



GPO Box 4499
Melbourne VIC 3001
Australia
website: www.auswea.com.au
email: info@auswea.com.au
mob 1: 0412.257.520
mob 2: 0412.257.521



AUSTRALIA'S PEAK BODY FOR THE WIND ENERGY INDUSTRY

WIND FARMS AND TOURISM

THE ISSUE: Because wind turbines are sometimes sited in landscapes which possess high scenic value, their impact on tourism has from time to time been questioned. Research from overseas and anecdotal evidence within Australia indicates that wind developments do not negatively influence tourism, and may in fact be having a positive effect.

"For over two years, we have operated tours at the Codrington wind farm, and in that time have welcomed many thousands of visitors, many of whom have come to the area specifically to visit the wind farm. We have only seen positive local economic benefits resulting from the existence of the Codrington wind farm... No technology is perfect, but a wind farm is one way of contributing to our energy needs, and at the same time to reducing greenhouse gas production and the associated climate change that may irrevocably change our coast line and way of life in the future if we do not take some action now."

Tim and Carmel Brady to the Moyne Gazette, 18/9/2003, p. 2

SUMMARY

Wind turbines are new feature in the Australian landscape, and much media attention has focussed on how they might impact tourism in regions with high scenic value. Of course, sensitive development through judicious planning is vital to ensure valuable landscapes are maintained. This is why the Australian Wind Energy Association is working with the Australian Council of National Trusts to develop mutually agreed methodologies for assessing landscape values. There are no Australian studies to substantiate the occasional claim that wind farms will harm tourism. On the contrary, initial polls and anecdotal evidence in Australia indicate the opposite may be true: wind farms are more likely to attract tourists. Wind farm visitor centres around the country are clocking thousands of visits, and tourism operations are springing up around wind farms.

Overseas evidence backs up this trend. New in-depth research from Scotland performed in a highly scenic area with a high density of wind farms indicates that tourists are much more likely to be attracted than put off by the knowledge that there are wind turbines in the area. In Denmark, a small country with the world's highest wind turbine development (6,000 turbines), tourism has grown 50% since 1980 and wind farms are thought to have had no negative effects on the tourist industry. Critically, public opinion there about turbines is unchanged, in that most Danes still want more wind farms.

BREAKDOWN OF ISSUES & RESEARCH

International research

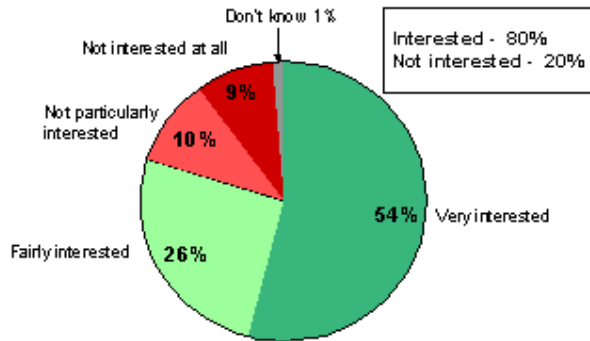
Scotland: An independent 2002 survey¹ performed by MORI (Market & Opinion Research International) and commissioned by BWEA and the Scottish Renewables Forum provides strong evidence that wind farms do more to benefit than harm tourism. MORI interviewed tourists visiting Argyll and Bute, Scotland, an area chosen because it currently has the greatest concentration of wind farms in Scotland. Furthermore, the area also has a tourism industry reliant on the area's high landscape value. Almost half (48%) of the respondents who came to the area reporting doing so for the scenery (as opposed to 10% who said they came for music festivals, the next most reported reason).

Forty percent of tourists interviewed were aware of the existence of wind farms in the area and when asked whether this presence had a positive or negative effect, two in five (43%) maintained that it had a positive effect, while a similar proportion (43%) felt it made no difference. Less than one in ten (8%) felt that it had a negative effect. This means that the majority of tourists who knew about the wind farms came away with a more positive image of the area because of their presence.

¹ Tourist Attitudes Toward Windfarms, MORI summary report, September 2002; available at <http://www.bwea.com/pdf/MORI.pdf>

Visiting Windfarm/Visitor Centres

Q If a windfarm in Argyll were to open to the public with a visitor centre showing information about how it works, to what extent would you be interested in visiting it on this or another trip to the area?



Base: All respondents (307)

Source: MORI

When respondents were asked whether the presence of wind farms in Argyll made any difference to the likelihood of them visiting the area, 91% said it made no difference. Importantly, twice as many people said they would be “more likely” to visit again than the amount who would be “less likely” to visit. Finally, tourists were asked to what extent they would be interested in visiting a wind farm if it were opened to the public with a visitor centre. The majority, (80%) would be interested with over half (54%) “very interested”. Around one in five are “not interested”.

These data show that tourism and wind farms can co-exist, and that wind farms can actually have a positive impact on tourism, by helping promote a positive image of an area and by encouraging repeat visits. The high interest in going to a wind farm visitor centre reflects the strong trend in increasing environmental awareness of the public and in particular underscores the public’s desire to learn more about what is actually being done to help reduce our reliance on fossil fuels.

Denmark: The birthplace of the wind industry, Denmark is a good case study because it is also the world's largest wind industry and has been installing turbines since 1980. This small country, the size of Tasmania, has 6000 turbines giving it the highest density of wind turbines of any nation. (This density is unlikely to be repeated in any other country since newer wind turbines are more powerful than the majority operating in Denmark and fewer are needed to generate the same amount of energy.) Yet tourism in Denmark has increased by some 50% since 1980. While there are no systematic studies, wind farms appear to have had no major impact on the country’s tourism whatsoever – positive or negative. It has been noted, however, that in general wind turbines tend to be good tourist attractions when they are new in an area.²

The general opinion amongst the industry is that wind farms are not perceived as a problem for tourism in Denmark. Wind farms are used for marketing in certain areas of Denmark, particularly to the German market, where the public is known to have a high level of interest in both environmental issues and new technology. Hotels, guest houses, and camp sites may use wind turbines for “green tourism” promotion.

Despite a six-fold growth since 1991 in the share of wind power to electricity consumption, a 2001 poll indicates 65% of the Danes still believe that it is a good idea to increase the share of wind energy in the Danish electricity supply -- exactly the same share of the population as in two previous opinion polls taken five and ten years earlier. People who

²<http://www.scotexchange.net/Downloads/windfarm/Section%20D.%20Overseas%20Case%20Studies.pdf>

Investigation into the potential impact of wind farms on tourism in Scotland – final report. Prepared for: VisitScotland, Prepared by: NFO System



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live near wind turbines are on average even more favourable towards wind energy, with a score of more than 80% in favour of wind energy.³

Related Research

Research on public attitudes to wind farms underscores the above findings that the majority of people believe wind farms add value to an area.

Neighbours of Wind Farms: A recent Scottish Executive survey of residents near wind farms found that their opinion of the sites became more positive after it became operational. This independent study carried out by MORI found high levels of acceptance and overwhelming support for wind power, with support strongest amongst those who lived closest to the wind farms⁴. A total of 1,810 adults were interviewed by telephone in early 2003. All respondents lived within a 20 km zone of the 10 operational wind farms that have nine or more turbines.

People are three times more likely to say that they feel that their local wind farm has had a generally positive impact on the area (20%) as they are to say it has had a negative impact (7%). Many hold mixed views (51%), or express no opinion at all (22%). People living within 5 km of the local wind farm hold the most positive views, with 45% saying that they think the overall impact has been positive, and 6% saying they think it has been negative.

A majority (54%) would support an expansion of their local wind farm by half the number of turbines again, while one in ten is opposed (9%).

Property Prices: New, government-funded research from the USA provides further evidence that wind farms do not erode the land values and seem to increase the value of nearby properties more quickly. In May, 2003 the Renewable Energy Policy Project (REPP) released results from an extensive and extremely thorough study that answers the serious charge that wind farms might reduce property prices⁵. REPP did a total of thirty analyses on ten large wind farm projects. They found that for the great majority of projects the property values actually rose more quickly in the view shed (the area within five miles of the turbines) than they did in the comparable community. Moreover, values increased faster in the view shed after the projects came on-line than they did before, and increased faster than comparable properties not in the view shed.

Australian Research

Thus far little research on wind farms' effect on tourism has been carried out in Australia. However, polling carried out by AusPoll for Pacific Hydro echoes recent UK research that wind farms are likely to have a net positive effect on tourism. There is also ample anecdotal evidence in Australia to show that wind farms have positive tourism potential.

Polls: An AusPoll survey conducted in 2001 for Pacific Hydro on the Portland Wind Energy Project, Victoria showed that 94% of Portland residents described wind generators as "interesting" and 74% as "graceful". In a separate AusPoll survey, when asked, "Specifically thinking about the tourism impact of building windmills would you be more or less likely to visit a coastal area for a holiday or day trip if there were electricity generating windmills in the area", 36% of Victorians surveyed said yes, 55% indicated that it would make no difference while only 8% said they would be less likely to visit the area.

Tourist Industry Support for Clean Energy: Notable tourism bodies, namely the South Australian Tourism Alliance and the Victorian Tourism Industry Council, have signed onto a statement demanding 10% new renewable energy by 2010 by expanding the Mandatory Renewable Energy Target. Currently about 70% of new renewable energy projects are wind farms.

³ Source: Danish Wind Industry Association website: <http://www.windpower.org/en/faqs.htm#anchor295666>

⁴ Public attitudes to wind farms: A survey of local residents in Scotland; Scottish Executive Social Research, 2003. Available at <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library5/environment/pawslr.pdf>

⁵ The effect of wind development on local property values; Renewable Energy Policy Project Analytical Report, May 2003. Available at: http://solstice.crest.org/articles/static/1/binaries/wind_online_final.pdf

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Australian Wind Tourism Examples

The following summarises some effects of wind farms on tourism in Australia.

Esperance, WA: The Salmon Beach (recently closed) and Ten Mile Lagoon wind farms were included in the Esperance Tourist Bureau information and visitor guides and were visited by about 50,000 people each year (SKM, 2001). Road counters to the Ten Mile Lagoon wind farm were measuring 80 cars per day.

Albany, WA: The Albany Wind Farm is considered by many to be a wonderful tourism attraction, so much so that it has been featured on Channel 7 Great Outdoors Show. Planning is underway for a Wind Discovery Centre at the Albany Wind Farm, with the aim to build a world class centre to attract additional tourists to the Albany region, with facilities possibly operating at the site early next year. According to the city's economic development manager, John Berry, traffic counters suggest about 100,000 people visited the wind farm last year. The site has "the potential to be a premier WA tourism icon based on the sheer size of the structures and magnificent coastal setting..." (Albany Advertiser 31/1/03)

<http://thegreatoutdoors.com.au/display.php?location=WA&ID=2961>

Codrington, Victoria: The Codrington wind farm currently attracts 50,000 visitors per year. For those who want to stop and take a look, a tour company has been specifically set up to meet tourism demands, and site tours are run up to six times a week. In addition, West Coal Rail has offered day tours of the wind farm (WCR, 2003).

Atherton Tablelands, Queensland: The Windy Hill Wind Farm on the Atherton Tablelands was visited by approximately 30,000 cars in the first three months of operation, and a local company includes the wind farm in its regional tour itinerary (AusWEA, 2002).

Ararat, Victoria: The Ararat Rural City Council and a private operator are planning to harness the tourism potential of Pacific Hydro's Challicum Hills Wind Farm. This will include interpretive signage and provision of a safe place for motorists to pull over and learn about the wind farm. This is needed to reduce the chance of accidents that might be caused due to drivers being distracted as they pass the impressive structures. A private operator has spent 12 months preparing for tours into the hills with the generators. (Stawell Times News-Ararat Advertiser 9/9/2003)

Woolnorth, Tasmania: Following the success of the public open days that saw 7,000 people visit the Woolnorth Wind Farm, Hydro Tasmania has contracted tour operator Woolnorth Tours to conduct one hour, half-day and full day tours of the wind farm (HT, 2002a). Liberal leader Rene Hidding called upon the Tasmania government to push for wind farm tourism, and to establish a Centre for Excellence in Renewable Energy and Visitor Interpretation Site near the wind farm, which "would become a major drawcard for the region and capitalise on increased visitor arrivals on the Spirit of Tasmania vessels," according to Mr. Hidding, who also added, "this wind farm has the potential to be a "must see" tourism attraction..." (Mercury, Hobart, 9/8/2003, p.11).

Crookwell, NSW: The Crookwell Wind Farm open day was attended by 400-500 people. Since then tourists have travelled to the wind farm both as individuals and interest groups.

Toora, Victoria: Stanwell Corporation established the Toora Wind Visitors Information Centre in the main street of Toora. Over 5,000 visitors have signed the visitors log book between September 2002 and April 2003. It is estimated that many more people visited the wind farm as the Toora Information Centre was only open 20 hours a week during that time. The Toora Information Centre is a regular stop for three tour companies to Gippsland.
<http://www.toorawind.com.au/windfarm.htm>

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