

## Not on my beach, please

*Across the world, wind technology produces as much political heat as electric light—stirring local arguments as well as global ones.*



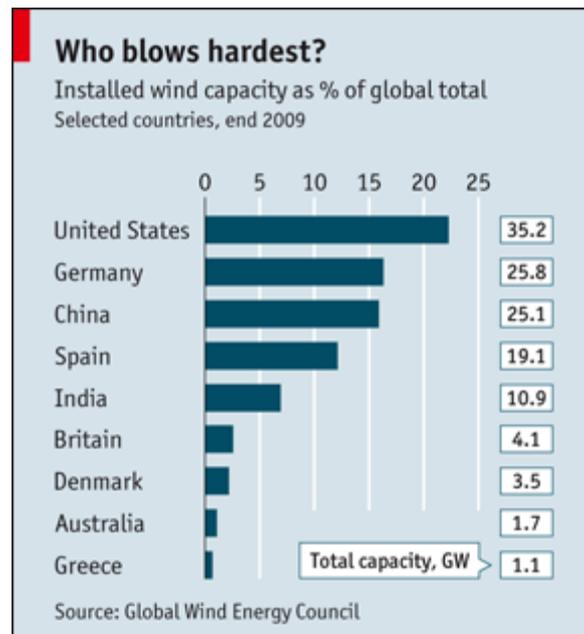
"OF COURSE I'm all in favour of clean energy, especially wind power, but..." That is a familiar opening gambit in a new sort of political storm, raging ever more fiercely in corners of the world where electric power comes, or may soon come, from flashing blades rather than blazing furnaces.

The odd thing about conflicts over wind is that, usually, each side claims to be greener than the other. Opponents say a unique landscape or seascape is being overshadowed, to the detriment of tourists and residents alike. Wind power does undoubtedly pose some hazard to birds and other fauna; some say it harms humans. Others simply find wind turbines ugly, an eyesore in any location. Yet, compared with other power sources, the green credentials of wind are pretty convincing: it creates no waste, uses no water and (unlike solar panels) doesn't need much room.

As an example of a green-on-green row, take one in Maine, where environmentalists squabble over plans to expand a wind farm on the wilderness of Kibby Mountain. Opponents say the lynx and other species will be disturbed; they hate the fact that the wind farm's builders, TransCanada, are also engaged in tar-sands extraction in Alberta. Supporters retort that global warming, which wind and other renewable energies help to avert, would not be good for big cats or the trees they prowl round. On August 5th, TransCanada announced that it was scaling back its expansion plan after running into resistance from state regulators.

Meanwhile in Scotland's border country, David Bellamy, a broadcaster on wildlife, has joined the campaign against a wind farm in the rugged Lammermuir Hills. This row is not just green-on-green, but blueblood-against-blueblood. The Duke of Roxburghe wants to host the turbines; his neighbour, the Duke of Northumberland, opposes them.

Tempers run extra-high when the locations are glamorous and global celebrities are involved. Take Robert Kennedy junior, an environmental lawyer who helped to clean up New York's Hudson River. He has been part of a campaign to stop a \$1 billion sea-based project, called Cape Wind, that was approved by the Obama administration in April. If it proceeds, it will be America's first offshore wind park, with an impressive capacity of 468 megawatts. The country has been a leader in land-based turbines but lags behind China and Europe in sea-based efforts. Among its many benefits, the park would meet the electricity needs of a gorgeous strip of coast where Kennedys and other grand folk have been summering for several generations. But it is a blessing those blazer-wearing, bourbon-sipping vacationers could do without.



Ken Salazar, America's secretary of the interior, said he gave his approval only after making adjustments to parry all objectors. The number of turbines was cut from 170 to 130, in part to reduce the "visual impact" suffered by the Kennedys' fabled compound. The wind park has been moved farther away from Nantucket island and its breadth has been reduced to make it less visible to holidaymakers there. The minimum distance from the mainland is now 5.2 nautical miles; Nantucket town is 14 miles away from the proposed blades.

But the Kennedys, as well as humbler sorts nearby, such as the owners of homes, boats and businesses, have not been persuaded. Before his death in 2009, Senator Ted Kennedy (Robert's uncle) had denounced the project as a "special-interest giveaway". Scott Brown, the Republican who took his place in the Senate, is following suit; he has likened the park to putting turbines in the Grand Canyon. In some local matters, even right-wing climate sceptics and climate-conscious lefties concur.

On a recent August day in Hyannis, the mood seemed carefree as tourists tucked into fish lunches or boarded ships for the islands. But in the naysayers' view, it is precisely these idyllic scenes that are under threat from machines that may cover an area the size of Manhattan and be taller (at 134 metres) than the Statue of Liberty. "It would be like industrialising the Sound," says Audra Parker, head of the Alliance to Protect Nantucket Sound, a protest group.

A study by the Beacon Hill Institute, a free-market think-tank associated with Boston's Suffolk University, lists a sharp drop in tourist spending among the economic costs the project would impose; it would not be viable at all without a vast subsidy from state and federal taxpayers, the report argues. But Mr Salazar insists that the Cape Wind project is not only desirable in itself, but a precursor to other wind parks on America's Atlantic coast, which has up to 1m megawatts of capacity.

One place where aesthetes and sceptics seem to have prevailed is the Greek island of Serifos, where plans were announced in 2007 to build 87 turbines of similar height to the ones proposed for Massachusetts. Critics felt the blades would disturb the 100,000 tourists who visit every year. "The project was way too large for our island," says Angeliki Synodinou, the mayor. Another foe of the plan, Daphne Mavrogiorgos, said the turbines would have been almost as high as the island's loftiest peak. Speaking for Elliniki Etaireia, an NGO which defends the Aegean's ecology, she said turbines are both desirable and aesthetically fine, but the scale must be right.

Yet advocates of wind insist that tourists and turbines can go together. In 2002, a survey of visitors to the west of Scotland (where wind farms abound) found that only 8% said their feelings were negatively affected by the blades; some 43% said the mills made them feel better about the region. "In China and Poland people go to wind farms to have wedding pictures taken," notes Steve Sawyer, of the Brussels-based Global Wind Energy Council.

Apart from aesthetics, the threat to migratory birds is the most frequently cited argument against wind farms. Since June, Cape Wind has faced a legal challenge from a group that includes Californians who normally lobby in favour of renewable energy. Their case is that the park could violate the Endangered Species Act and the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

In the Australian state of Victoria, concern over the threat that turbines could pose to the rare orange-bellied parrot nearly put paid to a wind farm, the Bald Hills project, in 2006. Earlier this year, the spectacular bird was again in the eye of an Australian storm, this time over another, larger wind park in Victoria, even though research had suggested that the threat to parrots is small. The park is going ahead.\*

Some Australians fret more about the effect of turbines on humans. Residents of Waubra, a town near Victoria's biggest wind generator, recently complained that low-frequency noise was causing headaches and earaches. Noel Dean, a local farmer, said he had to move his family away. He then commissioned a report that seemed to confirm his view.

But the Australian National Health and Medical Research Council, which advises the federal government, thinks otherwise. In a report published in July it concluded there was no scientific evidence to suggest that noise, flickering shadows or glinting blades made people sick. It found that a wind farm with ten turbines made much less din than an office; in fact, only about the level that might be found in a quiet bedroom, or in a rural area at night. Britain's National Health Service agrees: having studied the available research, it finds no proof of harm from turbines.

In practice, the way people feel about windmills may have as much to do with financial effects as with physical ones. Many people fear that turbines will instantly depress the value of property nearby, even if it enriches those whose land is used. Research in America and Britain suggests there is no consistent relationship between blades and property prices. But if enough people expect a negative effect, the fear will be self-fulfilling.

According to Australia's Clean Energy Council, an industry association, wind farms divide rural communities. On one side are those who are well paid by power companies for the right to set up turbines; on the other are their neighbours who gain nothing but a darkened skyline. Perhaps not surprisingly, the council found that people who benefited from turbines could endure the noise "despite exposure to similar sound levels as people who were not economically benefiting".

### Learning Danish

Both Australia and Greece have looked at how Denmark has fared with its community-owned wind farms. Danish lessons were used in the Australian town of Daylesford, where wind power has been accepted by the whole population, in the form of a two-turbine station meeting the needs of the area's 2,300 homes. The project, known as Hepburn Wind, grew out of a campaign by a few devotees to educate people about clean energy. They then raised about A\$8 million (\$7.2m) from the locals. Simon Holmes à Court, one of the founders, says a "wind rush" by big developers in Victoria a few years ago turned some citizens off. Hepburn took a different line, with consultation and co-ownership.

Wind doesn't always lead to political problems. In several countries where it flourishes—such as Germany, China and Spain—the technology is relatively free from controversy, whether because the public has been convinced, or is simply prepared to accept top-down decisions.

In fiercely democratic Greece, the potential for wind farms certainly exists, as anyone who sails the Aegean knows. And Tina Birbili, Greece's environment and climate-change minister, says her country can follow Spain and Portugal in promoting wind energy, despite the local opposition it sometimes arouses. Next year her government will invite bids for offshore parks—after specifying, to the dismay of some contractors, that the government would identify the locations. This was denounced in some newspapers as too statist an approach; she disagrees. Far from frustrating investors, the policy would help them by offering a one-stop shop. It would pre-empt the objections that might be raised by various bits of the Greek government—from the culture ministry, protective of antiquities, to the foreign and defence ministries, mindful of security. In any case, Miss Birbili says, the state welcomes private-sector proposals for land-based parks.

For visitors to Greece, the words "windmill" and "Aegean" evoke stone buildings with white sails, like the newly rebuilt ones on Patmos (pictured). Planning laws prevent such structures from being used for electricity. Miss Birbili thinks giant, high-tech blades, looming over the wine-dark sea, could become an equally welcome sight. But it may be a while before a new Homer hymns them in verse.

**Fonte: The Economist, Aug. 19<sup>th</sup> 2010. Disponível em: <[www.economist.com](http://www.economist.com)>.**

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