



Wind turbines are an increasingly familiar sight in rural France

**FOR WIND FARMS:**

France is blessed with excellent potential to generate electricity from wind, thanks to a variation in wind strength and timing in different parts of the country, says *Dominique Moniot*. Unlike the British Isles where wind is more uniform and controlled by depressions, France possesses three regions of 'independent' wind conditions - the Mediterranean, Nord Picardie and Brittany. 'This means that the wind is always blowing somewhere, making ongoing clean energy electricity generation a great option for the future,' he says. New technology means forecasters can now better predict wind conditions up to 48 hours in advance, thus helping control the uneven supply of electricity produced by wind. Wind power would clearly help to reduce CO2 emissions, progressively replacing gas and coal-fired power stations that supplement nuclear energy at peak times. 'Whether it's 2 percent or 5 percent, it just becomes a numbers game, but wind power will contribute to reducing climate change.' The environment and energy agency ADEME says France's wind farms reduced CO2 emissions by 1.65 million tonnes in 2008. Although these figures are disputed by opponents, the agency says if government targets are reached in 2020, wind power will cut emissions by 16 million tonnes. As for cost, Moniot says wind power, as an infinite source, is stable and independent

of fossil fuel market fluctuations. The Syndicat des Energies Renouvelables calculates the cost of electricity generated by wind farms as representing only an average of 60 centimes extra a year per household. Employment prospects are another positive aspect. 'Between 60,000 and 80,000 people already work in wind power in Germany, and a similar job market looks set to open up in France,' Moniot predicts. Wind turbines also provide valuable rental income to farmers, landowners and councils. As for the countryside, he says this is 'already covered with 150,000 high-tension electric pylons and 50,000 water towers... mankind has always modified the landscape.'

*Dominique Moniot is development director of La Compagnie du Vent, a Montpellier-based renewable energy company*

**AGAINST WIND FARMS:**

At an estimated cost of €23 billion or €900 per household, the government plans to increase wind-powered electricity generating capacity sixfold by 2020, writes *Charles Watt-Jones*. This expenditure does not offer value. Last year wind farms, located in the windiest parts of the country, made but 1 percent of the total output although they made up 3 percent of generating capacity. Many benefits claimed for the new investment are spurious. It's said that electricity prices will fall. Not so, EDF is required to pay a price close to

that which the householder pays today. Another is that wind power will have a significant impact on France's carbon CO2 emissions. Again false, the effect will be minimal as the country has an extremely low level of CO2 emissions per capita from electricity generation, since over 90 percent of its electricity is nuclear or hydro. Some claim that additional wind farms will allow the closure of nuclear plants. Highly unlikely, as wind power is by nature variable while nuclear power delivers constant base-load power. Recall here that France is a net exporter of electricity which provides an income of over €3 billion a year, and that the construction of two new reactors is planned. Another claim is that more wind farms will increase employment; while true during the year-long construction phase, it is false thereafter for few are needed to operate and maintain them. Another; that local tax revenues will increase. True - each 2MW wind turbine promises €30,000/year. This prospect attracts many who care not that the turbines, often sited in areas with small wind potential, will produce little power. The money will pay for urbanizing more of France so who will notice the windmills mutilating her beautiful countryside? To quote [the well-known environmentalist] James Lovelock: 'Wind farms will devastate the countryside pointlessly.'

*Charles Watt-Jones lives in Poitou-Charentes*

# The great wind farm debate

Adrienne Bourgeon, below, reports on plans to build thousands more wind turbines in the countryside, while above two writers debate their merits

The stirring sight of wind farms sprouting up around the French countryside has touched off a storm of protest that looks set to increase as France strives to meet ambitious renewable energy targets by 2020.

Alarmed by the growing number of favourable building permits for wind farms granted to developers, opponents are worried about the visual impact on farmland, historic villages and monuments. They claim that house prices can plunge by up to 30 percent if a wind farm is constructed nearby, complain about the noise and say they are a danger to birds. Some also doubt that wind power is an economical and efficient way to generate electricity.

Plans to put a wind farm close to the towering abbey of Mont Saint Michel in Normandy, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, have touched a particularly raw nerve. At a protest organised by several opposition groups in September, participants brandished such slogans as 'France is not an industrial zone' and 'Stop ruining our land'. A website created to support the movement declares that President Nicolas Sarkozy will be responsible for the future massacre of the countryside by industrial-sized wind farms. The president says he supports wind power as long as the parks are confined to industrial zones.

Further south in the Poitou-Charentes one opponent of wind farms went on a week-long hunger strike to protest against a plan for eight turbines in the Marsais countryside. Fabienne Choivet claimed that the mayor had been manipulated by developers and that her hunger strike was a last resort. She ended her strike when the municipal council voted unanimously to file an appeal against the wind energy project which had previously been approved. 'The impact of all those turbines would have just been too enormous, it would have ruined the countryside and opened up the planning process for even more

wind farms,' she says.

While the strength of opposition to wind farms is in little doubt, finding reliable facts and figures to fuel the debate is not always so easy. Nonetheless the French government has pledged that in order to reduce CO2 emissions it intends to boost electricity generated from renewable sources - sun, tides, biomass, geothermal heat and of course, wind - from the current 10 percent of output to 23 percent by the year 2020. Of that 23 percent, around 8 percent is to be drawn from the wind. France currently has an estimated 2,500 wind turbines producing 4,500 megawatts of energy a year from its established farms and plans to increase production almost six-fold to 25,000 megawatts a year by 2020. According to the state-run energy agency, the Agence de l'Environnement et de la Maîtrise de l'Energie, (ADEME), around 6,000 megawatts will be generated offshore with the remainder on land.

To meet this ambitious target an estimated 8,000 new land-based turbines will need to be built. However an alternative solution would be to switch to building more offshore, so people could not see nor hear the whirring blades, according to energy market analyst Christophe Dromacque. Dromacque, who is at the VaasaETT global energy think tank in Helsinki, says overall he supports wind power but believes that the impact on reducing CO2 levels will depend on how well future farms are sited and built. 'Finding the most suitable and efficient location is crucial for a wind farm's efficiency, however apparently it is too often not the first and foremost criteria when French authorities decide to allocate land to the building of a wind farm,' he says. He even cites one example where a poorly located farm used electricity to turn its idle blades so that it looked better for local residents. **TFP**

Have your say on wind farms.  
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Useful website on wind energy:

[www.withouthotair.com](http://www.withouthotair.com)

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