

Wind turbine syndrome is spread by scaremongers, new study finds

March 19 2013, by Simon Chapman



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

A [study of mine](#) published last night delivers a double whammy to those who argue that wind turbines cause health problems in communities.

Earlier this week researchers at the University of Auckland published an [experimental study](#) showing that people primed by watching online

information about [health problems](#) from wind turbines, reported more symptoms after being exposed to recorded infrasound or to sham (fake) infrasound.

The study provided powerful evidence for the nocebo [hypothesis](#): the idea that anxiety and fear about wind turbines being spread about by anti-wind farm groups, will cause some people hearing this scary stuff to get those symptoms.

The [double whammy](#) for the scaremongers comes in the form of an historical audit of all complaints made about wind farm noise or health problems on all of Australia's 49 wind farms. Australia's first wind farm, which still operates today, started [generating power](#) in 1993 at Esperance in [Western Australia](#). Twenty years on, our 49 wind farms have seen 1471 turbines turning for a cumulative total of 328 years.

In recent years, and particularly since 2009, we've heard a lot about health complaints involving wind turbines, thanks to the efforts of groups such as the Waubra Foundation (none of whose directors live in or near the Victorian town of Waubra) and the interconnected Landscape Guardians. And, just as the nocebo hypothesis would predict, the great bulk of health and noise complaints have arisen since 2009: 82% of complainants made their first complaint after that date.

There are some 32,677 people living within 5km of these 49 wind farms around Australia, and just 120 – or one in 272 – of them have ever made formal complaints, appeared in news reports or sent complaining submissions to government. Moreover, 81 (68%) of these are people living near just five wind farms, each of which have been heavily targeted by wind farm opponent groups.

Our study tested four hypotheses relevant to the nocebo hypothesis:

- Many wind farms of comparable power would have no history of health or noise complaints from nearby residents (suggesting that factors that don't relate to the turbines may explain the presence or absence of complaints)
- Wind farms which had been subject to complaints would have only a small number of such complaining residents among those living near the farms (suggesting that individual or social factors may be required to explain different "susceptibility")
- Few wind farms would have any history of complaints consistent with recent claims that turbines cause acute health problems (suggesting that explanations beyond turbines are needed to explain why acute problems are reported)
- Most health and noise complaints would date from after the advent of anti-wind farm groups beginning to foment concerns about health (from around 2009) and that wind farms subject to organised opposition would be more likely to have histories of complaint than those not exposed to such opposition (suggesting that health concerns may reflect "communicated" anxieties).

All four hypotheses were strongly supported by our study:

- Almost two thirds (63%) of all wind farms, including half of those with large (>1MW) turbines which opponents particularly demonise, have never been the subject of complaint
- The proportion of nearby residents complaining is minuscule
- Some complainants took many years to voice their first complaint, when wind farm opponents regularly warn that the ill effects can be almost instant
- Health complaints were as rare as proverbial rocking horse droppings until the scare-mongering groups began megaphoning their apocalyptic, scary messages to rural residents.

The first records of claims being made that wind turbines could cause health problems date from 2003, when a British GP wrote an unpublished report about just 36 people scattered around the UK who all said the turbines made them ill.

A Victorian country GP followed this up with an even smaller study in 2004, where after dropping 25 questionnaires to people living near the local turbines, eight reported problems like sleep difficulties, stress and dizziness.



Health complaints were rare until the wind turbine scare-mongering began.
Credit: Tejvan Photos

Among the many problems with this study is the fact that in any

community, regardless of the presence or absence of wind turbines, about a quarter to a third will have sleep problems, nearly half will have had a headache in the last week, and nearly one in six will have felt dizzy. When someone suggests that wind turbines – which some rural people don't much like the look of – might be causing such problems, this "rural myth" gets traction.

The rhino in the room for those who would dismiss the nocebo hypothesis is the small problem-ette of explaining why there are so many thousands of people living near wind farms who never complain. And of why between 1993 and 2004, there were no health complaints but 13 [wind farms](#) operating, including five with large turbines.

The standard response is that only some people are "susceptible", just like only some people get motion sickness. Our data produce big problems for that explanation: it is implausible that no susceptible people would live around any wind farm in Western Australia where there have been zero complaints, around almost all older farms, nor around nearly half of the more recent farms. No credible hypotheses other than those implicating psycho-social factors have been advanced to explain this variability.

In the early days, those who didn't like the turbines, complained that they looked ugly and were blots on pristine bush landscapes. A few worried that they might kill birds and bats (they do, but at a tiny fraction of the rate that plate glass, cars and feral cats kill). But as this lengthy [2004 report](#) shows, health problems were rarely mentioned, with the few who did being seen as doing the cause no favours.

But then opponents decided to push the health issue: when someone says they are ill, you are supposed to be sympathetic, not sceptical. It was always going to be a winning strategy. My collection of health problems opponents have named now numbers 216.

Until now, this strategy has worked well for them, but the two studies now out should pour a large bucket of cold water on this core claim, as should even cursory consideration of the weird and wonderful claims being made by some of their leaders.

Australia's high priestess of wind turbine syndrome, the unregistered doctor Sarah Laurie claimed last year that vibrations from [wind turbines](#) can "perceptibly rock stationary cars even further than a kilometre away from the nearest wind turbine" and that turbines can make people's lips vibrate "as from a distance of 10km away".

A pharmacist from near Yass in NSW, George Papadopoulos, claims to be able to experience the "problem" at remarkable distances,

"Where does the problem stop? This is a difficult question to answer. On two occasions when the ILFN (infrasound and low frequency noise) nuisance was at its worst, I travelled out west. On one occasion I discovered that it appeared to have dissipated at Wee Jasper, 70km away from the closest turbines. On another occasion, and by far the worst of all days, the problem had dissipated when arriving at Young about 100km from the closest turbines."

But don't worry –Mr Papadopoulos assures us:

"Truly these figures appear subjective, outrageous, and for most, impossible to believe. However, I am reporting my findings that have taken hours and days to determine. I'm not just plucking figures out of the air."

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