



GE

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Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications
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RE: Inquiry into the *Renewable Energy (Electricity) Amendment (Excessive Noise from Wind Farms) Bill 2012*

General Electric (GE) welcomes the Parliament of Australia's support, over 12 years, for increasing the contribution of electricity generated from renewable sources to the nation's future energy mix through its bipartisan support for the *Renewable Energy (Electricity) Act 2000* ("the REE Act") and a Renewable Energy Target.

To date, GE has deployed more than 18,000 wind turbines globally. GE is currently deploying 22 wind turbines in its first Australian project, the Mumbida wind farm near Geraldton in Western Australia for Verve Energy. GE is actively engaged as a prospective investor and supplier to other wind farms projects in Australia.

GE's involvement in delivering major projects in Australia dates back to 1896 when it provided electric motors to the tramways in Brisbane. GE employs approximately 6000 staff in Australia across its Power and Water, Oil and Gas, Energy Management, Capital, Healthcare, Aviation and Transportation businesses.

GE welcomes the opportunity to express our opposition to the *Renewable Energy (Electricity) Amendment (Excessive Noise from Wind Farms) Bill 2012* to the Committee.

The Bill is a retrograde step and contrary to the legislated bi-partisan target of 41,850GWh of renewable energy from accredited large-scale projects as it:

- overrides State and Territory planning rules, approval and assessment processes creating jurisdictional confusion and undermining investor confidence;
- seeks to treat wind farms differently to other infrastructure without justification;
- imposes an unjustified additional noise requirement on wind farm projects and will apply it retrospectively; and
- conflicts with the policy objects of the REE Act.

Planning rules implemented by States and Territories

The Bill seeks to override the responsibility of State and Territory Governments to implement planning rules for projects, thereby creating jurisdictional confusion and undermining investor confidence.

The 2011 Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee Report, *"The Social and Economic Impact of Rural Wind Farms"*, upheld the primary role for noise standards was with the States and Territories.

The Australian Government can play a role in the assessment and approval of projects through the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* where it can, among other objects, provide for the protection of the environment, especially matters of national environmental significance. The operation of the EPBC Act was subject to a Heads of Agreement between Australia's governments in 1997. Assessments under the EPBC Act are done in parallel with State or Territory approval processes.

To do otherwise, as the Bill suggests, would create uncertainty about the assessment and approval process for wind farm projects, potentially lead to project delays and undermine confidence of individuals and companies planning to invest, develop and supply to these wind farms.

Wind farms treated differently from other projects without justification

The Bill seeks to treat wind farms differently from other eligible renewable technologies under the REE Act and other forms of infrastructure, such a coal-fired power station, roads, dams or mines.

Senator Xenophon told the Senate on October 11, 2012 he did *“not oppose wind energy per se”*. Unfortunately, this Bill seeks to impose additional restrictions single out wind with its object *“to ensure that accredited power stations that are wind farms, either in whole or in part, do not create excessive noise”*.

The Bill does not seek to impose conditions on other forms of renewable energy generation or other infrastructure on any health impacts it may possibly cause.

Significantly, the Bill fails to acknowledge the National Health and Medical Research Council’s 2010 *“Public Statement: Wind Turbines and Health”* and its conclusion that:
“While a range of effects such as annoyance, anxiety, hearing loss, and interference with sleep, speech and learning have been reported anecdotally, there is no published scientific evidence to support adverse effects of wind turbines on health”.

GE acknowledges the NHMRC has commissioned a systematic review of the scientific literature to examine the possible impacts of wind farms on human health including audible and inaudible noise.

Noise requirement on wind farms unjustified and retrospective

While the Bill seeks to define what *“creates excessive noise”* means, it does not justify the level (exceeding 10db (A) within 30 metres of any premises), the frequency and duration of its measurement and under what conditions its suspended accreditation could be reinstated.

According to the South Australian guidelines for wind farms, the predicted equivalent noise level (*LAeq,10*), adjusted for tonality in accordance with these guidelines, should not exceed:

- 35dB(A) at relevant receivers in localities¹ which are primarily intended for rural living, or
- 40dB(A) at relevant receivers in localities¹ in other zones, or
- the background noise (*LA90,10*) by more than 5dB(A), whichever is the greater, at all relevant receivers for wind speed from cut-in to rated power of the WTG and each integer wind speed in between.

In addition, the Bill proposes to apply retrospectively with its provisions placed upon *“an accredited power station, whether the power station is accredited before or after the commencement of this item”*.

Conflicts with policy objects of the Renewable Energy Target

The objects of the REE Act are:

“(a) to encourage the additional generation of electricity from renewable sources; and

(b) to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases in the electricity sector; and

(c) to ensure that renewable energy sources are ecologically sustainable.”

The Bill seeks to amend the REE Act and require the Regulator under the REE Act to *“suspend the accreditation of an accredited power station that is a wind farm if the Regulator believes on reasonable grounds that the wind farm is creating excessive noise.... [and] that the information... has not been published on the internet”*.

Any renewable energy project, like all other infrastructure projects, operating contrary to the conditions of its planning approvals should be dealt under the legislation – State, Territory or the EPBC Act – under which the project was approved.

GE is a member of the Clean Energy Council and we would seek to associate ourselves with its submission to the Committee.

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Global Growth and Operations

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