

Social and Economic Impact of Rural Wind Farms

I have been employed by a renewable energy company for the past two years and my role has led to me working at and visiting a number of wind farms throughout rural Victoria and South Australia. I have spent many days at a time working within and around the turbines and have not had any ill health effects. I have also worked with and participated in many discussions with employees and contractors, many of whom have worked in the industry for many years. I do not believe that any of these individuals have ever suffered any ill health effects either.

The health effects that have been put forward by individuals and anti-wind farm groups are very general and imprecise. There do not appear to be any published scientific studies supporting the link between wind farms and ill health effects although there is much published research to suggest that such symptoms are typical of anxiety and stress. I do believe that a small number of people do suffer from symptoms but I believe that it is the thought of harm that creates this, rather than any actual physical effect from the turbine. There are many published studies showing how the power of suggestion can invoke symptoms such as drug trials where placebo drugs are given.

I have been on wind farms in all weather conditions and in nearly all circumstances the prevailing noise of the wind through trees and grass or the ocean noise (at some sites) is significantly louder than the noise from the turbines themselves. Most of the time, you are unable to hear anything at all unless you are standing right at the base of the turbine. Even when you are able to hear some noise from the wind farm, you are reminded how quiet it is when it is overshadowed by a bird singing or the moo of a cow.

I think comparison and consideration should also be given to the noise levels that the bulk of the population live with on a daily basis. The noise level in cities or even rural towns greatly exceeds the low levels of audible noise emitted by turbines. Recently I stayed in a small country town (Ararat) and worked on the wind farm during the day. I can honestly say I would have preferred to sleep under the turbine itself than in the town. The noise from trucks and trains going past the house (not on the main road) was quite extreme and didn't really stop all night. In comparison, noise levels at the wind farm were virtually non-existent.

One of the greatest fear campaigns used by the anti-wind farm movement is infrasound. The assertion is that infrasound is peculiar to a wind turbine and that the levels emitted are harmful. In fact, infrasound is everywhere, the noise in the trees, the ocean, traffic noise, air conditioners, the fridge in your house and your own heart and lungs. If the levels of infrasound emitted from a wind turbine were in fact harmful, people living in cities or coastal environments would all be sick as the levels of infrasound in these locations is considerably greater than that of a wind farm. It just doesn't make sense.

For many landowners, having wind turbines is a blessing and sometimes a lifesaver. It provides a regular, known income in an increasingly competitive and difficult farming market. In addition, the wind farm provides roads and infrastructure to the property, that not only increases the value of the property but allows the landowner safe access to his property in all weather conditions.

The surrounding community at each site receive many benefits from the wind farm. During construction, there is accommodation, meals and entertainment required along with the use of local

contractors to undertake works. This benefits continue once the wind farm is built with technicians employed to work on the turbines and who usually live locally and often have young families. The wind farms also bring tourism to the towns and this has substantial economic benefits to local communities. Wind farm community funds have enabled local groups to undertake projects that they might never fund themselves and are usually run to benefit the wider community.

A good example of the strong community support for wind farms was demonstrated following Steve Robertson's article about Sarah Laurie (employed by an anti wind farm organisation) in the Portland Observer on the 10 Jan 2011. This article made many unsubstantiated and misleading comments, ie "SOME people who live close to the wind farms at Cape Bridgewater and Cape Nelson may need to start monitoring their blood pressure". Such a statement could be true of any community. Not necessarily anything to do with wind farms but there is always going to be a certain proportion of the population who have underlying health issues.

The response by the community in the following week's Portland Observer was quite damning in response to Sarah Laurie's opinion. Each letter to the editor published showed overwhelming positive response to wind farms and were very critical of Sarah Laurie's opinions and demonstrated sound reasons for their opinions.

From my experiences working in the industry, the biggest opponents to wind farms are usually residents in areas where a wind farm is proposed and who aren't likely to receive any direct financial benefit from the wind farm. I believe that they have been fed misinformation and fear tactics by anti-wind farm groups and they naturally have concerns. However, when wind farms are built and operational, most residents realise that there is nothing to fear. There are few if any, ongoing complainants of the operational wind farms I have been involved with. It is more the perceived effects before they are built and often fueled by minority but vocal wind farm opponents.

You will indeed see from the submissions made to the enquiry that most of the anti-wind farm submissions relate to hearsay and the perceived potential health effects rather than any symptoms actually experienced. The fear campaign has been well run by the anti wind farm movement but it lacks credible and scientific evidence to back up its assertions.

Australia and the rest of the world have recently been subjected to extreme weather events and if we believe the experts, this will only get worse. To deny that our climate is changing is to bury our head in the sand. It is imperative that the world embraces clean, green energy if there is to be a future for our younger generations.

Thank you for the chance to comment.

Jenny Wall