Submission No: 62

SUBMISSION
TO
HOUSE STANDING COMMITTEE ON INDUSTRY & RESOURCES
ON
INQUIRY INTO THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NON-FOSSIL FUEL ENERGY INDUSTRY IN AUSTRALIA:
Case study into selected renewable energy sectors.

All possible options for renewable energy need to be looked at and discussed, particularly in regard to financial viability, efficiency, and ability to provide base-load power. This submission is particularly focusing on personal experiences with Wind energy production.

A few years ago, I was very much in favour of wind energy, to the extent that my husband and I consulted with a wind energy company about having some turbines on our 100acre property just south of Canberra.

Nothing came of this and we didn't think much about wind power generation until a couple of years ago when a wind farm was proposed on the ridge of a neighbouring property. We wanted to know more about the industry before forming an opinion one way or the other. Much research was carried out over the internet, as well as site visits to wind farms in South Australia (Lake Bonney) and Victoria (Codrington) where we were able to tour the sites to the point of touching the towers.

With the possibility of up to 15 turbines being within 2km of our house, we wanted to know about the noise issue. On our tour of the Codrington site, we went down into a quiet valley area where there were about 4 towers on surrounding hills within 300m or so from us. The wind was not blowing in the valley area, but it was above on the hills. It demonstrated to us that noise is definitely an issue, with 3 distinct sounds. There is the whoosh of the blade tips moving at approx.200km/hour, the sound from the gears moving, and a resonating thud as each blade passed the tower. It demonstrated that with multiple towers, the blades don't all move in sync - they are all turning at different times and speeds With wind being so variable (blowing strongly in one area, but barely moving leaves just a few hundred metres away), we realised that our house could be in calm weather, but the turbines on the neighbouring property could be spinning at maximum capacity, thereby sending the noise to us without any impediment in the way.

In our area, the other issues of visual pollution and bird-kill were also crucial. Being treed ridge areas, there is a high level of bird life that are not affected by any machinery, even cars, as it is a sparsely populated region with just a few dirt roads. Also, because of the natural beauty of the area (being next to designated Nature Reserves), we were very concerned about the visual aspects. We live out here with a certain amount of deprivation compared to suburbia precisely because of the scenery. Having an industrial plant in the middle of it, on a prominent ridgeline, would diminish that natural value substantially.

Apart from our concerns with our local proposal, the viability of wind turbine energy has to be questioned in the light of the fact that wind is so variable (generally only able to produce power one third of the time). When the wind is blowing, the power being generated has to be fed into the grid then and there. It is not possible to store it to then gain optimum price for it at another time, creating some uncertainty for investors I would think. These factors, coupled with the large amount of costly infrastructure required to establish a wind power plant, bring up

questions of financial viability. This is why these companies are still crying out for Government subsidies.

Wind power can have its place in the broader scheme of renewable energy, but it is never going to be able to produce enough to really contribute to base power requirements. With this in mind, there should also be much more consideration given to where wind turbines are located. It is ironic that they are not allowed to put them into National Parks or around suburban/city areas because of the noise and visual pollution issues, but they are being installed in rural residential areas despite great community objection. Many people are moving to smaller acreage properties just out of suburbia to have a specific lifestyle which encompasses the enjoyment of the beautiful natural surrounds, and paying a substantial price to do so.

These rural residential areas experience next to no background noise - perhaps the odd car, bird calls and leaves rustling. Much of the data on noise impact of wind turbines has been carried out in more heavily populated areas and simply do not reflect this lack of noise. When outside, we can often hear our neighbours dogs or cattle, but our neighbour is 2km away! If we felt able to put up with industrial noises, we would have stayed in the city. The reasons for this semi-rural (and sometimes difficult) way of life are not always fully understood by our city-dwellers, but it means everything to us.

I firmly believe that wind power is just not efficient enough to justify disrupting (almost destroying) people's lives as well as the scenic beauty around them. So many areas of Australia are great international tourism sites because of the natural wonders. So there should be much more care taken in siting these huge wind towers. There are still so many areas in regional Australia with broad expanses that have good access to the power grid where wind power plants could be placed and not impinge on local residents. There should definitely be mandated minimum limits on location of wind towers from houses - perhaps 5km.

I don't feel that wind power is a bad thing, but its place in the renewable energy debate needs to take the above issues into consideration, particularly in the bigger picture and not just as a short-term "feel good" thing for those who have not fully looked at its local impacts, viability, or appropriate location.

Yours sincerely

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