

# Case Study - the spread of misinformation around retirement age renewables

## Background

One of the issues regional communities we work with are most keen for better information on is what happens when renewable energy projects come to the end of their lives. Questions like “who is responsible for decommissioning?” and “will materials be recycled?” are common ones we hear. Other aspects of this issue we find are not widely understood are that renewable energy assets can have their lives extended through refurbishment and repowering.

To try and provide reliable information on these questions, we published [this toolkit](#) and have sought to distribute it widely in renewable energy regions.

Nevertheless, the issue of decommissioning of renewable energy plants is one that provokes high levels of misinformation and disinformation that uses false and exaggerated claims to drive confusion and anxiety in the community as part of campaigns to oppose either renewable energy in general or specific renewable energy projects.

## Case Study

Claims in 2023 that wind turbine blades were being dumped at a site in North Queensland demonstrates an example of how misinformation is generated in spite of the facts and then is amplified through various media and digital outlets with the purpose of confusing audiences who consume the information.

### **Background**

In July 2023 Nick Cater, Executive Director Menzies Research Centre, published a video on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WOicWEp9P-s>) claiming to be set in a “wind farm graveyard”. It showed footage of Mr Carter exploring an area of land where old turbine blades had been discarded. It made it look like the blades had been dumped in forested areas and he labelled the actions a “green energy grift” while going on to lament “there’s nothing much renewable about these”.

### **Media**

The story was picked up by The Australian:

<https://www.theaustralian.com.au/commentary/is-chalumbin-set-to-be-the-new-franklin-dam/news-story/713bbd58a15f3fc42f96a6ed4f1ce1a4> and was discussed at length on Sky News

Australia:

- o [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tlcPsl\\_mOvA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tlcPsl_mOvA)
- o <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oLb3fdNwnZM>
- o <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KMuiILr0eic>

It went on to be circulated and discussed by other anti-renewables groups, news outlets, commentators and politicians:

- o Advance: [The truth about “Renewables” ... Nick Cater uncovers discarded wind turbine blades in a forest in north Queensland. From ADHTV: <https://youtu.be/WOicWEp9P-s> | \[Advance Australia | Facebook\]\(#\)](#)
- o NewsMax: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WOicWEp9P-s>
- o People’s First Party: <https://www.facebook.com/gerard.rennick/videos/shocking-footage-of-a-discarded-wind-farm-in-north-queensland-unfortunately-i-di/803444121490830/>
- o Rainforests Reserves Australia: [Is this the future for the... - Rainforest Reserves Australia | Facebook](#)
- o Property Rights Australia: [Nick Cater from The Menzies... - Property Rights Australia | Facebook](#)
- o Ben Fordham 2GB: [‘Dirty big secret’: Wind turbine GRAVEYARD found in Aussie forest](#)
- o Craig Kelly: <https://x.com/craigkellyAFEE/status/1683079529617833985>
- o Wide Awake Media: [https://x.com/wideawake\\_media/status/1753018261011099931](https://x.com/wideawake_media/status/1753018261011099931)

### **Fact Check**

The reality is that these turbine blades were, in fact, being stored on a private property of a local Ravenshoe Contractor, Kidner Contracting. Kidner responded to the video the following day debunking it: [Ravenshoe's Kidner Contracting defends 'wind turbine graveyard' claims | QLD](#). The turbines were from Queensland's first wind farm, Windy Hill. They were not in a bush or forested area, but instead were in a quarry on the site awaiting further use in the circular economy by the contractor who hadn't dumped them, but who had stored them. The company saved them from landfill to be recycled. Kidner claimed Mr Carter had obtained the video footage illegally through trespass on the site. A company spokesperson went on to say *“The neat stockpile is not hidden in the forest. Nick’s political agenda does not show that there is a large shed and office within 100m of these, the camera man is standing on a quarry haul road.”* You can find out more here: ["Turbine graveyard" debunked: Anatomy of a media anti-wind scare campaign](#).

### **Wind Turbine Recycling**

90% of wind turbine components are recyclable. Wind turbines are expected to last 30 to 40 years and, at the end of their life, either need to be decommissioned or upgraded. Today, 85 to 100 per cent of the materials used in wind farms, such as steel, copper, and concrete, are recyclable. The biggest opportunity to further reduce waste is to find new ways to recycle the turbine blades. For example:

- Shredding to turn the blades into small fibrous components or powdered materials.
- Strong chemical solutions are used to transform the polymer into small molecules to recover fibre.

- Thermal recycling which involves applying heat to melt specific parts and transform into different forms. For example, some companies are turning turbine blades into surfboards<sup>1</sup> and sneakers<sup>2</sup>.

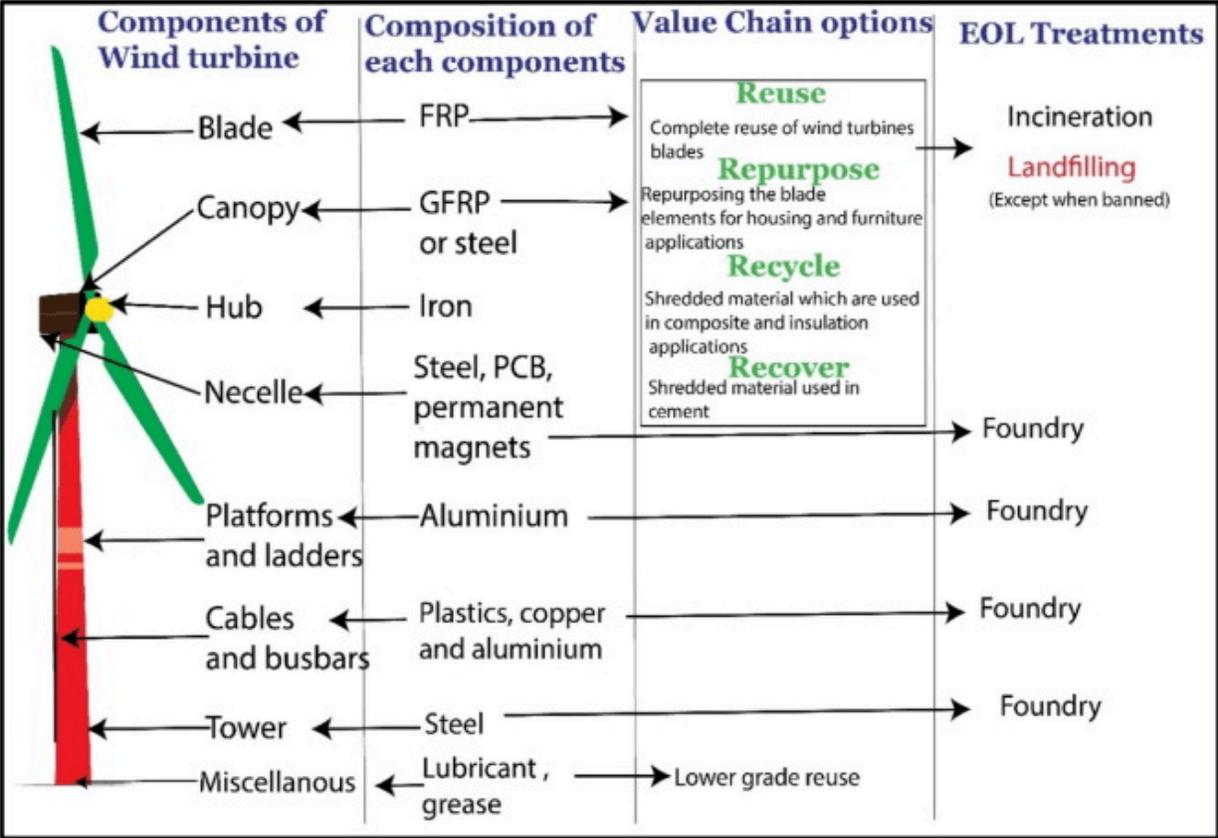


Image 2: Value chain and EOL options for various components for rotor blades of wind power plants. Source: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1755008423000121&nbsp>

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.acciona.com.au/surfboard>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.acciona-energia.com/el-ganso-acciona-sneakers>