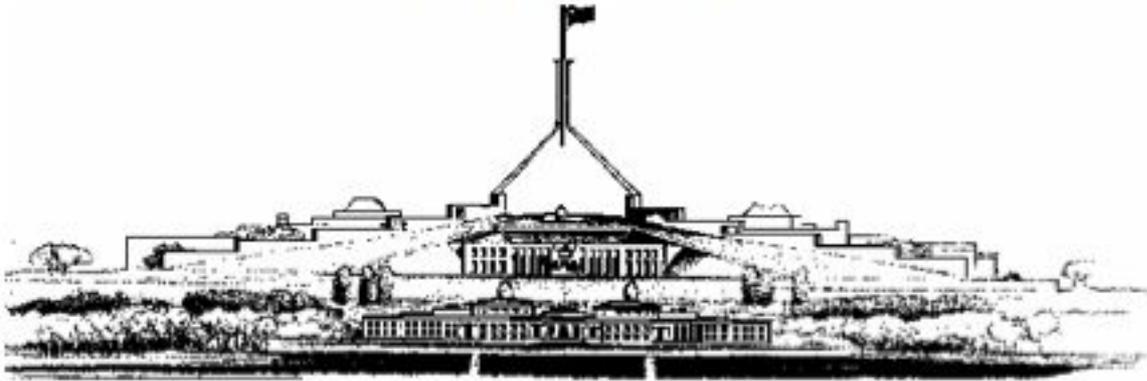




COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



THE SENATE

PROOF

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Renewable Energy

QUESTION

Thursday, 6 March 2014

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

QUESTION

Date Thursday, 6 March 2014
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Questioner Madigan, Sen John
Speaker

Source Senate
Proof Yes
Responder Nash, Sen Fiona
Question No.

Renewable Energy

Renewable Energy

Senator MADIGAN (Victoria) (14:19): My question is to the Minister representing the Minister for Health, Senator Nash. Minister, in my home state of Victoria residents impacted by the Toora, Waubra, Cape Bridgewater and Macarthur wind farm developments regularly contact my office describing adverse health effects that they say are caused by exposure to excessive noise from nearby wind turbines. None of those Victorian wind farms are compliant with the noise conditions attached to the conditional planning approvals. If a wind farm operator cannot demonstrate compliance with noise conditions attached to their planning approval, the acceptable noise standard has been exceeded. Does the government agree that adverse health effects reported under such circumstances should be investigated separately to ascertain whether there is any relationship between adverse health effects and exposure to excessive noise from unregulated wind farms?

Senator NASH (New South Wales—Deputy Leader of The Nationals in the Senate and Assistant Minister for Health) (14:20): I thank the senator for his question and note his very genuine concern in this area. My understanding is that the planning relating to wind farms is a state issue, but I do understand that there is concern out there in the community about the real or perceived potential adverse effects of the wind farms. Indeed, prior to the last election, we in the coalition recognised that there are concerns out there in the community, which is why we said before the last election that we would ensure that there was an independent review of potential health impacts from wind farms.

I note that the NHMRC has just released a draft report relating to this issue. I also note that there has been some concern around some of the poor quality relating to that particular report, which, as Senator Madigan would understand, was raised at the last estimates committee hearings. In terms of the adverse impacts that the senator has raised, we in the government are well aware of the concerns in the community surrounding this and we will be putting steps in place to determine that we are fully aware of any impacts that do exist.

Senator MADIGAN (Victoria) (14:21): Mr President, I ask a supplementary question. Several wind farms in Victoria operate outside noise compliance and in breach of the acceptable noise standard. The consequence of failing to comply with permit conditions is that planning permits do not protect impacted communities from harm. Why has the important matter of noise compliance been overlooked in the NHMRC's 2010 and 2014 literature reviews concerning wind farms and health?

Senator NASH (New South Wales—Deputy Leader of The Nationals in the Senate and Assistant Minister for Health) (14:22): I can certainly indicate to the senator that the draft report is a first step in the process. Indeed, I note that there will now be a period of public consultation on the draft report, from 25 February to 11 April. Again, the coalition are aware of Senator Madigan's concern in this area, but we are also aware that we have to make sure that we get the information and the data received so that we can make informed decisions going forward in relation to this area. While we do appreciate that those concerns are there, the NHMRC is aware that some literature has not been captured in the current draft—which was primarily a literature review—which is why we have said this a first step in the process and we will indeed need to look to doing further work.

Senator MADIGAN (Victoria) (14:23): Mr President, I ask a further supplementary question. In a recent study, a professor of public health highlighted complaints received about the non-compliant Toora, Waubra, Cape Bridgewater and Macarthur wind farms. In order to protect communities like those that Professor Chapman has identified, will the government support a moratorium on further wind-farm development approvals until the NHMRC can confirm that non-compliant wind farms which breach the acceptable noise standard do not cause adverse health effects?

Senator NASH (New South Wales—Deputy Leader of The Nationals in the Senate and Assistant Minister for Health) (14:24): What I can inform the senator is that the government will ensure that we are properly informed before next steps are taken in relation to the wind farm issue, which is why we said—as I stated earlier, prior to the last election—that it is very important that we have independent research that can

inform the policymaking surrounding the area of wind farms.

Again, I do note the concerns that have been raised out there in the community. The NHMRC intends to announce a targeted core for research. We will indeed be developing an independent research program. I do note the senator's concerns, which have previously been raised, about ensuring that there is an independent research program attached to this which will indeed investigate the potential health effects of wind farms.