Department of the Senate
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Australia

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Dear Sir/ Madam,

Submission to the Senate Inquiry into the Social and Economic Impact of Rural Wind Farms

Please accept my submission to the Senate Inquiry into the Social and Economic Impact of Rural Wind Farms.

I have worked as a professional in the clean energy sector for over 12 years designing and project managing the construction of community power supply systems, developing energy efficiency policy and developing wind farms. Over this time the industry has been subjected to wavering Government support and various types of misinformation campaigns initiated by vested interests.

The Australian Government, including every single elected Member of Parliament, needs to look beyond perceptions and politics and consider the bare scientific facts relating to the terms of reference of this Inquiry and beyond. The Australian Government needs to show leadership on climate change and provide consistent unwavering support to the clean energy industry to ensure that the targets the Government sets are met.

I have responded to each of the terms of reference of the Inquiry below.

(a) Any adverse health effects for people living in close proximity to wind farms;

There is no credible scientific evidence that wind farms directly contribute to adverse health effects.

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

Wind turbines are located at such a distance from dwellings so as to comply with noise standards stipulated by the relevant planning authorities. The standards adhered to in Australia are some of the most stringent in the world. Research conducted on modern wind turbines has shown that the levels of low frequency noise and infrasound are within accepted thresholds.

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

Claims that wind farms have a negative impact on property prices can be countered by claims they have a positive effect on property prices. The fact is that the local studies undertaken to date are inconclusive. Studies undertaken overseas, where the wind energy industry is more mature and the sample sizes are therefore larger, have not found a significant correlation between wind farms and property prices.

There could be little doubt that in the vast majority of cases, drought proofing a farm's income and increasing a farming business income would increase the value of the business and therefore the associated property.

Wind Farms have significant local and national economic benefits. It would be impossible to invest billions of dollars constructing wind farms without having a positive economic impact on the local and national economy. It is up to the Australian Government and State Governments to provide consistent support to the industry to ensure that the most is made of these economic opportunities.

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

The three layers of Government need to provide a consistent and sensible policy framework. The requirements placed on the wind energy industry should not exceed those of other development industries such as coal mines, conventional power stations or other major industrial operations on the basis of unsubstantiated claims or on the basis of public perceptions.

(e) Any other relevant matters.

It seems clear from the increases in temperature and 'natural' disasters worldwide over the last 15 years that we need to reduce carbon emissions and do it without further delay. To do this we need leadership from our elected representatives to look beyond the election cycle and to provide the renewable energy industry with consistency.

Wind energy is the most advanced and cost effective form of renewable energy currently available and the most effective means for Australia to reduce carbon emissions in the short term. Wind farms are constructed in rural areas and contribute greatly to the economic development of a region. With appropriate sustained and secure policy support, the most can be made of this positive economic impact. Leadership from our elected representatives is required to ensure the most is made of the positive economic impact of wind farm development in rural areas.

I would also like to stress that if humans are to avoid the most serious effects of climate change, we need our elected representatives to look beyond perceptions and elections and to make decisions based on a balanced understanding of any issues. It is expected that our elected leaders will stand up against negative lobbying with regard to wind farms on the basis of claims that have no scientific evidence.

Yours sincerely,

Ben Purcell