

## Research shows community generally on board with wind farms

**Survey findings announced by renewable energy company Pacific Hydro accord with separate CSIRO research showing strong community support for wind farm developments – in contrast to media coverage of the issue over the past few years.**



Credit: Hepburn Wind

The installation of wind farms in Australia has been slow due to a number of factors: the low cost and volatility of the Renewable Energy Certificate (REC) price, regulatory factors, and widely publicised community resistance.

CSIRO's 'Science into Society' research team focused on documenting the 'social gap' between the documented high levels of support for wind farm development and the lower success rate and cited opposition in the media to wind farm development proposals.

The main findings of the CSIRO study of nine wind developments in communities – across Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia, the states with the most wind resources nationally – were:

1. There is strong community support for the development of wind farms.
2. The benefits can be communicated in ways that can enhance community support for the development of wind farms in a region.
3. Current regulatory approaches provide a suitable framework for negotiating wind farm developments – but there is scope for improving outcomes.
4. The concept of a 'Social Licence to Operate' provides a useful framework for wind farm developers to engage local communities in a more transparent manner. While community concerns are sometimes over-represented in

the media, limiting opportunity for community input risks undermining potential local support. The alternative of more prescriptive rules and processes to protect perceived community interests can risk forgoing developments that could deliver local benefits and achieve local support.

The CSIRO research included interviews with stakeholders and a media analysis of 49 articles from 19 newspapers in the second half of 2010. This analysis indicated more reasons for wind farm opposition were reported than reasons for support.

The most cited reasons for rejecting wind farms were landscape change and visual amenity impacts; noise impacts; and poor consultation. The most cited reasons for supporting rural wind farms were as a means to take action against human-induced climate change; to reduce greenhouse gas emissions; and to support job creation.

Pacific Hydro also interviewed residents in ten communities across Victoria, NSW and SA. Its study found the level of support for wind farms was 83 per cent overall with 14 per cent opposed to their development. While there is overwhelming support across all regions, support was higher in Victoria and South Australia than in selected NSW regions.

The perceived impacts causing concern were the depreciation of property values (5 in 10), the effect on visual amenity (4 in 10) and noise (4 in 10).

Survey participants were less concerned about the perceived health problems (1 in 10), despite recent media attention to this issue.

Sources: CSIRO and Pacific Hydro

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