

Submission to the Senate Enquiry into the Social and Economic Impact of Rural Wind Farms

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on the social and economic impacts of rural wind farms.

I would like to declare that I work in the renewable energy industry.

Health effects, noise and vibration:

I am regularly in the communities that host our wind farms, both in regional Victoria and South Australia. I have spent many hours on wind farms and stayed in accommodation within close proximity to the wind farms. At no time have I had any adverse health effects from them. Working in a community relations role, I have the opportunity to speak with community members on a regular basis about the wind farms and listen to their opinions. While some make negative comments, I can assure you the majority of people that I have spoken to are supportive of wind farms and do not have any health problems. I am not discounting these people who are feeling unwell, I feel terrible for them, however I feel the issue is not the wind farms, but stress related. Stress is the one thing that causes all the symptoms that Sarah Laurie and others have described. Working in the industry I have genuinely asked myself, what if these people are getting sick from the wind farms? The problem is if it is infrasound, I just can't see how it's possible. Why are the millions who live in cities not ill all the time? Why do people flock to the beach to live and play when the infrasound levels coming from the beach are so much higher than at a wind farm?

I live in an industrial area of Melbourne called Brooklyn. 1km from my house there is a rubbish tip, 1km from my house is the Westgate Freeway and 300m from my house is Geelong Road. Around 2km from my house there is a gas fired power station and the surrounding area is zoned heavy industrial. When I first purchased the property in Brooklyn, I read a lot of information about the health effects of the industrial businesses and how it was affecting residents. I too began stressing over the possibility that I had made a bad decision and was about to get sick. Thankfully, I stepped back and took a wait and see approach and have not had any health problems. My little decibel reader which I downloaded on my iPhone says the levels of noise around Brooklyn are about 75-80dbA and that's when it appears quiet.

When standing under a turbine (I have been on a wind farm in 70km winds and low winds) I liken it to a washing machine. The gentle swoosh is noticeable; however the wind noise is just as loud. Step back from the turbine a few hundred metres and someone would have to concentrate on the sound to hear it. As for vibrations, again I refer to living in a city. There are vibrations from trains, cars, construction and a host of other activities. I simply believe that people in the country are perhaps stressed by the significant changes that occur when a large scale projects such as wind farms are constructed. City people are subjected to change on a constant basis, while country people aren't.

Property values, employment and farm income

I can't speak of property values; however it really is subjective as far as I'm concerned. I know of someone who loves the wind farm so much they built an extension on their house to get a better view of the wind farm. Personally, I would jump at the opportunity to own a property near a wind farm. I believe there are jealousy issues within the community regarding money and I find talking with community members who are upfront and honest about this to be far easier to discuss than people I know of who make up the weirdest (borderline alien abduction weird) stories about the wind farms making them sick and then decide that if they were compensated they would be ok. Honestly, if something is really detrimental to your health, are you going to take money and then stop complaining about it? I don't think so, if I was getting sick, it wouldn't be money I was after.

As mentioned, I am employed in the industry. The company I work for is, as far as I'm aware, a conscientious, community minded company who aims to be sustainable across all areas of their work. I am very proud to work for this company and the renewable energy industry. Without the industry I would not have a job and neither would thousands of other people.

As far as farm income goes, a farmer who has been living with drought and now flooding should be able to make use of his land so he and his family are able to survive. Neighbours complaining really do seem jealous to me. It is important to note that the wind farm is only around for 20-25 years, which is not forever. The travesty that is Hazelwood power station has been around for over 40 years now and I'm pretty sure that monstrosity would be causing land values to plummet far more than a wind farm.

The environment and climate change

I find it extraordinary that we have readily deployable renewable energy sources available and yet Australia – a land of abundant sun, wind, tidal and geothermal energy sources is still using coal/gas. Even if you do not believe in climate change, the dangerous gasses and hideously ugly ditches that are produced from burning coal and gas should be reason enough to change energy sources. Wind farms, while not suitable for base load, are part of the energy mix. The grid can accept wind energy and the way we produce and use electricity needs to be changed. Coal and gas, while there may be plenty still available, is a finite source. At what point do we make the change? There has been too much evidence for too long to keep ignoring climate change. Unfortunately I believe half the planet will need catastrophic problems before anyone does anything real to help it. In the mean time, the renewable energy industry is setting up the country and the world for the shift that will eventually need to be made.

I leave you with a quote from a recent documentary I watched:

'The planet will thrive without humans, but humans will die without the planet'

I hope the senate will support renewable energy and the jobs, investment and carbon abatement opportunities it brings.

Sincerely,

Chloe Carpenter