



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



THE SENATE

PROOF

BILLS

**Renewable Energy (Electricity) Amendment
(Excessive Noise from Wind Farms) Bill 2012**

Second Reading

SPEECH

Thursday, 28 June 2012

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

SPEECH

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Questioner
Speaker Madigan, Sen John

Source Senate
Proof Yes
Responder
Question No.

Senator MADIGAN (Victoria) (02:31): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I table an explanatory memorandum relating to the bill and seek leave to have the second reading speech incorporated in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

The speech read as follows—

I am very pleased to introduce this Bill in both my name, and that of Senator Nick Xenophon, who cannot be here today. This Bill is being introduced in the hope of resolving a problem, a serious problem that has spread across this country for a number of years.

This Bill seeks to give powers to the Clean Energy Regulator to ensure that accredited powers stations, that are wind farms, do not create excessive noise. Among other things, the Bill adds a definition of 'creates excessive noise' and 'wind farm' into the *Renewable Energy (Electricity) Act 2000*.

Everyone in this place is fully aware that on 23 June 2011, just over 12 months ago, the Senate Community Affairs References Committee tabled its report into the social and economic effects of rural wind farms. In its report, the Committee made 7 recommendations. Those recommendations were, to put it bluntly, extremely limited but at least they made some mention of the concern about the effects of wind turbines on human health and recommended studies be undertaken to resolve the matter. To date nothing has been done. If it had been done, this legislation may not have been necessary.

For several years before I took my place as a Senator last July, I had been receiving repeated reports of people in distress due to the ever growing number of wind turbines that were spreading across the farmland of Victoria. People suffering illnesses they had never had before, stress, high blood pressure, serious sleep disorders and deprivation. I was also becoming aware that we had a new form of refugee in our midst, the 'wind farm refugee'.

These people, these wind farm refugees, have been forced to leave properties they and their families had lived on for generations. Driven off by a situation over

which they had no control. These were people whose daily lives involved hard work, difficult conditions and adversity. These were rural people and farmers; the type of Australians who have faced drought, fires, floods and all the other disasters known to the generations of country people who have come before them.

These people, these iconic Australians were suddenly being forced to flee the properties that held not only their memories and their lives but hold the bones of their ancestors. What could do that, except the direst of circumstances?

These people are not political activists; they are not radicals or zealots. They do not chain themselves to buildings or machinery; they do not attack others and they do not seek the end of renewable energy. They are the typical average Australian who hates making a fuss, who doesn't readily get involved in political issues but is always there for family and community. These people want to live their lives, bring up their families and generally remain in the background.

In every case I have come across these people, those in distress because they have been driven off their land and those in even greater distress because they have nowhere else to go and can get no respite from their sufferings. In every case they have all stated their support for renewable energies, including wind farms. Like almost all Australians they believe that to use clean, safe, efficient and cost effective alternative technologies is something we should strive for but in doing so we should not pursue the clean aspects at the cost of safety or health.

We all know the stories of illnesses caused by asbestos, lead, mercury and other physical substances. We have all seen and heard, even experienced issues such as repetitive strain injuries, post traumatic stress disorders and numerous other conditions we could all name. In virtually every one of those cases those who originally suffered these problems were ridiculed, called 'nutters' or 'whingers', or simply had their conditions fobbed off as "it's all in your mind".

Now these people across Australia, not just in one or two places but in dozens of places, are suffering identical symptom and we are again told, 'nutters', 'whingers' and again we hear that "it's all in their

minds". That is to be expected from the Wind Industry itself, which obviously would not want to accept that its industry could be the cause of a major health issue. It is also the type of thing I and others have come to expect from the Clean Energy Council, which is simply an advocate group for the Wind Industry. It is the argument being espoused by numerous blogs sites that dedicate themselves to the end of coal and the expansion of wind power.

But while it is to be expected from these groups, what is extremely disappointing is that it also comes from members of various State governments and the Federal governments, whether ALP or Coalition.

Where are the health studies that have been called for? We need genuine independent health studies incorporating experts from all related fields, including acousticians, neuro-specialists, stress experts, experts in sleep disorders; in fact experts in any of the areas that repeated disorders have been reported. These studies need to be conducted by eminent Australian specialists under Australian conditions using an approved methodology.

These are human beings who are suffering, Australian citizens and our constituents. They are not asking for anything that any other human being does not deserve as a basic human right. They want to live in safe and healthy conditions and it is the duty of their elected representatives to ensure that is what they get.

This Bill will hopefully go some of the way to alleviating the sufferings of some of these people and allow some to return to their homes. It may not solve all the issues but it is a start and should be put in place as soon as possible.

If the Wind Industry is as confident that there are no health issues as they keep telling me, then I would have thought they would be falling over themselves to have these studies done. They could then get on with building their industry and gathering their Renewable Energy certificates. Unfortunately I see plenty of advertising coming out about how wonderful wind farms are, how safe, how clean etc...; I see articles and letters in the paper, often by the same people, heaping praise on the wind industry and scorn on any that claim to be suffering.

Neither I nor Senator Xenophon can bring about these studies; that is up to the Government. But what we can do is to have legislation put in place to ensure that power stations deriving some or all of their power from wind must comply with acceptable standards and must openly disclose the data that is necessary to ensure these health issues do not occur.

I will speak more about these issues at a later date, as I am sure will Senator Xenophon. I am encouraged by the support this issue has received from several members and senators and am confident that something can be done soon to alleviate the problems of those already suffering and to ensure we do not see any expansion in the number of wind farm refugees.

Senator MADIGAN: I seek leave to continue my remarks later.

Leave granted; debate adjourned.