

David Suzuki is not the last word on wind power

David Suzuki is an environmentalist and a biologist, with a PhD in zoology. He is also a celebrity, and has made a considerable contribution: in highlighting concerns about our treatment of the natural environment; as an activist in climate change matters; and specifically in the promotion of conservation measures. As such, he is a notable Canadian, but he is far from the last word on industrial scale wind power. Relying on the view of one person or any environmental, scientific, or engineering organization, no matter how apparently authoritative, is not sufficient given the scope and seriousness of this matter.

Here is a case in point. Germany has achieved reductions in CO2 emissions approaching 20 per cent below its 1990 level. This is largely the result of the 15 per cent gains made in the early 1990's due to shutting down the worst polluters in Eastern Germany after reunification. This occurred before its massive implementation of wind power, which started in 1999. The European Environment Agency reports that any gains since are mainly due to some shift from coal to gas in the production of electricity and heat, and reductions in emissions from road transportation, households and services. Therefore, referencing this statistic within the context of wind power in Germany is, to say the least, questionable.

The projection that in 30 years Europe could have a new electricity grid more supportive of renewable energy is reasonable. The time frame is at the low end of being realistic, and this in itself is a strong argument against premature industrial wind implementations. However, there are considerations beyond the delivery system alone, including any assumption that supply would match demand at any point in time. Large scale storage capability, which is not available today, would also be necessary. In any event, within this time frame other, better energy sources, such as solar, would likely eclipse wind, although wind may survive in small, local installations.

It is necessary to look below the surface in considerations relating to electricity generation in general and wind power in particular. There is a great deal of information on all sides of the issues, and cannot, and should not, be reduced to one catchy line from a song.

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