

Senate Wind Farm Inquiry

Submitted by

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I would like to comment on the following:

(a) Any adverse health effects for people living in close proximity to wind farms

There is a rapidly growing world-wide professional realization that reported health issues in people living close to established wind farms have both commonality and substance. Wind energy proponents dismiss this evidence as being symptomatic of “Nimbyism” and claim that peer reviewed studies have not conclusively linked these health issues to wind turbines, while medical professionals call for urgent scientific research to establish the facts. **The concern is that development approvals are being fast tracked ahead of the outcomes of research.**

(b) Concerns over the excessive noise and vibrations emitted by wind farms, which are in close proximity to people’s homes

Wind energy companies deny that measured noise levels exceed established limits (although there are many world-wide examples leading to litigation to the contrary) but their research data is tailored to their needs – e.g. Noise measurement data published by industry experts focuses only on the range of sound frequencies audible to the human ear. Independent audiologists have proved that frequencies below the human hearing range have much higher sound pressure levels extending up to several kilometres downstream of operating wind turbines.

It is acknowledged by the industry that wind turbulence is created downstream of operating turbines, but no recognition of the effects of beat frequencies created where the turbulence from adjacent turbines merge is attempted. Valley locations downstream of turbines can focus and amplify these effects.

My experience with the proponents of a local wind farm development is that there is little willingness to consider these effects on residents whose properties are in close proximity, but are not sought as turbine sites. The best verbal commitment made to me is that “there won’t be a turbine within one kilometre of your house” Legislation has already been enacted in other countries to prevent turbine location within two kilometres of houses, and recent research suggests that greater offsets are required. **There are currently NO offset provisions in planning requirements in Australia, at Federal, State and Local Government levels.**

(c) The impact of rural wind farms on property values, employment opportunities and farm income

Wind companies claim that property values increase in the vicinity of a wind farm. Factual evidence is just the opposite. Where residents have moved away from wind farms to avoid the noise and health issues, they have been unable to sell their properties, except to the wind company concerned – e.g. Waubra and Toora in Victoria. Rural real estate experts have come forward to confirm that local property values decline when a wind farm is built. (Elders Rural manager is one recent example). Any increased farm income only applies to those property owners who have entered into agreements to have turbines sited on their property. Adjoining residents receive no benefit whatsoever – only the loss of value of their property, possibly preventing them from relocating if they desire. Conversely, turbine site lessors have a guaranteed income which allows them to live elsewhere if they subsequently choose to do so. **Residents who have chosen a rural lifestyle in their desired location are the big losers when a wind farm is constructed nearby.**

(d) The interface between Commonwealth, State and local planning laws as they pertain to wind farms.

What interface? When attempting to research planning codes, the Commonwealth response was that it is State responsibility; the State response was that it is Local Government's responsibility; the local government response is that they have to fit in with State guidelines, and that if a project is given Major Project status all guidelines are overridden by the state anyway. Such is the current case in South Australia where our government has committed to 30% renewable energy by 2020, in a trade-off for Commonwealth funding for Adelaide's desalination plant. Premier Rann has publicly stated that he wants 2,000 turbines in South Australia's Mid North region and 5,000 turbines on Eyre Peninsular. No consideration has been given to local government planning requirements. **Wind energy companies are currently taking advantage of this lack of systematic planning from Commonwealth Government downwards to override local objections to their developments.**

(e) Any other relevant matters.

Bushfire risks from wind turbine fires

There are current proposals for wind farm developments in the Southern Flinders Ranges, e.g. Origin Energy's Collaby Hill development. This location is recognized by the Country Fire Service as an extreme fire risk area in which a fire is likely to present major access difficulties. South Australia has already experienced three wind turbine fires, the latest at the Starfish Hill wind farm at Cape Jervis. The energy company concerned would not allow fire crews to approach closer than one kilometre from the tower due to the possibility of blades breaking up and

flying some distance from the tower. This did eventuate and ultimately the tower also collapsed. In the case of a similar event in the Southern Flinders this exclusion zone would allow a ground fire started from falling turbine components to expand into a possibly uncontrollable bushfire, particularly in extreme heat conditions when a turbine fire is most likely. **Wind turbines have been proved to start fires. Inappropriate siting without planning control will be inviting potential disasters.**

The business ethics of wind energy companies

The secrecy provisions imposed by wind energy companies begs the question:- if these developments are such a good thing, why do companies go to such lengths to keep information from the public? Communities have been divided by wind farm developments. Turbine site lessors are prevented from comparing their contracts under threat of being sued. In the case of a property at Waubra being purchased by Acciona Energy to settle claims of health issues by the owner, a “gag clause” was part of the contract. When this person was subpoenaed to appear as a witness in a court case challenging approval of a wind farm development, they were threatened with litigation if they proceeded! Why will energy companies flatly refuse to attend community forums to present their case for a proposed development? They will only meet with individual landowners on their properties. “Divide and Conquer” appears to be the strategy by which these companies operate.

Small local communities with a long history of mutual cooperation are being split by wind farm developments. The social fabric of these communities is destroyed by commercial wind farm development.

Long term viability of wind farms

The commercial viability of wind farms is questionable. North America has abandoned wind farms where they were proved to be uneconomic. The Australian scene appears to be driven by government incentives and history has already shown that existing wind farms have had multiple ownership changes in their short existence. Locally there is a wind farm proposal, approved but not constructed, which is on its third owner (Carmody Hill). Existing Australian wind farms have been sold to foreign companies as soon they have been completed and commissioned. If wind farms are sound, viable, long term investments in Australia's future energy needs, why are they being traded as short-term commodities by the companies which build them? By their own statements, energy companies confirm that wind generation will never be considered as a base-load power producer and that back-up generation will always be required.

There is little evidence that wind farms are being constructed with a view to meeting long term Australian needs – rather than as short-term tradable commodities taking advantage of current government incentives.