

04 February 2011

Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA, ACT 2600

Dear Senators,

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

Thank you for providing the opportunity to make a submission as part of the Senate Inquiry into the Social and Economic Impact of Rural Wind Farms.

I would like to make it clear at the beginning that I currently work in the wind industry and have done so for the past eleven years (Pacific Hydro is my current employer). Accordingly, I have had a long exposure to wind farms and living in communities that host wind farms. The views expressed in this submission are my own personal views and these views do not represent the position of my employer.

My reasons for making a submission

Since 1997, when commercial scale wind farms were first mooted for the South West of Victoria, I was immediately attracted to the potential for wind farming in my district. At this time, I was the CEO of the Glenelg Shire Council and met a number of wind farm developers who were expressing interest in establishing wind farms in the Glenelg Shire Council. I saw a lot of potential for the wind industry because of:

1. Abundant wind resource along the SW coast of Victoria
2. Excellent electricity grid infrastructure due to the presence of the Portland Aluminium Smelter
3. Victoria's largest electricity consumer (Portland Aluminium) was already here and consuming vast quantities of electricity produced from brown coal and causing massive green-house gas emissions that gives Australia the dubious title of being the world's worst emitter of green house gases per capita.
4. There was huge potential for local companies such as the Port of Portland, Keppel Prince & GR Carr to supply goods and services to the fledgling wind industry and thus create more local jobs and provide more economic stimulus for the local economy.
5. Renewable energy is clean and green and contributes to a healthier environment.
6. The Glenelg Shire Council welcomed new investment and industry in its Shire and the community were also supportive of new economic development initiatives.

Whilst working in local government, I tried to learn as much as I could about the wind industry and whilst I had heard about some "bad" experiences overseas, further research revealed that these "bad" experiences were mainly propagated by vocal minority groups who were basically NIMBYS (Not in my backyard). These NIMBYS were people who supported the concept of renewable energy but did not want a wind farm within their vista. I respectfully suggest that a modern day incarnation of the NIMBYS has necessitated the need to have this Senate Inquiry. During the past eleven years, I

have met many potential land owners who want to host a wind farm and many neighbours who live next door to our wind farms. On the whole, people have embraced wind farms and are becoming more accustomed to seeing wind farms as part of the landscape. Sure, there are still a few people opposed to wind farms and have made some fanciful claims about noise and health impacts but I find it very difficult to accept some of these claims.

Accordingly, I would like to submit the following information based on my personal experience and observation and address each one of the terms of reference in the Senate Inquiry.

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

Some people have made some claims of excessive noise and vibrations from wind farms that cause sleep deprivation and other side effects. From my own personal experience from living on an operational wind farm at Clements Gap in South Australia for a period of 3 months, I never had any problems getting to sleep or staying asleep. My place of residence was a renovated barn that was less than 500 metres from a long string of wind generators and I can recall only once waking up in the night and actually hearing the wind generators. The noise of the wind generators did not wake me up, but once I lay awake for a couple of minutes, I realised that I could hear the wind generators. I could also hear the iron sheets on my roof flapping in the wind and just rolled over and went back to sleep. I suspect that it comes down to your state of mind. If you are negatively disposed towards wind generators and if you can hear them, then it is likely that this will manifest itself and amplify the negatives and such people will start to have some adverse health effects that can be loosely linked to the presence of wind generators nearby. But on the other hand, if you are ambivalent or supportive of wind generators, then you are highly likely to have an uninterrupted night's sleep and you will not suffer any of the so-called adverse health effects linked to wind generators.

I am also highly sceptical of recent claims that living near wind generators increases your risk of suffering from high blood pressure (HBP). There are many causes of HBP including genetics, obesity, smoking, lifestyle, alcohol etc. I have had HBP for the past 13 years thanks to a family history of HBP. However, in the past 2 years, I have made many lifestyle changes such as a healthy diet, regular exercise and weight reduction and my doctor has actually reduced my HBP medication and says that if I continue on this path, I may be able to discontinue the medication. This improvement in my health occurred at the same time that I have worked on our wind farms. Accordingly, from my own personal experience, I cannot support the contention that living near wind generators increases your risk of suffering from high blood pressure (HBP). I am happy for a representative from the Senate Committee to contact my doctor to verify my medical history.

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

I have many friends and acquaintances that live near our wind farms who do not host any of Pacific Hydro's infrastructure. These people are mostly ambivalent to wind farms but they all say that the noise issue is just a beat-up by wind farm opponents. In fact, some of the early complainants about noise have dropped their complaints and have adjusted to the new environment. I still see them regularly in the supermarket or at local sporting events and they do not talk about any negative impacts of the nearby wind farms. I suggest that once a wind farm is established, then there will be some complaints early in its operational phase and these will peter out as the wind farm continues

to operate over a longer period of time. This can be explained by people adjusting to the change, or perhaps ambivalence or apathy. However, it is acknowledged that a few people are genuinely aggrieved by the noise issue and the relevant wind farm companies need to work closely with these people to resolve these issues.

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

I am aware of several properties that have changed hands in the Yambuk/Codrington area and there have been no signs of devaluation or lack of buyer interest. The same can be said for Cape Bridgewater, although there is a lack of property sales evidence, but property valuations have continued to rise despite being in the highest bracket within the Glenelg Shire Council area. These facts can be easily verified by the valuations department at the Glenelg Shire Council and Moyne Shire Council.

With respect to employment opportunities, the Portland region has greatly benefitted from a number of wind farm projects in the south east corner of Australia. In the mid 1990s, Portland was literally going down the gurgler with many major industries closing down. Population was in decline and it looked very dismal. With the advent of Australia's first commercial-scale wind farm at Codrington (40kms east of Portland), many local businesses geared up to provide goods and services to this project. There were several local companies who participate in the Codrington Project and went on to work on many wind farm projects. These companies are:

- Keppel Prince (manufacturing wind towers and crane services)
- Jennings Towers (manufacturing and erection of met masts)
- GR Carr (concrete foundations)
- Porthaul (civil works)
- Day's Electrical (electrical)
- Menzel Electrics (electrical)
- Port of Portland (freight)
- Spikins Transport (freight)
- Berry & Whyte (surveyors)
- Boral (concrete batch plant and concrete truck drivers)

And in recent times, other local companies have diversified into providing services to the wind industry:

- Noske Transport (heavy haulage and bulk storage)
- Rex Andrews (heavy haulage and bulk storage)
- Mibus Brothers (civil works and bulk storage)
- Repower (service technicians)
- Keppel Prince (service technicians and bulk storage)
- Kempe (service technicians)

Due to the cyclic nature of establishing the wind industry in Australia, and the vagaries of Government policy, it is difficult to estimate the number of local jobs that can be attributed to the wind industry. During a busy period where many projects were in construction, say 2007 & 2008, I

would suggest that there were approximately 300-400 jobs just in the Portland community that related directly to the wind industry. This does not include accommodation and hospitality jobs that also ballooned during this period. Then when uncertainty about the Renewable Energy Target (RET) and the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) hit, I would estimate that there were approximately 200-250 jobs in the Portland community that related directly to the wind industry.

Now that there is more certainty about the RET and the GFC has passed, the future for the Portland economy is looking better with the Macarthur Project starting up soon and companies such as Keppel Prince have begun a recruiting campaign to bolster their employment numbers to meet their production schedule.

To fully capture the social and economic benefits of wind farming, Portland businesses would greatly benefit from having a supportive government policy environment to ensure a steady stream of wind farm projects rather than the stop/start cycle that has been experienced over the past 10 years. If this was to occur, then many Portland businesses would have the confidence to invest in human resources and new technology to capture more opportunities. This would also maximise local content in Australian projects which has a positive flow on effect to the whole Australian economy.

With respect to the impact on farm incomes, it is easily demonstrated that the farmers who host the wind turbines are clear winners. These farmers only have to give up a small percentage of their land to host a wind farm. Usually, the wind mills are located on hill tops which are usually the least productive parts of a farm (due to wind). The farmers do not have to make any effort – the wind mills don't need to be milked or need to be shorn. It is a great way to diversify farm incomes and to help "drought proof" the farm. The wind continues to blow through periods of flood, drought and locust plagues.

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

The planning system and laws are overly complex, acts as a barrier to investment and is in crucial need of reform. Having worked in local government for 22 years, I can appreciate the problems that local government is faced with when it is presented with a proposal for a wind farm in its area. Put simply, local government does not have the resources or expertise to deal with a planning application for a wind farm, let alone have the ongoing task of ensuring planning compliance when the wind farm becomes operational. This opinion is formed after talking to several senior executives in local government in both Victoria and South Australia. It is also backed up by the findings by the Environment and Natural Resources Committee in its report – *Inquiry into the Approvals Process for Renewable Energy Projects in Victoria* (Feb 2010).

Anything to streamline the planning laws would be welcome!

Concluding comments

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission. I trust that my submission will help the Committee to make some recommendations that will have a positive effect on the wind industry and help dispel some myths and misconceptions that are linked to wind farms.

Yours Faithfully

Danny Halstead