

Submission to:

Inquiry: The Social and Economic Impact of Rural Wind Farms

I live in the South-West region of Victoria neighbouring the wind farm operated in the Codrington-Yambuk region. I have lived in this region for almost three years and, on trips to Portland that pass the wind farm, I was initially in awe of the size of the facility and the kilometres of coastline that it followed.

The wind turbines are magnificent structures that quietly churn out energy to supplement the electricity grid feeding Victoria. Once you become accustomed to the vista of the turbines on the horizon you appreciate the quiet efficiency of these wind turbines that provide clean, green energy with seemingly little impact on the environment.

Having retired and relocated to this region from Melbourne where, on occasions my job took me into the Gippsland Valley near Traralgon. In this region coal-fired generators constantly discharge thick plumes of smoke and steam into the atmosphere that is driven by brown coal gouged from ugly open-cut mines. The contrasting image of a slowly turning wind turbine, providing clean, green energy, is a sight much more palatable than the ugliness of fossil-fuelled generators that are gradually being phased out as the state and country strive for cleaner energy and carbon neutrality. With the cost of coal generated electricity escalating at a rapid rate there is no argument that we need to deploy cheaper and cleaner forms of energy generation.

The move to build alternative energy sources in Victoria is prevalent in the south-west region of Victoria and the installation of these new power stations is generating jobs and contributing greatly to the economy of the region. Wind farms are one of a number of alternate energy generation plants being planned for the region and, provided the land owners are adequately compensated and are willing to accept the turbines on their properties, then one can only view this as being a positive for our region and towns. Furthermore, the companies that are bank rolling these alternative energy ventures have proven to be very good corporate citizens. They have not only brought employment and wealth to the region but have also given much back to the community as witnessed by the operators of the Codrington-Yambuk wind farm facility who, through their Community Assistance Fund, have supported many local, charitable organisations over a number of years.

Despite my having a Science Degree, majoring in Physics, I cannot adequately comment or offer a professional opinion on the health aspects of low frequency noise that is purportedly emitted by wind turbines. I can only say that it would be relatively simple, in scientific terms, to measure the frequency and amplitude of the noise that they generate.

Recent, negative publicity concerning the health aspects of wind turbines is ever present on our television screens. I have witnessed numerous TV news reports and documentaries that parade people claiming to be seriously affected by being in close proximity to the turbines. From a scientific perspective, all of these TV reports are presented in a sensational manner with no hard scientific or medical evidence to support the claims of ill-health. Other programs have occasionally been aired that counter the arguments and refute the claim that low-frequency noise / vibrations from the turbines is detrimental to the health of a human – neither argument has been compelling. What these 5 minute current affairs / news grabs do indicate is the need to have a proper, detailed study

done of the effects of the turbines, what frequencies are generated and what effect they may have on human health.

Clearly, there is a similarity here to the dearth of studies done world-wide into the supposed adverse effects of mobile phones on users and indeed even the effects of living close to mobile phone towers. So far, I have read claim and counter-claim in studies that are obviously driven from positions of vested interest. Unfortunately, most of the negative comment on wind farms is driven by people who are obviously applying the NIMBY principle (Not In My Back Yard) and would present any argument to ensure that wind farms are not erected on land-based sites or near their own patch.

As much as I am mindful of the need to fully investigate the health aspects of wind turbines it surely must be a matter of balance as to whether their deployment is good or bad for us and the environment. From my perspective, there is a strong argument that the overall environmental impact (lower cost, greener energy, less pollution) of wind farms far outweighs current, dubious arguments about the health effect on humans.

Without knowing the relative cost of erecting wind turbines at sea, when compared to land-based installations, it seems that consideration should be given to installing more off-shore wind farms. After all, we have a very long coastline. Of course, once any move to put them off-shore, as they are in many overseas installations, then objections will surely flow about the detrimental effects of having these “monsters” spoiling our view!

I ask people who would mount such an argument to consider the alternative picture of smoke billowing from coal-fired generators, as witnessed in Gippsland. If they don't like either then an obvious alternative is to invest, as do many other countries, in nuclear energy. Of course, the nuclear argument would generate even more wide-spread, ill-informed and politically-biased views.

I trust that the Senate Enquiry into the Social and Economic Impact of Rural Wind Farms will form a balanced view of the overall benefit of having wind farms accepted as a viable, safe, clean and cheaper form of generating our electricity.

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