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Publisher's Letter



Renewable energy is seriously damaging the Australian economy

No doubt most readers know about the state-wide blackout that occurred in South Australia in September. Let me summarise what happened. It seems that the wind blew just a bit too hard for their much-vaunted wind turbines and they all automatically feathered their blades to stop self-destruction. Up to that point, the wind turbines had been pumping out power at a huge rate and their sudden throwing in the towel meant that

the power shortfall had to come from somewhere else. Since South Australia no longer has proper base-load power stations, it had to come from Victoria via the fabled "interconnector". But the load was too much for it and it suddenly became the "disconnecter". Everything else fell in a heap after that.

Of course, after the blackout occurred, a bunch of their spindly transmission towers then blew over and that did not make the job of restoring power any easier. It is only now that people are starting to realise that you actually need a powered grid to allow wind farms to generate power. They cannot simply start up on their own! In that way, they are exactly like the tens of thousands of grid-tied solar systems installed right throughout Australia. As their owners are painfully aware, if you have a blackout, your shiny solar panels and inverters are prevented from generating power by the "anti-islanding" feature.

Actually, given the serious difficulties involved, it is incredible just how quickly the energy distributors managed to reconnect power to most of the population. But it could all happen again, any time the wind blows at more than about 90km/h, which is not much more than a stiff gale.

So I wonder if many people died in their home during that blackout because their life support system stopped? How many hundreds of millions of dollars of production were lost? When you take into account the serious disruption to blast furnaces at Whyalla and Port Pirie and the interruption to production at mines at Olympic Dam and elsewhere, it might run to a lot more.

This problem of the intermittency of wind and solar power and the need for expensive backup generation has been well-documented in the past. In fact, not only do South Australian electricity consumers pay the highest rates in the country, the cost for their peak power (when the wind stops) has risen as high as \$14000 per megawatt! And while the South Australian government politicians like to boast that their state has the highest proportion of power generated by renewables, ultimately they rely on Victoria's dirty brown coal power stations in the Latrobe Valley, via the interconnector/disconnector. How much longer can that happen, since Victoria seems to be heading down the same "renewable" energy dead end?

Finally, just in case anyone thinks that South Australia was subjected to a really severe weather event, just consider that when Cyclone Yasi hit Queensland in 2011, it did not black out the whole state – far from it. Even during that severe event, the disruption to the State's grid was relatively modest. And more recently, consider Cyclone Matthew which just ravaged Haiti, Florida and some of the southern United States. Florida was not "blackened out" although about 2.2 million homes and business were blacked out for a short period.

I am actually optimistic about the outcome of this South Australian calamity. It should make all Australians aware that this religious crusade to produce more and more renewable energy will not just cost all taxpayers and electricity consumers lots of money if we keep going as we are. It will mean loss of employment to untold thousands of people as businesses realise that Australia is not a good place to operate. Let us hope that sanity will be restored.

Leo Simpson