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ABN: 16 549 616 697

Sustainable Energy Association of Australia Inc  
GPO Box 2409  
PERTH WA 6000

Committee Secretary  
Senate Community Affairs Committee

community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au

Phone: (08) 9228 1292  
Fax: (08) 9228 0597  
ceo@seaaus.com.au  
www.seaaus.com.au

## Inquiry into The Social and Economic Impact of Rural Wind Farms

The Sustainable Energy Association of Australia Inc. (SEA) is one of Australia's largest energy chambers.

SEA is a membership-based group of enterprises providing the commercial solution to climate change through their products and services, or that aspire to be more sustainable in their own energy use, inclusive of businesses offering or using services and products that manage or offset greenhouse gas emissions in transition to sustainable energy use.

SEA constitutional objectives include the following elements of direct relevance to the Committee's inquiry:

- Promoting the adoption of sustainable energy solutions that encourage the protection of the environment which traditional energy sources are damaging;
- Facilitating the adoption of sustainable energy technologies and practices as a method of reducing greenhouse gas emissions in all sectors of Australia's economy and across all urban, rural and remote regions of Australia, both on electricity grids, and off grid;
- Increasing employment opportunities in a sustainable energy industry across and within all regions of Australia, contributing to a sustainable future for Australia..."

SEA lobbies for substantive action at local, state and national levels on for energy solutions that are sustainable.

### SEA Corporate members



SEA has a strong reputation for authoritative commentary and advocacy on a broad range of energy efficiency and sustainable energy issues, including submissions and media releases.

Many businesses are acting to support the development of the best policy outcomes for the industry by becoming SEA members. SEA has almost 400 members from a diversity of enterprises and industries. This range of companies, businesses, organisations and individuals are involved in sustainable energy practices and including energy efficiency across government, business and the community in: infrastructure; architecture and design of buildings and homes; transport; performance of appliances, vehicles, machinery, and industrial processes; use of renewable energy passively, in support of process and in electricity generation.

Responding to climate change will create new business, new employment opportunities, and a more sustainable economy in Australia. Many of these opportunities will of necessity be spread across the regions in rural Australia, and will not just be growing for the biofuels market -there will also be building, supplying and maintaining regionally distributed renewable energy generation plant, and for land required to be dedicated to wind farms and solar farms.

Opportunities exist to use sustainable energy projects as a way of restructuring and refurbishing regional towns and cities, and contributing to the renewal of flagging rural economies, creating sustainable communities.

Renewable energy generation is generally more labour intensive, and more broadly distributed across regions. With a better employment factor, renewable energy projects can lead to growth of local communities in rural Australia. Further, the establishment of renewable energy generation projects will bolster a broad range of skills, particularly in agricultural regions.

While all forms of renewable energy are relevant to the development of regional and rural Australia, this inquiry highlights the social and economic impact of rural wind farms.

Jobs are one key consideration in building the sustainability of regional communities and there are many international examples of the value of wind farms in building local employment. Recent reports from the UK show number of jobs in the UK wind energy industry increased by 91% between 2007/8 and 2009/10 with 10,800 employees now in the wind turbine sector.<sup>1</sup>

In Australia a study by SMK and MMA commissioned by the Clean Energy Council (referenced in Submission 67 of this inquiry) highlights the potential value to Australia, and to the same extent the opportunities Australia has missed to date by not moving faster in harvesting wind energy.

SEA believes our energy sources must be sustainable, and not all renewable energy is sustainable in the same way that not all clean energy is green energy. The development of any infrastructure project whether it be a road, a port or an energy generation facility should face a high level of scrutiny to ensure its sustainability. Wind farms should be no exception – but nor should they be treated inequitably through the addition of measures that might not be applied to any similar project. SEA supports the view of the Clean Energy Council in their submission, existing standards and guidelines currently used in Australia at a state and federal level for wind farm development are already among the most stringent in the world.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.renewableenergyspot.com/wind-energy-employment-growth/>

**SEA 2030 VISION**

30% energy generation from sustainable sources and 30% reduction of existing use through energy efficiency by 2030

**SEA – Australia's peak body for sustainable energy**

SEA promotes the development and adoption of sustainable energy technologies and services that minimise the use of energy through sustainable energy practices and maximise the use of energy from sustainable sources.

Health affects of wind farms are rightly considered in this inquiry – it is surprising to some that issues of health are a key component of sustainability, but logically an unhealthy community will consume more resources, as it must, in care and risk abatement than a healthy one. However, SEA argues such assessments must be science-based and not based on spurious claims that lack evidence.

The National Health and Medical Research Council “Public Statement: Wind Turbines and Health”<sup>2</sup> is clear on this matter, concluding “that there is currently no published scientific evidence to positively link wind turbines with adverse health effects”, a conclusion supported by the Victorian Department of Health<sup>3</sup>. SEA refers to and supports the case made by the Clean Energy Council in Submission 67 to this inquiry.

Wind farms are also relevant to non-rural settings and SEA believes more needs to be done along infrastructure corridors and industrial and commercial precincts within cities to ensure that cities too are generating renewable energy.

SEA is a key advocate for efforts from individuals and enterprises contributing to the solution of climate change, and works to support actions that assist the community to use energy more sustainably and act on global warming.

SEA would be pleased to provide further information on the above or any other matter related to this inquiry if requested.

Yours sincerely

Prof Ray Wills  
Chief Executive Officer  
Sustainable Energy Association of Australia Inc. (SEA)

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/synopses/new0048.htm>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.health.vic.gov.au/environment/community/windfarms.htm>

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