

**Submission  
No 58**

## **INQUIRY INTO RURAL WIND FARMS**

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## WIND FARMS

Monaro's rugged windswept plains are beautiful, but at present they are a desperate sight as the howling wind whips up the dust- the most precious and fertile portion of the topsoil- and tears at the last shreds of the native grassland, for which it is renowned.

Harvesting that exceptional "Wind Resource" makes so much sense in a world that must reduce its dependence on finite fossil fuels and its excessive consumption of them.

Wind Energy is an essential part of the suite of options that needs to be developed and utilized to help achieve this fundamental objective, which is why wind farms are being encouraged by both State and Federal Governments here and around the world.

The Boco Rock Wind Farm is sited in one of the "least viewed" parts of Monaro and apart from the participating landholders, there are relatively very few others within a 5 km radius of the project.

Anybody driving around the district at present would have to be horrified at what they see: the bare, dry and denuded land, the loss of biodiversity and an invitation to weeds.

Obviously, Monaro farmers need help to maintain their environmental stewardship of this area as well as the need to remain financially profitable and strong enough to continue that role and the production of their hardy seedstock, both sheep and cattle, for which Monaro is renowned.

The 17 landholders involved in the Boco Rock Wind Farm, who will have their income supplemented by the rent from the towers on their land, will be able to reduce their stock numbers, maintain ground cover, protect biodiversity and better battle the ever-present noxious weeds like Serrated Tussock.

Is it any wonder that they are "willing participants"??

Not only will the Bombala and Cooma-Monaro Shire Councils benefit from the Community Fund to be established by Wind Prospect CWP Pty Ltd, a company with a wealth of experience in the wind energy harvesting field, but clean green power for up to 130,000 households, (about 40 Cooma's) will be generated by this project.

The Windmill has been an iconic symbol of rural Australia for many years and I believe that these new Turbines also have a grace and beauty of their own.

In relation to their effect on the visual landscape I submit the attached piece by Canadian scientist and author, David Suzuki, from the New Scientist magazine, issue 2495, titled "The Beauty Of Wind Farms".

(In it he refers to his own retreat on the island of Quadra, where he has a cabin, and says:"It is one of the most beautiful views I have seen. And I would gladly share it with a wind farm.")

He goes on to explain why.

Howard Charles.

## The Beauty Of Wind Farms

OFF the coast of British Columbia in Canada is an island called Quadra, where I have a cabin that is as close to my heart as you can imagine. From my porch on a good day you can see clear across the waters of Georgia Strait to the snowy peaks of the rugged Coast Mountains. It is one of the most beautiful views I have seen. And I would gladly share it with a wind farm.

But sometimes it seems like I'm in the minority. All across Europe and North America, environmentalists are locking horns with the wind industry over the location of wind farms. In Alberta, one group is opposing a planned wind farm near Cypress Hills Provincial Park, claiming it would destroy views of the park and disturb some of the last remaining native prairie in the province. In the UK more than 100 national and local groups, led by some of the country's most prominent environmentalists, have argued that wind power is inefficient, destroys the ambience of the countryside and makes little difference to carbon emissions. And in the US, the Cape Wind Project, which would site 130 wind turbines off the coast of affluent Cape Cod, Massachusetts, has come under fire from famous liberals, including Senator Edward Kennedy and Walter Cronkite.

It is time for some perspective. With the growing urgency of climate change, we cannot have it both ways. We cannot shout from the rooftops about the dangers of global warming and then turn around and shout even louder about the "dangers" of windmills. Climate change is one of the greatest challenges humanity will face this century. It cannot be solved through good intentions. It will take a radical change in the way we produce and consume energy - another industrial revolution, this time for clean energy, conservation and efficiency.

We have undergone such transformations before and we can do it again. But first we must accept that all forms of energy have associated costs. Fossil fuels are limited in quantity and create vast amounts of pollution. Large-scale hydroelectric power floods valleys and destroys animal habitat. Nuclear power is terribly expensive and creates radioactive waste.

Wind power also has its downsides. It is highly visible and can kill birds. The fact is, though, that any man-made structure can kill birds - houses, radio towers, skyscrapers. In Toronto alone, it is estimated that 10,000 birds collide with the city's tallest buildings every year. Compared with this, the risk to birds from well-sited wind farms is very low.

Even at Altamont Pass in California, where 7000 turbines were erected on a migratory route, only 0.2 birds per turbine per year have been killed. Indeed, the real risk to birds comes not from windmills but from a changing climate, which threatens the very existence of bird species and their habitats. This is not to say that wind farms should be allowed to spring up anywhere. They should always be subject to environmental impact assessments. But a blanket "not in my backyard" approach is hypocritical and counterproductive.

Pursuing wind power as part of our move towards clean energy makes sense. It is the fastest-growing source of energy in the world - a \$6 billion industry last year. Its cost has dropped dramatically over the past two decades because of larger turbines and greater knowledge of how to build, install and operate turbines more effectively. Prices will likely decrease further as the technology improves.

"We can't shout about global warming and then shout even louder about the 'dangers' of windmills"

Are windmills ugly? I remember when Mostafa Tolba, executive director of the United Nations Environment Programme from 1976 to 1992, told me how when he was growing up in Egypt, smokestacks belching out smoke were considered signs of progress. Even as an adult concerned about pollution, it took him a long time to get over the instinctive pride he felt when he saw a tower pouring out clouds of smoke.

We see beauty through filters shaped by our values and beliefs. Some people think wind turbines are ugly. I think smokestacks, smog, acid rain, coal-fired power plants and climate change are ugly. I think windmills are beautiful. They harness the power of the wind to supply us with heat and light. They provide local jobs. They help clean our air and reduce climate change.

And if one day I look out from my cabin's porch and see a row of windmills spinning in the distance, I won't curse them. I will praise them. It will mean we are finally getting somewhere.

David Suzuki is a scientist, broadcaster, author and chair of the David Suzuki Foundation ([www.davidsuzuki.org](http://www.davidsuzuki.org))  
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