

Science for Environment Policy

Public support for wind farms increases with community participation

Public support grows for wind farms if they are located away from recreational areas and if they are either fully or partly owned by organisations within the local community. In addition, Swedish consumers would accept bigger bills for electricity generated by wind power if the local population were heavily involved in wind farm planning, a recent survey suggests.

Public attitudes towards [wind farms](#) vary across Europe. Opposition to wind farms because they are in the local area (the 'NIMBY', or 'Not In My Back Yard', effect), has been dismissed as being too simplistic to explain why many communities oppose turbines. Various studies have shown that *how* wind farms are introduced to a community seems more important.

This study explored Swedish attitudes to wind farms through an online survey. The researchers argue that public acceptance of wind farms is important if governments are to continue supporting wind energy through schemes such as tradable renewable energy certificates (REC), which are issued in Sweden (among other countries, including Belgium, Italy, the Netherlands and the UK). REC schemes are designed to ensure that a certain percentage of energy comes from renewable sources.

Their survey asked respondents to select their preferred wind farm from a choice of two farms. A series of choices was given, where the two farms differed in key features. A total of 1 500 people completed the survey, who were selected from a randomly phone-recruited group of volunteers to be representative of the general Swedish population, according to age, gender and place of residence. Questions within the survey revealed that most were broadly supportive of wind energy. The respondents revealed a number of general preferences, including the following:

Ownership: Respondents preferred wind farms that are at least part-owned by either a cooperative or the local municipality, while private ownership was viewed much more negatively.

The survey's use of the term 'cooperative' did not specifically refer to the local community, but the researchers believe that this is how respondents may have interpreted it. If so, this survey potentially supports other research which suggests that higher levels of community ownership in Denmark and parts of Germany partly explain why the wind energy sector has developed more rapidly in these areas than in the UK or the Netherlands, for example.

Location: Respondents were generally opposed to wind farms in recreational areas, such as summerhouse locations or coastal resorts. They were also strongly against farms being placed in mountainous areas. They did not appear concerned about farms in the environment where they actually live, however, although they preferred offshore sites.

Consultation: Respondents would like to be involved in 'extended consultation', whereby the operator consults stakeholders at an early stage of a farm's development and gathers their input throughout the whole process. This approach contrasts with the more basic level of consultation required by Swedish law, and these results support other research which shows the important role of consultation in wind farm acceptance.

REC fees: Swedish consumers currently pay an extra 0.06 Swedish kronor (kr) (€0.007) per kWh of electricity, which goes towards the REC scheme. This survey suggests that they would pay an extra 0.045 kr (€0.005) per kWh on top if farms in mountainous areas and private ownership are avoided.

Although consumers naturally prefer lower electricity bills, the study suggests that, generally, higher bills through the REC fee would be more accepted if: wind farms are not in recreational areas, they are part or fully owned within the community and the local population is extensively consulted in their development.



25 September 2014
Issue 387

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Source: Ek, K., & Persson, L. (2014). Wind farms — Where and how to place them? A choice experiment approach to measure consumer preferences for characteristics of wind farm establishments in Sweden. *Ecological Economics*. 105, 193-203. Doi: 10.1016/j.ecolecon.2014.06.001.

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To cite this article/service: "[Science for Environment Policy](#)": European Commission DG Environment News Alert Service, edited by SCU, The University of the West of England, Bristol.