

Turbines almost get the all-clear

The Australian

Pia Akerman - February 25, 2014

NHMRC chief executive Warwick Anderson said work so far showed only seven studies worldwide were reliable enough to draw conclusions. "It's clear that further high quality research is needed, particularly exploring some of those health-related effects," he said. "At that stage we will consider calling for specific research to attack these particular gaps in knowledge."

Existing research on the health effects of wind farms is insufficient and substandard, according to the peak national medical research body, which will seek fresh scientific study proposals.

The National Health and Medical Research Council has released a draft information paper based on an examination of existing international studies, concluding there was "no consistent direct evidence" to show exposure to wind farms was associated with any health outcome.

"The few associations reported by individual studies could have been due to chance," it said. "The body of evidence relating to wind farms and health is small and of poor quality. The direct evidence showed no consistent association between wind farms and health effects; but there was consistent evidence that proximity to wind farms is associated with annoyance and, less consistently, with sleep disturbance and poorer quality of life."

Some residents living near wind turbines have reported suffering headaches, inability to sleep, nausea and anxiety.

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Wind farm advocates said the paper was "another tick of approval" for the industry. Clean Energy Council policy director Russell Marsh says it should "give peace of mind to those living near operating or proposed wind farms that their health will not be adversely affected".

The Waubra Foundation, which has spearheaded calls for more research, said the NHMRC had excluded some work completed after its 2012 cut-off point, and a 1980s study showing links between old turbine models and health effects.

The NHMRC has stressed that although annoyance, poor sleep and reduced quality of life may be associated with wind farms, there is insufficient evidence to show they are the cause.

Public health expert Bruce Armstrong, who leads the NHMRC reference group on wind farms and human health, said annoyance could spring from the turbines' visual impact as well

as any noise. The NHMRC stands by its 2010 recommendation for authorities to take a precautionary approach when approving wind farms.