

Senate Community Affairs

Committee

Submission to the Enquiry into the Social and Economic Impact of rural wind farms
(...)
Victoria

Monday, February 7, 2011

Responses to the terms of enquiry regarding the social and economic impacts of rural wind farms:

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

I'm familiar with two local wind farms, the Toora wind farm (12 turbines) and the Wonthaggi wind farm (6 turbines). Both wind farms are in close proximity to homes, particularly the Toora wind farm.

Regarding health affects, there have been no adverse health effects claimed by any individuals that could conclusively point to either wind farm being the cause. I'm aware of one case where an individual claimed the Toora wind farm was affecting his health, yet after receiving and accepting a buyout offer from Stanwell Corporation (the then owners), he purchased a house only slightly further (less than 1 km) from his original residence and has been living quite happily at his new home.

Interestingly, I know of two land purchases well within 1 km of the Toora wind farm, made since the wind farm was constructed. In both cases the residents are more than happy with the wind farm and have stated categorically that it does not disturb them in anyway, in fact they feel quite privileged to be living near the turbines. They view them as works of art as well as energy producing facilities.

I would like to point out that there is no peer-reviewed evidence anywhere in the world that conclusively points to wind farms causing health issues. In those few cases where some individuals claim adverse health effects, it could reasonably be argued that lack of information, or misinformation promoted by wind farm opponents has caused them some anxiety. Nor has it been determined that these individuals were not already suffering from some psychosomatic effect before the wind farms were constructed.

A perfect example of induced hysteria occurred at Melbourne airport on Monday 21st of February, 2005 when 57 people were hospitalised after a supposed gas leak. After a lengthy investigation it was determined there was no gas leak and those who had been hospitalised suffered no real effects but were victims of misinformation and hysteria causing a mass psychogenic illness.

(b) concerns over the excessive noise and vibration submitted by wind farms, which are in close proximity to people's homes;

The Sonus Report¹ produced for Pacific Hydro clearly shows that noise levels from two modern wind farms are well within established guidelines and significantly lower than the noise generated at either Adelaide's central business district or the beach at Cape Bridgwater.

There are tens of thousands of turbines operating in continental Europe, the UK and in the US and to date there is no consistent or credible evidence that sounds emanating from these wind farms.

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

There is no consistent evidence of a link between property values and wind farms, certainly the property values around the Toora wind farm have moved in line with property values in the region and judging by real estate advertisements in recent weeks compared to when the wind farm was first constructed, property values are much higher today than they were in 2002.

While wind farm opponents regularly claim wind farms adversely affect property values, the evidence simply does not support their assertions. Time and common sense reveal the truth and expose their propaganda for what it really is.

I make a point of promoting the region whenever I get the opportunity, one enjoyable activity is taking visitors to see the Toora wind farm and the adjacent lookout overlooking Wilson's Promontory and Corner Inlet. There has never been an occasion when the wind farm visitor centre has not had visitors looking at or photographing the turbines.

Wherever possible I ask my visitors and the others at the lookout what they think of the wind farm and the turbines generally, the comment I most frequently hear is "what's all the fuss about?" And I have yet to hear anybody condemn the turbines or the idea of wind farms. Many say they will bring their friends to see the wind farm and most also stop in the town of Toora at the base of the wind farm for coffee or a meal.

It's self-evident that farmers who host these turbines benefit from the annual rental they receive but it's also clear they spend more in the local area thanks to this extra income. This in turn supports local jobs.

It's disappointing that the local council (South Gippsland) has not done more to promote renewable energy and support the wind farms in the area, unfortunately the council has been controlled (up until recently anyway) by councillors who listened more to the noisy minority of wind farm opponents rather than the silent majority who are quite happy for wind farms to exist in this region.

As proof of that, I attach a survey² conducted in 2006 by Gippsland Friends of Future Generations at the height of the anti-wind farm propaganda exercise. The results were both informative and surprising - and ignored by the council. Despite the ridiculous claims made by wind farm opponents, wind farms and by extension, renewable energy was supported by the majority of respondents by a ratio of about 4 to 1 and when the figures were analysed region by region, it was interesting to note, those closest to the wind farms were more supportive of them. Those who knew least about them were more likely to oppose them.

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

There clearly needs to be set guidelines that are both sensible and practical, the Australian Wind Energy Association has consulted communities across Australia to formulate national planning guidelines, as far as I'm aware, they are still in draft form. Federal, state and local authorities need to get their act together and adopt the guidelines nationally. Hopefully ridiculous requirements such as a 2 km buffer zone, as required by the new Victorian state government, will be ignored.

Concluding comments.

It's time science and common sense were the determining factors in the establishment of wind farms across Australia, rather than the antiscience propaganda promoted by a noisy minority of wind farm opponents, climate change denialists and those beholden to the fossil fuel sector.

No other renewable energy sources is as well developed as wind energy and until such time as other renewable sources can match wind energy, wind energy should be promoted and developed wherever practicable.

¹ http://www.pacifichydro.com.au/media/192017/infrasound_report.pdf

² Survey attached to this document

Thank you for the opportunity to present my submission.

Submitted by:

Gippsland Friends of Future Generations - Survey Conducted during October '06

Total No. Surveyed: 227, Regions covering Grantville, Wonthaggi, Leongatha, Meeniyan, Foster and Toora

NR = No Response, 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree

No. Statement/Question

		NR	1	2	3	4	5
		%	%	%	%	%	%
1	Climate change is a serious issue	1	1	0	6	18	73
2	We can reduce the effects of climate change	2	0	3	11	36	48
3	Australia should reduce it's greenhouse gas emissions	1	0	1	4	26	67
4	Australia should increase it's use of renewable energy	1	0	1	6	23	68
5	Wind energy is an effective energy source	2	4	9	18	29	38
6	Wind energy can help combat global warming	4	2	8	22	30	33
7	Wind farms are appropriate in this region	3	12	10	21	26	30
8	South Gippsland Shire should conduct a postal ballot to determine community attitudes to wind farms	3	1	6	17	26	46
9	I have had access to factual information relevant to wind energy	4	5	11	22	33	25
10	Australia should use nuclear power for electricity generation	5	33	16	22	15	8
11	Australia should try to develop clean coal technology for electricity generation	5	8	6	18	36	27
12	The Federal Government supports renewable energy	6	15	22	31	15	11
13	The State Government supports renewable energy	6	6	13	35	29	11
14	The Shire Council supports renewable energy	8	10	13	41	19	9
15	Would you support a study on tidal power in the Gippsland inlets?	3	2	7	16	36	36
16	Would you support a study on wave power on the Gippsland coast?	4	2	4	15	41	34
17	Would you accept a nuclear power plant operating in Gippsland?	4	52	11	18	10	6
18	The Toora wind farm is visually.. (1=very bad 2=bad 3=neutral 4=good 5=very good)	4	8	9	30	27	23
19	The Wonthaggi wind farm is visually.. (1=very bad 2=bad 3=neutral 4=good 5=very good)	7	10	10	33	20	19

Note. Questions 20 to 24 are multiple choice, more than 1 option could be selected.

20 What do you believe is the greatest cause of climate change and global warming?

	%
NR	8
Fossil Fuels	72
The Sun	5
Natural events	25

21 Does the majority your family support renewable energy?

	%
NR	6
No	1
Yes	76
Unsure	17

22 Which energy technologies should the Australian Govt. fund research in?

	%
NR	7
Solar	87
Wind	63
Ethanol	28
Geothermal	30
Tidal	59
Hydro	37
Wave	50
Biodiesel	29
Hydrogen	25

23 Do you prefer certain renewable energy sources?

	%
NR	9
Solar	81
Wind	56
Ethanol	21
Geothermal	17
Tidal	42
Hydro	26
Wave	37
Biodiesel	19
Hydrogen	15

24 How many **additional** wind farms between Phillip Island and Lakes Entrance should be **constructed here in the next ten years?**

	%
NR	23
0	21
2	7
4	15
6	12
8	5
10	17

Note: We attempted to avoid “selecting” respondents with known views on wind farms, for or against. The point of the exercise was an attempt to determine the real/majority community attitudes to renewable energy/climate change.

Gippsland Friends of Future Generations has a loose association with Friends of Renewable Energy in NSW and Friends of Future Generations in SA, primarily with information exchange. We do not receive any funding. Our members cover the region from Phillip Island through to Yarram.

Press Release

During October, Gippsland Friends of Future Generations conducted a public poll on renewable energy at Grantville, Wonthaggi, Leongatha, Meeniyan, Foster and Toora.

The compiled results conclusively demonstrate South Gippslanders support renewable energy in this region, particularly solar and wind energy. The results mirror the recent Lowy Institute and A.C. Nielson polls.

93% believe Australia should reduce greenhouse gas emissions, 91% believe we should increase our use of renewable energy, 67% believe wind is an effective energy source, 63% say wind energy can help combat global warming and 56% believe wind farms are appropriate in this area as opposed to 22% against. 50% thought the Toora wind farm was visually good or very good and only 15% disliked the look of the wind farm.

Despite the misleading statements of some councillors, local politicians and the Prom Coast/Tarwin guardians, the majority of people in this region are content to see additional wind energy developments here. 56% wanted an additional two or more wind farms constructed here, 21% opposed additional wind farms and 23% chose not to respond.

It is also notable that all levels of government are far behind public sentiment on the matter of renewable energy and it's development. It's time local counsellors and politicians listened to the majority, not a noisy minority.