NHMRC’s comprehensive review finds little evidence of adverse health effects from wind farms

The National Health and Medical Research Council has today released a statement concluding that ‘there is currently no consistent evidence that wind farms cause adverse health effects in humans.’

The NHMRC Statement: Evidence on Wind Farms and Human Health is based on a rigorous independent assessment of the existing scientific evidence on wind farms and human health.

The review was overseen by NHMRC’s Wind Farms and Human Health Reference Group, which was chaired by Emeritus Professor Bruce Armstrong, and comprised experts in public and environmental health, research methodology, acoustics, psychology and sleep, as well as a consumer advocate.

NHMRC’s internationally recognised processes were used to conduct the review:

- Independent reviewers with expertise in evidence review methodology were commissioned by NHMRC to comprehensively search the existing literature.
- The methodology for the literature review was assessed by international experts.
- Based on the findings of the evidence review, a draft Information Paper was released for public consultation in February 2014.
- During public consultation, additional evidence was sought and the initial literature review updated to include studies to May 2014.

The review identified over 4000 papers, however of those, only 13 studies were found to be of sufficient scientific quality to consider possible relationships between wind farms and human health.

Based on the comprehensive assessment of the evidence, key findings include:

- Examining whether wind farm emissions may affect human health is complex, as both the character of the emissions and individual perceptions of them are highly variable.
- After careful consideration and deliberation of the body of evidence, NHMRC concludes that there is currently no consistent evidence that wind farms cause adverse health effects in humans.
- Given the poor quality of current direct evidence and the concern expressed by some members of the community, high quality research into possible health effects of wind farms, particularly within 1500 metres, is warranted.

Overall, the body of evidence that directly examined wind farms and their potential health effects was small and of poor quality.

There is consistent but poor quality direct evidence that wind farm noise is associated with annoyance, as well as less consistent, poor quality direct evidence of an association between sleep disturbance and wind farm noise.

The review also considered evidence on the effects of similar emissions from other sources, including what is known about environmental noise from road traffic, aircraft and rail.

Based on this supporting evidence, the statement concludes it is unlikely that people would experience significant health effects beyond 1500 metres from wind farms.

The CEO, Professor Warwick Anderson noted that, based on the poor evidence base and continued public interest, NHMRC intends to issue a one-off Targeted Call for Research.

The findings of NHMRC’s review are summarised in the final NHMRC Information Paper: Evidence on Wind Farms and Human Health, also released today. Its release follows public consultation on the draft Information Paper in 2014.

The Statement, Information Paper and other supporting materials are available on the NHMRC website.

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