

Questions arise over CSIRO wind farm report

BY BRENDAN GULLIFER

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A REPORT claiming strong community support for wind farms, including Hepburn, has raised questions about the independence of Australia's peak scientific body.

The 81-page CSIRO study found negative media reporting of wind farm issues did not correlate with positive community views.

The Courier was not included in the examination of wind farm articles across 19 newspapers against community attitudes.

But the involvement of local green entrepreneur Simon Holmes a Court as well as the CSIRO's alleged close links to wind developers drew criticism yesterday.

CSIRO deputy director of energy technology Dr Jim Smitham called the study "a snapshot" and similar to research undertaken across all energy sectors.

He said the CSIRO had previously worked with the wind industry but denied bias.

He said the study was not designed to examine alleged health impacts on those living near turbines.

But Moorabool mayor Pat Griffin, Ballarat-based Senator John Madigan and state Member for Western Victoria Simon Ramsay questioned the report's findings, as did Liberal environment spokesman Greg Hunt.

"I've dealt with the CSIRO for over 30 years on a professional basis and find it staggering that it has put out such a biased report," Cr Griffin said.

Senator Madigan questioned the involvement of Mr Holmes a Court, who is Hepburn Wind chairman.

"Additionally, I've only become aware today that the CSIRO has a division that I believe is involved in the siting of wind farms," Senator Madigan said. "Therefore, is the CSIRO unbiased on this issue?"

Federal Liberal Mr Hunt said he had "enormous respect" for the CSIRO.

"But I do think it is important that in a debate on significant community and environmental issues all voices are heard."

Green groups such as the Clean Energy Council welcomed the study, saying community support for wind was "much stronger" than reported in the media.

Cam Walker from Friends of the Earth called the report "an excellent piece of research".

Mr Holmes a Court did not respond to a media inquiry.

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