



'Helping build a renewable energy community'

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SUBMISSION TO

SENATE INQUIRY INTO THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACT OF RURAL WIND FARMS

FROM DANDENONG RANGES RENEWABLE ENERGY ASSOCIATION INC

FEBRUARY 6, 2011

The Dandenong Ranges Renewable Energy Association Inc is strongly of the opinion that wind farms have a positive social and economic impact on rural and regional communities. We also think these positive impacts will increase if State and Federal government guidelines encourage clean energy.

As will be outlined below concerns about wind farms have not been scientifically substantiated whereas the social and economic benefits are real and tangible.

Secondly, the need for wind farms is well understood. To achieve a safe climate we must reduce our greenhouse gas emissions. To do this we need to change the way we generate electricity. Wind power is a proven and affordable form of renewable energy. This is evident in the amounts of wind energy being installed in China and Europe.

Recently it was revealed that 25 of 27 European Union countries would either meet or exceed their renewable energy target. This has become possible because of the widespread uptake of wind power across Europe.

This tells us that Australia needs a healthy wind industry if it wants to meet either its renewable energy target or to satisfy its international obligations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Our response to specific areas of interest outlined in the scope of the inquiry is as follows.

[1] Are there any adverse health effects for people living close to wind farms?

There is no scientific evidence or published research which links wind turbines with adverse health effects. In fact, wind farms and other forms of renewable energy are much cleaner, healthier and safer for rural and regional communities than coal fired power plants.

[2] Is there excessive noise and vibrations emitted by wind turbines built in close proximity to people's homes?

Scientific literature shows that noise and vibrations from modern wind turbines is low and below perception threshold levels. In short, there is no scientific evidence that noise or vibrations have adverse health effects.

[3] Do wind farms have a negative impact on property values?

While there may be individual exceptions research indicates that overall wind farms do not have a negative impact on property values.

[4] What are the positive impacts on local communities?

Jobs are the main impact. Figures about this will have been provided by peak bodies in their submissions. It comes in the form of direct employment during installation and for many years later during the operational phase. There is also income for the landowners. Both provide flow on employment for local businesses. Importantly, this will help stem the drift of people away from rural areas in search of employment.

Another positive impact of wind farms on rural communities is that compared with coal fired power stations wind farms use very little water.

[5] Are additional regulatory controls needed?

Climate Scientists talk about the need for a rapid transition to 100% renewable electricity so that we can lower our emissions and avoid tipping points which might lead to uncontrollable climate change.

To achieve a rapid transition it is important that any new development guidelines for wind farms do not complicate assessment procedures. Secondly, assessment procedures for wind farms should not be more complex than for any other type of infrastructure project.

[6] Other relevant matters

One consequence of a transition to 100% renewable electricity like that outlined in the 'Zero Carbon Australia Stationary Energy Plan' [1] is that we will move away from a centralised electricity generation system with power plants concentrated where the coal is, to a more distributed electricity generation system. The result would be a large number of wind farms and Concentrated Solar Thermal distributed around Australia. This would bring economic and employment benefits to many rural communities.

Secondly, wind farms offer local communities the opportunity to become part of the solution to climate change. Evidence of this very positive impact of wind farms and other renewable energy projects can be seen with the Hepburn Community Wind Farm near Daylesford in Victoria. It can also be seen in many of the community based renewable energy projects in Europe. These projects empowered local communities. They also show that the benefits of renewable energy far exceed perceived disadvantages.

Conclusion

Many of the objections to wind farms are based on concerns and perceptions which have not been verified or vindicated by scientific investigations and research. Any report on the Social and Economic Impact of Rural Wind Farms should reflect this. It should also reflect the economic and employment benefits that wind farms and other renewable energy projects could deliver to rural communities across Australia as it transitions to 100% renewable electricity.

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[1] The Zero Carbon Australia Stationary Energy Plan says that by 2020 wind power could meet 40% of Australia's electricity demand. It will be a very important part of Australia's clean energy future.