



Wind Farms and Human Health

Scientific Forum

Discussion paper for the 7 June 2011 scientific forum

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1 Purpose of this paper

The purpose of this paper is to inform interested people about the NHMRC scientific forum on wind farms and human health.

2 Background to Scientific Forum

In 2009 NHMRC conducted a rapid review of current scientific literature to determine whether there was a link between wind turbines and adverse health effects. The review considered the potential health impacts of infrasound, noise, electromagnetic interference, shadow flicker and blade glint produced by wind turbines and concluded that, at the time of writing, there was no published scientific evidence to positively link wind turbines with adverse health effects.

In July 2010, NHMRC released *NHMRC Public Statement: Wind Turbines and Health* and supporting evidence *Wind Turbines and Health: A rapid review of the evidence*. The Public Statement recommends that, to minimise any potential impacts of wind turbines on surrounding areas, authorities take a precautionary approach and continue to monitor research outcomes. Members of the public are urged to contact their doctor if they have any individual health concerns. Both documents can be found at <http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/synopses/new0048.htm>

Residents living close to wind farms have raised concerns about potential adverse health impacts from wind turbines including nausea, headaches, anxiety and sleep and learning difficulties (termed 'Wind Turbine Syndrome').

In response to mounting community concern Senator Fielding initiated a Federal Senate Inquiry into the health, social and economic impacts of rural wind farms, which was conducted in March 2011. In the NHMRC submission provided to the Senate Inquiry NHMRC indicated that as part of its ongoing work in the field it was conducting a Scientific Forum in June 2011.

3 Purpose of the NHMRC Forum

The purpose of the forum is to:

1. identify further Australian and international evidence related to possible health impacts of wind farms,
2. consult with stakeholders to ensure that NHMRC is aware of the range of issues over which there is public concern,
3. identify any gaps in the evidence on this issue, and
4. explore possible collaborations within the health, environmental health, planning, industry and community sectors to progress this issue.

This information will allow NHMRC to update its Public Statement:

The Forum aligns with Objectives 1, 2 and 3 of the 2010-12 NHMRC Strategic Plan (Table 1).

Table 1. NHMRC Strategic Plan 2010-12 Objectives

Objective 1	Raise the standard of individual and public health throughout Australia
Objective 2	Foster the development of consistent standards between the various States and territories
Objective 3	Foster medical research and training and public health research and training

Objective 4	Foster consideration of ethical issues relating to health
Objective 5	Build a better NHMRC

4 Role of NHMRC

NHMRC is Australia's peak body for supporting health and medical research; for developing health advice for the Australian community, health professionals and governments; and for providing advice on ethical behaviour in health care and in the conduct of health and medical research.

Health advice provided by NHMRC is based on robust scientific evidence published in peer reviewed journals. Although NHMRC maintains a watching brief on anecdotal evidence, it does not develop advice based on this type of evidence. Increasing levels of anecdotal evidence can act as a trigger for NHMRC to review the published scientific literature and for researchers to formulate research proposals in these areas.

NHMRC does not have a role in environmental planning or regulation, and it does not develop health policy. These fall outside its remit and are undertaken by other parties.

NHMRC has a strategic and planned approach to funding research. Researchers with an interest in this area are already able to apply for current funding schemes advertised on the NHMRC website, however NHMRC cannot commit to funding any recommendation from this forum. It is an interested party in the formation of Australian and international groups undertaking research in priority areas and raising funds to do this research.

5 Encouraging Collaboration

NHMRC focuses on research funding and developing health advice, and it is also keen to encourage partnerships and collaborations that will enhance these activities.

The Forum provides an opportunity to gather information from a broad range of stakeholders including:

- Environmental health experts
- Acoustic engineers and scientists
- Environmental health researchers
- Representatives from State and Territory health and planning/environment departments
- Members of the public living close to windfarms
- Major public interest groups involved with wind farms in Australia (eg Waubra Foundation)
- Department of Health and Ageing
- International experts from countries with substantial experience in wind turbines

Programme as at 1/6/11

NHMRC Forum Wind Farms and Human Health 7 June 2011

8.45 am– 4.00 pm

Facilitator: Dr Gael Jennings

8.45am Opening:

Professor John McCaillum

9.00am Scientific Panel One: current evidence on health impacts

Professor Geoffrey Leventhall

Professor Mariana Alves-Pereira

Questions and discussion

10.45am MORNING TEA

11.15am Scientific Panel Two:

Dr Bob Thorne – human perception and infrasound

Dr Simon Chapman – psycho-social factors

Questions and discussion

11.45am Panel Three: Personal stories

Dr Sarah Laurie (Chair)

Ms Bernie Janssen

Mr Donald Thomas

Mr David Page

12.15 pm

Professor Warwick Anderson CEO NHMRC: the context for NHMRC

Dr. Gael Jennings, facilitator - Summary of morning and issues for discussion

12.35pm LUNCH

1.15pm

Small group workshop sessions, discussing evidence gaps, public concerns and other issues.