

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

by Peter Hall – 2 Feb 2011

My wife and I are both shareholders in Hepburn Community Wind Park Cooperative Ltd (Hepburn Wind), the developer and future owner and operator of Australia's first community owned wind farm at Leonards Hill, just south of Daylesford Victoria. The wind farm, when commissioned later this year, will comprise two 2 megawatt wind turbines giving a total capacity of 4 megawatt of power. This will produce enough electricity for 2,300 homes, almost the number of households in Daylesford and nearby Hepburn Springs.

Before making this submission I scanned the 72 submissions already made public on the web. What I found alarmed me:

- 52 (74%) were against wind farms for a variety of reasons, 13 (18%) were in favour and 5 (7%) called for more investigations / tighter controls (in fact, I had scanned 52 submissions before I found one that was favourable)
- 14 (20%) came from overseas – all of them negative. A network in action?

I trust the Committee will reach its conclusions based upon the strength of the evidence presented, and not upon the numbers of misinformed or misguided submissions. After all, recent polling in regional NSW has shown that 85% support wind power, with majorities supporting it in their own communities.

Global warming, exhaustion of non-renewable resources and the need for wind generation

Despite what deniers may say, climate change is a demonstrable and proven fact which must be of major concern to ourselves and the generations that follow us on this planet – for as long as the climate allows. And the evidence for its anthropogenic origins is overwhelming to those willing to look at it openly.

Already we are feeling the effects, with more and more disturbed climate events. We owe it to our descendents to do every thing within our power to limit our effects on climate, and to accommodate those that are already inevitable.

Power generation from renewable, non-contaminating resources is one of the most important steps we can take. And wind power is at the forefront of technologies currently available. So why do we not pursue it with all possible speed?

Objections to wind power

I have no doubt that you will examine the submissions received more thoroughly than I, but I note that objections focus on four main areas of concern – visual intrusion in the landscape; noise pollution; health risks; and economics. I wish to comment on each of these from my own limited perspective.

Visual intrusion in the landscape

There are no “experts” in assessing this issue, as conclusions are entirely subjective. My own view is that wind turbines are not an objectionable intrusion on the natural landscape – in fact in many instances they can add interest. As for those who do object, I'm glad they weren't around giving voice when the nation's major transmission lines were built, or we might still be in the dark ages (no pun intended).

I acknowledge that there are some areas of especial scenic beauty, such as some of our

better known coastlines (say Victoria's "Twelve Apostles") where wind turbines would be entirely out of place. But in general I consider this objection to be without foundation.

Noise pollution

I have visited wind farms on several occasions and stood under the turbines in varying wind conditions. I have not experienced any objectionable wind noise. Nor have residents living nearby, to whom I have spoken about it, had any complaints.

Some will say it is not just the most audible noise that is the problem, but in particular that of lower frequencies. However, research by Adelaide consultancy Sonus for Pacific Hydro Pty Ltd has recently shown that low frequency noise levels at the beach and in the CBD are typically higher than near wind farms. Perhaps it is time that we moved our populations away from the beaches and the cities!

Obviously there needs to be a minimum distance between operating turbines and residential accommodation, but with that proviso I consider this objection also to be without foundation.

Health Risks

This objection would cause me serious concern if I considered it to be warranted. However, I have read the findings and conclusions of "Wind Turbines and Health – A Rapid Review of the Evidence, July 2010" by the National Health and Medical Research Council of the Australian Government and appended as attachment 1 to Submission 56 by REpower Australia.

The report concludes: "This review of the available evidence, including journal articles, surveys, literature reviews and government reports, supports the statement of the American and Canadian Wind Energy Association that: *There are no direct pathological effects from wind farms and that any potential impact on humans can be minimised by following existing planning guidelines.*

I accept this finding over the many alarmist concerns raised in other submissions, and trust that you will do the same unless strong evidence to the contrary comes to your attention.

Economics

Other submissions present all sorts of arguments to suggest that wind power generation is not economic.

The nearly 1600 investors in Hepburn Wind would beg to differ. We did not invest out of the goodness of our hearts, or as a token gesture toward climate change. We did so because the Prospectus for the investment demonstrated that we could expect a good financial return on the funds committed.

We have also invested in solar panel generation on our home, but only to the extent that was subsidized by government. Beyond that, we believe money directed to Hepburn Wind will give much better returns in power generation than any domestic solar facility.

Conclusion

By all means investigate the Social and Economic Impact of Rural Wind Farms in Australia. But please do so with a view to **encouraging wind farm development, subject to appropriate planning constraints.**