

10 February 2011

Senate Inquiry into Social & Economic Impact of Wind Farms
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT

By email:

Dear Committee Members

Submission to the Inquiry

1. It is important that the Inquiry identify the concerns embedded in the terms of reference to the Inquiry as ill-founded, contrary to expert advice and expressive of “nay-sayers” or special interests not the general weight of public opinion.
2. The supposed adverse health effects of wind turbines have been investigated by appropriate medical authorities several times both in Australia and overseas. Such concerns have been found to be groundless. In any case, were significant risk to be identified, it would have to be balanced against the known and serious adverse health effects of coal burning.
3. The supposed problems of excessive noise or vibration have similarly been investigated several times and similarly found to be without foundation. Obviously a reasonable distance from housing is necessary but having lived next to windfarms in Europe I can say from personal experience that wind turbines can be completely unobtrusive.
4. The effects of windfarms on existing interest – farmers – will vary. In some cases the effect will be negligible. In other cases there may be negative impact, as with any development. Existing legislation makes perfectly adequate provision for appropriate compensation. Adverse effect on a few individuals should not be an absolute basis for not proceeding with development of any kind, including windfarms.
5. Employment opportunities appear to be created rather than destroyed by windfarms, on current evidence from Australia and overseas.
6. Clearly there are various potential negatives about windfarms and it is reasonable for there to be planning constraints. Obvious considerations might include:
 - outstanding aesthetic or heritage nature of a proposed site
 - protection of birds
 - proximity of housingHowever the existing State and Commonwealth planning regulations more than adequately cover such things.

7. Australia is dragging its feet in dealing with the self-evident need to increase non-carbon electricity generation. We are seeing, once again, quite reasonable initial prudence about alternative energy transformed into bloody-minded obstructionism and obstinate refusal to accept the informed opinion of medical and scientific authorities. Your Inquiry is an opportunity resolutely to discredit such lobbying and to insist that discussion of alternative technology be conducted rationally and without undue regard to special interests. To date, political leadership has plainly lagged public opinion. You have an opportunity to change that.

Yours faithfully

John Brennan