

To members of the Senate inquiry into rural windfarms – A submission.

I write to you as a former economist with the State Electricity Commission and Monash University and as the founder and owner of the company Video Education Australasia Pty Ltd which produces and distributes most of the videos and DVDs used in Australian educational institutions. More recently I was the founder and for three years the chair of the Mount Alexander Sustainability Group (MASG) in Castlemaine, Victoria.

I have had a strong interest in wind energy since the 1970s. In recent years I have worked in a voluntary capacity with the Windpower Subcommittee of MASG. The group is hoping to instal a 12MW community – owned windfarm along the lines of the Hepburn Community Windfarm near Daylesford.

In 2006 I went to Germany to study the wind industry at two sites, at Dardesheim in the old East Germany and in the north of the country near the Danish border. On return to Australia I made a film, 'Renewing Hope – Solar, wind and Biomass in Australia and Germany', and this is now distributed to schools and tertiary institutions in Australia and overseas. In brief, my experience was that windfarms are not noisy, that in Germany they have wide public acceptance (especially amongst conservative farmers) and that there appears to be no concern about health effects after several decades of operation.

I recently wrote to two of my contacts in the German wind industry to ask them if there were rising concerns about health effects. Quite independently they both replied that these concerns were raised when the industry started in the 1970s but were unheard of these days. They both likened the concerns to those which were initially reported in the early days of the railway industry.

Since then I have kept up with windpower news and research via various overseas organisations, including the Danish Wind Industry Association.

I am aware of recent reports by the National Health and Medical Research Organisation and Sonus as well as the Health Department of the Victorian government.

These reports make it clear that there is no scientific basis for concern about windfarms in rural areas. The Sonus report makes it clear that noise levels are not significantly different to background noise we have all become used to.

I am also aware of well conducted surveys which show a high degree of public acceptance of wind turbines and of widespread approval of their aesthetics. That accords with my personal experience: most people I ask for their view say that they actually like the look of the turbines in the landscape.

Why is there this highly vocal opposition? I think fear has been whipped up by people who share some common characteristics: 1. they are climate change deniers and resent anything which supports the Greens' view of the world, and 2. they resent outsiders coming into their territory and making a difference. It's xenophobia on a local scale.

Over the years, I have seen the opposition grab onto any possible negative factor in the industry. For some time it was argued that wind turbines cost more energy to build than they deliver, then it was argued (and is still argued) erroneously that they are ineffective because they don't contribute to baseload power and/or need complete backup systems in case the wind drops. The latest argument about health effects has the greatest potential to stop the industry's development. Yet the evidence of harm is completely lacking.

It is clear that windpower is by far the most economic of the renewable energy sources and will be for quite a few years. It is also clear that if the industry is to become more efficient we need to allow it to build

windfarms now. Only then will technological change be able to occur.

I sometimes ask protestors to ask themselves why if windpower is useless or dangerous, it is being so strongly supported by governments of all persuasions and large private companies in over 70 countries, especially in China, the USA and Europe. A rational response to this question is not easy to obtain.

I hope the committee to look into the points I have made and will support the further development of the Australian wind industry.

I don't mind if this submission is put on your website.

Yours sincerely

Neil Barrett