



Clean Energy Council

22 November 2012

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

By email: Jarrod.Baker@aph.gov.au
cc: ec.sen@aph.gov.au, Ian.Holland@aph.gov.au

Dear Mr Baker,

Clean Energy Council further questions on notice regarding the *Renewable Energy (Electricity) Amendment (Excessive Noise from Wind Farms) Bill 2012*

The Clean Energy Council welcomes the opportunity to answer the further questions on notice taken during the public hearing regarding the *Renewable Energy (Electricity) Amendment (Excessive Noise from Wind Farms) Bill 2012* (the excessive noise bill). To date the Clean Energy Council has made statements to the inquiry via our submission (number 165) and in person at the public hearing at Parliament House on Wednesday 14 November 2012.

Further information on notice from the public hearing

Do you endorse the Sonus assertion that people are not annoyed by the noise as much as they are by other factors?

The Sonus document does not make an assertion regarding the factors for annoyance, but rather highlights the available research in this area, including that conducted by Pedersen in 2005.

Wind farm noise and annoyance

The CSIRO refers to annoyance in the report *Exploring community acceptance of rural wind farms in Australia: a snapshot*¹. The report finds that “International research has found there is a higher proportion of reported noise annoyance from wind turbines than from the equivalent amount of transportation noise.

“It was proposed that “the participants’ attitude to the visual impact of wind turbines on the landscape scenery was found to influence noise annoyance” (Pedersen & Persson Waye, 2004, p.3460). This finding supported earlier research from Gipe (1991), which found the perceived tranquillity of the local landscape for the local population is often highly valued. The introduction of a new sound, from which the surrounding residents receive no direct benefit, heavily impacts on their acceptance and support of the technology (Gipe, 1991)”.

¹ Available online: <http://www.csiro.au/Organisation-Structure/Flagships/Energy-Transformed-Flagship/Exploring-community-acceptance-of-rural-wind-farms-in-Australia.aspx>

“These research findings are supported by comments from the participants. One noted that some residents’ preconceptions were so high that: *There were people who complained about the noise of the wind farm before it was even constructed*”.

Would there be technical problems in supplying the noise output of wind farms?

Yes there would. Measuring the noise output of wind farms is an extremely complex undertaking that involves sophisticated comparison of wind farm noise levels (which includes the wind farm alongside numerous sources of environmental noise including vehicles, wind in trees, etc.) and background noise levels measured prior to the wind farm construction. It is not simply a matter of installing a microphone and publishing the received data on the internet.

Noise compliance and complaint resolution

Wind farm projects adhere to specific technical compliance regulations. In order to apply for a development permit the wind farm developer must undertake various technical measurement, analysis and modeling and submit it for approval. Once approved, wind farm owners are required to supply further information to the regulator (usually the state government) who has experts who undertake the compliance analysis.

Wind farm companies have robust complaint resolution systems and staff who are dedicated to ensuring that any complaints are registered and actioned. If a noise complaint was a legitimate compliance issue it will be dealt with through the wind farm developer and the regulator.

Community engagement guidelines

The wind industry in Australia is absolutely committed to community engagement. A wind company can be part of a community for 25 years or more and it is in the project owner’s interest for it to engage properly with locals. The Clean Energy Council has worked closely with its wind industry members who have contributed significant resources to developing a set of best-practice community engagement guidelines.

These were developed in consultation with government, regional councils, wind developers, community groups and landholders. The aim of the Guidelines is to benchmark the level of engagement expected by local communities. It also provides the industry with a tool to demonstrate their level engagement with their community.

Further information on notice asked by Jarrod Baker by email 20 November 2012

“On page 20 of the attachment to the Clean Energy Council submission, which is the *Sonus Windfarm Technical Paper: Environmental Noise*, the following assertion is made:

‘Only a few field studies on noise annoyance among people living close to wind turbines have been conducted and further investigations have been recommended by these studies.’

The report continues on page 20 to state that:

'European studies (Pedersen, 2005) indicate correlation between the noise level and annoyance, but stronger correlation with factors such as overall sensitivity to noise, attitude towards the noise source, attitude towards the area as a pristine place or a place for economic development, influence over the proposal, daily hassles, visual intrusion and the age of the turbine site.'

1. *Do you endorse the Sonus assertion that people are not annoyed by the noise as much as they are by other factors?*

This question was asked during the public hearing and is answered on page one of this letter.

2. *Why does the Sonus report omit reporting the German standards and regulations?*

There does not appear to be a translated version of the German Standard available. Notwithstanding, based on the German document it appears that the approach is consistent with Australian jurisdictions with respect to the objective noise standards applied.

3. *Are you aware of any of your members being subject to a selective shutdown for the purpose of bringing turbines into compliance?"*

The Clean Energy Council is not aware of any wind turbines being non-compliant with the relevant noise conditions. We suggest that the committee ask this question directly of wind farm owners and the relevant government regulators.

Other information relevant to the inquiry - Confidentiality clauses

The Clean Energy Council and its members believe that provisions relating to confidentiality in wind farm landowner agreements are standard clauses covering commercial matters and do not preclude people from raising concerns about health matters. All landowners, who are business partners in the project, may freely discuss such matters with their doctors, government agencies and in public. In order to avoid further confusion on this point, the wind industry is in the process of clarifying this with landowners.

The Clean Energy Council's members strive to ensure open communication with landholders and we (and our member companies) would hope that any members of the community who have a concern will contact the relevant company to discuss the matter.

If you have any further questions please contact me via telephone on 03 9929 4118 or by email at alicia@cleanenergycouncil.org.au

Yours sincerely,

Alicia Webb
Senior Policy Advisor
Clean Energy Council