

Submission to the Senate Inquiry on Wind Turbines

My name is Charles E Barber. I live at "Bannister Springs", Bannister NSW 2580. The home in which I live is in close proximity to the Gullen Range Wind Farm; the nearest turbine of which is located approximately 1.8 km from my home.

In addition, the multi-hectare substation is located only 450-500 m from my back boundary. The wind farm has had a profound effect on my lifestyle, my rural amenity and, most of all, the value of my property.

In writing to this inquiry, I would like to write to the following terms of reference:

- c. the role and capacity of the National Health and Medical Research Council in providing guidance to state and territory authorities;
- d. the implementation of planning processes in relation to wind farms, including the level of information available to prospective wind farm hosts;
- e. the adequacy of monitoring and compliance governance of wind farms;
- f. the application and integrity of national wind farm guidelines;

Abstract:

This submission is a personal reflection on the wind industry based on my experience in living in close proximity to the Gullen Range Wind Farm.

Further this submission raises points for the Senator's consideration regarding health, the planning process and the business operations and business models of the wind industry here in Australia.

Recommendation:

I would respectfully request that the Senators involved in this inquiry respond by recommending a Royal Commission which will investigate the possible health problems of the wind industry and the industry's viability as an economic entity.

There is too much at stake for any other conclusion to be reached.

Submission

I feel that I can write with some authority on these particular terms of reference due to my experience with the wind farm proponent, Goldwind Australia (operating through a subsidiary, the New Gullen Range Wind Farm).

Goldwind has been and continues to be what only can be described as a wretched developer whose attitude to the local residents and landowners can only be described as indifferent, insensitive and cavalier.

There are a significant number of affected residents and landowners whose rights and properties have been traduced by a rogue company with scant regard for the basic rights of Australian citizens and, apparently, the law.

It is a weighty matter assigned to this inquiry, and there are two considerations that should guide the committee's judgement. It's just not the review of the policies guiding the development of wind farms, which is in and of itself a critical task. It should be a consideration of the effects this industry has on the citizenry of Australia.

Further this inquiry should consider the economic viability of an industry which is utilising 16th Century technology (supposedly updated for the 21st Century) and the effect this industry is supposedly having on carbon abatement.

In pursuing these two related objectives, the inquiry needs to have an objectivity that focuses on the terms of reference without the attendant hysteria governing climate change, carbon abatement and global warming.

I am in no position to either analyse or provide useful input regarding Term of Reference (TOR) "a.", however, I'm sure wiser heads than mine can explain whether or not this industry justifies both its privileged status with the federal government and various state governments and whether or not the wind industry pulls its economic weight.

I can, however, comment with some insight about TORs c-f.

TOR c.: "the role and capacity of the National Health and Medical Research Council in providing guidance to state and territory authorities;"

The NHMRC has been no friend to the residents and landowners proximate to wind farms.

The body has done little except to be a reassuring cheerleader to an industry that it appears has no shortage of friends.

The matter would seem to be simple: The onus that wind turbines and wind farms are not hazardous and an impediment to health and wellbeing should be placed on the manufacturers of wind turbines and the builders of wind farms. It should not be placed on nearby residents who are scapegoated by health officials and the media as a group of whinging NIMBYs who are either resentful of development or envious of their neighbours' financial windfall.

Again, the matter would seem to be simple.

Wind turbines produce large quantities of low frequency infrasound at sound frequencies inaudible to human hearing, but sufficient to produce responses in some sensitive recipients.

The guidelines, which were implemented by the various state bodies, insist on measuring sound pressure levels in the audible spectrum using the DbA weighted index. This seems incomprehensible to me.

And again, to me, the matter is simple.

Low frequency infrasound has long been recognised as an industrial hazard that stimulate discomfort, annoyance and ill-health in heavy industry. Vibro acoustic disease stimulated by low frequency infrasound have long been recognised. Yet, residents are forced to be exposed to infrasound for days on end

The NHMRC has a statutory duty to thoroughly investigate the role wind turbines potentially have in causing health problems.

Their duty to date seems to revolve around reviewing studies published by the wind industry insisting that there is no problem.

Thorough and independent research must be funded.

However, recently there has been a new development.

Last month, on the 25th of February, in the Senate Estimates Committee under close questioning from Senator John Madigan, Professor Warwick Anderson, Chairman of the National Health and Research Council admitted:

“The overwhelming bulk of the evidence shows that, up to 500 metres, there are indeed effects on health of noise at the level that wind turbines do. From 500 to 1,500, the evidence is that there probably are, although they are probably modest. And the bulk of evidence shows that, after 1,500 metres, although some people may indeed individually attribute their sleep to the wind turbine noise, the likelihood is low.”

My apologies for Professor Anderson’s tortured syntax.

This may not seem like such a big deal, but it is.

The dominant theme in all statements from the NHMRC has been that there are no problems, that there are no health effects, that, without directly stating the principle, that wind turbines are safe.

Those that complain of health effects are characterised as neurotics, obsessing over benign structures whose only sin is blocking their view. One academic has reached into the obscure using the opposite of the placebo effect, hence the “nocebo” effect. Stating essentially that the effect of people experiencing symptoms from wind turbines is psychogenic. In other words, it’s all in their heads.

How right they are. The last time I checked headaches, nausea, vertigo and the main effects of sleep deprivation are indeed in peoples’ heads.

One noted climate change advocate, who has been scathing in his criticism of people suffering from wind turbine related symptoms has said that it is only the green eyed monster of envy at all the dollars neighbours are raking in from having wind turbines on their properties. A little package containing a stack of unmarked bills would remedy all their symptoms and dollar signs would cure all.

How insulting.

But, Professor Anderson has let the cat out of the bag. There are health effects and they are acoustical.

And this is the rub.

Acoustics as a science is a slippery creature.

All of the learned senators know that sound can play tricks on us.

The most important factor for any concert whether it be London Philharmonic or Metallica is not the instruments, the vocals, the sound system or the performers. It's the venue – the theatre, the room, the stadium in which they are playing.

For Warwick Anderson to establish a bullseye of empirical concentric rings at 500 and 1500 metres is only making a target for the NHMRC and himself.

The direction of the wind is infinitely variable. As is the velocity. As is the temperature. As is the humidity. As is the topography. As is the placement of the turbines in an array.

And most importantly, as are the people.

In families, there are people who suffer grievously from the noise. Others are unaffected.

There has been research primarily coming out of the USA for decades that wind turbines cause problems.

1 July 1979 a prototypical wind turbine was installed in Boone, North Carolina USA. By 1 September 1979, families within 3 km were complaining bitterly about noise and unpleasant sensations.

In 1982 an obscure scientific research body, NASA, provided evidence to the wind industry that both inside and outside homes, wind turbines caused problems.

In 1985 doctors DS Nussbaum and S Reinis proposed a hypothesis on why some people suffered from wind turbine noise and others didn't. And they identified infrasound, low frequency noise as the culprit.

In the years 1985 through 1987 Noel Kelly, NASA again, both provided evidence about infrasound and recreated the annoyance and symptoms in the laboratory. Infrasound yet again.

Unfortunately, in 1995 NASA ended their research. The source of the annoyance was the sound of the blades passing the pylon of a wind turbine generating huge low frequency sound waves.

By 1996 the wind industry had regrouped utilising the Chicken Little school of thought that what you can't hear can't hurt you and came up with the **ETSU-R-97 Guidelines**. There were no longer any problems from wind turbines because we'll only measure the sound in the audible spectrum and no testing inside homes either. We don't need to do that because you're inside right? The sound would have to be less. Except that certain homes in certain frequencies resonate in sympathy with the sound waves and it's like living in a bass drum.

This has gone on for years.

The wind industry asserts that there is no problem while the money rolls in. People suffer and their money rolls out because no one, including environmental fanatics, eco warriors and even wind turbine executives, want to live near a wind farm.

The wind farms are imposed on naïve farmers who think that they will make easy money and pay in spades for their cash. Their farms are tied up in restrictive leases for insane periods of time. In the case of the Gullen Range Wind Farm, it's 60 to 90 years. They are bound by confidentiality clauses and are gagged from complaining.

Nearby residents have no say at all. The consultative process is lip service and box ticking. Their properties are devalued. Their present and futures blighted. And their lives made a misery.

I live near the Gullen Range Wind Farm. I know what it's like to live in close proximity to a large intrusive industrial development.

The Gullen Range Wind Farm has been an exercise in corporate thuggery. Intimidation, buyouts, under-the-table deals, shadowy third-party purchasers of property and media disinformation are their stock and trade.

In the meantime, they run an industry that is based on government largesse and subsidy while spreading misery over hundreds of square kilometres.

When a PAC Commission denied a modification to the wind farm. And I'm sure you eminent senators would be well aware of the legal impudence of Gullen Range in moving 69 of 73 turbines in defiance of a Land and Environment Court Order. A compliant state government did some public hand wringing, but will only require the proponent to move nine turbines. And, we all know, that won't happen, because residents have been bought out, paid off and intimidated.

Those nine turbines will probably not be moved. We know the other sixty won't be touched. And it will be business as usual.

As the distinguished businessman Don Vito Corleone observed to his son, "It's just business, Michael."

Michael, as we all know, learned his lessons and the business from his father well.

I would ask the learned commissioners to reject this development. The previous speakers have made their points well as to how inappropriate this development is and how it will further blight both the landscape of the Crookwell District and the lives of its residents.

I would think the precautionary principle of "*Primum non nocere*", the first principle of bioethics, "first do no harm", should apply. In this case, it is better to do nothing and leave the landscape as it is and the residents as they are, than to risk causing more harm than good.

The wind industry is a rapacious machine that cares nought for the environment and probably even less about renewable energy.

It is concerned with its bottom line and it is concerned about reaping as much money as possible from the lives of others.

Nothing else.

TOR d.: “the implementation of planning processes in relation to wind farms, including the level of information available to prospective wind farm hosts;”

TOR e.:” the application and integrity of national wind farm guidelines;”

The planning behind the Gullen Range could be used as a case study for how not to plan a major development.

The chronology, which I’m sure other submissions will cover in detail, includes:

- a court case in the NSW Land and Environment Court in 2010;
- a determination by this court ruling that the turbines (because of proximity to residents) had to be sited as per the Development Application;
- the developer resiting 69 of the 73 turbines, some over 100 metres from the original locations;
- the submission of a retrospective modification to the development, after building;
- rejection of these modifications by a Planning Assessment Commission
- the NSW State Government essentially ignoring the decision of its own Planning and Assessment Commission and permitting the modifications;
- a further court case in which the wind farm proponent is taking the government to court in a case to be heard this year;
- and in all probability, another court case after that.

One is lost for words at what only can be termed a fiasco.

The two concepts of adherence to planning regulations and oversight by the supervising government agency (in this case, the NSW Department of Planning and Environment) can only be termed notional and fanciful.

Bureaucrats ignored their duty. Were too busy to visit the development. Permitted a ruthless and rapacious developer to do as it wished. And then legitimised the process.

As I wrote, oversight and compliance procedures were strictly notional.

TOR e. “the adequacy of monitoring and compliance governance of wind farms;”

I would simply ask the Senate Inquiry: “What monitoring? What compliance procedures?”

There has been a cursory attempt at monitoring and perfunctory and feeble efforts on the part of government agencies to ensure compliance.

The turbines erected at the Gullen Range Wind Farm were **not** part of the original development application. One would ask, apparently rhetorically: how could the

major component of the wind farm, i.e. the actual turbines to be utilised, **not** be part of the environmental impact statement?

Indeed.

Consequently, the noise within the precinct of the wind farm is horrible. Residents are suffering. Land values have plummeted.

And, the major element of local annoyance, the noise from the turbines has never been subjected to scientific analysis. The much-discussed South Australian Environmental Noise Guidelines for Wind Farms (adapted and implemented all over Australia), are pretty much accepted as gospel without the veracity of their theology ever being tested. The noise guidelines are designed for an absolute minimal level of compliance on the part of any wind farm proponent. And they fail to protect residents.

One is reminded of Ralph Nader's ground breaking whistle blowing effort on the car industry Unsafe at Any Speed about the car industry's unwillingness to incorporate safety features in automobiles.

It is not in the interest of the wind industry to comply. It is not in the interest of the wind industry to see to the well being of surrounding residents.

It is only in the interest of the wind industry to build as many turbines as possible to generate as much electricity as possible and garner as many of the consumer based subsidies the Large Renewable Energy Scheme guarantees.

Martin Luther King had a dream fifty-two years ago. So do residents in the precincts of wind farms: that wind farms will be adequately regulated to comply with environmental guide lines that safeguard residents, not ensure profits for multinationals and that this industry competes on a level playing field economically that unwitting consumers fund an uneconomic industry.

I would respectfully request this inquiry to make adequate recommendations to bring this particular industry under control, specifically a Royal Commission.