

Submission:

I support renewable energy, be it wind, solar or geothermal. Now is the time we need to shift our energy from non-renewables to renewables. This is a massive task – but such an important one that it should be given bipartisan support. Climate change is one of the two most serious issues I have seen in my lifetime, and its potential to do harm to many people and to the whole environment is very frightening. The other for me was nuclear war, and I recall those years when we feared that a nuclear war could devastate our planet.

Wind turbines have become controversial. Local communities are often against them, resentful of impacts on their local landscape, sometimes concerned about health issues, and sometimes feel that the financial benefits of a wind farm go to the few who have turbines on their land. On the other hand, some communities are embracing these opportunities because they can see community and environmental benefits and have control over the size and location of the wind turbines, and they know the benefits will be shared.

I have invested in my local wind farm – Hepburn Wind – precisely because I think it is a new and exciting model for the future. It will provide community benefits and it is community controlled.

Australians in general support wind farms – but local communities often don't. This is the problem to be addressed. The national guidelines developed with all the parties including the Australian Council of National Trusts provide a sensitive approach to wind farm planning, and if applied should result in better siting and design decisions, ensuring the avoidance of adverse impacts on the local landscape. An important question for the Senate Committee is to assess whether these guidelines are providing good outcomes – and if not, why not.

I would not like to see further hurdles put in the way of renewable energy, but I do want to see good outcomes for all. So in conclusion I would urge the Senate Committee to consider how we can urgently increase renewable power generation, and to look at how the Federal Government can use its influence to promote and support this direction. Active support for community-based renewable power schemes is one area where greater government support is warranted so that communities that see the potential in renewables, can establish and be owners in local renewable power operations that can provide for their own power needs as well as give them the potential to 'export' power into the grid and share in the prosperity that such initiatives deserve.