



Climate Action Now! Wingecarribee

February 3, 2011

Dear Senators,

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

Canwin, with about 100 members, is one of hundreds of climate action groups around Australia seeking ways to halt the course of global warming. There are 3 alternatives:

- To show people how to reduce their individual energy use
- To lobby governments to do those things that individuals cannot do for themselves
- To gather together in a cooperative endeavour to generate renewable energy.

In this regard, Canwin is following the lead set by Hepburn Wind in investigating the feasibility of building a grid-linked wind turbine to reduce local use of fossil fuel energy.

The Climate Problem

One of the main convictions of the world's leading climatologists is that man-made climate change results in severe climate extremes such as those that are happening around the world right now, particularly in Australia. This expectation is consistent with a multitude of other global observations such as the progressive decline in Arctic Sea Ice. Were fossil fuel capital to be released at the same rate that it was produced so long ago, there would be no problem. But that is not the case; that buried capital is now being dug up and burned at much faster rates than it was produced, destabilizing the global climate. For reasons such as these, the hard heads of the insurance industry accept the evidence that the interlinked atmosphere and ocean have a limited capacity to process carbon dioxide. Consequently they take steps to limit their climate-related risks on the basis that man-made global warming is more likely than not.

Renewable Energy

The nations and peoples of the world are looking to replace fossil-fuel energy with the renewable energy of sun, wind and wave. This will require structural industry adjustment such as that which led to the introduction of the automobile. Countries such as China and the EEU are leading the way to a prosperous alternative future. Australia is lagging behind, due either to lack of political will or governmental inability to read the public mood.

Wind Energy

The University of Melbourne think tank ZCA 2020 has demonstrated that Australia is capable of reducing its fossil fuel emissions to sustainable levels within the space of the next 10 years the same time that it took the USA to develop the atomic bomb and land a man on the moon. By contrast with those "giant steps for mankind" the ZCA 2020 goal can be achieved drawing on existing technology such as wind turbines.

Wind Turbines

Most Australians are now familiar with the sight of wind turbines in the landscape and most accept them as the price to be paid for climate stability. Some people actually find them to be aesthetically more attractive than the pylons of the electricity grid that march inexorably across the landscape. I have inspected turbines on Thursday Island and the slopes of Bungendore (Capital Wind Farm) and on both occasions found that I could conduct a normal conversation at their base with little difficulty. Could those who complain about turbine noise have a vested interest?

Community Wind Turbines

With due respect to the good people of the Senate whose task it is to consider and review controversial issues, the people of Australia have lost faith in their “leaders”. I am reminded of the French Revolution story about those who surveyed the populace marching down the street - “Let’s follow them”, they said “we’re their leaders; we must follow them”. So too it seems to be with governmental responses to renewable energy initiatives.

The Base load Question

We accept the argument that off-the-shelf wind turbines cannot provide base load power but that, with respect, is irrelevant. The existing grid provides base load power whether it is derived from coal or the interim alternative, gas. The purpose of the wind turbine is to feed renewable energy into the grid at strategic points to reduce local use of coal or gas.

Co-operative Action

The central principle of democracy is that governments respond sooner or later to the wishes of the people. The political parties that compete for leadership are those that most accurately gauge the wishes and sincerity of the people. It is the view of Canwin and no doubt other proposed community-owned wind power cooperatives that it is up to the community to lead the way to a “carbon-neutral” future in the hope that governments will get the message that wind power is an essential ingredient of future prosperity

Summary

While respecting the motivation and convictions of those who oppose rural wind farms, we submit that their concerns are largely unfounded and that existing regulatory regimes will ensure that their construction and operation can be regulated within the limits of normal local government development consents.

-David Tranter (Canwin)