



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



THE SENATE

PROOF

COMMITTEES

Wind Turbines Select Committee

Report

SPEECH

Thursday, 13 August 2015

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

SPEECH

<p>Date Thursday, 13 August 2015 Page 90 Questioner Speaker Back, Sen Chris</p>	<p>Source Senate Proof Yes Responder Question No.</p>
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Senator BACK (Western Australia) (18:11): History will record that Senator Urquhart's words will come back home to haunt her in the future, as indeed will many of those who have so derisively commented adversely on the outcomes of this report. Let me put on the record that I am very much in favour of aspects of renewable energy. I proudly ordered and had constructed the largest number of small-scale solar units, hot water systems—some 240—ever in Western Australia. I also had responsibility for the first wind turbine in Western Australia. It failed; in fact, the first four all failed. That is history.

I also want to place on the record my strong support for hydroelectricity in your state, Senator Urquhart, and in the Snowy Mountains. When you can generate in the high peak periods and when you can use off-peak periods to pump water back up to generate again the next time it is needed surely has to be the ultimate value of renewable energy. I do not think wind turbines are a renewable energy source. I reflected on this driving back from Sydney on Sunday. I happened to be looking at the wind turbines just out of Canberra and thought to myself that I want to look at this in both environmental terms and economic terms. I said to myself, 'What is the environmental benefit of wind turbines?' Of course, the benefit would be greenhouse gases forgiven during the generation process. I said, 'That's good.' So that is a positive benefit. What are the negatives? What do you have to take off that greenhouse gas forgiven? Firstly, you have to take off the massive cost of greenhouse gases, the carbon dioxide, used in the construction—the original iron ore, the steel, the transportation and the tens of thousands of tonnes of concrete that go into each of these.

The committee had evidence—and Senator Urquhart did not like it much—from Mr Hamish Cumming, whom I found to be a very credible witness, that about 16 years of the use of a wind turbine would be necessary before you would actually get back to the cost-benefit of the greenhouse gases forgiven as a result of the construction.

Secondly, what do you take off that greenhouse gas benefit?

You take off the cost of the baseload generated electricity, the carbon dioxide, required when you need coal, gas or whatever other form of baseload generation you need in reserve, because when the wind does not blow and the ship does not go you do need another form of baseload power. Then something that will have a profound effect on people who are hosting wind turbines—and local governments around this country—will be the environmental cost of decommissioning these wind turbines at the end. So I suspect there is very little, if any, actual environmental benefit.

I then looked at economic benefits. The benefit from wind turbines would be the value of the power generated, but from that what do you deduct? You have got to deduct the huge costs of the renewable energy certificates that are quaintly absorbed and the burden on consumers. Funnily enough, consumers are also taxpayers—isn't that amazing? This is not a tax, the renewable energy certificate; it is a 'cost to the consumer'. Somehow or other I do not think they are different people. Again, in an equation you must take away the dollar value of the baseload power that is sitting there doing nothing in case the wind blows or does not blow. In the future I hope we see effective, valuable battery storage. Whether we do or not, nevertheless it still comes at a cost. If you want to look at the economic benefits of these wind turbines, then it is one of the costs. And again you have the dollar value of the decommissioning process.

I admire that Senator Urquhart and indeed, in Cairns, Deputy President Senator Marshall attended each one of the hearings. That is to their credit. I have got to say that unfortunately the Greens political party—despite the fact that Senator Siewert chaired the inquiry in 2009—chose not to participate at all in this inquiry. I do not think that is to their credit.

Senator Urquhart mentioned the Canadian study, which has been put out there as a very credible study—until you get some advice from other credible Canadian scientists, who told us that when the data was collated, this mass of Canadian data, they just happened to reject, with no reasons given, the majority of the data that was captured

and collated. They decided to ignore it—no reasons given. The other interesting thing is that they also decided to eliminate all people under the age of 18 and older than 79 years. No reason was given; they just dropped them off. Under 18 and over 79—they do not count. In the days when I was around as a scientist if without explanation somebody were to produce international results and ask for them to be credited I would expect them to give some explanation as to why they would wipe out a significant proportion of the population and indeed a significant amount of the dataset.

Our dear friend Professor Chapman speaks of the nocebo effect. This is the effect that you think you are going to get sick from wind turbines, or you think you are going to get sick going out in a boat, so you do. Initially Professor Chapman would always say, 'I've never ever heard of a host who, if he or she is making money out of these, got sick.' The first ones, unfortunately for dear old Professor Chapman, were Mr and Mrs Mortimer. Mr Mortimer is a retired naval officer whose sphere of influence happened to be the movement of waves through solids, liquids and gases, so he knew a little bit about this. Mortimer was the first person to stand up and say, 'Despite the fact that the income we are getting from these couple of turbines is enormously important to our retirement income, we can't live on our farm.' Funnily enough, they could not see the turbines but they knew when they were on. When they went away from their home for a week or so, strangely enough the nocebo effect seemed to disappear. The other interesting case was that of a Mr and Mrs Gare, who appeared before us in Adelaide. Mr and Mrs Gare make \$200,000 a year from hosting wind turbines. Mr and Mrs Garesaid to us, 'If we could have our time over again, if we could get rid of these wind turbines and get rid of the \$200,000 so that we could go back to living on our farm and working on our farm, we would do it tomorrow.' I do not know where the nocebo effect came in there, Professor Chapman.

In the time available left to me, all I will do is ask this question. I ask it of Senator Urquhart and I ask it of others who spoke before us. Why do these people carry on the way they do? The case down at Cape Bridgewater—five generations of the family have lived on their farm, so what is in it for them to walk away from their community? People say that they are not really sick at all, that it is just in their heads. It is in their heads. You are quite right. Nausea, anxiety, annoyance and sleeplessness are sure as hell in your head. The question is: why would that family walk away? Why would their children not be able to go to school? Do they get compensation like in the old RSI days? No, they do not; there is no compensation out there. There is no hope of any reward for carrying on like this. They lose their friends in their communities. We know that in many rural communities it tears communities apart. I have said before in this place that we have circumstances now in my home state of Western Australia where bushfire brigade members do not turn out if there happens to be a fire on the farm of someone they are opposed to on this. CWA members—and they are the two pillars of rural communities: bushfire brigades and CWAs. People are not going. They are not shopping in the towns. Why is that? Is it that they all of a sudden woke up one day and, as Senator Urquhart said, they are not sick at all? The value of their properties—we learnt all over Australia that their properties are effectively worthless. They have not just gone down significantly. People who moved into the Barossa Valley for their change of lifestyle, the tree change, are now in a situation where they have had to walk away. So what is in it for them? Generally there has got to be a motivator if you are going to change your whole lifestyle, if you are going to walk away from your friends—you bet your life. Do not worry about Senator Urquhart going on about English speaking—Germany, Finland. Why did the Prime Minister of the UK go into the election saying he is going to stop subsidising on-land turbines and win the election? There is a long way to go in this story. I assure you it is not finished.