are considered significant or public interest projects, more detailed overviews of the socio-economic issues are required to be included in the DPEMP, however, the additional detail required is not specified.

Additionally, the DPEMP must outline (and provide evidence of) any public engagement undertaken, and how the results of this consultation have been incorporated into the proposal. Due to the mandated public consultation phase following finalisation of the DPEMP (where the DPEMP is opened to the public and submissions are invited), consultation ahead of publication is not required. The EPA, though, encourages proponents to undertake engagement beyond these minimum requirements, for example sharing the draft DPEMP with the public to allow for public comment and responsive amendment before the DPEMP is finalised. The EPA promotes this on the basis that consultation on the draft DPEMP leads to fewer objections during the mandatory consultation phase, which ultimately expedites assessment and approval.

1.3.1. Illustrating the Tasmanian DPEMP in practice: three wind energy examples

To illustrate the effect of these DPEMP guidelines in practice, we briefly reflect on three wind energy development proposals that have recently entered or been assessed in the Tasmanian DPEMP system. The **Low Head Wind Farm** outlined social impacts in terms of how the local visual amenity would be affected by the development (Low Head Wind Farm Pty Ltd., 2012). Proponents committed in their Notice of Intent (a precursor to the DPEMP) to endeavour to maintain the values of living in the region. The proponents indicated the project would lead to job creation, and would result in maintenance of local roads. To demonstrate a positive contribution to the local area, the project would lead to the establishment of a community fund and a committee to administer the fund. The **Cattle Hill Wind Farm** DPEMP outlined social impacts in terms of demographic changes (e.g. due to the presence of non-local construction workers), local infrastructure, and workforce changes (Scientists, Engineers, Managers, and Facilitators for NP Power Pty Ltd., 2010). Information was collected about local lifestyle, and recreation activities in particular, and community perceptions about whether the project would affect the ability to do these activities. This data collection was undertaken using a paper-based mail out survey, with a response rate of under 10% and the demographics of participants skewed toward older residents. The **West Coast Wind** project reported over two years of public consultation, and full support from the local community (Pitt and Sherry for West Coast Wind Pty Ltd., 2013). The proposed project was to be developed on private land belonging to just one landholder in order to minimise broader social and environmental

impacts, and aimed to be "consistent with the existing social fabric of the region". Proponents described a visual impact study that included the importance of public perceptions of turbines, and how these perceptions can affect whether the visual impact on the landscape is welcomed or opposed.

The proposals described satisfy the requirements of the Tasmanian EPA. The Clean Energy Council (CEC; Australia's peak body for the renewable energy industry), advocates to industry to meet best practice guidelines that extend beyond mandated expectations. The CEC argues for proponents to initiate public consultation at site selection (well ahead of finalisation of a DPEMP), with an emphasis on engagement with community and key stakeholders (Clean Energy Council, 2013a). Quantitative social baseline studies are encouraged. The CEC acknowledges the potential for local opposition, and suggests strategies for proponents to manage this opposition. The CEC frames potential disturbances to communities in terms of the physical disturbances of the development of the proposal (Clean Energy Council, 2013b), i.e. social conflict which may result from the proposal is not explicitly considered to be an impact.

Through this brief overview of how the Tasmanian EPA approaches the assessment of social impacts, we observe two key points. One, social impacts, when measured, are done so using quantitative indicators of local change (e.g. population changes, job creation, land values). These social impacts do not extend to include the qualitative social impacts. Further, while the CEC recognises the potential for local conflict through acknowledgement of the likelihood of encountering local opposition, this is not identified as a potential social impact. Two, the requirements of mandated public consultation are minimal. The EPA requires proponents to consult only during the mandatory public submission process following finalisation of the DPEMP. However, both the EPA and the CEC encourage proponents to engage with community and stakeholders earlier in the process, on the basis that this early engagement allows for more reflexivity in the development of the DPEMP (or finalised proposal), and expedites the approvals phase due to an expectation of fewer public objections during the mandated public submission phase. The implications of these two factors – quantitative measures of social impacts and consultation ahead of the formal assessment process has been initiated – will be discussed through examination of a wind energy development proposal in King Island, Tasmania.

1.4. About King Island and the TasWind proposal

King Island is located between the mainland of Australia, and the island State of Tasmania which has jurisdiction over the island. In late 2012, the TasWind wind energy development project was proposed by Tasmanian state-owned corporation Hydro Tasmania. TasWind included the development of two hundred large turbines in King Island to generate an estimated six hundred megawatts of renewable energy for export to mainland Australia facilitated by the associated construction of an undersea cable (Hydro Tasmania, 2013). Following around two years of consultation with the King Island community (see Colvin et al., 2016 for detail), proponents announced in late 2014 the project would not continue, with exogenous economic factors cited as the reason.

During the two years the project was under consideration, a range of community consultation efforts were undertaken by the proponent (see Colvin et al., 2016 for detailed analysis). Despite these measures, the community experienced significant social conflict during the time of the proposal, reflected by national media attention on the Island's story, and culminating in legal actions taken by a local community opposition group against the proponents.

The TasWind project did not reach the DPEMP stage, despite the two years of community consultation and significant investment of resources into the proposal by the proponent. However, two reports by consultancy firms were prepared by independent consultancies, and included social impacts of the project, reflecting what would likely be

included in a DPEMP had the project reached that stage. An initial report outlined the likely socio-economic impacts of the project, and in this capacity 'social division' was included within 'environmental impacts' (e3 for Hydro Tasmania, 2013). The report acknowledged the potential for community conflict between supporters and opponents due to concerns about the distributional fairness of the project. The potential social division was identified as a risk to the project, rather than as a social impact, and community engagement was suggested as a tool to mitigate this risk. A second report by a different consultancy was commissioned in the months following (CH2 Hill for the TasWind Consultative Committee, 2013), due to concerns from parts of the local community that the initial report did not capture the full breadth of potential economic impacts. The second report, as a result, included economic assessment of the proposal, but did not include social costs or impacts in the assessment.

Based on the two reports and the community engagement undertaken, it appears that the TasWind proposal exceeded recommendations to commence community consultation early in the process and indicated the potential for considering social impacts beyond quantified measures of factors such as demographic change (i.e. through recognition of social division via the initial consultancy's report). Although the formal SIA process was not initiated for this proposal, this case provides a unique opportunity to examine two key complexities of SIA. First, the in-depth, qualitative, study of the King Island case provides insight into the nature of these 'soft' social impacts. Second, the fact that the proposal did not proceed beyond the two year pre-feasibility consultative phase means that the anticipatory social impacts of the *proposal* of the project, rather than the project itself, can be analysed.

2. Methods

A qualitative research methodology was undertaken to examine the social impacts of the TasWind proposal for the development of a wind energy facility. Thirty community members in King Island were interviewed to learn about their experiences and perceptions during the two-year consultative process. Interview participants represented a wide range of perspectives. The methods reported here summarise those described in Colvin et al. (2016) as the two studies report on findings from the same project. Interviews were in-depth and unstructured, based around five topics rather than defined questions (interview guide included in Supplemental Materials):

- About the participant and King Island.
- What happened during the time of the TasWind proposal?
- Who was involved in discussions about the TasWind proposal?
- How was the participant personally engaged with the TasWind proposal?
- What has happened after the TasWind proposal?

The interview transcripts were coded and analysed in NVivo 10 (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013; QSR International, 2012). Coded content (quotations from interviews) relating to social impacts was categorised into groupings of similar impacts and themes. These themes were then examined in the context of descriptions of causation or sequences of events as provided by interview participants, allowing for connections between the social impacts identified in the data. Quotations from participants included in the following sections are identified by anonymised identifiers (e.g. P1, P2).

3. Results

Participants described a complex process of interaction and iteration between the King Island social context, TasWind proposal consultative process, and the response to this by the King Island community. In this article we focus on characterising the changes in the King

Island community and how these changes manifested as social impacts. Further detail on the social complexity of the consultative process is available in Colvin et al. (2016).

Participants represented a broad spectrum of attitudes toward the TasWind project, ranging from strong support to strong opposition, and including those who were uncertain, disengaged, and ambivalent. All participants were residents of King Island, some being long-term residents (and often from multi-generational King Island families) and others having more recently moved to the Island. Across all participants, the TasWind process was described as coming at a substantial cost to the community, especially given participants by and large described a pre-standing appreciation of and pride in the close-knit and cohesive sense of community and place identity.

The study of the social impacts of the TasWind proposal in King Island revealed twenty-five dimensions of social impacts, representing two key, higher-order social impacts: *divided community* and *future development capacity*. These are discussed in Sections 3.1 and 3.2 with extended descriptions tabulated in the Supplemental materials.

3.1. Key social impact: divided community

Community cohesion was weakened through the community becoming divided (Supplemental Materials Table 1). Interview participants described the proposal affecting their sense of community via social conflict that followed the proposal. This was most pronounced for those who were most closely engaged with the process.

> *"It's robbed our community, and it's caused huge divisions. […] And King Island has survived plenty of controversy over the years. Community things where people have disagreed, but it's never been split like this." P5.*

Trust was affected through community members developing cynicism about the motives and conduct of others. As trust was lowered, community bonds were weakened. Divides formed between those with strong and differing opinions, and too between those with differing levels of engagement in the process (i.e. those who were less engaged distanced themselves from those who were most vocal, regardless of the alignment of their opinions on the proposal).

> *"The biggest thing was that we protect our sense of community, and that was what people valued the most, and that was probably the saddest part of the whole thing in that it did get affected." P2.*

Some Islanders developed suspicion of outsiders. Whereas King Island had been described as warmly welcoming visitors in the past, due to the disruption caused by the 'outsiders' proposing the TasWind project, outsiders were now viewed with some caution and suspicion.

> *"We're wary of welcoming people who… we're very wary. I mean, before we loved visitors, because we're so remote we love people coming, like you guys, we love it. People coming to see us, I mean we talk to, when a tour bus comes we chat with all the people, we really love it. But now, not so much." P5.*

Local institutions were affected due to perceptions about allegiances to or against the proposal. The local standing and reputations of the King Island newspaper, a community meeting place, and the local Council all were negatively affected. Council, however, was considered by some to be an important local institution that has contributed toward healing the community divide following the proposal. New institutions formed in the Island. For example, due to concern about the potential impacts of the proposal on local and migratory wildlife, a local bird conservation organisation formed, which has persisted following cessation of the proposal, and has continued to function with the intention of protecting local birds and promoting tourism.

> *"The [community organisation] […] they took money off them [proponents], and I haven't bothered renewing my membership." P8.*

The community's social networks were changed by the proposal. The general social groupings and associations in the Island were altered through the formation of new relationships, promoted by shared views on the proposal, and the breakdown of pre-existing relationships due to divergent views on the proposal.

> *"Everybody here on the island was thrown into the air, and when they all landed on the ground a completely new string of relationships have grown." P15.*

Long-term friendships and family relationships were described as being strained or broken. Some residents left the community due to uncertainty about future prospects, particularly related to perceptions about the impacts of the proposal on land value and tourism opportunities. Critically, many weak ties in the community (associations, though not close friendships) became hostile during the proposal (and many remained so). In some cases, these hostilities subsided. Both strong (friendships, family relationships) and weak (associations) relationships were affected by personal attacks, experienced by some community members in person (e.g. at public events/forums, in town), via the newspaper (e.g. in letters to the editor), online (e.g. on a Facebook group created for discussion of the proposal), and on the phone.

> *"It became very bitter on there [Facebook]. There was a lot of fighting on there, and nastiness, and I just stopped doing Facebook at that time. I just thought, 'I don't need it', and I sort of backed off a bit." P8.*

Business relationships, too, were strained, particularly between small business operators who identified differing views on the proposal, but depended on cooperation due to the small community economy. Some employees changed workplaces due to the conflict caused by the proposal. Additionally, businesses with owners whose stance on the proposal was publically known were boycotted by some with differing views.

> *"Businesses that supported [argument], people would boycott because they were [stance] wind tower." P8.*

Meanwhile, new friendships and associations formed as a result of

Table 1
Qualitative social impacts as outlined by Vanclay (2003, p.8).

| Qualitative social impact	Description
Way of life	How people live, work, play and interact with one another on a day-to-day basis.
Culture	Shared beliefs, customs, values and language or dialect.
Community	Cohesion, stability, character, services and facilities.
Political systems	The extent to which people are able to participate in decisions that affect their lives, the level of democratisation that is taking place, and the resources provided for this purpose.
Environment	The quality of the air and water people use; the availability and quality of the food they eat; the level of hazard or risk, dust and noise they are exposed to; the adequacy of sanitation, their physical safety, and their access to and control over resources.
Health and wellbeing	Health as a state of complete physical, mental, social and spiritual wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.
Personal and property rights	Particularly whether people are economically affected, or experience personal disadvantage which may include a violation of their civil liberties.
Fears and aspirations	Perceptions about safety, fears about the future of their community, and aspirations for their future and the future of their children.
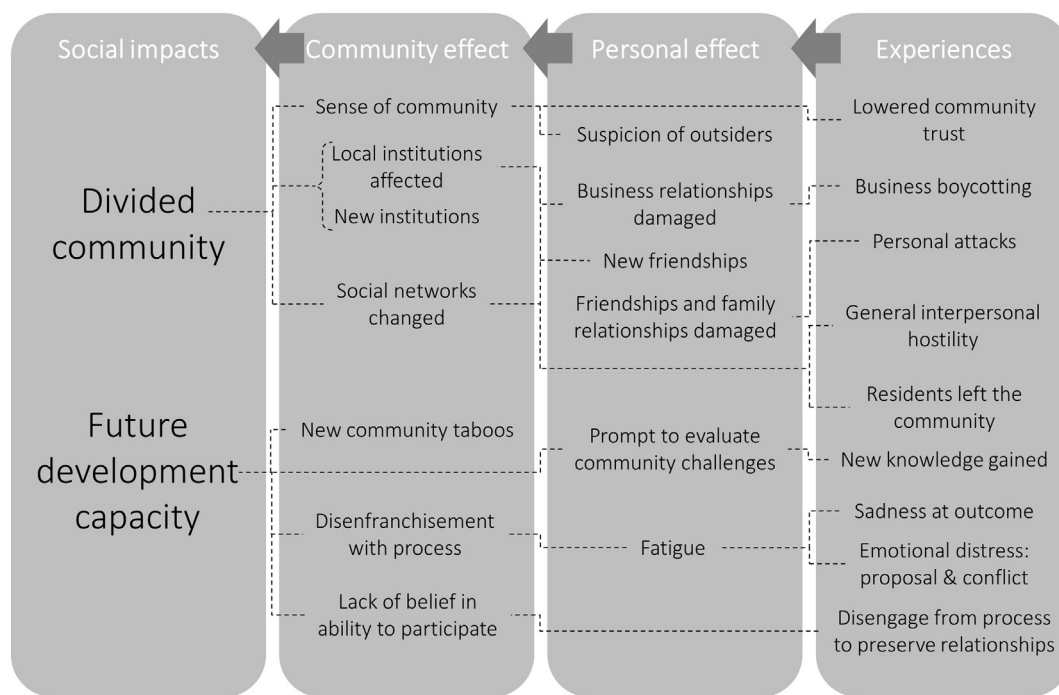
Fig. 1. The pathways of social change through to social impacts, affecting communities through personal experiences, personal effects, and community effects, resulting in the higher-order social impacts of a divided community and the community's future development capacity.

the community organising in new ways in response to the proposal. This was especially the case for the community members who engaged with a local community group that formed in opposition to the TasWind proposal.

3.2. Key social impact: future development capacity

The community was affected in terms of its future development capacity, both with regards to how locals expect to engage with future development opportunities, and how locals believe outsiders' perceptions of King Island will affect the future opportunities brought to King Island (Supplemental Materials Table 2).

"I think it would scare people off coming to do a project here or anything. […] They probably wouldn't consult, they'd buy the land and come in and do it." P12.

Despite the conflict associated with the proposal, many gained new technical or social knowledge as a result of their engagement with the project, for example, greater knowledge of how people behave in settings of uncertainty, or the economic requirements of large development projects. In many cases, this served a prompt to consider potential solutions to other challenges to the Island.

"It's got people thinking outside the square, and um… you know, it wasn't all bad. […] it has got people thinking about how we can improve our productivity here and so on, because we've got to make up for the loss of [local employment, unrelated to the TasWind proposal] mainly. We've got to try and improve business so that we don't continue that spiral downhill." P7.

For some community members, a decision to withdraw and disengage from the process was considered the best option given the social conflict that occurred. Accordingly, some developed cynicism about the community's ability to engage constructively in large-scale decision-making processes.

"To engage in that process in a really constructive way would've been great for us, because then we could engage in more processes […] to live in a community that can really engage in those sorts of processes would

be fantastic. You know, the process of looking at what we need, what we want, how we want to go about doing that, what our focus should be, who we think we are as a community (and as an island). We're not clear on any of that anymore." P16.*

Emotional distress was felt by many, caused by both the proposal itself (i.e. the technical specifications of the project, and the expected impacts of this on the community) and the conflict that resulted. These feelings saw some people expressing despair (e.g. not wanting to get out of bed in the morning), and others feeling that they may not have a future in the Island.

"I can't even describe the feeling, it's a hard emotion. It's despair. Like how do you fight it, you know? They just seem so big, and we're so small." P9.

As the proposal did not proceed beyond the feasibility stage, some experienced feelings of sadness and disappointment due to their perception of lost opportunities. As a result of the emotional cost from the proposal and conflict, community members became fatigued with the TasWind consultative process. This lowered their resilience to future disruptions or changes. This fatigue caused many to experience disenfranchisement with the consultative process, viewing either the consultative actions taken by the company, or the community's response to these actions, unfavourably. The proposal additionally created new local taboos. Following cessation of the project, TasWind, and wind energy more generally, became topics that were best avoided in order to preserve social harmony.

"It sort of put that little bit of a barrier there. You were, in a social thing, you were deliberately staying away from [TasWind/wind energy]. You know, if you were out on the social thing, you just kind of stayed away from that area rather than start it all up again. You just kept it a little bit different, which made it a little bit different." P13.

4. Discussion

Through this study, it is evident that social impacts manifest in complex ways, with interplay between the proposal and local dynamics. Social impacts on individuals and communities were categorised as

contributing to the higher-order impacts of a divided community, and the future development capacity of the community. Building on work from Vanclay (2002, 2003) and Arce-Gomez et al. (2015) that the qualitative social impacts are critical for a thorough, best practice SIA process, this study has demonstrated how they manifest from individual experiences of change through to social impacts at the community scale. We present these social impacts, reflecting how they manifested in the King Island community, in Fig. 1.

The pathways from social change through to social impacts presented in Fig. 1 provide insight into the manifestation and complexity of qualitative social impacts, and in this case those that are anticipatory (i.e. a result of the consultative process, rather than of the project itself). These findings bear out the work of Vanclay (2002), showing that social changes will interact with local conditions and context to cause social impacts.

Understanding such pathways, offers a means to predict, and therefore plan for, manage, and mitigate, the qualitative social impacts that occur before or early in the SIA process. While good practice guidelines for social impact assessment (Vanclay et al., 2015) espouse the assessment of impacts before they occur, the presentation of pathways here aims to explain the types of impacts that can occur as a result of pre-SIA consultation and anticipation, and by extension the SIA process itself. Social cohesion, in particular, can be affected by changes to social networks, the standing and roles of local institutions, and the strength of the sense of community as held by locals. Such community-scale effects, leading to a 'divided community' (e.g. Gross, 2007; Grubert and Skinner, 2017), are precipitated by individual level experiences relating to lowered trust in their community, personal attacks and general hostility, boycotting of businesses, and other residents leaving the community. This is contrary to expectations of social learning, where via participation in decision-making processes, community members develop a "cooperative discourse" (Webler et al., 1995, p. 447) that promotes acceptance of the range of values and interests in the community and pursuance of collective benefits ahead of self-interest (Webler et al., 1995; O'Faircheallaigh, 2010; Esteves et al., 2012). In cases where project proponents wish to minimise the negative social impacts caused to communities (whether for moral or strategic reasons), monitoring the incidence of these individual-scale experiences can identify when the proposal is at risk of causing damage to community cohesion. This accords with other research on the social impacts of wind farm development in Australia, where the resulting community conflict was identified as a key factor causing community concern and distress (Gross, 2007).

Similarly, for communities facing a locally significant wind energy development, articulation of the ways through which the capacity for future developments may be inhibited could assist community leadership and members to best maximise the positive impacts of a project proposal, whether those positive impacts are a result of the project itself (e.g. Junod et al., 2018), or through increased capacity as a result of constructive engagement with consultative processes (Webler et al., 1995; Gross, 2007; Glucker et al., 2013).

A central finding is that these social impacts stemmed not from the development of the wind energy project itself, but from the proposal of such a project. These anticipatory impacts occur with no material change to the landscape. In the case of King Island, the two years spent in consultation about the TasWind proposal provided ample opportunities for these social impacts to occur despite the project never reaching implementation. For SIA, this raises the question of what is considered within the scope of a project's social impacts. Vanclay et al. (2015) indicate that all social impacts resulting from an intervention in a social system ought to be captured within the SIA process. For SIA of wind energy developments (or other significant development proposals), there is an awkward mismatch between recommended best practice encouraging early consultation with communities and the assessment process that captures impacts forecast to arise from the project, but not the entire lifecycle of the proposal. Further, given the SIA is

a mandatory step toward regulatory approval for a wind energy development, there are demonstrated concerns regarding the impartiality of the content of the assessments, i.e. given they are prepared for the purposes of achieving the proponent's aims (Gross, 2007). The result of this is that a significant portion of the impacts felt by the community – those anticipatory impacts stemming from the consultative process rather than the project – go unassessed by regulators, and potentially unaccounted for by proponents.

SIA processes incorporate community consultation and engagement as a risk mitigation measure, but this study demonstrates that the consultative process itself can be a source of social impacts, and should be considered as such. Reflecting Vanclay et al. (2015), a wind energy development *intervention* would best be viewed as the project and consultative process, and social impacts assessed as such. This would capture the anticipatory social impacts, rather than a project-centric approach that assesses social impacts of the proposed project development, with the act of proposing considered an impact-free matter of process.

Implementation of an *intervention* approach, rather than a *project* approach to SIA processes, however, would complicate wind energy development proposals and their assessment. At present, SIA processes, such as those embedded within Tasmania's regulatory approvals system, require a finalised statement of social impacts, presented to authorities along with declaration of environmental impacts and specifications of project development. Maintaining the same project assessment schedule while considering social impacts of the *intervention* would require retrospective approvals for actions, for example community consultation, already undertaken. Moving the timing of the social impact assessments earlier in the process, ahead of intervening in a social system, would require project development to be undertaken in secret from communities, and likely would undermine the standard and reliability of information presented to authorities for assessment.

A workable solution may therefore be to disentangle SIA from EIA (Esteves et al., 2012) and require project proponents to develop social impact management strategies ahead of any consultation or engagement with communities. Such plans could be submitted to and assessed by government regulators or best practice industry organisations, guaranteeing adherence to minimum standards of consultation and accountability for the social impacts the process may cause. As wind energy developers have an incentive to minimise social impacts in order to avoid reputational risk and to pursue the social licence to operate (Lacey et al., 2017; Bond et al., 2018), such a system supporting responsible practice and accountability for impacts may be a welcome change to the regulatory systems if implemented in a way that minimises time and resource burdens on developers. Guidelines for best practice community consultation (e.g. Clean Energy Council, 2013a) may serve as the basis for codification of minimum requirements for community consultation. Recent research has shown that expectations for good practice community engagement may not be resisted by developers, with some wind energy developers (in this case in Canada) recognising limitations to extant minimum standards (Songsore et al., 2018). With consistency of consultative approaches, communities may additionally benefit from adjusting to familiar practices that over time become predictable, thereby lowering uncertainty and angst, potentially lessening the stresses caused by social conflict. Critical, however, is the recognition that well-planned community consultation does not in itself guarantee social harmony. Acknowledging not just the importance of the activities of community consultation, but also how these activities are executed and received by communities as significant factors influencing outcomes (Colvin et al., 2016; Lacey et al., 2017), emphasises that a box-ticking, compliance-based, approach to community consultation and the management of social impacts is likely inadequate (Vanclay, 2002). As energy justice is increasingly recognised as essential to the transition to renewable energy (Gross, 2007; Sovacool and Dworkin, 2015), it is reasonable to expect that SIA practice standards will extend to require meaningful and qualitative

insights across the entirety of a proponent's *intervention* in a social system.

Putting aside whether or not a structuralist approach such as the above to addressing the challenge of accounting for social impacts is sufficient or even feasible, an important recognition is that of the inherent power imbalance between project proponents and communities. This research has examined the anticipatory social impacts of the act of proposing, regardless of subsequent development of a resource project. For proponents, then, little more than publically sharing an idea may be adequate for disrupting a community. In response, communities are expected to engage with proponents through consultative processes that can range from minimum levels of consultation via the mandated public submission process through to protracted and time-intensive engagement processes. In these cases, communities' only choice is the extent to which they will engage with the process as designed by the project proponent, or whether they will organise outside of the facilitated consultation process and undertake oppositional (or supportive) actions to represent their interests.

5. Conclusions

This study examined the experiences of the King Island community during the proposal of the TasWind wind energy development proposal to unpack the qualitative nature of social impacts, producing insights that go beyond quantitative measures of demographic or economic change. Additionally, the implications of significant anticipatory social impacts resulting from the consultative process, as distinct from the project impacts, were discussed. Social impacts affect communities through social changes that occur as experiences at the personal level, which drive effects on people and the community more broadly. These culminate in higher-order social impacts, in this case affecting the capacity of the community to respond to future development opportunities, and the division of the community. Through explicating the pathways of these social changes through to social impacts, we gain an empirically-grounded understanding of how complex social impacts manifest. From this, communities, and particularly community leaders, can anticipate the possible changes resulting from a resource development proposal, potentially allowing locally-based plans for managing and mitigating the worst of the impacts and best capitalising on the positive impacts.

The processes for social impact assessment presently do not allow for pre-approval of the proposal-based actions (i.e. consultation) which can cause social impacts ahead of development of the project (and ahead of the formal SIA process). Separating SIA from the traditional environmental and economic regulatory approvals may provide an opportunity to improve practices and accountability for impacts, and at the same time elevate the standing of SIA above being viewed as just one small part of the broader environmental impact assessment processes.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eiar.2019.03.007.

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