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April 5<sup>th</sup> 2014

Dr Steve Hambleton  
President,  
Australian Medical Association  
PO Box 6090  
KINGSTON ACT 2601

Dear Dr Hambleton,

**Re: AMA Position Statement on wind farms and health**

The Foundation is dismayed to be writing to an association of health professionals to express our deep concern over the factually incorrect, egregiously misleading, incautious position statement on wind and health published by the AMA last month.

We are at a loss to understand the lack of rigour in the preparation of the statement unless the intent of the association is to publicly advocate for the wind industry.

The AMA statement appeared shortly after the release of the National Health and Medical Research Council draft Information Paper, but displayed none of the caution or uncertainty displayed by the NHMRC.

The Foundation acknowledges that the NHMRC said *"There is no reliable or consistent evidence that wind farms directly cause adverse health effects in humans"*, but notes they also stated *"The body of evidence relating to wind farms and health is small and poor quality"*. Furthermore, *"No studies were identified that explicitly considered possible effects on human health of infrasound and low-frequency noise or electromagnetic radiation produced by wind turbines."* A direct connection between wind turbine noise and adverse health impacts is unlikely to be found if it is not explicitly considered.

It appears the association is so convinced there is no possibility of many rural residents suffering debilitating adverse health impacts from wind turbine noise that the AMA stands alone in not even suggesting that more conclusive medical research needs to be undertaken to give the issue more clarity. Even the wind industry is on the public record as supporting medical research into this issue after the 2011 senate inquiry into wind farms made unequivocal recommendations for such.

The AMA's certitude over the absence of adverse health impacts in light of the acknowledged paucity of conclusive quality medical and acoustical research is breathtaking.

AMA states *"there is no accepted physiological mechanism where sub-audible infrasound could cause health effects."* Is the association aware of the work by professor of otolaryngology Alec Salt and colleagues at the Washington University School of Medicine? This week the U.S journal *Acoustics Today* published a paper by Salt stating that the A-weighting measurements of turbine noise, used by the wind industry and all Australian regulatory agencies, are *"highly misleading"* as they mask the level of infrasound.

Professor Salt says *“Given the knowledge that the ear responds to low frequency sounds and infrasound, we knew that...the logic to A-weight sound measurements was deeply flawed scientifically. Low frequency regions of the ear will be moderately to strongly stimulated for prolonged periods by wind turbine noise. Given the present evidence, it seems risky at best to continue the current gamble that infrasound stimulation of the ear stays confined to the ear and has no other effects on the body.”*

The AMA states with certainty that sub-audible infrasound cannot cause health effects, which is contradicted by the internationally respected Professor Salt and his colleagues who have deep expertise and specialise in this very field.

The Foundation would be grateful if the AMA could help us better understand your position statement by providing answers to the following questions:

1. The AMA would be aware that the NHMRC found only seven studies internationally that were reliable enough to draw conclusions from saying, “It is clear that more high-quality research is needed.” Given these uncertainties expressed by the NHMRC and their explicit advice at Senate estimates hearings “we do not say there are no ill effects [from wind turbine operation]” **how can the AMA produce a position statement that infers there are no ill effects from wind turbines without offering any precautionary advice as the NHMRC has previously done?**
2. The AMA states “The available Australian and international evidence does not support the view that the infrasound or low frequency sound generated by wind farms, as they are currently regulated in Australia, causes adverse health effects on populations residing in their vicinity.” **Is the AMA aware of Neil Kelley’s research presented to the American Wind Energy Association conference in 1987 discussing the known impact of wind turbine noise on communities or the 2004 presentation to the Australian Wind Energy Association by Vesta turbine manufacturer employee Erik Sloth acknowledging the noise impact on residents “even if the noise is below noise limits”?**
3. The AMA states “The infrasound and low frequency sound generated by modern wind farms in Australia is well below the level where known health effects occur.” **Given that all State guidelines only stipulate allowable audible noise levels of between 35 – 40 dbA and neither they or wind industry consultants account for or measure infrasound how can you state this?**
4. **If infrasound levels inside the residences in the general vicinity of wind farms were found to be above normal rural levels would this be of concern to the AMA?**
5. **Given infrasound is not mentioned in any State guidelines or measured routinely by any government agency how can the AMA be confident infrasound levels in the vicinity of wind farms are at an acceptable level?**
6. The problem with the lack of such measurement is that the guidelines, which we understand were designed by the wind industry, totally ignore the large infrasound component of wind turbine noise, which is the primary cause of adverse health impacts. **Does this flaw in the guidelines concern the AMA?**

7. **Does the AMA acknowledge that chronic sleep deprivation can lead to adverse health impacts?**
8. **Does the AMA acknowledge that noise can be a primary factor in chronic sleep deprivation?**
9. **Does the AMA acknowledge a primary complaint of residents near wind farms is sleep deprivation?**
10. **The AMA acknowledges that wind turbines produce infrasound that is often inaudible to the human ear. Does the AMA acknowledge that some frequencies in the infrasound spectrum and length of exposure present dangers to human health?**
11. The AMA states “All modern wind turbines in Australia are designed to be upwind of local populations, with the blade in front. These upwind turbines generate much lower levels of infrasound and low frequency sound.” This statement is factually incorrect, patently ridiculous and reveals the author of the statement has a poor understanding of the issue as any wind farm will be upwind of some residents and downwind of others, moreover when the wind changes, as it does most days, the situation will be reversed. **Does the AMA acknowledge this statement is false and misleading?**
12. The AMA by stating “Wind turbine technology is considered a comparatively inexpensive and effective means of energy production” ignores the vast amount of industry data that shows wind energy is two to three times more expensive than the major generation sources of coal and gas. Wind energy is intermittent and not demand driven, but controlled entirely by the vagaries of the weather being therefore anything but an effective contributor to the electricity grid. **Why was a highly contestable statement relating to the cost and effectiveness of wind energy used in a position statement on the health effects of wind turbines?**
13. **On what basis is the AMA qualified to offer opinions on their perceptions of over-rigorous regulation of wind farms by government and of what relevance is this to health issues?**
14. **Given a 2011 senate inquiry chaired by a Greens party senator under the Gillard government recommended comprehensive medical and acoustical research into the impacts of wind farms and that the NHMRC in 2010 and 2013 called for more research, as well as the Abbott government commitment to research on this issue why has the AMA issued a position statement on the same subject but stayed silent on further research?**
15. In its position statement the AMA has given its opinion on the over-rigorous regulation of wind farms, the cost and effectiveness of wind energy, as well as offering advice on community consultation and planning. **Does the AMA acknowledge these statements give the impression the association is actively advocating in support of the wind industry?**

The Foundation has been concerned about the economic and environmental impacts of wind turbine operation as well as the mounting evidence relating to adverse health impacts for a number of years and has based our advocacy on the available evidence and science.

The AMA and its members have rightfully occupied a position of trust within the community over many years and we would therefore be grateful if you could help us understand the evidence on which association's position on wind farms and health is based.

Yours sincerely,

Max Rheese  
Executive Director,  
Australian Environment Foundation