windlab

AUSTRALIA
CANBERRA

Boeing Centre, Level 3,
55 Blackall St, Barton,
ACT 2600
tel · +61 2 6175 4600

www.windlab.com

10 February 2011
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia
By email: community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au

Windlab submission to the Senate Inquiry "The Social and Economic Impact of Rural Wind Farms"

Dear Sir/ Madam,

Windlab welcomes the opportunity to provide the Senate Inquiry with evidence of the substantial social and economic benefits of wind energy in rural communities. Windlab itself is an example of how the green economy is providing employment, export opportunities and sustainable economic growth for Australia.

Wind Power: the leading low emission electricity generation source

Whilst it is important that the industry demonstrates to this Inquiry that it is not presenting unreasonable impacts on communities and the environment, it is also important to reinforce that the purpose of the Renewable Energy Target is to deliver the lowest cost clean energy to the electricity user. Wind power is presently unique in this ability to deliver this affordable, reliable energy.

Wind power is the most effective and lowest cost means of removing carbon dioxide emissions from Australia's energy mix with abatement costs in Australia as low as $40 per tonne. This compares with figures as high as $400 per tonne for domestic solar and is a fraction of the cost of large scale solar.

Windlab: Integrated and strategic science, innovation policy at work

It has been proved many times that innovation is the engine behind productivity growth and ultimately the economic health of the nation. Windlab is an example of how investment by the Australian people in education, science, innovation and renewable energy has created a new industry employing Australians in an international business. Windlab was founded based on world leading science developed within CSIRO, our growth was underpinned by funding from Ausindusty's Innovation Investment Fund (IIF) and our Australian market is underpinned by Australia's Renewable Energy target. This long-term, evidence-based vision and discipline by successive Australian Governments should, in Windlab's opinion, be perpetuated by this inquiry and its findings should be based on empirical evidence with reference to perils of continued reliance on emissions intensive electricity generation.

Community Benefits
There are 278MW of wind power currently in construction in Australia as a direct result of Windlab's science, skills and people, providing enough emission free power for around 200,000 Australian homes. These turbines deliver around two million dollars per year to the rural communities that host them. Just as importantly adherence to our planning laws ensure they do this without unreasonable social and environmental impacts.

There are no current study results or scientific observations to support the claim that they cause adverse health effects for people living near wind farms.
The National Health and Medical Research Council, Clean Energy Council, World Health Organisation, Victorian Department of Health, as well as a number of overseas organisations all conclude that there is no evidence of direct health effects arising from wind turbines. No credible scientific evidence exists which identifies any negative health effects of wind turbines. More than 150,000 turbines are now installed around the world, with some operating for several decades. Additionally, noise standards used in overseas countries have allowed turbines to be located much closer to houses than those proposed and built in Australia today. Even so, no negative effects are yet to be credibly identified in the 20 years or so that modern wind turbines have been operating.

Stringent Australian standards set conservative maximum noise levels which are supported by careful planning and post construction monitoring.
Wind Farms in Australia are located to conform to the stringent existing standards and guidelines currently used in Australia. The base noise level requirement of 35 or 40dB (A) typically used in Australia is much more conservative than recommended by the World Health Organisation of 45dB (A). Windlab accepts the need for effective noise standards for wind projects and we use best practice to ensure that any of our proposals conform to the guidelines in place in the relevant state or territory. Windlab understands that once wind farms are built, the rates of complaints are very low in Australia. However we do appreciate that for some people if a noise can be heard, then annoyance can result, regardless of the noise level or the standard or guideline that applies.

A reduction in property values has not been statistically proven in results of studies on wind farms.
Studies conducted both in Australia (by the NSW Valuer General) and internationally (such as "The Impact of Wind Power Projects on Residential Property Values in the United States: A Multi-Site Hedonic Analysis") have shown that wind farms do not appear to negatively affect property values. Even though, home sales prices are sensitive to the general visual quality of views from a property, a view of a wind farm did not demonstrably impact sales prices. The 2009 US study concluded that "neither the view of wind farm nor the distance of the home to wind farm was found to have any consistent, measurable, and significant effect on the selling prices of nearby homes". Windlab is not aware of any credible studies that support the claim that wind farms have an impact on property values. Any claims to date have been largely subjective and not supported by statistical evidence.

The growing Australian wind industry generates employment opportunities in local rural communities and in innovative future oriented businesses.
Construction of wind farms is expected to generate up to 17,000 full time equivalent jobs by 2020. Many of these jobs will be located in rural communities which should create an economic boost and help to strengthen and diversify regional Australia. Windlab staff based in Canberra, Melbourne and internationally are helping our company and nation to earn export revenue from a sustainable and clean industry.

Wind farms should not be required to meet unnecessary higher standards than faced by other infrastructure developments which are already among the most stringent in the world.
Windlab operates globally in markets such as North America, South Africa and Australia and New Zealand. Our experience shows that Australian wind farm development guidelines and planning assessment standards are already some of the strictest in the world. The current planning structure generally provides sufficient mechanisms to assess any impacts and balance these with the benefits from any proposed wind farm developments. However, we find that the planning process in our Australian market is more complex and less efficient than elsewhere and is often due to the interaction of the often conflicting Federal, State and local government planning requirements. Providing for more universal and consistent regulation across all levels of statutory authority would help to reduce red tape and hopefully make wind power less expensive.

Windlab is delighted to lead the technology which supports the development of high quality wind energy sites which in turn is essential for Australia to meet its renewable energy target and to reduce carbon emissions. Windlab's employees, investors, clients, and supporters look forward to future government initiatives and policies which continue to support the necessary and appropriate development of wind power as well as helping our dynamic industry to continue to grow and strengthen in Australia.

If you have any questions arising from this submission, please contact Luke Osborne
.

Yours sincerely,

Luke Osborne
Chief Operating Officer