

Submission to the senate inquiry on Wind Power

from Wodonga Albury Towards Climate Health (WATCH) 9th Feb 2011

My submission will offer some key points on two issues – why we need wind power, and why objections to it are ill-founded and lacking in substance.

Wind has long been a key energy resource, used for centuries before the burning of fossil fuels took its place. The windmill water pump is an Australian institution, or was, but in some places – Denmark obviously springs to mind – wind power has continued to be widely used because of its cheapness and simplicity. As supplies of fossil fuel inevitably diminish and their cost increases, energy security can be added to this list of wind power's advantages, as well as its self-evident lack of emissions.

Many countries in Europe have seen the writing on the wall on fuel supplies for power stations, as well as the desirability of electricity generation from renewable sources, and have invested considerable amounts in building and encouraging wind farms. It is difficult to travel in Western Europe now without seeing a wind farm, and it is a glorious sight! It would be equally difficult to find much opposition to this development, given that it is so relatively innocuous and so useful, compared to such things as new freeways, new industrial developments or new tourist developments like golf courses and holiday apartment complexes.

In some countries, particularly in Britain, there has been concerted opposition to wind farms in certain areas, which has made developing the resource more difficult. Despite this the UK now produces nearly 5% of its electricity from wind, and massive development of the offshore wind potential is currently underway as the UK strives to meet its greenhouse gas reduction targets.

The announcement today from Greg Combet that we are set for a 23% rise in emissions by 2020 on 2000 levels with 'business as usual', shows it is past time for reviews and submissions on this particular avenue for emissions reduction – the consideration is merely on how the incentives should be designed to encourage the most rapid deployment of wind power as the major contributor to electricity generation. If the 'carbon price' is a

means whereby money can be taken from coal fired electricity generators and put into wind power generators then this would be a suitable incentive.

Apart from the widespread take up of renewable energy resources around the world (and let's not forget China), and the moral obligation it puts on Australia to actually join in this revolution, there are other economic and employment advantages in wind power generation. Statistics from the trade group Renewable UK, show that employment generated from wind power developments in the UK has nearly doubled in the last three years to 10,800 jobs. The same body has also estimated the benefit of wind turbines to local communities at around \$3.5 million over the lifetime of one typical turbine. If one were to add the benefit to the community from emissions reductions and the many ways that this adversely affects health the figure would be much greater.

It is on this basis that the many claims against wind farms should be assessed. Households perceiving adverse effects from noise or claiming diminished property value must consider how they would be affected by the alternatives. What is the effect on health and property value of the new freeway that must be built instead of the new electrified rail? Would nuclear power be more acceptable? And what are the health effects on the whole community of increasing greenhouse gases in the atmosphere and the climatic shocks that result? While some may still dispute it, there is little doubt that recent extreme weather events around the globe including Cyclone Yasi are typical of such shocks, and the cost of these events is enormous and ongoing.

In my own experience of wind turbines, I could not consider noise a significant feature, leave alone a problem. Usually the wind makes too much noise for one to be able to hear anything from greater than 100 metres. Arguments about the danger to birds are I think overplayed, and used as a lever against proponents. An Orange-bellied Parrot ploy. Do we have opposition to new road developments based on the dangers to wildlife? The sometimes considerable death toll of birds and reptiles and mammals is just seen as an unfortunate accompaniment to something we consider a necessity.

And of course the wider effect of climate change on animal and bird populations makes such considerations look absurdly trivial. As for the question of property values, it is doubtful whether this is a serious consideration, and the aesthetic arguments are highly subjective. Property

owners who receive generous payments for 'hosting' wind turbines find the machines beautiful and don't notice any noise problem. If compensation of this kind were to be offered to land owners affected by wind farm developments, any opposition not based on solid science could rapidly evaporate. As suitable sites are generally in lowly populated areas this would be an inexpensive solution to an irritating problem.

If we are genuinely convinced of the need to reduce our emissions, and not simply to slow the rate of increase, then the rapid development of this key renewable resource is obligatory, combined with the equal and complimentary reduction in use of fossil fuel for power generation. Coupled with the development of solar power and some serious efforts to reduce household electricity consumption, it is just possible that we could achieve a more substantial reduction in total emissions than the miserable 5% we have committed to. Failing this effort, we are evidently well on the way to becoming the world's energy pariah.

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