

Dear Community Affairs Reference Committee,

I write in response to your inquiry regarding "The Social and Environmental Impact of Rural Wind Farms". I am a strong supporter of wind energy, and personally believe that it is the most environmentally friendly and socially responsible form of electricity generation available to us in Australia at this time. I grew up on a farm in regional Victoria and now work for a company in the renewable energy field, having joined this industry 9 years ago in a personal quest to align my career with something that I could genuinely believe in. My work has included significant periods of time working in rural communities, and much time spent physically located on wind farms both during construction and operations, therefore I have much first hand experience of their "impacts". Please note that whilst I do work in the renewable energy industry, the views in this submission are entirely my own.

In response to the specific elements of the inquiry:

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

I don't believe there are any adverse health effects, with the exception of the stress that at times some people appear have suffered coincident with wind farms in their community. In my opinion this stress has mostly been either driven by anti-wind campaigners with alternative agendas fear-mongering in these communities, resulted from jealousy ("the neighbour is being paid for wind turbines on their property, but I'm not"), or been associated with a general aversion to change. I have personally dealt with many landowners who live in close proximity to wind farms and am not aware of any of them experiencing adverse health effects.

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

Vibration is not an issue and I have never previously heard this raised as a concern. Noise has the potential to be an issue if wind farms are poorly planned and wind turbines are sited excessively close to houses (especially if those houses are in valleys out of the wind). However there are standards, models and planning restrictions and guidelines to deal with the noise from wind farms, and so long as developers and planning authorities are diligent in complying with these, then this should not be an issue.

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

I have not seen any evidence of negative effects of wind farms on property values, and clearly those farms which actually have wind turbines located on them would experience a significant uplift in value as a result of the income stream that the turbines bring with them. This boost to farm income is extremely important in rural areas, particularly given the often low and volatile incomes that otherwise are the norm in farming. There is a strong flow-on effect to the rest of the local community in the long-term, with most windmill rental payments, other community investments associated with wind farms and a significant portion of construction and operational expenditure being

local and flowing into the local economy in the area where the wind farm is located.

Rural wind farms clearly have a very positive impact on employment opportunities in regional areas, including from development, construction and then long-term operations. I have personally benefitted from this in the past and the company I work for today employs (both directly and indirectly) many people in rural areas in support of our wind projects and assets. Again, rural areas are often those with the most challenging job markets (low wages, less skilled jobs available), therefore the quality and quantity of jobs provided through wind farms is extremely valuable to rural communities.

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

I have limited experience in this facet of wind farms and so have no comment on it.

(e) Any other relevant matters.

In my experience, whilst many spurious arguments are raised from time to time against wind farms, the majority of those arguments do not stand up to rational analysis and typically those raising such arguments are driven by one of four things:

1. A general and irrational dislike of anything "environmental", particularly where they don't believe in the existence of climate change.
2. Vested interest in the fossil fuel industry.
3. A fear of change.
4. Genuine concern with the aesthetics of wind turbines on landscapes. Whilst the majority of the population find them attractive, beauty is in the eye of the beholder and there is no denying that wind farms do alter the visual landscape, so in my opinion this can really be the only valid argument against wind farms.

I also believe that any consideration of wind energy needs to also take into account the alternatives. Wind farms are not perfect, but in my opinion they are the best option we presently have in Australia for environmentally and socially responsible electricity generation, and as long as we still demand electricity then it has to come from somewhere. There are minimal opportunities for other large-scale renewable energies in Australia in the short-medium term, therefore practically if wind farms are not built then generation will continue to come from fossil fuels. Any wind farm not built in Australia will practically result in more coal being burnt, and in my opinion (as supported by the vast majority of technical and academic literature on this subject), the environmental and social impacts of this are far more detrimental to society. The negative impacts from coal and gas generation (including contributing to climate change which directly harms rural communities, which are disproportionately susceptible to its impacts) significantly outweigh those from wind farms.

In summary, I believe that on balance the social and environmental impacts of wind farms on rural communities are overwhelmingly positive.

Yours sincerely,

Nigel Baker