

Submission:

SUBMISSION TO SENATE ENQUIRY ON SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACT OF WINDFARMS

Other submissions will have demonstrated the breadth of benefit in many domains brought to regional communities by windfarm development. One aspect perhaps not widely appreciated is the educative benefit of these facilities.

Ballarat Grammar operates on 100% “green power” electricity. Most of this is bought from major electricity retailers, although the School has had for ten years 1kW of wind generation capacity and 5kW of solar capacity on campus.

Educational programs at the School involve detailed study of renewable energy, preparing young people for a world in which the majority of their energy will need to be renewable if the planet is to continue to support life as we know it.

While some of the practical studies involve small-scale renewable energy experiments (wind, solar, biofuel) studies are also made of the large-scale sources which could be said to provide our School’s power. So excursions have been taken to the Waubra and Challicum Hills windfarms and the Ballarat Solar Park. These involve scientific studies of aspects such as the location, size and height of turbines, noise levels, power generated, etc.

It is a valuable thing for students to understand that power is more than just something that comes out of a socket: that it must be generated. They come to appreciate that any form of generation involves some sort of environmental impact. The general conclusion of the young mind, however, both from local studies and from reports of extensive windfarms in Denmark and Germany, for example, is that windpower entails relatively low environmental impact.

My main point, however, is that in addition to significant environmental, social and economic benefits, there are educational benefits which form a subset of the social capital created by local windfarm developments.

Stephen Higgs