

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

We support the proposed amendments to the renewable energy act, stated above because wind developers need to be made accountable for noise pollution and comply with appropriate noise guidelines. We would like to see public access to noise and wind mast data for transparency and severe penalties imposed for breaking the law as with any other industry.

There is no current law to protect from excess noise and other impacts of wind developments for neighbouring residents on human health. This must change for the good of all mankind. This is a basic human right.

What is the problem? Noise, vibration, or other. What is the type of noise source? How far away from the nearest noise source do you live?

The problem includes both excessive noise and vibration. I.e. noise which is audible and inaudible. Also at times, a humming type sound within our ear/head which increases to an intolerable level, especially during the night.

The type of noise source is from the nearby wind farm at Cape Bridgewater and other (power interference to our domestic supply/dwelling).

We lived 1.5 kilometres from the nearest noise source being a wind turbine (one of twenty-nine in total).

How often do you have problems, and what is the pattern? I.e. what makes you think the problems are related to the noise source?

We encounter problems daily with a pattern (day & night) that exists when we are in proximity of the wind farm. These problems mostly do not occur when we are out of this zone. Other encountered problems fluctuate, pending wind velocity, wind direction, and humidity. We did not have this pattern of problems prior to this..

When did they first start? (E.g. when the noise first started, or weeks, months or years later)

In early June 2008 when the wind farm first came on line and commenced operation. That is when we first noticed there was a serious problem with associated noises emanating from the wind farm, with excessive noise late at night and early morning.

What have been the consequences? (Effect on sleep, new symptoms and health problems, and any changes to pre-existing conditions e.g. physical and mental health)

Interrupted sleep patterns and daily activities: Our lifestyle has changed dramatically for the worst; these symptoms we experience and endure have never been in existence in our normal lives before the commencement of the wind farm operation. We feel we have not slept and struggled to perform the simplest of duties throughout the daytime.

The other related symptoms are:

Headaches: piercing pain which becomes stronger with exposure to the noise of the neighbouring wind farm. The pain can move from place to place but almost always is across the forehead.

Nausea: a constant ill-feeling and heightened sensitivity to smells

Ear and facial pressure: a tightening feeling like having a swim cap over the entire head. This can then become heavier with pain extending to the ear and the jaw cavity. We have attended the dentist with pains in our teeth to find there is no physical problem. This pain has subsided since we moved from the property.

Ringings in the ears, sensitivity to sounds (low and high frequency) Brian has extreme sensitivity to sounds particularly low frequency diagnosed as hyperacusis or vibro-acoustic disease. He has had extensive testing done by ear, nose & throat specialists and an audiologist. The other family members also have a heightened sensitivity to sounds and vibrations

Sleep deprivation (every night not being able to sleep past 2-3am then noise issues increasing until approximately 6-7am)

Tiredness: to the point of exhaustion where it was difficult to care for our family needs and even driving would be a risk to our safety.

Cognitive dysfunction (complete lack of brain function on occasions)

Body aches and pains (cramping of muscles and aching bones (particularly lower legs and hands))

Excessive bladder and bowel triggers: constantly having the urges while at home with little output, but elsewhere away from wind farm not an issue. At times it felt as though the whole digestive system from the mouth to the lower end was one large muscle system which was activated and would not stop.

Heart palpitations (racing heart and irregularity for no known reason)

Blood pressure irregularities: a pattern of blood pressure rising when exposed to the noise pollution/vibration which can drop to low levels when away from the area of the wind farm.

Breathlessness: a sense that there is no oxygen in the air and it is a struggle to breathe
Anxiety and irritability: no control over behaviour changes which increase with exposure to noise.

Speech difficulty: we found ourselves struggling to say what we were thinking and repeating the same words constantly while we were experiencing exposure to the excess noise. Also Joanne noticed while she was speaking or using the telephone there would be a vibration or tingling sensation on her lips and tongue. This was only at home.

Eye Problems: from blurring of the eyes to eye pain and dryness of the eye fluids. Our vision was always better away from the area of the wind farm. Again eye specialists and optometrists cannot explain this difference.

What helps alleviate or improve the symptoms?

The only way to alleviate the symptoms is to leave the immediate area, depending on the strength and velocity of the wind. We must avoid any sounds or environments which replicate those of the wind facilities. The only way to improve symptoms is to go to natural environments.

What happens with ongoing exposure to the noise?

With ongoing exposure to the noise (audible & inaudible) we become very lethargic and a sense of being unable to think with migraine strength headaches and pressure around the head and ear region with a level of being anxious. There is no option to remain in the zone as we are debilitated so dramatically we fear for our lives. It feels and sounds like we are in a microwave and might explode in time if we do not escape.

Are the symptoms affected by wind and weather conditions? If so, what wind and weather conditions are worst for you? These chronic symptoms are influenced by weather conditions and wind velocity and direction, and the worst possible wind is of a Westerly & Northerly direction. Not ruling out the two other prevailing wind directions with additional unusual symptoms. The turbine could be barely turning at times yet the pressure within our head is stronger like being in a vice which is being turned slowly causing more pain.

Other effects (effect on income earning capacity, safety on farm and on the road e.g. near misses, effect on the family, extended family and community relationships)

Our income capacity has diminished to zero with a larger percentage of expenditure out going to compensate with our forced change of lifestyle due to not being able to live in our own home .Our neighbours and friends in conjunction with our small local community have been severely and grossly impacted on so many levels which has devastated us as a family.

We have had to endure extended legal proceedings due to a minor vehicle incident as a result of shifting furniture to relocate away from the wind farm. There have been several times when driving and other duties has been difficult and frightening with blanking of brain function and thinking ability.

The effect on our family extended family and community relationships is tragic and depressing. We feel extremely isolated to the few other persons in our region which are brave enough to discuss and share their concerns and effects.

Our marriage is like a business relationship as we need to put so much energy into solving and dealing with our concerns. Our two sons have stopped asking if we can do certain outings(where there is excess noises) as they realise it is too painful for their parents to endure, if not themselves.

Have you ever had to leave your home, either temporarily or permanently in order to regain your health?

As a family of four we had to leave our home of twenty three years which has impacted dramatically to our health and wellbeing, In total we have now lived permanently away from our home for a period of twenty six months, due to the relentless associated noise problems emanating from the near by wind farm at Cape Bridgewater, Portland Victoria.

Have you ever slept away from home because of these problems?

Yes we were sleeping at the houses of friends and family for approximately six months to reduce the impact and to allow our bodies to have a rest and alleviate the symptoms which were constantly haunting us. Now we simply cannot sleep at the house, the risk is too great of impacting our health.

Is there currently full spectrum noise monitoring 24 hours a day transmitted to the internet for everyone to access the raw data to see exactly what the noise pollution levels are?

No. To our knowledge there has not been any noise monitoring conducted and transmitted in real time, this raw data is not made available to us as landowners.

.Has the company ever organised noise monitoring at your home? Were the measurements conducted inside or outside your home, or both? No

Have you ever been given the raw data from any noise monitoring done by the company's acousticians?

No raw data.

There has been no monitoring done at our property.

Have you told your family doctor or other health care providers? Were they able to help you? Our family doctor has a full history of our initial and present concerns and complaints in relation to our decline in health ever since the wind farm commenced operation dating back to early 2008.

Does your family doctor know about the health problems that can result from vibration and infrasound and low frequency noise pollution? Yes.

What do you think about the proposed amendments to the Bill, which are designed to ensure that noise pollution which is harmful to health does not occur and that if it does it is detected and action is taken. With the proposed amendments to the bill we certainly welcome with open arms as we are desperate to find a resolution to our problematic situation. Australian regulated government bodies must also consider and implement new standards to regulate new and existing wind farm operation, and not to choose or rely on adopted standards from other countries which certainly do not apply, nor are designed for Australian conditions. The need for professional independent investigation and for government authorities to take responsibility for the wellbeing and duty of care for all land holders who are subjected to neighbouring wind farms.

Any other comments?

Prior to the wind facility being constructed our quality of life in the country environment at Cape Bridgewater was to be envied. It was so quiet and peaceful at our home. We rarely heard our neighbours and if so was generally the hum of a lawnmower once a week or the sound of children playing in the fields. There is no comparison to the torture of noise and corresponding health effects we have endured until the risk and pain was too great. We chose this lifestyle as we wanted to provide our children and ourselves with the best life away from environmental pollutants. We did not oppose the wind companies and even assisted their project with the ignorance of not knowing there was a potential danger to our health looming. This man made disaster must be dealt with appropriately before more harm to humans is irreversible. This must not go another day without the necessary government departments implementing and supervising guidelines for excessive noise both audible and inaudible.