

# Base debate on facts, activist says

By Ross Lees For The Whig-Standard

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ROBLIN — Sierra Club executive director John Bennett can't understand why some people don't want honest and forthright debate on wind energy in Ontario.

At a Greater Napanee council meeting Tuesday night, Bennett was allowed to make his full presentation on the controversial topic in the Roblin community hall and there was an opportunity for questions and comment following the presentation.

"I'm not surprised some people oppose wind mills," Bennett said during his presentation. "Part of me sympathizes on a very basic level."

This opposition to windmills is understandable, Bennett said, especially in light of what he calls misinformation and aggressive tactics being used to stifle badly needed debate, he said following the meeting in Roblin.

"The debate ... should be based on facts, not fear, and conducted in a spirit of goodwill, not intimidation," he said.

Bennett said after the council meeting Tuesday night the Sierra Club lobbied for 15 years to have a Green Energy Act and, when the provincial government finally passed one, the organization felt it had to step in and help battle the backlash.

"When they passed the legislation, it was like they stepped on a land mine — it blew up in their faces," Bennett said.

In his address to council, Bennett said he wanted to put Ontario's Green Energy Act into context, adding it is not just about electricity, whether it is portrayed as eliminating coal or creating jobs.

"It's an essential part of addressing climate change and providing us with safe energy," he said. "It is not something we should discard lightly."

While Bennett said the Ontario Green Energy Act is perhaps imperfect, he supports wind energy and properly located wind farms.

Bennett said turbines need proper setbacks in place and the Sierra Club's literature review on wind turbines in Ontario called The Real Truth About Wind Energy "found more than enough evidence to assure us and you that turbines do not constitute a significant public health risk."

"When properly located, turbine noise, vibration and flicker will not cause significant health impacts," he noted after the meeting, emphasizing "when properly located."

Bennett said his organization's report has been shared with other researchers and authorities.

"It is a living document and we have invited everyone to provide additional material and will improve it where necessary," he stated.