



ENVIRONMENTAL FARMERS NETWORK

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Submission to the Federal Senate's Committee on Community Affairs (the 'Community Affairs Reference Committee') Inquiry into the 'Social and Economic Impact of Rural Wind Farms'.

EFN represents farmers in south-east Australia interested in sustainable farming in a social, environmental and economic sense. We represent mostly commercial farmers very concerned about: the impact of climate change on farms, people and landscapes; loss of farm biodiversity; and, the loss of farmland and relatively natural areas to urban expansion. Our policies and previous submissions are available at www.environmentalfarmersnetwork.net.au. In particular, we encourage strong greenhouse gas mitigation and adaptation to climate change. We strongly support State and Federal Governments developing market mechanisms that reward those landholders providing ecosystem services such as retention and protection of biodiversity on farms and carbon sequestration.

Our Wind Farm Policy

This policy is based on the assumption that we need to reduce our total energy use especially where we use fossil fuels. Every year humans consume fossil fuels equivalent to four centuries worth of plant and animal growth. This is not sustainable. We need to be more efficient and use less energy. Wind farms use a renewable energy source efficiently and cut greenhouse gas emissions, making a contribution to meeting greenhouse gas targets.

The true cost of coal fired electricity generation needs to be imposed on power generators and consumers using Government tax and pricing instruments so that the wind farms can compete commercially.

Traditional agriculture is a significant source of greenhouse gas emissions (about 18%) and wind farms offset this usage.

The available evidence indicates that provided wind farms are located in appropriate areas the risks to biodiversity are likely to be small. Overseas research indicates that the mortality rate for birds and bats from wind

turbine collisions is low - typically less than five birds and five bats per turbine per year. There is no evidence to suggest that wind farms pose a fire risk or cause noise pollution. (Source: Wind farms - facts and fallacies. Discussion paper no 91 - Australia Institute).

Wind farms need a planning permit and permit conditions must reflect the requirements of relevant planning overlays and should be developed with minimal disturbance to biodiversity and as efficiently as possible. With the above constraint, site selection should be based on commercial considerations regarding the wind resource.

Therefore, EFN supports wind farms:

- If they are built as part of an overall energy plan that aims to reduce CO2 emissions.
- If they are built only on those commercially windy sites and if they avoid areas of relatively high conservation value.
- If they conform with the requirements of local planning overlays. These requirements should be detailed enough to include matters such as about the level of traffic, lighting, advertising, noise, and work requirements that will continue after construction, and the level of infrastructure planned for the farm
- If landholders on proposed development sites are well informed about the likely level of farm traffic, lighting, advertising, noise, and work requirements that will continue after construction, and the level of infrastructure planned for their farm.

We have no evidence of adverse health affects where our members have windfarms on their property or are close to a wind farm. We understand there have been complaints concerning health issues at the Victorian Waubra Windfarm. We also understand that Pacific Hydro commissioned monitoring/research into background noise issues (infrasound) and found that levels of the subject noise were higher in suburban areas than within operating windfarms.

Several of our members have experience of windfarms (eg Challicum Hills at Ararat, Victoria) or working in local communities surrounding wind farm sites as landcare facilitators or local farmers and anecdotal evidence is that there is overwhelming support in these established areas for windfarm projects.

The operating windfarm at Challicum Hills near Ararat (owned by Pacific Hydro) and several other proposals in an advanced stage of planning have generated little opposition to both construction and operation. The proponents of the Challicum Hills Project consulted local communities and community groups extensively before progressing and there was no opposition. There has been no significant complaints of any description since the Challicum Hills project began operation.

Impact on the environment is minimal and bird kills associated with the wind farm are monitored. The incidence of kills is a tiny fraction of the impact of other causes of kills such as collisions with vehicles, buildings and power lines. Any damage caused to native vegetation in the construction phase must be offset.

Many positive benefits come with wind energy projects including job opportunities, investment, greenhouse gas abatement, secure returns for farmers with turbines on their land, fire access roads in steep hill country, native vegetation protection and support for local community initiatives. Pacific Hydro initiated an annual Community Grants Scheme to ensure all district Community members benefited from the windfarm. This initiative originated from a suggestion by the local Ararat Landcare Community.

In summary EFN believes that with careful site selection, effective community consultation, and judicious construction and embedding activity, windfarms can be built and operated with many positive benefits for rural communities whilst contributing to greenhouse gas abatement at the national level. If we fail to address greenhouse gas emissions and climate change, temperatures will continue to rise (with associated extreme weather events) and the impact on humans and most life forms will be catastrophic.

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