

Against the wind

The pursuit of clean energy has relegated ordinary people to the status of 'collateral damage'

MAURICE NEWMAN

Even before they threatened my property, I was opposed to wind farms.

They fail on all counts. They are grossly inefficient, extremely expensive, socially inequitable, a danger to human health, environmentally harmful, divisive for communities, a blot on the landscape, and don't even achieve the purpose for which they were designed, namely the reliable generation of electricity and the reduction of CO₂ emissions.

Even if you buy the anthropogenic global warming case, experience shows that wind energy is not the answer. How is it, then, that governments around the world have embraced this technology with abandon, in the process spending hundreds of billions of dollars of other people's money in a shameless wealth transfer from the poor to the rich? Surely the economic effect of taxing hardest those who can least afford it was thoroughly examined ahead of politically motivated empty gestures designed to placate climate change alarmists?

Apparently not.

I am not a conspiracy theorist, but we have witnessed the birth of an extraordinary, universal and self-reinforcing movement among the political and executive arms of government, their academic consultants, the mainstream media and vested private sector interests (such as investment banks and the renewables industry), held together by the promise of unlimited government money. It may not be a conspiracy, but long-term, government-underwritten annuities have certainly created one gigantic and powerful oligopoly which must coerce taxpayers and penalise energy consumers to survive.

Not even independent UK research which shows 3.7 jobs in the broader economy are lost for every 'green' job created has engendered any real sense of concern within this politically protected and publicly funded class. After all, those who are crowded out by ever-more-costly green schemes are simply, as one bureaucrat informed me, 'collateral damage' and victims of 'the greater good'.

But to whom do the 'damaged' now turn? All political parties to a greater or lesser degree follow the same irrational policies, mindlessly repeating slogans about renewable energy targets and CO₂ reductions plans, lest they be labelled climate change deniers.

Yet nowhere is there evidence that these policies work. Even Europe, with its huge investment in wind energy as well as an ETS, has not reduced emissions. And the much-vaunted Kyoto Protocol, which until the Rudd government Australia refused to sign, saw emissions of signatories grow substantially faster than those of non-signatories. So why should we be optimistic that any future global agreement on emissions will be more successful? Experience with trade and nuclear nonproliferation treaties suggest domestic considerations will prevail over lofty ideals. Political correctness may go down well at elite gatherings, but it doesn't pay the bills.

This fact is finally being recognised in Europe, where climate tipping points are now of less concern than economic tipping points. Hence the Clayton's agreement

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at Durban. But in Australia, with its relatively strong balance sheet, waste on climate gestures is apparently more affordable. With religious zeal and the voice of authority, we plough ahead as if consumed by a deathwish.

At the local level this religion is evangelically spread by state bureaucrats who regularly pander to the oligopoly's wishes. In a perverse distortion of the democratic process, the mostly multinational wind power industry has influence but no votes, while those most affected have votes but no influence.

For example, while citizens' groups in New South Wales are begrudgingly granted access to the Department of Planning and Infrastructure, the wind power industry is given a workshop and a colour document replete with pictures of wind towers taken through daisies and a group of happy campers surrounded by a forest of turbines. No prize for guessing on which side of the fence the Department of Planning and Infrastructure sits.

An academic adviser to the New South Wales Department of Health says he does not accept the expert testimony which led an Ontario court to conclude that wind turbines are harmful to human health. One wonders how thoroughly that adviser examined the peer-reviewed clinical studies on

which the court based its decision. Perhaps his public service masters employ him only for confirmatory bias?

And, when an existing wind farm, approved under the inadequate South Australian noise guidelines, is in breach of the rules under which consent was given, is action taken? Not so far, even though an authoritative source found that noise far exceeds the conditions of approval. This is because official monitoring maintains the wind farm is still compliant. Given the qualifications of the independent acoustician, this calls into question the integrity of the monitoring process.

There are countless other examples in which the rights of citizens are treated as 'roadkill', to quote another bureaucrat. Rules are bent and blind eyes turned. The Department of Planning and Infrastructure is the consent authority as well as the arbiter in dispute resolutions. Sham community information meetings are held simply to tick a box.

The height of wind towers can be materially changed without consultation. Environmental details have been checked at nightfall and, if no fauna are observed, consent is given, regardless of information provided by local residents. The harmful health effects, despite peer-reviewed and anecdotal evidence, are dismissed as being unconfirmed, psychosomatic or the politics of envy. It's true. Not everyone who lives near wind turbines experiences adverse health effects. But then not everyone who smokes contracts lung cancer. Unaffected residents are bought off with bribes of better roads, community improvements or offers of employment. But these are token gestures and lead to bitterness and deep divisions in the community.

There is clearly an imbalance when cash-poor local residents are pitted against governments and powerful corporations. Rather than listen to their constituents, politicians are lending their support to oligopolistic insiders and, in so doing, are destroying the property rights of the very people they have pledged to protect.

But don't expect help from academia, mainstream media or the public service. They are members of the same establishment and worship together at the altar of global warming. By ruthlessly perpetuating the illusion that wind farms can somehow save the planet, they keep the money flowing. All the while the poor become poorer, ever more dependent on welfare and colder in winter.

The conclusion is clear. Our once independent public service is no longer servant but master! Sir Humphrey is firmly in control.

Maurice Newman is former chairman of Deutsche Bank, the Australian Securities Exchange and, most recently, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.