

Dear Sir/Madam,

I would like to take the opportunity to present my view of the wind industry in relation to the Senate Enquiry into the Social and Economic Impact of Rural Wind Farms.

I am a qualified engineer working in the development of wind farms in Victoria. As a member of Engineers Australia, I abide by their code of ethics, the fourth of which is to promote sustainability by:

Engaging responsibly with the community and other stakeholders;

Practising engineering to foster the health, safety and wellbeing of the community and the environment and;

Balancing the needs of the present with the needs of future generations.

I look to the scientific evidence to justify that I am fulfilling the above in my line of work. Based on the scientific facts, I am confident that wind farm developments do not directly compromise the health of those living nearby (), do reduce greenhouse gas emissions (), and do provide positive economic benefits to the communities in which they are situated ().

Australia has the opportunity now to begin reducing its carbon emissions and switching to a renewable and sustainable energy generation system. Wind energy is currently the most affordable method of green power generation however, excessive barriers to development only reduce its affordability and are counterproductive to achieving the country's goal of 20% of electricity generation from renewable sources by 2020. Such barriers include a proposed arbitrary 2km dwelling setback and compensation for neighbouring properties.

If the 2km setback is an attempt to preserve amenity at a dwelling, it is more logical to address the issues that could affect amenity directly and mitigate those. Current standards and guidelines do this by assessing impacts such as noise levels and shadow flicker at a dwelling and applying justifiable limits on those which are consistent with, or more stringent than, international standards. The result is a far more appropriate determinant of distance between turbines and houses. An arbitrary distance is not based on scientific findings and does not logically and clearly ensure that amenity will be preserved.

The concept of compensation for neighbouring properties comes from the underlying assumption that they are disadvantaged by the presence of the wind farm, an assumption which increases negative perceptions of the development. It is also a very localised payment, likely to unsettle communities – what about their immediate neighbours? As well as the demonstrated economic stimulus that a wind farm has on the community during and after construction, my company takes the view that a community trust fund, run for and by the community, is a more fair way of distributing the benefits of the wind farm to the local area. Typically, money is donated to the fund by the wind farm operator, which can then be used to fund school improvements, sporting events or whatever the local community chooses.

In a well educated and technologically advanced society, we expect our leaders to make sound, objective policy decisions based on hard evidence, not ill-informed perceptions. I also expect those responsible authorities to act to correct public perceptions and allay unnecessary fears.