

Submission to Senate Enquiry

The social and economic impacts of rural wind farms

I could tell you that we must employ wind as part of an overall strategy to mitigate our impact on the planet through anthropogenically induced climate change. I could destroy all the NIMBY's arguments by addressing their emotive, unsubstantiated claims and selective presentation of the facts.... But I won't. While these arguments are clearly supported by the evidence of the understanding of climate change and the global experience with wind farms, we need to address the key issue. The key issue is nation building, it is about making significant and justified change to the way we get our energy. My message is simple, change is required and it will be painful for some, it always is. The challenge for this enquiry is to put the long term interests of Australia first and balance the benefits and the risks of rural wind farms. In addition, it is essential to conduct further research that allows us to mitigate the risks that are established.

So what are the key questions you are seeking to address in this enquiry?

The social and economic impacts of rural wind farms, and in particular: (a) Any adverse health effects for people living in close proximity to wind farms; (b) Concerns over the excessive noise and vibrations emitted by wind farms, which are in close proximity to people's homes; (c) The impact of rural wind farms on property values, employment opportunities and farm income; (d) The interface between Commonwealth, state and local planning laws as they pertain to wind farms; and (e) Any other relevant matters.

What is missing here? It starts with E and is what we have in our stewardship while we are on it. I guess that is why (e) is "Any other relevant matters". It seems clear that the terms of reference are already skewed toward an outcome, but let's press on shall we. & (b) If these issues exist, and as we are talking about rural wind farms, then the affected population is small and therefore solutions can be cost effectively found for the issues of concern. The issues raised here have not halted the development of rural wind farms globally. However, we must address the clearly demonstrated impacts, that is only fair and reasonable.

c) This is such a subjective issue, do wind farms add or detract visually? It is not really the point, what do wind farms do for the community as a whole is a better question. They bring employment, complementary land usage on farms, strengthening of the grid as well as moving us toward a more sustainable existence. The economic impact over time are demonstrably positive when a vibrant and positive industry such as wind power generation is established. This is a key benefit of such an investment in national capacity both from a capability and energy generation perspective.

d) There are already in place very stringent planning regimes for the approval of wind farms. Any changes to these controls need to be based on solid evidence, not on weak and emotive arguments from minority pressure groups. Or from non-peer reviewed "studies" commissioned by industries affected by the competition renewable energy brings.

e) It's about the environment, it's about the economy, it's about each of us, but most of all it is about the balance of all these that move us toward a truly sustainable existence. You stand in service of all Australians, not just the people who don't want their view spoiled.

It is a hallmark of the introduction of new technology that often sees vocal minorities with vested interests garnering a disproportionate share of attention and credence in the

media. This is clearly in evidence in a number of submissions I have seen already. My Masters level studies into Renewable Energy over the last 10 years indicates that many of the issues and negative impacts raised have already been addressed around the globe. European experience is extensive on this matter and, with something in the order of 100,000 turbines installed worldwide, many issues that are being raised have been addressed.

Wind farms are not without their issues, but, on balance, we cannot afford not to develop our wind based energy generation capacity. It has been clearly demonstrated, through practical experience, that wind power is an essential part of any credible Renewable Energy Portfolio. It builds national capacity and intellectual property. In addition, it allows us to utilise a more sustainable energy source.

We can argue that Australia is somehow different, and it is, it has some of the most significant renewable energy resources in the world. The challenge we face is global and the answer is common, renewable energy must play a key role in the provision of energy for a sustainable future.

We already have significant experience in wind energy in Australia. Renewable Energy is a key area of opportunity for this country as a whole, and we can squander this opportunity, or act, as if we believe we must, in the best interests of the community, the economy and the environment. Your support for the wind industry is crucial at this time. I urge you to take a bold step forward and ensure you help build this industry, not bury it. Current and future generations will be well pleased when they reap the reward of true vision and leadership in supporting industries that truly contribute to a more balanced interaction between people, profit and our planet.

Part of the answer is blowing in the wind, we have the means to ride the wind into a new tomorrow. Let's take that journey together as a whole community, united in purpose.