



Australian Government

**Response to the Senate Community Affairs
References Committee Report**

***THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACT OF
RURAL WIND FARMS***

JULY 2012

**THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACT OF RURAL WIND FARMS
GOVERNMENT RESPONSE**

Introduction

On 27 October 2010, the Senate Community Affairs References Committee (the Committee) was established to consider the social and economic impact of rural wind farms, and in particular:

- any adverse health effects for people living in close proximity to wind farms;
- concerns over the excessive noise and vibrations emitted by wind farms, which are in close proximity to people's homes;
- the impact of rural wind farms on property values, employment opportunities and farm income;
- the interface between Commonwealth, state and local planning laws as they pertain to wind farms; and
- any other relevant matters.

The Committee received more than 1000 submissions, many letters and other documents, and had access to much published information. Public hearings and site visits were held in various capital cities and regional areas.

The Committee tabled its report, *The Social and Economic Impact of Rural Wind Farms* in parliament on 23 June 2011 making seven recommendations.

The Australian Government welcomes the Committee's report and thanks the Committee for its considered approach to the recommendations made in the report.

Some of the Committee's recommendations are directed to state and territory governments, local authorities and professional bodies. The Australian Government encourages those agencies to respond positively to the recommendations.

The Government recognises that this Senate Committee report has captured a range of issues for many individuals and the wider Australian community with regard to wind farms. These include noise, health effects, planning laws, property values, employment and farm income. The Government also recognises that in order to meet the legislated Renewable Energy Target of 20 percent by the year 2020, the number of wind farms can be expected to increase significantly in the next few years.

The Department of Health and Ageing has led the coordination of the whole of government response to the Senate Inquiry. Input to the response was provided by agencies within this department and by the departments of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities (DSEWPC) and Resources, Energy and Tourism (DRET) where recommendations relate to their respective portfolios.

Government Response to Recommendations

The Australian Government recognises that while the Senate Committee report has captured a range of issues for many individuals and the wider Australian community, there is no strong evidence either way as to the impact of wind farms on the health of Australians.

The lack of evidence therefore makes it difficult for the Government to determine what course of action to take, if any. The Government recognises it has responsibility for consideration of recommendations four, five, six and seven and these are addressed further in the response. As for the remaining recommendations, these are areas that lie outside of the Government's responsibility and should be considered by relevant state/territory governments, local governments and planning authorities.

Recommendation 1

2.44 *The Committee considers that the noise standards adopted by the states and territories for the planning and operation of rural wind farms should include appropriate measures to calculate the impact of low frequency noise and vibrations indoors at impacted dwellings.*

Response:

This is a matter for consideration by state/territory governments, local governments and planning authorities.

Recommendation 2

2.58 *The Committee recommends that the responsible authorities should ensure that complaints are dealt with expeditiously and that the complaints processes should involve an independent arbitrator. State and local government agencies responsible for ensuring compliance with planning permissions should be adequately resourced for this activity.*

Response:

The Australian Government accepts this recommendation, but notes that it is a matter for consideration by state/territory governments, local governments and planning authorities.

It is also important to note the level of complaints about wind turbines and wind farm projects can be aligned with a lack of effective community consultation in the planning and development stages. As highlighted in the Australian Psychological Society's submission and in the Committee's report, early consultation with the community could improve community understanding of wind turbines and could therefore reduce community anxiety and complaints. In the Committee's report, it is acknowledged that research on the societal acceptance of wind farms is currently being undertaken by the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation.

It is also noted that the draft National Wind Farm Development Guidelines July 2010 (the draft Guidelines), produced by the former Environment Protection and Heritage Council of Australia and New Zealand, provides extensive advice on how to conduct

community consultation. The draft Guidelines remain a valuable reference document for industry and planning authorities and may assist effective community consultation and possibly reduce complaints.

Recommendation 3

2.69 *The Committee recommends that further consideration be given to the development of policy on separation criteria between residences and wind farm facilities.*

Response:

This is a matter for consideration by state/territory governments, local governments and planning authorities.

Recommendation 4

2.101 *The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government initiate as a matter of priority thorough, adequately resourced epidemiological and laboratory studies of the possible effects of wind farms on human health. This research must engage across industry and community, and include an advisory process representing the range of interests and concerns.*

Recommendation 5

2.102 *The Committee recommends that the NHMRC review of research should continue, with regular publication.*

Recommendation 6

2.103 *The Committee recommends that the National Acoustics Laboratories conduct a study and assessment of noise impacts of wind farms, including the impacts of infrasound.*

Response:

The Australian Government accepts these recommendations in principle.

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) is already actively engaged in supporting the assessment of available research on this issue and will shortly commission a comprehensive review of the literature to inform any update to its 2010 public statement. The review will include audible noise, infrasound and low-frequency noise. A reference group will be established to advise on the review and will include members of the public, industry, researchers, sound engineers/consultants and planning representatives.

The results of the literature review and the revised public statement will be published on the NHMRC website.

Further, there are a range of funding mechanisms within the Australian Government, in particular within the NHMRC, that could be used to fund additional research on the possible impacts of wind farms on human health, including epidemiological and laboratory studies.

Recommendation 7

3.99 *The Committee recommends that the draft National Wind Farm Development Guidelines be redrafted to include discussion of any adverse health effects and comments made by NHMRC regarding the revision of its 2010 public statement.*

Response:

The Australian Government does not accept this recommendation.

The former Environment Protection and Heritage Council of Australia and New Zealand (EPHC) released the Guidelines in July 2010 for a twelve-month consultation period. The draft Guidelines outlined best practice for industry and planning authorities and were not mandatory, nor did they seek to change existing jurisdictional statutory processes.

The Australian Government understands that jurisdictions have developed, or are currently developing, planning application, assessment and approval processes within their own planning frameworks to manage community concerns about wind farm developments such as turbine noise, shadow flicker, electromagnetic interference and impacts on landscapes and wildlife. The EPHC Standing Committee therefore has decided to cease further development of the Guidelines. The draft Guidelines remain a valuable reference document for industry and planning authorities and may be used and reproduced for non-commercial purposes.

The Australian Government recognises the important role research will continue to play in informing state/territory planning and development approval processes. The Australian Government would like to emphasise that the revision of the NHMRC's 2010 public statement will depend on the outcomes of the literature review, which it will commission shortly.