

11th January, 2011.

Dear Senate Committee,

Firstly, thank you for the opportunity to express our opinions on wind farms in Australia, a matter that greatly affects so many rural Australians.

We live about five kilometres from the approved, but yet unbuilt, Lal Lal Wind Farm and, for the last four years, have witnessed first-hand the affect this has had on our community. We have heard arguments for and against wind farms and feel we have some experience on the topic.

1. Lack of adequate planning guidelines:

First and foremost, the most important thing we have learned is that a lack of planning guidelines is responsible for much of the debate, angst and worry about wind farms.

The simple measure of keeping turbines a minimum distance from homes would alleviate the concerns of many people. What this distance should be seems to still be unclear. We originally felt that two kilometres would be sufficient however there are people who suffer from turbine-related health issues who live up to 10 kilometres from turbines.

With better planning we can have the same amount of apparent gain with a minimum of pain.

When we first learned there would be a wind farm near us we didn't form an opinion straight away. We spoke to people and researched the topic. We came to the conclusion that the Lal Lal Wind Farm was inappropriately located as there are over 2000 people living within five kilometres of the sites. We don't believe there would be any other wind farm location with this large population living nearby.

2. Health issues:

If the health problems being displayed at the nearby Waubra Wind Farm, which has a comparatively small population living nearby, are true indications of what to expect then a lot of people will soon be having health problems in our area.

We believe the government needs to do two things urgently:

1. Undertake independent studies into the health effects of turbines on people living near them. Doctors should be advised on how to treat and follow-up on people who present with possible turbine-related symptoms.
2. Put a halt on all new wind farm projects until these independent studies are completed. There are wind projects in the pipeline that are to be constructed within 400 metres of people's homes or are surrounding their homes. Until the possible health effects of this are understood it is irresponsible of any government to impose this on its people.

3. Noise standards:

It seems ludicrous to us that the current noise standards that apply to wind farms are 12 years old. They were made at a time when turbines were up to 50 metres high and

the engines were measured in kilowatts, not megawatts. New noise standards need to be urgently set that are relevant to today's turbines and will cover forward growth.

4. Loss of our environment:

A less tangible argument, but one that is extremely important to us as well as many other rural people, is that wind farms will spoil our beautiful environment. Our area is one of mainly small farms, hobby farms and rural towns. We have a mix of people who have lived here for generations and those who have made the "tree change". We built our house here 10 years ago, after living in the area for about 30 years and we thought we would stay here forever. Our environment forms a part of who we are. We love it here – it's so beautiful. With the threat of the wind farm looming over our heads though, we have put many property improvements on hold. We are seriously considering moving, something we are loathe to do but we can't bear the thought of watching our beautiful landscape turn into an industrial one.

5. Division of our community:

Another reason to move is that the community we once knew here is now a divided one. People who were friends for many years now no longer talk to each other. This is nearly always a problem between the farmers who want the turbines on their land and their neighbours who have the turbines imposed on them.

It's interesting to note that all of the problems listed above would be largely resolved by simply imposing a minimum distance between turbines and homes. We also believe that, contrary to popular opinion, this distance between turbines and homes should apply to everyone, including landowners on whose property the turbines are being built. There should not be an option for these landowners or nearby neighbours to sign a waiver saying they accept the turbines being closer than the stated distance. At the moment, these landowners can sign a waiver and have the turbines placed closer than the limits allowed by the noise standards. This means that their families, including children and elderly people, can have unacceptable noise levels imposed on them when they may not be in a position to make this decision for themselves.

We hope that this inquiry will result in improvements to the wind farm planning guidelines that will bring relief to thousands of affected Australians.

Yours sincerely,
John and Heather McMahon