

To whom it may concern:

I would like to take this 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 wind industry and have worked in it in Australia for the last 8 years. I have also worked in other countries where my experiences and observations are the same as I summarise below.

Social Effects

Through my work I visit many regional towns in Australia. Since I am involved throughout the life of wind farms, from construction through to ongoing support and maintenance, I spend many months in accumulation over long periods of time in regional communities. Since the design life of a wind farm is typically in the order of 20-25 years I shall continue to spend time in regional Australia. During this time I observe local community opinion on the wind farm which is practically all positive.

In many cases wind farms bring tourists to certain regional areas which they might not otherwise visit. Many wind farm owners and operators also operate tours of wind farms and also accommodate school trips to wind farms from an educational perspective.

Humans by nature do not like change – this means that the wind industry will always have a struggle to be accepted – future generations, that grow up in the presence of the wind industry are likely to be more accepting. Do we ever question the existence of ugly coal power stations?

Climate and Planet

Personally, I am proud to be working in the wind industry – ultimately contributing directly to the welfare of the planet. Any amount of energy we can generate from non fossil fuels we have a duty to generate, this is in the best interests of the planet and future generations. If all countries do their small part, the global cumulative effort is immense.

We all know that the earth's fossil fuel resources are limited – so we should be doing everything possible to avoid using them – with the long term hope that we are no longer dependent upon them.

Technology

Ongoing investments and a thriving wind energy industry will also result in improved designs and products. This is simply illustrated when you look at wind energy technology even in the last ten years.

If you draw the example of the motor car – look how far that has come in the last 100 years – what do you think could happen in the wind industry? Not so long ago, we were using horse and cart. Humans must not be underestimated in their ability to push the envelope of technology.

Health Effects

During all my time of working on wind farms, I have met one couple who had complained about the health effects of wind farms – the people in question cited the low frequency noise from WTGs as the cause. From discussion with the people in question, who in fact looked extremely healthy and happy, it appeared to me that they intent monetary compensation. The people in question did not complain about the money they earned from the wind farm owners as a result of wind turbines being on their land. The foot print of wind turbines and associated infrastructure on farm land is very small – farming can continue without being hindered.

Through my work, I spend many hours in control room buildings within 100 metres or so of wind turbines – I personally have never noted any ill health effects – in fact, my main ill health effect is hay fever – and that is not caused by the wind farm.

I know first hand that you can stand under a wind turbine and hold a normal conversation without needing to raise your voice. Some people I meet often quote reports of wind turbines being noisy – this is simply not true and is propaganda. Once you are 50-100 metres from a wind turbine, you can hardly hear it – if the wind is strong then I can tell you that you will have more noise in your ear from the wind itself than the wind turbine. I would challenge anyone to come to the wind farms I visit to a noise challenge. Even is there are some locations which are prone to creating more noise from a wind turbine than normal – I can tell you first hand that there is a lot of analysis done by professionals to avoid such issues.

Economic

From an economic perspective, it is obvious to me that the wind industry has a positive impact, resulting in direct and indirect income and jobs. During the normal service life of wind farms there are some times large numbers of engineers and technicians involved in the maintenance and upgrade retrofit works – all of whom need somewhere to eat and sleep.

In my experience, in regional Australia, locals typically always show an active interest in what is happening and likely to happen in their area in the wind industry. Business people are business people – they will always find opportunities. Many I know make a good living from the wind industry – it is a win-win situation.

During the construction phase of a project when there can be 100-200 workers on site, I have know local businesses to run a mobile food van – win-win again.

I appreciate that politicians try to keep every one happy, however, does it have to come at the cost of the planet? What is the real cost of using fossil fuels? Ultimately, the destruction of the earth – we must do all we can – we have a duty to protect the earth. Unfortunately, it is easy for politicians to take a short term view on matters since their time in office is unlikely to span more than 5-10 years – we need to be thinking well beyond this time frame.

How can you compare the cost of coal, oil or gas to that of renewable energy? Fossil fuels take thousands of years to form – humans are consuming them at a far quicker rate – how can one out a price on coal? – Is it the cost to dig it up? What about the long term pollution?

Visual Impact

Despite the many wind farms I visit, I do not tire of seeing wind farms – wind turbines have a very graceful appearance and add to the beauty of the landscape.

If anyone complains that they spoil the view – then they should consider houses, roads etc – when is something natural – when is something ugly. Another perspective is to consider wind farms as being good for the earth – much like fruit and vegetables – some people do not like them – but they know they are good for them – the same can be said for the planet and the wind industry – for that matter the whole renewable energy industry.

Conclusion and Overview

In conclusion, I would have to say based on my first hand experiences that the wind industry has been nothing but positive for rural Australia – both socially and economically.

I hope the senate will support renewable energy as it will be positive both socially and economically for rural Australia.

Sincerely,

Nilesh Patel.