

Wind Energy and Public Opinion

New Zealand's first wind turbine – the Brooklyn wind turbine on the hills above Wellington – was built in 1993. Since then, a lot of people have had a lot to say about wind energy and wind farms. Today, wind energy is a frequent topic in both daily news and community papers.



In recent years there have been a number of surveys and polls examining people's attitude towards wind energy. A consistent theme that emerges is that New Zealanders strongly support wind energy.

SO WHAT DO THE POLLS TELL US?

Nielsen conducted research, on behalf of the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Authority, between January and June 2008 into public perceptions of renewable energy and energy efficiency.¹ The survey found:

- » 88% of respondents expressed support for wind farms, with 71% expressing support for a wind farm that could be seen from their home.
- » 81% of respondents felt that where their energy comes from is important

enough to think about what they can do or personally do something about.

- » 88% believe that climate change is important enough to think about what they can do or personally do something about.

In May 2004, EECA conducted a similar survey through UMR research.² The results of this earlier survey showed 82% of respondents approved of wind energy. It is interesting to note that since 2004, New Zealand has had significantly more experience with wind farms, but public support has remained high.

Shape NZ, an organisation run by the New Zealand Business Council for Sustainable Development, also conducted a survey of people's preferred energy sources in early 2008.³ In the survey:

- » 77% of respondents said they prefer wind as the best energy source in the next

decade. Respondents also expressed strong support for other renewable energy sources, with 69% supporting solar, and 47% supporting geothermal.

Support for electricity generation in New Zealand

Wind	77%
Solar	69%
Geothermal	47%
Wave	40%
Large scale hydro	35%
Small scale hydro	34%
Nuclear	19%
Gas fired	10%
Coal	7%

Source: ShapeNZ Poll: Most preferred energy sources in next 10 years, April 2008. Available at <http://www.nzbcscd.org.nz/story.asp?id=880>

1. EECA, Public perceptions of renewable energy, May 2008. Available at <http://www.eeca.govt.nz/node/1483>
 2. EECA and UMR research, Omnibus Results, May 2004.
 3. ShapeNZ, ShapeNZ Poll: Most preferred energy sources in next 10 years, April 2008. Available at <http://www.nzbcscd.org.nz/story.asp?id=880>

- » 48% said they like the way wind farms look, while 44% say it depends on where they are located.
- » Only 5% said wind farms do not look acceptable.
- » When asked how concerned they would be, on a scale of 1 to 5 (one being not concerned at all and five being very concerned) if a wind farm was built in an area visible from their home, 84% of respondents gave an approval rating (1 to 3).

The survey included results split into council areas. Although drawing on a smaller sample size and needing to be treated with more caution than national results, the results indicate good support for wind energy in areas where wind farms are operating or are proposed.

Mighty River Power's recent proposal to build a large wind farm in Manawatu spurred considerable interest in local attitudes towards wind farms. The Manawatu is home to three

wind farms, built progressively between 1999 and 2007. In 2009 three surveys undertaken by Mighty River Power, the Palmerston North City Council and the local paper, the Manawatu Standard all revealed support for wind farms in the region. Most recently, in September 2010 the Manawatu Standard ran a poll that found 87% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "Wind farms in the Manawatu are an asset for the region".⁴

WHAT ABOUT PUBLIC OPINION IN OTHER COUNTRIES?

Wind energy receives strong public support in many countries around the world. For example, in the UK 60 surveys over 15 years show a consistently high level of support for the development of wind farms, on average 70 to 80%, both in principle, as a good thing,

4. Most favour wind farms, Manawatu Standard, 6 September 2010. Available at <http://www.stuff.co.nz/manawatu-standard/news/4100063/Most-favour-wind-farms>

and also in practice, among residents living near wind farms.⁵

BUT I'M STILL UNSURE HOW I FEEL ABOUT WIND FARMS

While the results discussed indicate that most New Zealanders would like to see our wind harnessed for electricity generation, statistics and public opinion polls only tell part of the story.

A new wind farm introduces change to its surrounding area, and its positive and negative effects must be carefully considered. If you would like to know more about a proposed development, you should talk to the developer about the project. Most developers hold open days, where you will be able to find out about their plans and the expected effects of the project.

The following wind farms have viewing platforms and interpretive displays:

- » Brooklyn wind turbine, off Ashton Fitchett Drive, Brooklyn, Wellington
- » Te Apiti, Saddle Road, near Palmerston North, Manawatu
- » White Hill, Mossburn-Wreys Bush Road, near Mossburn, Southland
- » Hau Nui, Range Road off White Rock Road, east of Martinborough, Wairarapa.

5. Public Attitudes to Wind Energy in the UK, BWEA Briefing Sheet, October 2005. Available at www.bwea.com



Strong support – even after 17 years

Brooklyn Wind Turbine sits on the hills above Wellington. It is a popular landmark and attracts thousands of visitors each year. After 17 years of reliable operation the turbine developed a fault that required a major repair. In early 2010 Meridian Energy, the turbine operator, asked Wellingtonians if they thought the turbine should be repaired, replaced or removed. An overwhelming 85% of respondents supported the continuation of wind generation at the site, with 40% favouring replacing the turbine, and 45% favouring repairing it.

Meridian decided to repair the turbine, and the turbine is continuing to supply electricity into the local Wellington lines network.

www.windenergy.org.nz

Find out more about wind energy and wind farms in New Zealand at www.windenergy.org.nz.

NZ Wind Energy Association

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The New Zealand Wind Energy Association (NZWEA) is an industry association that works towards the development of wind as a reliable, sustainable, clean and commercially viable energy source. We aim to fairly represent wind energy to the public, government and the energy sector. Our members include 80 companies involved in New Zealand's wind energy sector, including electricity generators, wind farm developers, lines companies, turbine manufacturers, consulting firms, researchers and law firms.



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