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Department of the Senate
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10 February 2011

Dear Sir/Madam,

Senate inquiry into the social and economic impacts of rural wind farms

We welcome the opportunity to make this submission to the inquiry into the social and economic impacts of rural wind farms.

Epuron Pty Ltd is a renewable energy developer with interests in wind and solar projects. Epuron is the most experienced wind farm developer in NSW, responsible for over 70% of the approved wind power capacity in the State.

In brief we would like to respond to each of the five issues for inquiry.

(a) Any adverse health effects for people living in close proximity to wind farms

There are tens of thousands of wind turbines installed worldwide and no independent study has demonstrated any harm to people living in close proximity to wind farms despite a number of attempts to find evidence of such harm.

We refer you to a recent Australian report by the [National Health and Medical Research Council](#) (NHMRC) which concluded that "there is currently no published scientific evidence to positively link wind turbines with adverse health effects."

The 'Wind Turbine Sound and Health Effects, an Expert Panel Review'¹, concludes "There is no reason to believe, based on the levels and frequencies of the sounds and the panel's experience with sound exposures in occupational settings, that the sounds from wind turbines could plausibly have direct adverse health consequences." This report astutely notes that:

"the large volume of media coverage devoted to alleged adverse health effects of wind turbines understandably creates an anticipatory fear in some that they will experience adverse effects from wind turbines. Every person is suggestible to some degree".

(b) Concerns over the excessive noise and vibrations emitted by wind farms, which are in close proximity to people's homes;

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http://www.cleanenergycouncil.org.au/cec/technologies/wind/turbinefactsheets/mainColumnParagraphs/0/text_files/file3/AWEA_CanWEA_SoundWhitePaper_12-11-09.pdf

Each state has adopted a noise standard or noise guidelines which it considers best addresses concerns about wind farms and noise at neighbouring dwelling or homes. Excessive noise would be where such standards or guidelines are breached and the operator must take action to comply. This is no different to any activity which must operate to a standard or prescribed guideline.

Numerous studies have looked into the effects of noise and vibration from wind farms. Adelaide consultancy Sonus has published the most recent report (November 2010) showing that low frequency noise levels at the beach and in the CBD are typically higher than near wind farms.² This Australian study reinforces several international studies by government organisations that infrasound emissions from wind farms are well below the hearing threshold and are therefore not detectable to humans.

To our knowledge no independent peer-reviewed study has found a problem.

(c) The impact of rural wind farms on property values, employment opportunities and farm income

Property values are not and cannot be a valid planning consideration for wind energy or other types of development. Some properties may go up in value and others may go down, neither situation is likely to be solely as a result of a wind farm.

The NSW Valuer General's report in August 2009 'Preliminary Assessment of the Impact of Wind Farms on Surrounding Land Values In Australia, found that: *.. "wind farms do not appear to have negatively affected property values in most cases"*.³

Rural wind farms provide excellent employment opportunities and much sought after farm income diversification in the unpredictable Australian climate, thereby increasing the resilience of regional communities.

(d) The interface between Commonwealth, state and local planning laws as they pertain to wind farms

State and Federal planning laws exist for wind farms as they do for every other aspect of development in each state or territory. There are some aspects of wind farms and indeed all developments which fall under Commonwealth jurisdiction such as the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act.

The Federal government has no role in the planning and development of wind farms outside of the existing Commonwealth legislation. This is a much preferred situation as planning is a state and territory matter and attempts to overlay Federal planning legislation would lead to conflicts in compliance and hinder the development and uptake of renewable developments.

(e) Any other relevant matters

In 2009 the NSW government's General Purpose Standing committee No 5 held an inquiry into Rural wind farms with similar Terms of Reference. Epuron noted in that submission that: *"Reports by TransGrid confirm that growth in electricity demand will soon exceed supply during peak times. Scheduled demand projections indicate that additional generation will be required to manage peak periods by summer 2014/15. New South Wales currently has the capacity to supply 15,500 MW of reliable electricity but will need 1500MW additional capacity within the next 5 years."*⁴

² http://www.pacifichydro.com.au/media/192017/infrasound_report.pdf

³ http://www.lpma.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0018/117621/t0L51WT8.pdf

⁴ TransGrid, 2009 *NSW Annual Planning Report 2009*

This situation is little changed yet the demand for renewable, sustainable power grows. Leadership demands action that is effective whether or not it is popular with minorities. We would respectfully guide you to the findings of the NSW inquiry ⁵and to the pressing need to take action to enable the uptake of socially, environmentally and financially appropriate renewable technologies.

The wind farm industry needs strong consistent growth in the sector over the long term. Investment cliffs set back the development of wind farms, regional jobs, manufacture and financial confidence in the sector.

Consistent planning processes are required of the states and these are generally in place. No further layering of approvals should be implemented. The challenging job for the sector now is to get clean renewable, sustainable developments built.

Yours sincerely,

Martin Poole
Executive Director, Epuron Pty Ltd

⁵<http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/Prod/parliament/committee.nsf/0/EA247659081D31FDCA25768E001A2E2A>