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(...)

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Department of the Senate
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Senate Inquiry into: The Social and Economic Impact of Rural Wind Farms

To The Community Affairs Committee,

Thank you for providing an opportunity to make a submission on this Inquiry. My responses to the terms of reference of the Inquiry are outlined as follows:

a. Any adverse health effects for people living in close proximity to wind farms

The report by NHMRC, "Wind Turbines and Health – A Rapid Review of the Evidence", July 2010, should be enough to alleviate any concerns about supposed health effects. Add to this the absence of any credible example of a person whose health has been directly, physically, effected by their proximity to a wind farm or single wind turbine, and it is clear that wind farms, or single wind turbines, do not produce anything unique that would have a detrimental effect on a human being or animal.

Any reported effects that do exist are most likely psychosomatic, purely psychological (fear of change), or envy-based psycho-physiological responses. If the converse was true, and wind turbines caused any adverse effect of this nature, then most humans on the planet would be continually sick, based on their close proximity to motor vehicles, aircraft, industrial operations that produce noise and vibrations, or their neighbours air-conditioning unit.

b. Concerns over the excessive noise and vibrations emitted by wind farms, which are in close proximity to people's homes

If guidelines and planning laws are adhered to, there should be no excessive noise or vibration at any dwellings.

Most expressions of concern regarding excessive noise seem to be made before a wind energy facility has commenced operation, or even before a permit is issued. After this point, only envious neighbours with psychosomatic 'conditions' and the crackpot element of landscape 'guardians' are heard to complain.

Vibrations should not be an issue at all. Wind turbines, if capable of producing vibrations at a level that is felt by the human organism, would shake themselves into pieces and fall apart. This simply does not happen.

c. The impact of rural wind farms on property values, employment opportunities and farm income

The value of a property to any potential purchaser is highly subjective, and the only negative impact that a wind farm could have is if a potential purchaser has an aversion to wind farms, and doesn't proceed with the purchase.

Hearsay reports that real estate salesmen have stated that a particular wind farm will drive down values in the area are nothing more than that; hearsay.

There are plenty of reports from reputable, impartial, entities that show minimal impact on property values.

Employment opportunities are obviously enhanced by the massive injection of capital that goes along with any major project, wind farms included. There is no reason to expect that a wind farm project will have negative effects on employment in a region.

Farm income for those landowners that host wind farms or have an agreement with a wind farm development firm is also obviously enhanced. Again, there is no reason to expect that farm income is negatively affected, as farming practices can continue unabated around the small land area occupied by wind farm infrastructure.

d. The interface between Commonwealth, state and local planning laws as they pertain to wind farms

There are considerable barriers to the development of wind energy facilities as a result of the overlapping and duplicitous nature of federal and state guidelines and rules. No other industry is subject to quite the same rigour when it comes to applying for a planning permit, including coal mining and other forms of resource extraction.

If any improvement could be made in this respect, a national Code of Practice for Wind Energy Facilities would, if drafted correctly, improve this situation and create a firm base for the industry to move forward without artificial hurdles.

Of course, all the necessary standards should be adhered to as part of this, for the protection of people who live in close proximity, as well as any flora and fauna protection that is required.

e. Any other relevant matters

Your Inquiry will no doubt hear from some submitters a wide variety of arguments against wind farms, which are based on a poor understanding of simple mechanics or electronics. There will also be submissions based on a poor understanding of economics and the machinations of government and industry.

Some of the submissions to this Inquiry make claims that the government subsidises the development of wind energy. With the single exception of Renewable Energy Certificates (which is simply a law that creates a stimulus, not really a subsidy), there is not one cent of government/taxpayers money that contributes to the development of a viable wind energy sector within Australia's energy industry.

There are submissions that decry the 'destruction' of landscapes. These are usually self-interested people who are disappointed that their 'pristine views' have been 'taken away' from them. It should be remembered here that nobody 'owns' the view. Ownership of land with a view is nice to have, but we live in a changing world, and so some vistas will evolve along with the society that surrounds them.

Some submissions address issues around the economic viability of wind farms. These arguments are baseless, as it is the developer's/project owner's responsibility to itself to ensure that the project is economically viable. (We don't ask McDonald's restaurants to prove their ability to produce cheeseburgers and therefore generate profit before approving a new outlet. It is simply their risk.)

Other submissions will argue that wind energy is inefficient and intermittent. Wind energy companies are only too aware of this, and that is why they spend considerable time and effort to design the most efficient layout for the wind farm infrastructure.

Looking at the big picture, there is a definite need for a wind energy industry to be developed to maturity in Australia. Wind energy can play a vital role in creating clean, renewable energy. While in its infancy, the wind energy industry will make modest inroads into our polluting emissions from electricity-generation; but it needs to be remembered that a 'critical mass' of wind energy production, and other clean energy production, is required before we can look at 'turning down' or decommissioning fossil-fuel power stations.

And wind energy is only one part of the broad mix of clean energy production that is required to get us to that point.

All of my points here give a reason why this Inquiry should result in the dismissal of petty, selfish, and unfounded concerns about wind energy, and send the clear message that we simply need to 'get on with it'. There is much to do if Australia wants to switch away from dirty energy and embrace cleaner energy:

1. Whether you believe in climate change/global warming/global cooling or not, surely it is obvious that 'clean' is better than 'dirty' – does there need to be any more incentive for the nation to move forward with the development of cleaner energy production?
2. Create a Code of Practice for wind energy, and all other forms of energy production, to streamline the process and allow for the rapid expansion of cleaner energy production. Included in this is the enshrinement of protective guidelines that will prevent inappropriate developments and negative impacts on people, animals, flora, and places
3. Prevent corrupt and devious entities from fear-mongering and engaging in self-protective activities (e.g., nuclear lobby-funded 'guardian' groups)
4. Make it possible to file defamation lawsuits against those who proclaim health impacts of any clean energy technology (i.e., comparisons with 'asbestos' or 'tobacco'), unless they can prove their claim
5. Remove all barriers (especially artificial ones) to research, development, and roll-out of clean energy technologies
6. Eliminate protectionist activities and policies at all levels of government and industry that 'prop up' old-fashioned energy production technologies
7. Australia's '20% by 2020' target is at risk of dismal failure if nothing proactive is done about the continued pre-eminence of dirty energy production techniques

Thank you again for accepting my submission.

Yours sincerely,
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Adam S. Gray