

Community Affairs Committee - Wind Farms Inquiry

I undertook, during the presentation of my evidence to the committee, to do two things:

1. To submit the research proposal referred to during the presentation of my evidence for scrutiny by the committee and submission for external review at the committee's discretion. This proposal is attached. I am always grateful for feedback and any suggestions are welcome. I do ask, however, that confidentiality is maintained in relation to the proposal, at least until the data are available.

It is planned to submit this to be Clean Energy Council and request funding.

2. I undertook to read and comment on the report from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, entitled Health and the Environment a Compilation of Evidence, released in March 2011. I have now done so. The issue of renewable energy has to be seen in the context that one of the greatest threats we face to survival is climate change. Arguably, a more immediate threat is that of combustion of carbon-based fuels on air quality. Both of these issues are clearly highlighted in the report. The report succinctly addresses the issue of environmental noise. Noise is particularly a problem in urban environments although it is for the most part not entirely clear that there is significant evidence for independent (and directly causal) adverse health effects; these appear to be limited to those circumstances when the decibel level of the noise is particularly loud for example above 60 dBA. In Australia, beyond annoyance experienced by a small number of individuals (for whatever reason), and the anxiety that is being generated in a larger number, by activists, there is simply no credible evidence of adverse health effects from wind farms. Despite their extensive use in a number of countries over a prolonged period there is similarly no credible evidence of harm.

It is interesting to note in Victoria between 1986 and 2006 the marked increase in individuals hearing noise from various sources and that the effect of this on annoyance has been more limited. This suggests that people accommodate. Moreover trends in high blood pressure probably been a decrease rather than an increase in prevalence over the same period. Nevertheless prudent monitoring of any change to the environment is desirable and the development of environmental health surveillance capacity in Australia is listed in the report as one of the eight key objectives of the Australian government's national environmental health strategy 2007 to 2012. It also indicates that a report from the Western Australian Environmental Health Directorate has identified that such monitoring is feasible and associated with strong cross sectorial support.

I consider that the research project that we have proposed an submitted for your review represents an example of how such monitoring could be undertaken in a cost-effective manner.

Thank you for the opportunity to present to the committee and to submit additional material on notice.

Yours sincerely

Professor Gary Wittert MBBch, MD, FRACP, FRCP
Head, Discipline of Medicine
University of Adelaide