

FACT SHEET 4

Wind Farming & Tourism

Wind farms are usually located in exposed and windy landscapes and the values placed upon these landscapes and the perceived impacts of development upon them vary considerably. Generally, responses depend on both the individual observer and the site being considered.

Wind farms tend to get more support than many other visually prominent forms of development because they produce clean energy, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and ultimately help mitigate climate change. While climate change is very important, some landscapes should be cherished and protected from all development.

Like other human-made structures such as bridges and lighthouses, well designed wind farms can give interesting perspectives and furnish the landscape with new architectural and heritage values.

In 2001, a poll¹ in Victoria showed that 94% of respondents described wind generators as “interesting” and 74% as “graceful”. A subsequent survey² showed that 36% of respondents were more likely to visit a coastal area if it had a wind farm, while 55% said it would make no difference. Only 8% said it would deter them from visiting.

The February 2002 survey also showed that 95% of respondents supported the construction of more wind farms. This result was again backed up in a national poll³ by AusWEA in 2003 which found that 95% support (27%) or strongly support (68%) building wind farms to meet Australia’s rapidly increasing demand for electricity.

Are Wind Farms Tourist Attractions?

Yes. Hundreds of thousands of people visit Australian wind farms each year. Some of these are casual observers who stop at roadside interpretative centres or displays. Others pay to participate in organised tours. In a number of cases, tourists are able to walk right up to the base of the tower, gaining a full appreciation of their size and the power generated by these machines.

In Esperance (WA), more than 80 cars per day travel down the wind farm access roads with the majority visiting the wind farms. Although wind farms have been in operation in the region for over 20 years, visitor numbers have not declined over time.

What Is The Experience Overseas?

Utility scale wind energy is relatively new for most Australians but we can look to the long-term experience overseas. However we need to remain aware of differences – Australian landscapes are generally more impressive and our perceptions of environmental values may be different.

Tourism Overseas

In Denmark, there are 6,000 wind turbines in an area approximately the size of Tasmania and wind farms there are used for marketing tourism. Hotels, guest houses and camp sites may use wind turbines for “green tourism” promotion. This is particularly targeted towards the German market, where the public is known to have a high level of interest in both environmental issues and new technology.

In a Scottish study⁴, 43% of responding visitors said a wind farm would have a positive effect on their inclination to visit the Argyll area, an area of high landscape value. About the same proportion said it would make no difference, whilst less than 8% felt it would have a negative effect.

Surveys in the UK show that for 94% of visitors to North Cornwall, the presence of wind farms has had no adverse impact on the likelihood of them visiting North Cornwall again. The majority of the remaining 6% say that the presence of wind farms would actually encourage them to

revisit. Such public interest has led to a steady increase in the use of serviced accommodation in the area of the Delabole Wind Farm.

Public Perception Overseas

Research from a wide variety of sources consistently shows that general public support for wind power is between 70% and 80%.

In Denmark since 1991, the share of electricity consumption from wind power has grown six-fold to current levels of around 30%. However, a 2001 poll⁵ indicated that 65% of Danes still believed it was a good idea to increase the share of wind energy in the Danish electricity supply. This is exactly the same share of the population as in two previous opinion polls taken five and ten years earlier. Further information on public attitudes to wind energy can be found at; <http://www.bwea.org/ref/surveys.html>

Visit a Working Wind Farm?

Viewing Areas

Most wind farms are located on private land so it is not always possible to walk up to the wind turbines. However in Australia every utility scale wind farm has a viewing area at which members of the public are able to safely pull

Self Guided Tours

Some wind farms are located on public land and allow members of the public to walk amongst the turbines at their leisure (e.g. the 9 and 10 Mile Lagoon Wind Farms - Esperance, WA and the Albany wind farm - Albany, WA).

Commercial Tours

Several wind farms in Australia attract so many visitors that commercial tour operators have been established and provide an opportunity for the public to get a close up view of the wind farm.

- Woolnorth, Tasmania:
www.woolnorthtours.com.au/windfarm.html
- Challicum Hills, Victoria:
www.windfarmtours.com.au
- Codrington, Victoria:
www.myportfairy.com/windfarmtours

Virtual Tours on the Web

Many wind farms around the world have virtual tours on the web, in particular some of the large offshore wind farms.



off the road and learn more about the project. Some wind farms have visitor information centres such as the Visitor Information Centre for the Toora wind farm in Victoria - www.toorawind.com.au/windfarm.

In Western Australia, a major Wind Discovery Centre for the Albany wind farm is being planned by the Albany Council to attract additional tourists to the region - www.albany.wa.gov.au/albany/windfarm/windfarm.

1 AusPoll study - June 2001

2 AusPoll study - February 2002

3 Australian Research Group Study - September 2003

4 Tourist Attitudes Toward Wind Farms, MORI Summary Report, September 2002: <http://www.bwea.com/pdf/MORI.pdf>

5 <http://www.windpower.org/en/faqs.htm#anchor29566>