How the factoid of wind turbines causing ‘vibroacoustic disease’ came to be ‘irrefutably demonstrated’

Chapman S. and St George A. Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health 2013; 33: 244-249
(from the Public Health Association of Australia website)

This paper documents a number of issues around the term ‘vibroacoustic disease’, which is said to be a multi-system illness brought about by chronic exposure to large pressure amplitude and low frequency noise.

The authors searched peer-reviewed journals and found 35 papers referring to vibroacoustic disease in which the term did not refer to either an ultrasound measurement or an occupational measure of noise. All but one of those papers has authors from the same Portuguese research group, suggesting a small network of people who use the term. The papers cited each other vigorously, again suggesting a small network of people who use the term, and lack of acknowledgement of or interest in the term outside that group.

None of the papers contained any reference to wind turbines. All were published before 2007.

The authors searched Google for links between vibroacoustic disease and wind, returning 24,700 hits. The first reference to vibroacoustic disease being caused by wind turbines was contained in a press release issued by the Portuguese group on 31 May 2007. This press release promoted a talk to be given by one of the Portuguese group referring to two case studies. The case studies describe various symptoms in one family living near wind turbines, and another not living near a wind farm but provided no evidence of illness nor of a link to wind turbines, the authors say.

The authors conclude that:

- vibroacoustic disease is of limited interest to anybody other than one group of researchers, and should be considered a ‘non-disease’
- the case studies do not demonstrate any link between vibroacoustic disease, should it exist, and wind turbines
- the use of the term vibroacoustic disease is an attempt to pull together common health conditions such as tiredness, sleeping problems and high blood pressure into memorable quasi-scientific sounding entities
- the press release saying that the case studies ‘irrefutably demonstrate’ a link between wind turbines and vibroacoustic disease is misleading.