



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



THE SENATE

PROOF

COMMITTEES

Wind Turbines Select Committee

Report

SPEECH

Thursday, 20 August 2015

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

SPEECH

<p>Date Thursday, 20 August 2015 Page 106 Questioner Speaker Madigan, Sen John</p>	<p>Source Senate Proof Yes Responder Question No.</p>
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Senator MADIGAN (Victoria) (18:20): I rise to speak as the former Chair of the Senate Select Committee on Wind Turbines. It is nearly 30 years since Australia's first wind farm was built—that was in Esperance in Western Australia. Currently, there are 82 wind farms accredited under the Renewable Energy (Electricity) Act 2000. They consist of 2,077 wind turbines with a total installed capacity of 4,180 megawatts. Among renewables wind is a major player in Australia. It has benefited significantly from the financial incentives of the Renewable Energy Target. The committee report represents a substantial body of evidence. Undoubtedly it is the most complete inquiry into wind farms in Australian history, receiving nearly 500 submissions, 39 pieces of additional information, 82 responses to questions taken on notice, 46 tabled documents and significant additional correspondence from all over the world. Additionally the committee held hearings in Canberra on three occasions as well as sitting in Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide, Cairns and Portland. We heard testimony from hundreds of witnesses.

As a Ballarat-based senator for Victoria, I have long been aware that many people residing near western Victorian wind farms have reported noise nuisance, ill effects and sleep deprivation due to their proximity to wind farms. In fact, in June 2010, up to 20 residents from the Waubra and Cape Bridgewater areas alone sent the former health minister and current Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews statutory declarations reporting that their health and wellbeing were being seriously compromised by the operation of wind turbines. This small group hoped the Victorian government would not turn its back on them. They did not have much luck. They gave their stat decs to the same premier who has told the wind industry that Victoria is open for business. They then halved the setback distance from two kilometres to one kilometre to prove the point.

In my view, clean energy can be a dirty business. The unimaginable injustice of what I have seen—decent rural people done over by big business in the name of saving the planet—is what inspires me to keep asking one question. Why is the wind industry exempt from appropriate regulatory practices that apply to other industries? In my home state of Victoria, for example, the EPA plays no role in the assessment of wind farm noise. These matters are left to paid consultants—guns for hire, really—who write the report the wind farm operator needs to appear compliant. The wind industry is in fact regulating itself in Victoria and elsewhere, riding roughshod over country people. This is what drives me to keep shining light in dark corners.

So it staggers and it disappoints me that those who profess to stand up for people, for the rights of communities and the wellbeing of this country, waged throughout the committee's hearings a campaign of denigration, misinformation and lies. Senator Urquhart from the ALP was extended every courtesy during the committee's operation. We bent over backwards to accommodate her requests. She sat through the same testimony as we all did. Yet her speech on this matter and the ALP's dissenting report bear all the marks of Orwellian propaganda and group think. I have to ask myself whether they were referring to the same inquiry that I had chaired.

Likewise, various green lobby groups attended committee hearings and, using digital media and press releases, misrepresented and lied about hearings and evidence. And, of course, the Greens political group refused to be part of the committee. Instead they took cheap pot shots from the sidelines, blaming victims, vilifying witnesses and sneering. It staggers me how afraid some people are of the facts. It staggers me how afraid some people are of real debate, discussion and investigation. As George Orwell said, 'In a time of near universal deceit telling the truth is a revolutionary act.'

I am particularly proud of the work of the Senate Select Committee on Wind Turbines. Our 15 recommendations provide a roadmap for the way forward. As everyone agrees, Australia has a clean energy future—and I support that—but the clean energy imperative, with its ideologues and carpetbaggers, must be tempered by respect for people and their lives. Again I thank Senator Leyonhjelm in calling for this inquiry. I thank Senator Day for his excellent support as deputy chair. I thank my other fellow committee members, Senators Back and Canavan, for their positive input. I thank Senator Xenophon for his valuable input as a participating member as well as Senator Marshall. The committee secretariat did an extraordinary and unenviable job. The committee tabled its

final report on 3 August 2015. Already, the body of evidence developed through the inquiry has been heralded internationally as the most significant ever accumulated on wind turbine impacts.

I would encourage everyone to take the time to read the wind turbine inquiry report and its recommendations. I strongly encourage reading the submissions and transcripts of evidence that were obtained at the hearings. These are the stories of the people who are dealing with wind turbines at ground zero, not from an ivory tower in the middle of Sydney. You will read testimony of sleep disturbances, compromised health and reduced amenity. This is all too often the reality for rural Australians who reside beside industrial wind energy facilities, whether they host turbines or not.

For anyone who is genuinely interested, who can think independently and is not blindly obedient to the ideological spin put out by the wind industry and its propagandists, take a look at the report and the committee's work. What have you got to lose besides your ideological innocence? For anyone who is faithfully beholden to the alarmist politics of the Greens and the Labor Party and who would have us sacrifice rural families for the worship of wind turbines, take a look. All that one needs to be able to support the report's important recommendations is an open mind and access to the committee's website.

The inquiry may have wrapped up when the committee tabled its report earlier this month but its legacy remains. This is the inquiry's gift to rural Australians who have long been nuisanced by industrial wind turbines. Their complaints have been trivialised by wind operators, planning systems and decision makers. Their symptoms have been misunderstood by a compliant media, captive to the messaging of a narcissistic academic, well-practised in ridicule, defamation and bullying. The report, its recommendations and the supporting information gathered, speaks for itself.

Question agreed to.