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Senate Inquiry into the Social and Economic Impact of Rural Wind Farms

Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

By email: community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au

A Response to the Social and Economic Impact of Rural Wind Farms

Dear Sir/ Madam,

Please accept our submission to the Senate Inquiry into the Social and Economic Impact of Rural Wind Farms.

The Central Victorian Greenhouse Alliance Inc. is an association whose members consist of 14 local governments, businesses, education and community organisations from the Central Victorian Region. The CVGA is playing a key role in creating sustainable, climate-aware communities and profitable, climate-friendly economies in our region.

Our objectives are to reduce Central Victorian Greenhouse Gas Emissions and to promote sustainable development and sustainable economic growth throughout the region.

Our key activities include:

- Raising awareness of climate change, its effects and the solutions.
- Providing a forum for discussing opportunities and challenges in transitioning to a sustainable society.
- Facilitating communication networks, partnerships and cooperative ventures on regional issues of sustainability and climate change adaptation.

We believe that our region has enormous potential for generating and utilizing renewable energy and that a combination of wind, bioelectricity, solar and geothermal power generation, in combination with energy efficiency measures, could supply 100 per cent of Central Victoria's energy needs by 2050.

Historically, the electricity supply network has been constructed and managed with a vision of large generation facilities remote from population centres. In Victoria, the transmission and distribution networks have been designed to evacuate power from the large Latrobe valley coal generators, and transmit and distribute it to the rest of Victoria. The resulting structure of our energy networks was

appropriate in their time; however, the environment in which the electricity industry operates is changing, with a much greater societal focus on carbon emissions and environmental sustainability. This is clearly evident in the level of government policy initiatives resulting from the [Garnaut Climate Change Review](#), the [Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme](#) (CPRS) and [Mandatory Renewable Energy Targets](#) (MRET). In recent years, there has been much activity on the subject of sustainable and distributed generation in the Australian electricity industry, including a large body of work undertaken by the [Ministerial Council on Energy](#).

Clearly if Australia is to make a serious effort to combat climate change and greatly reduce our greenhouse emissions in this and subsequent decades, our society will need to move away from our current reliance on coal and other fossil fuels to meet our energy needs as soon as is possible.

Wind Generation is currently an advanced, proven and economically viable renewable energy option and has been the primary large scale generation activity supported under the MRET scheme. For our society to transition away from coal generation, a suite of well planned wind energy projects should be a cornerstone of this new renewable energy industry.

The development of Wind Energy Generation Infrastructure has benefited communities in regional Australia, producing local and regional jobs, economic growth and diversity in engineering, service industries and providing direct financial support for many farmers and other land owners and their communities.

Investment in Wind Energy Generation in the 2009-2010 was reportedly almost \$1.6 billion (Bloomberg, New Energy Finance, 2010). The wind industry as part of the larger renewable energy industry is of considerable economic benefit to our nation via the creation of jobs, the stimulation of growth in manufacturing and construction sectors and by providing a spread of economic activity over a number of regions.

Wind Energy Projects as with other renewable energy projects do not decrease the agricultural value of the land and are compatible with agricultural land uses, unlike the activities of coal and coal seam gas extraction.

The CVGA believes that appropriately sighted and connected wind projects both large scale and smaller scale 'community funded' and renewable generation projects such as Solar PV and Solar thermal, biomass to energy and to a lesser extent geothermal projects to locally offset the need for increasing investment in network infrastructure., when combined with comprehensive demand management and efficiency measures amongst power consumers.

We would like to respond to specific areas of interest outlined in the scope of the Inquiry.

“This inquiry will look into the social and economic impacts of rural wind farms, and in particular:

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

The CVGA membership is aware that their constituencies are exposed to ‘mixed messages’ regarding the suggested adverse health effects of living near wind farms. There is no peer reviewed science based evidence to support ill effects from exposure to wind farms. Australian and international studies on wind farm noise do not support a causal link between the presence of turbines and some individual’s health issues. The CVGA would welcome government funding of further Australian based research into this area.

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

We believe that the noise from wind farm infrastructure has been shown to be of a similar level to that of back ground vibrations experienced from exposure to traffic, domestic appliances and environmental noise such as the sound of the ocean. There is currently no peer reviewed scientific data to suggest that the levels of low frequency noise or infrasound emitted by wind turbines make humans sick. Research to date has not shown any negative health effects at the sound levels produced by operational wind turbines. There are documented scientific studies ^(1,2) that link exposure to high (greater than 110dB) industrial levels of low frequency infra sound with some levels of physiological effect, however these levels have not been found to exist in the proximity of any wind farm in Australia.

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

We understand that some members of the community have concerns about the placement of turbines and that this concern places significant demands on local government resources when addressing planning issues arising from proposed developments. Our members accept the need for robust planning processes, to ensure wind farms are placed in appropriate locations. Renewable Wind Energy Projects are subject to the issues and personal opinions that apply to any infrastructure development in our landscape. We do not wish to see a tightening of restrictions or the placement of further restrictions on project development than already exist under Federal, State and local government planning and environmental guidelines. We would like to see long term strategic planning for the development of renewable energy infrastructure by both state and federally.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we urge the senate committee to consider the overwhelming weight of evidence that supports wind energy as a viable source of renewable energy. Wind energy installations are a proven form of energy generation and should be supported as part of a broader matrix of renewable energy generation and energy efficiency measures. Supporting investment in renewable generation will generate regional employment and directly benefit for landowners and their communities in rural areas whilst acting to reduce our greenhouse emissions.

With appropriate controls and robust planning processes, wind has proven itself to be an excellent form of energy as part of a broader mix, while driving investment and employment and direct benefit for landowners in rural areas and acting to reduce our greenhouse emissions.

References

(1) Infrasound Toxicological Summary November 2001 National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences USA (NIEHS)

(2) National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC, 2010): Wind Turbines and Health. A Rapid Review of the Evidence
http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/_files_nhmrc/file/publications/synopses/evidence_review_wind_turbines_and_health.pdf