



## A Review of “The Wind Farm Scam”

However, for ecologist John Etherington, the most apropos description of wind power can be summarized in one word — “scam” — and his book entitled [The Wind Farm Scam — An Ecologist’s Evaluation](#) is dedicated to revealing that “scam” to his readers. And although his book is written in the context of the battle in the United Kingdom over the future of alternative energy in that country, much of Etherington’s argument is applicable to the American context, as well.



Dr. John Etherington might seem, at first glance, an unlikely critic of wind farms. A retired “reader in ecology” at the University of Wales, he is also the former editor of *The Ecologist*. However, the root of Etherington’s objection to the wind farms is rooted in the simple physics of power generation: In short, the author maintains that the potential power generation that the burgeoning ranks of wind turbines could provide the U.K. is grossly disproportionate to the economic, environmental, and aesthetic cost of their construction and maintenance. As he notes in his Introduction, “Electricity generated by modern industrial wind turbines has many failings, all of which can be traced back to the physical laws which govern air movement and limit the energy that can be extracted from the wind. The huge size of the machines which make them so inappropriate in the countryside is also a consequence of those same physical laws.”

Etherington notes that an essentially irrational attachment to wind power has come to dominate the mindset of many advocates of “alternative energy”; in his words:

Over the past three decades, wind power seems to have appeared from nowhere, to dominate the world of power generation. This is hardly because it provides a lot of electricity and yet it has become a source of vigorous support by extremists, public dissent and political coercion. Entering “wind power” in a Google search gives about 20 million hits (as I write)! And yet worldwide, wind provides just one or two per cent of power. Try a search for “electricity generation” and there are 1.5 million hits — a “spin disproportion” I think.



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The degree of “political coercion” exerted by the media advocates of wind farms is particularly troublesome to Etherington, who declares:

They camouflage the fact that the rush to renewables is more a matter of quick profit than about saving the world from self-inflicted disaster. The public at large is beginning to suspect this, but there is huge political inertia based on the fear that individuals or parties may be branded as “climate change deniers” with all the horrific undertones that phrase carries. Indeed extremists in the media have already proposed “Nuremberg type climate trials” for the deniers!

Etherington attempts to answer the hype with an appeal to science, and he devotes the first three chapters of *The Wind Farm Scam* to studying the science behind the wind-farm turbines. For the reader who is interested in an introduction to the physics behind the modern wind farm, Etherington’s evaluation is quite sobering. As Etherington observes, the power production shortfalls of wind power were known before the U.K. suffered a wind-related power shortage during the brutally cold winter of 2009–2010. At their best, the turbines generate little power in modest winds: “The energy content of wind is so small at low wind speeds that no useful work is available below about 3 m to 5 m per second (7–11 mph).” Furthermore, “For a few days a year there is no significant electricity at all from wind turbines throughout Britain, and for much of the year they produce less than half of their potential maximum.”

Given the production shortfalls of wind farming, how could construction of a massive network of turbines make any economic sense? Only by means of massive subsidies. Etherington’s cites the words of a former chief executive of E-ON UK (one of the largest energy producers in the U.K.): “Without the renewable obligation certificates nobody would be building wind farms.” Etherington notes that the Renewables Obligation (RO), the Climate Change Levy exemption (CCLe) and RO Certificates (ROC) have amounted to “a hidden tax on all electricity consumers and a huge hidden subsidy to providers of renewable energy — larger indeed than any subsidy in history.... These three thus total £35.76 + c. £20 + £4.56 = £60 per MWh, which is added to the wholesale value of the electricity generated by wind power.” Thus he concludes, “The repeated claim that ‘There are no direct subsidies for wind farms’ is deliberately misleading — a smoke and mirrors matter when we consider that the accumulated RO and CCLe subsidy income alone, during a projected life of about 25 years, will be more than £3.5 million per installed megawatt.”

The wastefulness of spending such sums to subsidize wind farms becomes even more egregious if it can be determined that the use of wind power is essentially meaningless when it comes to abating the purported effects of global warming. Etherington’s chapter evaluating the environmental “benefits” of switching to wind power as a substitute for coal and nuclear power finds that the environmentalists will need to find a new way of saving the world:

The Government’s own figure for saving of CO<sub>2</sub> emission by renewable power generation, mainly wind, is just 9.2 million tonnes per year by 2010 (quoted by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and DBERRn as 2.5 Mt carbon). This is less than the emission from a medium sized coal fired power station and more to the point is less than four ten-thousandths (0.004) of global total CO<sub>2</sub> emission and stands no chance of altering atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> concentration, still less deflecting climate change over a millennial period!

Etherington also documents the negative impact of the wind turbines on property values and tourism — a further economic cost that is often left out of the equations of the industry’s advocates. And Etherington, ever the ecologist, offers an impassioned presentation of the plight of birds who find



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themselves in the path of "progress" and the slaughter that has resulted from many species being unable to adjust to the presence of large, fast-moving turbines.

Although Etherington does offer a series of alternatives to wind farms, he notes that he feels little reason to do so:

This damning compendium of failure suggests that we would be better off without wind power at all — that is certainly my view, but it has been part of the successful strategy of the wind power industry to represent any opposition as being both negative and misled. Thus I feel no more compelling need to suggest an “alternative” to wind than I would offer in exchange for the fairies at the bottom of my garden, pedalling their infinite power generator!

Although written several years ago, the recent Kindle release of *The Wind Farm Scam* highlights the ongoing significance of Etherington’s analysis of a fatally flawed approach to “alternative energy.”

John Etherington, [The Wind Farm Scam — An Ecologist’s Evaluation](#), (London: Stacey International, 2009) 198 pages. Paperback. (Also published in 2012 in a Kindle edition.)



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