DEA Doctors for the Environment Australia
www.dea.org.au

Health Effects of Wind Turbines: DEA Position Statement

DEA recognises that:

- Ensuring a safe climate for future generations needs significant and urgent reductions to greenhouse gas emissions.
- Replacing carbon intensive energy generation in the timeframe required can only be achieved using currently feasible, scalable technologies that harness abundant renewable resources. The only energy technologies that currently fulfil these criteria in Australia are solar energy and wind.
- Successful roll out of these technologies is therefore paramount to our chances of averting global temperature increases beyond 2 degrees.

DEA notes that:

- Acoustic health effects of wind turbines have been raised as an issue in the media and grey literature.
- Any negative effects arising from an energy source must be viewed in the context of wider social and environmental effects including climate change from greenhouse gas emissions and other pollutants. The adverse social and health consequences of global warming are prolonged, cumulative and far reaching, affecting whole populations and the biosphere.
- Literature reviews, including DEA's Submission to the Senate Wind Farms Inquiry[1] have failed to identify any indication of adverse physiological effects, and attribute symptoms to other causes both social and psychological. These are most recently summarised in NHMRC 2010.[2]
- The Senate Community Affairs Committee Inquiry into the Social and Economic Impact of Rural Wind Farms concludes that there is not enough research to directly link any adverse health outcomes with the noise or vibrations caused by the wind farms.[3]
- There are no known physical mechanisms that could explain proposed adverse health effects of infrasound at the pressure levels generated by wind turbines. There are instead a small number of individuals that have increased sensitivity to audible noise and the symptoms displayed are consequent to the annoyance from this. The focus on infrasound distracts discussion from this real phenomenon.[4]
- The factors that attend introduction of any new technology (understanding of the technology and the sense of control over the deployment and of the risk,[5] aesthetic concerns, concern based on geographic proximity, a sense of missing out on the benefits) [2] may be used by those wanting to oppose expansion of wind energy.

DEA therefore:

- Acknowledges that a small proportion of people living near wind turbines have reported suffering from noise related complaints.

- Suggests that in siting wind farms a wide ranging community consultation is undertaken and that benefits from wind farms are shared among the whole community not just those on whose land they are sited.

- Recognises that the transition to a decarbonised economy can only be achieved in the timeframe required using cost effective, proven and scalable sources of renewable generation, meaning wind must play an integral part.

- Supports the urgent deployment of wind farms to enable the transition away from carbon intensive energy generation.

References

1. Doctors for the Environment Australia, 2011, Submission to the Senate Community Affairs Committee Inquiry into the Social and Economic Impact of Rural Wind Farms at http://dea.org.au/images/uploads/submissions/Wind_farms_senate_sub_2011.pdf (accessed 26 June 2011)
2. NHMRC, 2010, Wind Turbines: a rapid review of the evidence, National Health and Medical Research Council
3. Commonwealth of Australia, 2011, The Social and Economic Impact of Rural Wind Farms, at http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/clac_ctte/impact_rural_wind_farms/report/ (accessed 26 June 2011)
4. Leventhall, Geoff, 2011, Submission and Appendices to the Senate Inquiry: The Social and Economic Impact of Rural Wind Farms, available at http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/clac_ctte/impact_rural_wind_farms/submissions.htm (accessed 2 June 2011)
5. Chapman, Simon, 2010, *Croakey*, 23 Feb 2010