

WIND TURBINE IMPACTS ECHO SEASICKNESS

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WIND turbine health impacts can be like seasickness, according to a recently retired consultant physician.

Dr Wayne Spring said, much like seasickness, wind turbines may not affect everyone exposed, but those affected could suffer disabling symptoms including nausea, vertigo, sleep disturbance and a sense of feeling unwell.

Dr Spring was a Consultant Physician in regional Victoria for 33 years, including 20 years as a Ballarat-based sleep specialist, and cared for patients who lived near wind turbines.

“I’ve spent my whole life as a physician interviewing patients, assessing their symptoms and looking at their individual circumstances. I object when people are vilified because they have a range of symptoms that they claim are related to wind turbines. I object that they are sometimes labelled malingerers just because there is no current scientific evidence to attribute these symptoms to their proximity and presumed sensitivity to wind turbines,” Dr Spring said.

“This labelling is often done by non-medical professionals who do not have the experience in interviewing, or even the contact with, individual patients.”

He said while people with seasickness were generally sympathised with, people without any medical qualifications were quick to malign and criticise people who suffered symptoms possibly from wind turbine activity.

Dr Spring said as a sleep specialist he only saw patients who were referred to him by their GPs and therefore the actual number of patients who were suffering from wind turbine health impacts was probably far greater.

“Some affected people go to other locations to sleep in an effort to cope and some people have just sold up and moved away,” he said.

“Another confounding factor is that farmers with wind turbines on their farms are bound by confidentiality agreements so that complaints cannot be made.

“It has always struck me how stoical country patients are and, of this stoical population, the most stoical are farmers and this group makes up a large part of the complainants. As doctors we are trained to listen to patients and note their symptoms. If we do not have an adequate scientific explanation, we do not just dismiss them; rather we investigate and if no explanation is found we continue to observe them to see what develops. We do not tell them they are ‘imagining things’ unless we have incontrovertible evidence to prove that.”

Dr Spring cautioned both the critics of wind turbine health sufferers and government authorities to not be so quick to dismiss people who were

experiencing troubling symptoms near wind turbines just because of the current lack of scientific evidence, particularly when new generation turbines are so much bigger than those near his former patients.

Donald Thomas thought wind turbines were the way of the future, until they were switched on next door to his parents' property at Waubra. Now he wants to arm people with information so that they can make informed choices about putting wind turbines in their backyard.

"When they proposed a wind farm at Waubra I got some fact sheets about wind farms and I was enthusiastically promoting them, but once they started up I soon changed my mind," Donald said.

Donald's parents have turbines on three sides of their 225 acre property and the closest is 1200 metres away.

"Sometimes we heard a high-pitched noise, like a generator or fan. I thought these were just teething problems. I then started to feel pressure in my ears, sinus pain and get really intense headaches. It was like a band around your forehead and someone was tightening it up. I thought I must've had a problem with my neck," he said.

"One day my parents both experienced bad headaches. A few days later I was at a community event and overheard some women talking about bad headaches they'd had, and I said 'Was this last Thursday?' They couldn't believe it happened to us too. Those ladies have since left the area."

He said initially there wasn't a complaints register, so a lot of the people who were affected early on left without their complaints being documented.

Donald said one of the reasons he was vocal was to stop the same thing from happening to anyone else. "There are more than 1000 new turbines planned for western Victoria alone and they will be up to four times the rotor sweeps of those at Waubra. Combine these huge size increases with a much greater population exposure and I believe we will have a major problem on our hands. And the EPA is still not tasked with independent noise testing in Victoria."

"Until they fully recognise the health impacts on people, the regulations aren't going to change. They need to do bigger, independent studies. If special audible characteristics were recognised, and enforced, then they wouldn't be allowed to run the turbines at Waubra."

Donald said the constant criticism aimed at him, his family and members of his community was the most difficult thing to endure.

"It wears you down. You have your really bad days. I'd like the wind companies to take some ownership for what they're doing to people. That's why we have to get information out there to inform people. Don't believe everything the companies are telling you. Come and speak to us, who have to live with turbines every day."

