

“Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks!”*

by Stuart Sexton

I recently took a cruise through the Baltic Sea region, and was ‘blown away’ by the large numbers of wind turbines along the coastlines of Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands; not so much by their placement, as the coastal winds from the North Sea and the Baltic blew constantly, but by the fact that such enormous objects were located in such scenic surroundings. Often in Australia we hear criticism about using wind turbines to generate power because they are ugly, noisy, and disturb the environment and the landscape. Yet in Northern Europe, dozens and even hundreds of wind turbines stand just offshore well within sight of nearby towns and beaches. Holland for example has more than 2000 turbines, some even in the suburbs of Amsterdam as well as along the rivers and foreshores. The arguments against turbines seem to be well and truly quelled in these countries.

I have done a little research to try and discover what has motivated the deployment of so many turbines. Some reasons are obvious: there is plenty of wind along these coasts for a start, and if you are thinking about renewable energy there, wind offers much more capacity than solar or hydro power. But why go for wind turbines in such a big way?

The example of Denmark is illuminating. Denmark has no coal resources and diminishing North Sea oil and gas, so from 1997 there were to be no new coal-fired power stations, and existing coal power stations will be converted or decommissioned by 2030. The choice for the Danes was to become more dependent on imported gas and oil, or look for other energy alternatives, in particular non-polluting power generation to meet environmental standards. So by 2000, wind power provided about 14% of total power, and this is planned to increase to 40%-50% by 2030.

Where can wind turbines be located in Denmark? There are many in rural Jutland, but the majority are being located offshore as there is limited available land. So apparently Denmark has become reconciled to the sight of rows and rows of turbines slowly rotating along its coastline. Denmark has in fact become a major exporter of wind technology and equipment.

Holland too is moving rapidly to embrace wind power. Rows of turbines march across the countryside within sight of Amsterdam (pictured), and I was awed as our ship passed some turbines more than 100 metres tall. I noted that they were almost completely silent from about 50 metres away, and some bases had even been painted shades of green – to blend in with the landscape perhaps!

As a sidelight, our attention was drawn to two power stations on the outskirts of Amsterdam that are using ‘clean coal’ technology. I

have no information on how ‘clean’, but it was interesting to note that the technology is in operation – why not in Australia with our dependence on coal for power?

Having seen so many turbines together, I have begun to think that it is possible to come to terms with them, to the extent of not even noticing them in the landscape. One problem is that birds are killed by them, and research is continuing to try and overcome this issue. But otherwise, I think that wind power deserves serious consideration for Australia, if we can overcome our aversion to

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IT'S A VILLAGE OUT THERE

having them where our winds are strongest – particularly along the coastline.

It is a hopeful sign that the NSW Government last February identified five possible wind farm sites in rural NSW, and the responses from some local people were positive. Let’s hope that Mr Rees and Ms Tebbutt can get these plans into operation. Surely these would qualify as worthwhile infrastructure projects.

One other thing impressed me: most countries in Europe and Scandinavia are already committed to moving away from fossil fuels in the very near term. In this respect they are far ahead of Australia; can we

see Australia moving

away from coal completely by 2030? Of course, the economic implications are huge for us, but in the long term so are the climatic effects if we cannot reduce our greenhouse emissions substantially.

At the local household level we are all conscious of the need to use power more efficiently, but in the end we as a country need to do more. Over to you Mr Rudd and Senator Wong!

* from *King Lear* by Shakespeare



Wind turbines are common in Northern Europe