

Wind storm

Channel 9 Sixty Minutes Story About the Toora Wind Farm, Victoria.

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We thought a story about the pros and cons of windmills, wind power, would be pretty harmless. Not on your life. Even before we started filming, the industry was mobilising.

A message went out from the Australian Wind Energy Association asking supporters to help stop this story. Sorry folks. Wind power might be promoted as an answer to global warming — a cheap, environmentally friendly source of electricity — but it's causing one hell of a stink in once-peaceful little communities.

So far, the industry's not generating much power, but it's certainly generating plenty of heat.

Transcript

CHARLES WOOLEY: Around the world in some of the most beautiful places, they're appearing. In the green coastal hills of Victoria's Gippsland, along the blustery western ridge lines of Britain and the storm-tossed cliff tops of Tasmania, towering turbines are sprouting everywhere. And according to many environmentalists, they are far from clean and green.

DAVID BELLAMY: Why are you importing these bits and pieces, sticking them up in the air and looking at that wonderful phallic symbol as green? It's not green at all. There is nothing green about this landscape and there's nothing green about these weapons of mass destruction ... because basically, that's what they are.

CHARLES WOOLEY: British environmentalist Professor David Bellamy once campaigned to save the Franklin River. Now he's back in Australia, this time tilting at windmills. Look, there is a perceived energy crisis. Here is something perceptible, something concrete.

DAVID BELLAMY: Something perceptible, but something contrary to common sense.

CHARLES WOOLEY: This wind farm at Toora, in Victoria's South Gippsland, is the first of many planned for this lovely coastline. When the wind's blowing, and only when the wind is blowing, these 12 turbines can provide electricity for up to 9000 homes. But according to Professor Bellamy, they are a blight on the landscape.

DAVID BELLAMY: Because they do chop up birds, because they do spook bats, because they do reduce the value of property and they screw up the tourist industry. That's what really gets up my nose. But the really ... the thing ... they don't work. They don't produce enough electricity to make it worthwhile to stuff the landscape and stuff people's lives.

STEVE GARITO: Basically we've been terrorised by these things since they've been up.

CHARLES WOOLEY: Terrorised?

STEVE GARITO: Terrorised. That's the only way I can put it.

CHARLES WOOLEY: Steve and Jane Garito live next door to the Toora turbines and they say their intimidating giant presence and incessant low-pitched hum has destroyed their dream of a sea change in these rolling green hills.

JANE GARITO: It is a dripping tap. It just doesn't stop.

STEVE GARITO: So that noise is there 24 hours a day — it was used in Nazi Germany in the Second World War as an instrument of torture because it is such a depressing, monotonous, continual overriding beat. You cannot escape it.

CHARLES WOOLEY: The Garitos' lives are now in limbo. They say they can't sell their cottage because its value has plummeted since the wind farm, but they can't live with it either. Then there's the added stress of a nasty intimidation campaign sparked by their opposition to the turbines.

STEVE GARITO: The shed's been threatened to be burnt down. I've received a death threat in the mail.

CHARLES WOOLEY: So it has divided the community.

STEVE GARITO: Yes, most definitely.

CHARLES WOOLEY: Is there a problem? Just how divided this community has become, I was about to find out.

MAN: Well, you've got no f***ing right, have you?

CHARLES WOOLEY: No right?

MAN: Put that f***ing thing down.

CHARLES WOOLEY: There's no need for that.

MAN: There is.

CHARLES WOOLEY: Down the road from the Garitos, one of the neighbours took exception to our unauthorised look at the wind turbines that have so upset the young couple.

MAN: Of course I'm f***ing upset.

CHARLES WOOLEY: No, we'll leave.

This is a measure of the anger that now pervades South Gippsland. The turbines have been built on farmland by power companies willing to pay substantial rents, but only landholders hosting the turbines get anything out of it and that's made a lot of their neighbours very angry.

MAN AT PROTEST RALLY: Flog them, beat them, write one letter, write two letters.

MAN 2 AT PROTEST RALLY: ...which causes cancer and kills people in the La Trobe Valley.

CHARLES WOOLEY: The prospect of many more turbines dominating the entire coastline is further inflaming feelings.

MAN AT PROTEST RALLY: At the moment, it is the cheapest form of renewable energy.

CHARLES WOOLEY: In this town hall showdown, it's farmer against farmer, local versus local and even greenie against greenie.

DAVID BELLAMY: Ruining people's lives. If you think that's green, mate, go back and campaign somewhere else.

CHARLES WOOLEY: This is exactly the same battle being fought in many countries. A world away in the highlands of central Wales, it's the same argument.

GORDON JAMES: It's all that and that is why wind energy is the fastest source of energy globally because they do work.

CHARLES WOOLEY: Gordon James is an energy campaigner with the international conservation group Friends of the Earth.

GORDON JAMES: I do not accept that figure.

DAVID BELLAMY: You won't accept any of the other side's figures.

CHARLES WOOLEY: Once these two greenies were brothers in arms, but Professor Bellamy's opposition to wind farms has made them implacable foes.

DAVID BELLAMY: Why start with wind in a beautiful place like this? In your national forest.

GORDON JAMES: I'm Welsh, I'm local. Don't you come here and tell me what I should do with my countryside. I love the Welsh countryside and the Welsh culture. And a lot of people, passionate Welshmen, support wind energy.

CHARLES WOOLEY: Cefn Croes is the latest and biggest wind farm in Wales in an area that literally bristles with turbines. Mushrooming through the alpine heathlands and along ancient droving paths, hundreds of steel towers pierce the sky. They're part of a vast network of almost 2000 windmills across Britain that generate probably not much more than one percent of the nation's power.

KAY LITTLE: They're planning about 800 more. They're paying thousands for the spine, the heart, of mid Wales. They are ripping out the heart of mid Wales.

CHARLES WOOLEY: Dr Kay Little is an English settler, while Brynmor Morgan is an eighth-generation Welsh farmer. They see themselves as custodians of one of Wales's last wild areas. This is the mountain stronghold of the red kite, riding the same westerly blasts that the wind farmers wish to tame.

BRYNMOR MORGAN: I think people are just being brainwashed. But the bottom line is there is a tremendous landscape impact of such a development and I think that the chickens are coming home to roost before long and people will realise the errors of their way.

CHARLES WOOLEY: Driving the push for wind power and the government subsidies it generates is the world concern about global warming. Our planet is heating up faster than ever before and already we're seeing the consequences in wild and erratic weather. Coal-fired power stations have been singled out as a major source of greenhouse gases.

DR JAMES LOVELOCK: If we go on doing what we're doing, we cross a threshold and once past that threshold, the world just goes on warming up, even if we become absolutely squeaky clean from that moment onwards. It will go on warming up so that all of the ice of Greenland and much of it in west Antarctica will melt and most of civilisation will be under water. That will kill not just a few thousand, but probably billions of people.

CHARLES WOOLEY: Professor James Lovelock is one of the world's leading environmental scientists. This distinguished British researcher warns the climate clock is already at five minutes to midnight. Now, in Australia, we're being told that wind power is one of the answers.

DR JAMES LOVELOCK: I wish it were, but it's not. At the best, wind power cannot provide more than a tiny fraction of the energy needs of civilisation. It's a nice idea. It looks good. It's showy. I think it's one of those things politicians like because it can be seen that they're doing something. But in practice, it's not really a useful remedy.

CHARLES WOOLEY: If the answer isn't blowing in the wind, then could it be found here? It's with some trepidation that I've come to visit Britain's Sizewell nuclear station. For me, its forbidding presence conjures up memories of the horrors of Chernobyl and Three Mile Island. It seems almost heresy to think that here could be a solution to our energy crisis. Well, considering all the security I've gone through to get here it looks fairly benign, doesn't it? But in fact, finally I've got to the top of the pile, the nuclear pile, that is. I am standing on the top of a working nuclear reactor. And it's a very different story, because a growing number of scientists in Britain today are saying that global warming is a consequence of our profligate use of oil and coal, is in fact a greater and more present danger and that rather than fearing nuclear power, we should actually be embracing it as a solution.

DR JAMES LOVELOCK: We're a bit like the Victorians. We're about Dracula and ghosts and things like that. We've built up a fear, almost a superstitious fear of things nuclear that is far beyond reality. It's not particularly dangerous.

CHARLES WOOLEY: Back in Australia, nuclear is very much a dirty word. Here at Bald Hills in Gippsland, Lindsay Marriott is in for quite a windfall if his eight wind towers are built, as much as \$80,000 a year in royalties from the power company. But this might make you a pariah with your neighbours?

LINDSAY MARRIOTT: Charles, I go out in the community regularly and I speak to a lot of people all the time who tell me I'm doing the right thing.

CHARLES WOOLEY: But not all his neighbours are happy. Grazier Rob Liley will overlook

the wind farm and he's devastated.

ROB LILEY: It's going to be in my face all day. This is my workplace. This is where I work and my staff work. The only time it's not going to be in our face is when we're in the house.

CHARLES WOOLEY: Is this a matter of NIMBY, though, not in my backyard?

ROB LILEY: Of course it's NIMBY. Yeah, I'm a card-carrying member, fully paid up, don't worry about that. If I don't look after my backyard, who's going to?

CHARLES WOOLEY: This turbulent debate is far from over. And worldwide, the turbines continue their inexorable march across the countryside, whether it's science or subsidy, environmentalism or NIMBYism, be it Gippsland or Wales, the wind blows strongest in the most beautiful places and so does the argument.

BRYNMOR MORGAN: I know Merlin the wizard is no longer here in Wales, but maybe one of these days, these constructions, these turbine will just snap in half and come tumbling down on the ground and by God, that will be hallelujah, hallelujah.

<http://sixtyminutes.ninemsn.com.au/stories/charleswooley/259238/wind-storm>