

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

To the Senate Community Affairs Committee

RE: Inquiry into the Social and Economic Impact of Rural Wind Farms.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide valuable information to the Senate Community Affairs Committee on the social and economic impact of rural wind farms. The wind energy industry contributes significantly to our community and we welcome a detailed investigation in order to capitalize on the benefits that wind energy can provide.

Our message to Government is that Wind Farms:

- Contribute to the development of our regions renewable energy sector
- Provide much needed jobs
- Provides a green job's industry training opportunity at our regional training centres (Warrnambool Tafe, Portland TAFE & Deakin University)
- Provide a new and reliable income for landowners and,
- Can attract new local and over sea's investment that supports economic development in the South West of Victoria

The Committee for Portland represents the corporate and community interests of the town of Portland, in South West Victoria. The Committee of Portland carries with it the voice of \$1.3b in annual business turnover and many of our members rely on the wind industry for direct and indirect employment opportunities. This extends to manufacturing of wind towers, civil works, electrical, transport, surveying, service technicians and trade through the Port of Portland.

Our Submission will separately address the five areas in the Senate's Terms of Reference:

- a) Any adverse health effects of people living in close proximity to wind farms;

The Australian Government's National Health and Medical Research Council's review found there was no credible evidence of adverse health effects due to wind farms (1).

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

Clean energy company Pacific Hydro have rolled out a number of projects in the South West of Victoria and actively consult and engage with communities in those areas. Residences in Codrington and Yambuk that have had wind farms since 2001 have shown overwhelming support for wind farms in their area. They have also commissioned independent work on the issue of noise.

In a 2010 study, acoustic consulting firm Sonus found that "the level of infrasound produced by wind turbines is well below established perception thresholds and, importantly, is also below levels produced by other natural and man-made sources"(2). Sonus undertook testing at Cape Bridgewater - a coastal town outside of Portland, home to 29 turbines and found decibel readings considerably less than Adelaide CBD and natural occurring beach noises such as crashing waves testing along Bridgewater beach.

Geoffrey Tonks from Codrington (40km's east of Portland) operates a B&B facility within 1.5km's of the Codrington Wind Farm and has lived there for two and half years. He attests that he has had "no ill affects from the wind farm, either health wise or with issues, such as noise, vibration or disruptions of any sort"(3).

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

As reported in The Great South Coast Regional Strategic Plan, the Glenelg Shire is considered as a 'High Wind Resource' area in the Victorian Wind Atlas (4) and therefore is ideal for wind farms providing a much needed sustainable and responsible clean energy source.

The Portland Wind Energy Project, which is currently being developed by Pacific Hydro, is constructing wind farms in the Glenelg Shire in four stages. The first three stages have been completed. Upon completion of all four stages, these wind farms will generate a total of up to 670 gigawatt hours per annum or the equivalent of powering 120,000 households each year.

The provision of a Wind Farm industry in Portland has been a boost to the community and is important to our future. Our community supports our local manufacturing companies and local suppliers who deliver substantial economic benefits back to our community. Engineering company Keppel Prince employs 150 people who are directly involved in the manufacturing of wind towers.

The variety of business opportunities within a wind farm project is extensive. A stable industry will encourage more businesses to relocate to the area or for current business to invest in more capital.

Opportunities exist in:

- Heavy Haulage
- Wind Monitoring
- Galvanizing Plant
- Tower Plant Fabrication
- Control and Switchgear Enclosures
- Tower Flange Fabrication
- Tower Ladder manufacturing
- Transport and Containers
- Ultrasonic Testing
- Provision of Safety Equipment
- Electrical Equipment and
- Tarpaulins

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

The proposal by the Victorian State Government to enable local government to decide on wind farm applications rather than the Planning Minister is not practical and a backward step. Local government does not have the expertise or resources to access issue relating to Wind Farms. The Committee for Portland's position is the complexity of wind farms and planning compliances should remain the responsibility of State Government who can engage technical experts to make vital decisions. The Committee for Portland strongly opposes the State Government's recent action.

Wind Farms have national significance in that they will contribute to Australia's efforts to reduce carbon emissions. Local Councils are not equipped to balance the trade offs likely in making decisions that impact beyond their boundaries. Victoria's power industry is a high emitter of carbon and it seems logical that State Government should be embracing and encouraging clean energy, including Wind Farms.

We draw the Committee's attention to the numerous studies that have identified New and Renewable Energy as a major opportunity for our region, Victoria, and Australia. The Committee for Portland endorse the recommendations of these studies and are keen to see the recommendations implemented.

Such studies are;

- The Great South Coast Regional Strategic Plan (p.g 24-25)
- The Barwon South West Region Advice to Government from Regional Development Australia (p.g 11)
- Glenelg Shire Council's Business Retention and Expansion Program (p.g 69-71)
- Getting the fundamentals right for Australia's infrastructure priorities report from Infrastructure Australia (p.g 28-29)
- Jobs for the Future Economy: Victoria's Action Plan for Green Jobs.

Small Communities also benefit from the social initiatives that good corporate citizens provide. Pacific Hydro's Community Support fund has provided vital resources for clubs and local service groups to delivery much needed grass roots projects and without their support these projects simply would cease to exist. Last year Pacific Hydro committed over \$150,000 in our region from revenue from existing wind farm projects as well as valuable in-kind support to community groups, involvement in community events and educational activities in our schools.

In conclusion the Committee for Portland supports Wind Farms in our region and believes they provide a healthy alternative for energy production. The Committee for Portland welcome the opportunity to invite and host any of your representatives to visit Portland to witness first hand the positive impact that Wind Farms have in our community and the jobs it has created.

Yours faithfully

Anita Rank
Executive Director
Committee for Portland

10 February 2011.

1 NHMRC, "Wind Turbines and Health – A Rapid Review of the Evidence", July, 2010.

2 Sonus, "Wind Farms Technical Paper- Environmental Noise", November, 2010.

3 Transcript from Geoff Tonks submission to the Senate Inquiry, January 2011.

4 The Great South Coast Regional Strategic Plan, 2010 (p.g 24-25)