

Alan Jones goes after wind farms again, citing dubious evidence

Written by Simon Chapman, Emeritus Professor in Public Health, University of Sydney

Last week, Sydney radio announcer [Alan Jones lambasted](#) those concerned about climate change and what he called “renewable energy rubbish”.

Jones has been loose with the facts in the past, having been [Factchecked](#) in 2015 after confusing kilowatts with megawatts and quoting a cost for wind power he later confessed “where the 1502 [dollars per megawatt hour that he stated] comes from, I have absolutely no idea”.

Jones, who chaired the much hyped but [poorly attended](#) 2013 national rally against wind farms in June 2014 (see photo) told his listeners last week wind farms are “buggering up people’s health”.

He also said “harrowing evidence” had been given by sufferers to the 2014-15 Senate Select Committee on Wind Farms chaired by (now ex-) [Senator John Madigan](#) . He along with [Bob Day](#) ,
[David Leyonhjelm](#)

,
[Chris Back](#)

and

[Nick Xenophon](#)

have been vocal opponents of wind farms.

Their [report](#) predictably savaged wind farms, while Labor Senator Anne Urquhart’s [minority report](#) was
the only one I found to be evidence-based.

Jones then went on to interview Dr Mariana Alves-Periera, from the private Lusophona University in Portugal ([world university ranking](#) 1,805, and impact ranking 2,848) whom he described as a distinguished international figure.

She was “recognized internationally” and had published “over 50” scientific papers over 30 years, something of a modest output. Jones, who may or may not have read any of these

publications, told listeners her findings were “indisputable”, there was “no opposing scientific evidence” and again in emphasis, “none of [her papers] have been disputed” to which Alves-Periera agreed instantly “no they haven’t”.

This is an interesting interpretation of the scientific reception that has greeted the work of the Lisbon group on the unrecognized diagnosis of “vibroacoustic disease” (or VAD), a term they have made their own.

I first encountered Alves-Periera when she spoke via videoconference to a [NHMRC meeting](#) on wind farms and health in 2011. She spoke to a powerpoint presentation which highlighted the case of a schoolboy who lived near wind turbines. Her claim was the boy’s problems at school were due to his exposure to the turbines, as were cases of “boxy foot” in several horses kept on the same property.

Intrigued by this n=1 case report, I set out with a colleague to explore the scientific reception that “vibroacoustic disease” had met. We published our [findings](#) in the Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health 2013.

We found only 35 research papers on VAD. None reported any association between VAD and wind turbines. Of the 35 papers, 34 had a first author from the Lusophona University-based research group. Remarkably, 74% of citations to these papers were self-citations by members of the group.

In other words, just shy of three quarters of all references to VAD were from the group who were promoting the “disease”. In science, median [self-citation rates are around 7%](#). We found two unpublished case reports from the group presented at conferences which asserted that VAD was “irrefutably demonstrated” to be caused by wind turbines. We [listed eight reasons](#) why the scientific quality of these claims were abject.

In 2014 Alves-Periera and a colleague defended their work in a [letter](#) to the journal and I [replied](#). They described themselves as the “lead researchers in vibroacoustic disease”. But as we had shown, they are almost the

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only

researchers who were ever active on this topic, with self-citation rates seldom seen in research.

Other experts have taken a different view of the group's work. One of the world's leading acousticians Geoff Leventhall who also spoke at the NHMRC's 2011 meeting, wrote in a 2009 submission to the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin about the Lisbon group's VAD work.

The evidence which has been offered [by them] is so weak that a prudent researcher would not have made it public.

[Another expert](#) said:

vibroacoustic disease remains an unproven theory belonging to a small group of authors and has not found acceptance in the medical literature

And most recently, the UK's [Health Protection Agency](#) said the:

disease itself has not gained clinical recognition.

Leventhall concluded his review by saying:

One is left with a very uncomfortable feeling that the work of the VAD group, as related to the effects of low levels of infrasound and low frequency noise exposure, is on an extremely shaky basis and not yet ready for dissemination. The work has been severely criticised when it has been presented at conferences. It is not backed by peer reviewed publications and is available only as conference papers which have not been independently evaluated prior to presentation.

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Jones told his listeners the reason wind turbines are not installed on Bondi Beach, down Sydney's Macquarie Street or Melbourne's Collins Street was because governments "know they are harmful to health". His beguiling logic here might perhaps also be the same reason we don't see these iconic locations given over to mining or daily rock concerts. Most people would understand there are other factors that explain the absence of both wind turbines, mines or daily rock concerts in such locations.

Jones has given [air time](#) to a Victorian woman who is a serial complainant about her local wind farm and who has [written](#) :

Around the Macarthur wind farm, residents suffer from infrasound emitted by the turbines, even when they're not operating.

At a time when we are seeing unparalleled increases in renewable energy and reductions in [fossil fuels](#) all over the world, one wonders why this is still public discussion in Australia.

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Read more <http://theconversation.com/alan-jones-goes-after-wind-farms-again-citing-dubious-evidence-68152>