

Department of the Senate
Community Affairs Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: Inquiry into the Social and Economic Impact of Rural Wind Farms

I am writing to voice my support for rural wind farms in Australia. I am the Chairman of the Upper Yarra Community Enterprises Limited (UYCEL) sub-committee responsible for the development of a mini hydro project. I am also a local resident and school chaplain. In 2008-2009 I coordinated a solar bulk-buy for 32 households in my community.

I am proud to be a part of a community group that is working towards the development of a small-scale hydro electricity plant. Warburton, in the east of Melbourne, traditionally had a small hydro electricity station, which powered the streetlights. This was eventually dismantled in the 1930s due to technological constraints of the time in connecting the power to the grid. In recognition of global attempts to reduce emissions, we would like to resurrect this clean power source.

The project will be funded and owned by Upper Yarra Community Enterprises Limited (UYCEL). UYCEL is a public company owned by 500 local share-holders in the Upper Yarra Valley. It has been established for 10 years (initially as Warburton Community Financial Services Ltd) to operate first one and later two successful Bendigo Bank franchisees in Warburton and Yarra Junction respectively. In the last 10 years \$1M has been distributed in grants to the local community.

We believe that community ownership of energy infrastructure offers many benefits to the community. These include participation and empowerment, acceptance, and education about the environment. There are also regional economic benefits from land rent, and shareholder dividends and community projects funded by power sales.

Renewable energy projects already face long, arduous planning requirements. All projects, be they roads, blocks of flats, or petrol stations, attract some resistance from the community. It is the responsibility of government planning officials to listen to these people while always acting in the interest of the greater good. Making planning requirements even more complex will deter the development of renewable energy, a huge backwards step for Australia and our responsibility to reduce our emissions.

Community ownership of appropriately scaled wind farms is commonplace in Europe, the United States and Canada. These wind farms are scaled to offset the energy needs of nearby towns and are often only two or three turbines. Community ownership allows people to take part in the solution to climate change, and to benefit financially from the sale of electricity. This ownership model has huge potential here in Australia to combat negative community sentiment, to drive the uptake of renewable energy and to help us to achieve our goals in carbon emission reduction. Policy settings such as Feed in Tariffs have been internationally proven to drive this sector and could be adopted here in Australia.

Stalling the wind industry as a result of a few claims without scientific backing would be an enormous backwards step for Australia. Many countries around the world that are doing their part to reduce their emissions would also see this unfavourably. Increasing community participation in climate change solutions will go some way in changing public attitude and acceptance, and community-ownership models can achieve this. Wind energy is an economic opportunity for regional Australia.