

Submission to the Senate Inquiry into the Social and Economic Impacts of Rural Wind Farms from the Chelsea Heights EarthCarers group

Chelsea Heights EarthCarers

The Chelsea Heights EarthCarers is a community group based in Chelsea Heights Victoria and a sub-committee of the Chelsea Heights Community Centre that exists to:

- empower people to reduce their impact on the environment
- contribute to wider discussion and policy on climate change.

Around 10 – 12 people regularly attend meetings with up to 70 people attending workshops and seminars organized by the group. The EarthCarers mailing list includes over 80 local community members.

Comments regarding Rural Wind Farms

The group would like to express support for the widespread use of wind farms as part of an overall strategy to replace fossil fuels as the major source of energy in Australia. We are greatly concerned at the rapid pace of climate change with impacts already being widely felt both in Australia and across many parts of the world. It is imperative that action is taken as soon as possible to introduce widespread renewable energy throughout Australia.

Power generation from wind is a well advanced and proven technology for providing renewable energy. Wind turbines are used extensively and successfully in many countries in the world, and indeed in Australia, with more than 150,000 installed globally. Australia should continue to implement construction of wind farms without delay.

The sight of wind turbines throughout the countryside, surrounded by farmland creates a far more pleasant view than the scars of energy production via coal: huge open-cut mines that obliterate the use of the land for any other purpose combined with huge smokestacks surrounded by dark, polluting clouds and unpleasant fumes. It is a pleasing that so many have chosen to support this clean, safe wind technology through payment of our power bills. Across Australia 841928 households have made similar choices by purchasing *GreenPower*.

It is our understanding that current research has found that there are no adverse health effects for people living in close proximity to wind farms and that the levels of low frequency noise and infrasound are within accepted thresholds. This is supported by a report from the Victorian Department of Health (Worksafe, 2010) which concluded that *'the weight of evidence indicated that there are **no direct health effects** from noise (audible or inaudible) at the levels generated by modern wind turbines.'* In contrast, elevated rates of mortality, lung cancer and chronic heart, lung and kidney disease have all been reported among people living near coal mines.

Many rural areas suffer high levels of unemployment. Construction of wind farms in a range of rural areas provides opportunities for employment across these areas both during the construction phase and beyond, potentially slowing the drift from country to city and allowing people to remain within their home areas. They also allow farmers and property owners to supplement their incomes – more crucial than ever in a time of increasingly severe weather events often leading to crop and stock loss.

Conclusion

The Chelsea Heights EarthCarers recommends that the Senate supports the continued and rapid implementation of wind turbine projects as part of an overall plan to produce Australia's energy from renewable sources. This will reduce greenhouse emissions and so reduce the impacts of climate change, whilst creating a cleaner and healthier environment for all, especially those living close to power generation sources.