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Submission to the Committee on :

THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACT OF RURAL WIND FARMS

By any standards is to refer to these industrial machines en masse as a farm is a travesty. They are purely and simply clusters of industrial generating equipment on a gigantic scale. For a government committee to use PR apologist's soft soap language is unfortunate before you even consider their Social and Economic impact on rural communities.

The concept of wind turbines certainly has great potential benefits to rural communities if kept to an acceptable scale such as the large windmills of the 20th century. Providing localised power supplies to homes, farms and rural enterprises is potentially a great benefit if the masts are only say 25 meters high or the height of the tallest trees in the region. However a cluster of wind turbines of a gigantic height out of any local natural or human scale is offensive and they also usually require a great number of additional, also out of scale, electricity pylons to feed the power generated to the distribution grid for towns and cities.

In France where I live, the local rural farming community at first accepted the concept of wind turbine clusters on masts over 100 metres high. The experience has been devastating as the location of the turbines is often too close (less than a mile) from houses and intimidate the people as the giant propellers scythe through the heavens like the grim reaper. Worse, and more insidious, the hum or harmonics the turbines create seem to have a harmful effect by giving people some form of mental or physical disturbance (the symptoms seem to differ between individuals) that has even driven some to sell up and move elsewhere. This clearly needs more medical research before you accept wind turbines en masses in Australia.

The countryside where I live in France has always attracted holidaymakers. Now the visitors move on, never to return, as they say they have enough of these monsters where they live in Holland, Denmark or Germany and they go on holiday to get away from them. The value of local houses has fallen, if the house is within sight of a turbine cluster. This fall can be as much as 20%. However I cannot prove that all this fall is because of turbines.

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In terms of being eco-friendly and reducing the carbon emissions there is in France a serious and cynical manipulation of the facts.

Firstly the manufacture of the steel masts, the turbines, the electronics, the pylons and cables to carry the electricity many miles is never taken into 'carbon' account. Nor is the giant excavation and concrete base carbon costed. All this for a life expectancy of less than 20 years. Who is going to pay for the dismantling of the turbines and masts and the return of the concrete bases to farming soil. In France the ownership of the land usually rests with local individuals or the community/council and the owner of the wind turbine itself is usually an intermediary company of straw with no bank guarantees given by any holding company.

Secondly the production of electricity is totally wind dependent which in many, maybe most, rural areas is highly variable. If the wind speed is too slow, no power is generated, if too fast the propellers have to be 'parked' to prevent them turning too fast and disintegrating – as has happened in a number of cases in France.

More dishonest, in France, is that the industrial speculators conceal that the nuclear power plants cannot ramp up or down power output quickly enough to match the vagaries of the wind. The problem has resulted in there having to be manufactured and installed myriad gas turbine generators to even out the supply of electricity when the wind either drops or is too high. Surprise, surprise, the Gas Turbines create carbon emissions that would not arise at all if the nuclear power stations had continued to take the entire load as previously. There is talk of very expensive equipment to rectify this inherent problem but the industrial speculators refuse to accept responsibility as they have government contracts to supply electricity at a guaranteed high price and no responsibility for evening out power supplies from other sources.

The high guaranteed price in France is of course directly loaded back onto the electricity consumer and electricity prices as a result are increasing far faster than any inflation yardstick.

In practical terms I am not affected, as I am not near any wind turbine cluster. However I certainly took an interest when extra charges started arriving on my electricity bill. They are simply explained as 'Autres Prestations' or in plain English 'Other Benefits'. It just shows how gullible EDF (A nationalised monopoly) must think their customers are.

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