

Submission:

I'm writing to you to note my very full support for the development of wind farms in Australia.

I believe renewable energy is a critical part of our response to climate change, and needs to be fast tracked in order to reduce our emissions to levels that will make Australia a safe and resilient place to live into the future.

From an economic perspective, wind power is shown to be the most commercially and technically viable form of renewable energy. And I believe that when well sited in rural, industrial and peri-urban areas, their benefits outweigh reason for opposition.

In research I undertook last year as part of my Masters in Sustainability, focused on Australia (the Hepburn Wind Farm), Canada, USA, Sweden, Denmark, Germany and Austria, we found that wind energy provides multiple benefits to communities, particularly when communities are well informed, involved in a wind development project, and benefits to the community are designed into the project from the outset.

The emphasis on economic benefits was very pronounced for communities we researched. Out of 39 reported benefits from interviews, 54% were economic. One of the most common economic benefits was that customers in the community have experienced cost savings on energy as a result of the project, evident in 50% of interviewed communities.

'General economic growth' was another community benefit reported by 50% of interview participants. The community of Thisted in Denmark reported general business growth as a result of their wind energy projects. On Ærø Island in Denmark, the fact that the community owns the wind turbines means that money, which might have gone to companies with headquarters off the island, stays on the island. The community of Prenzlau in Germany also reported indirect economic benefits from having businesses and companies settle in the area.

'Community branding and improved image' was reported as an important social benefit in 30% of communities we interviewed. Due in part to marketing and media coverage of their CRE projects, Thisted and the FolkeCentre for Renewable Energy in Hurup have had visits from international visitors and renewable energy tourists interested in learning from their example, as well as potentially partnering with local businesses.

Including communities we surveyed, the most common benefits from wind farms for communities were:

- 'Increased local employment' in 14 out of 17 communities (82%);
- 'Increased understanding of climate change and renewable energy' (59%);
- 'Increased sense of pride and identity in the community' (53%);
- 'The community received financial benefits' (41%);
- 'Strengthened social relationships' (41%); and
- 'Increased awareness of competency of residents' (41%).

(This research, 'Moving Towards Sustainable Community Renewable Energy: A Strategic Approach for Communities', can be viewed at <http://bit.ly/fSbMag>)

In the Hepburn (Victoria) case, along with a wide range of benefits for local shareholders, more than \$1,000,000 will be received by the non-shareholding local community as a whole over the next 25 years.

Community wind farms are common in Europe and there is a high level of public support for these projects, particularly in the context of historical oil shocks and high public awareness about the need to move away from dependence on polluting fossil fuels.

In terms of the policy and legislative controls to limit negative effects from wind farms, Australian states already have a well developed wind farm planning controls which are among the most onerous in the world. Any changes to these controls should be equitably and consistently applied across other industries and be informed by science.

I believe that in investigating wind power in Australia, the Senate Committee should not propose provisions that would unnecessarily make the development of the Australia wind industry more difficult or onerous. Wind farms are a critical and positive part of the more sustainable Australia we must move towards, with full support from Australian leaders in the Senate.

Sincerely,  
Kati Thompson