

Submission to the Federal Senate's Committee on Community Affairs regarding its inquiry into the social and economic Impact of rural wind farms

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Dear Committee Members,

I have worked in the Australian renewable energy industry for over 15 years. During that time the renewable energy industry has provided a livelihood for me and my family; but it has also given me so much more. My children regularly comment to me how proud they are that their father is professionally engaged and committed to an industry that is delivering environmentally positive outcomes for the planet and for their future.

I know that I could have chosen a different path, like many of my University friends did, and moved into other industries that have enjoyed more sustained economic growth and support. Had I done so, I am confident that I would have achieved far greater financial wealth. However wealth is not to be measured in financial terms only. Whatever path my professional career may have otherwise taken, I doubt I would have achieved the same sense of self-worth and pride, that I have derived from working for so many years in the pursuit of renewable energy solutions that are so desperately needed by our future generations.

For the past 8 years my focus has been on wind farming. Wind farming is an economically competitive source of electricity in many areas of the world. In Australia wind farms are unable to compete with other cheaper, but highly polluting, sources of electricity generation, such as coal. One way of levelling the playing field here in Australia is to recognise and give value to the environmental benefits that wind (and other renewable energy) delivers. This has been done through the Mandatory Renewable Energy Target (MRET); but to date the MRET has only been partly successful. The reasons for this, whilst not widely understood, have been documented substantially elsewhere. A price on carbon is an essential part of addressing the imbalance going forward.

Apart from the carbon abatement value created by wind farms, I believe that wind farms are environmentally benign, and deliver entirely positive outcomes to their local communities. Whilst I do not live near a wind farm, I do have family that live within a few kilometres of a wind farm in the Western District of Victoria.

My Father-in-law and Mother-in-law have always spoken very highly of 'their' wind farm and the positive impact it has had on their community. Whilst my in-laws do not benefit directly from the wind farm, they do enjoy, together with the rest of the community, the benefits delivered by the generosity of the community development fund run by the company that owns and operates the wind farm. They have enjoyed these benefits for some 7 years since the wind farm started operating. My in-laws are well known and well liked and respected members of their community. They tell me that they know of no one in their community that has complained of any health impacts from any noise or visual effects attributable to the wind farm. Their view is that wind farms help to validate the livelihoods and sense of purpose of people who live and work on the land. Their view is that there should be more wind farms. It helps to "drought-proof" those farmers that are fortunate to own land that is blessed with a valuable wind resource, and through those farmers and the

generous community development funds, the benefits ripple more widely to the rest of the local community. Whenever I visit my in-laws my father-in-law will enquire with interest about the wind farm sites that my company is trying to develop, in the hope that good progress is being made on any sites that are in or around his community.

I feel it is important to tell you about my in-laws' experiences with 'their' wind farm, not to discredit in any way those people that claim to suffer from health effects from wind farms, but because I have received first hand feedback on the positive impacts of wind farms from people who have day-to-day interaction with people who are directly and indirectly impacted by a wind farm in many ways. I reiterate that all of that feedback I have received has been extremely positive.

Whilst I have gained great pride and satisfaction from working in the renewable energy industry over many years, it has not been without its share of frustrations. I have endured what at times seemed like a never-ending roller-coaster ride, mainly due to the structural problems associated with the MRET. However this is first time, in my 15 years of working in the renewable energy industry, that I have felt compelled to speak up and say something about my concerns for this industry. I sense that there are dark clouds brewing on the horizon for the wind industry in Australia. I believe that these clouds can be attributed to public misunderstanding and misconceptions of wind farming, stoked by myths and misinformation spread by a small minority that would for some reason see this industry wither in this country. I believe that to allow them to succeed would be a great loss, not only to the economy of this country, but to the broader worthwhile pursuit of large-scale sustainable renewable energy for the planet.

I trust and hope that this committee will establish the true basis for these growing threats to the wind industry, and will confirm my understanding of wind farms' true value and genuine ability to deliver strong positive impacts to their local communities. I look forward to hearing about your findings in due course.

Yours sincerely,

Michael Wilson