

Submission to Senate Inquiry on Social and Economic Impact of Rural Wind farms

Tania Neville
(...)

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Dear Committee,

I am a resident of a northern South Australian community targeted by wind farm companies, a local journalist, mother, and have a background in environmental biology and am currently in my 4th year as a law student. Much of this is from personal observation and reading.

Regulation:

Lack of clear, consistent legislation regulating the 'wind farm' industry. Many of the processes are mere 'recommendations' or 'guidelines'. There needs to be a national legislative regime as per the mining industry to ensure all parties are given a voice. The developments are mostly private/ public partnerships (large funding comes from the federal purse) and so worthy of consistent, clear and fair legislative regimes.

Lack of regulation also means there is no way of ensuring compliance with noise levels or revegetation or rehabilitation of an area destroyed by wind farms.

Local, state and federal responsibilities are not clarified nor defined for each level of government, the rules are unclear and the guidelines can overlap. This causes confusion and frustration when trying to find out who is responsible for what. Ordinary citizens get passed from level to level of government in search of answers to simple inquiries.

Lack of 'real' community consultation. In the media age, it is strange that unless you really search, the community meetings are difficult to ascertain. Information on meetings should be available to a wider group not a small, confined, and selective group and put as large advertisements not selective leaflet dropping.

Local councils do not appear to have adequate resources and information to deal with submissions for wind farm development.

Conflict of interest of local councillors who are also landowners. Recently in our local council election, Regional Council of Goyder, SA, a newly elected councillor is also a large landowner in the Robertstown ward. He has publicly stated he wants turbines on his property. He has been elected to the Council Development Assessment Panel, in what would appear to be a clear conflict of interest. When approached on this matter, CEO John Brak said we would have to prove a conflict? This is not a satisfactory outcome to a genuine concern from local residents.

Contracts

Most contracts include a confidentiality clause, this effectively has gagged people from speaking about what really affects them. I understand that the contracts are voluntary, but

many landowners I have spoken to report of being coerced and bullied into signing. Sadly, many farmers do not seek independent legal advice.

If the wind companies have nothing to hide, why are they insisting on these clauses?

Many farmers I have spoken to report they feel that the true situation has been misrepresented by the wind companies in regard to leases and flexibility. For example: The contract affects an entire section of the property not just the area where the turbines are located, this potentially leaves the land vulnerable to misuse and abuse, many landowners are NOT aware of this when they sign.

Most wind companies do not state that they are majority owned by Chinese or overseas power companies and so the farms are effectively under Chinese control. Many farmers are unhappy when they learn this.

It must be considered whether wind farms are necessarily the best use of rural land as a resource.

What happens when the wind company goes broke?- who is responsible for annual payments?

Who removes the turbines at the end of their life? They are polluting the environment as should be removed when no longer functional.

Consider California where hundreds of thousands of disused turbines pollute the landscape- is this what we want for our grandchildren?

Health-

Overseas data on health impacts appear to be largely ignored in Australia- The First International Symposium on Health and Wind Turbines Ontario Canada, October 29, 2010 included data and research from the US, UK, Europe, Canada and Australia, from researchers including clinicians, physicians, engineers, physicists, acoustics experts, which clearly demonstrated adverse health effects.

Locals have reported (I am a local journalist) they feel they are often being ignored by doctors, and ridiculed for discussing issues with health in relation to turbines.

Health issues include arrhythmia, sleep disorder, wet wetting in children, headache, vertigo, high blood pressure. If even one person is feeling affected, this is one too many. Waubra report: Dr Sarah Laurie from the Waubra Foundation would have included this in her submission.

There needs to be independent Australian research before any expansion of this industry that includes people within at least a 10km radius of turbines- most studies have focussed on insular groups from much closer to turbines (only 2km) and so excluding many that complain of being affected. (problems here with contractual confidentiality agreements also)

Community

Divisive; there are those who do and those who don't want turbines, often in the same family, with shares in the same property, this creates terrible divisions in both families and communities.

The entire Lutheran Parish in Waterloo in South Australia has been split in half by terrible disagreements among families and communities over the wind farms there.

The companies appear to target poor, marginal, rural communities

Size

Turbines used to be 60m tall-the latest models are 150m! (Sydney harbour Bridge is 134m)

How can this blend into beautiful rural landscapes? Turbine companies spend money on landscape architects who try to convince locals that they can blend these monstrosities into our beautiful hills. There is nothing natural about these massive steel and concrete behemoths. They are unsightly and huge. (Put one in the city or on the local coast and see how the city folk like them there.)

Noise noise and noise

Wind turbines ARE noisy- they do not sound like 'rustling leaves', they make a reverberating 'whoosh'

This noise may be less noticeable in the day time, or under certain wind conditions, but can drive people crazy at night- the country is very quiet at night.

Property values

A local Elders Real Estate Agent has said turbines on or near a property have the same effect as piggeries, high voltage power lines, sewerage plants and rubbish tips. Given a choice a buyer will choose not to purchase in these areas and the effect is a 30-50% decrease in land values.

Who will compensate landowners and surrounding land owners for this loss? Denmark has introduced a compensation scheme and in Waubra in Victoria the wind company is buying up properties that the locals can no longer bear to live in.

Environment

Remnant vegetation; precious peppermint box vegetation in our region is under threat from wind farms

Eagles; already our Wedge Tail Eagle population is noticeably decimated many believe due to damage caused by the turbines already in existence. These birds have a very large home range. My local pair is gone since Waterloo was turned on.

Bats cannot navigate turbines

Fire; fire crews cannot fight wind turbine fires, they need to be left to burn out.

True Green Value?

Huge heavy duty machinery required

Hundreds of tonnes of concrete

Explosives and blasting

Roads built to site

Rare earths required for motors- VERY destructive mining mostly by China

Conflicting reports of outputs.

Output of wind must be backed up by coal and gas? So what is the point?

Wind resources to not follow demand

Supply needed in peak times- often when the wind is not blowing

Future

Who takes the monstrosities away?

What happens when companies go broke?

What landscape do we want to leave our children?

We need to look to other alternatives.

Thankyou

Tania Neville