

# Giving Voice to the ‘Silent Majority’

## exploring the opinions and motivations of people who do not make submissions

Most New Zealanders will accept renewable energy ... The opponents you get on a project is [sic] more often a minority, local populations. The people who support these things don't generally come out applauding. Hayes is a classic example. Central Wind as well, we got a lot of what we call the silent majority.

— an energy company representative,  
quoted in Stephenson and Ioannou, 2010, p.70

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Janet Stephenson is a social scientist with a particular interest in societal responses to environmental challenges. She is the Director of the Centre for Sustainability at the University of Otago.  
Rob Lawson is in the Marketing department at the University of Otago. His special area of expertise is in the study of consumer behaviour, with strong interests in the development of marketing theory.

### Introduction

As captured in the quotation above, there appears to be a widespread assumption that there is a ‘silent majority’ of people who support proposals but do not make submissions, and that those who do make submissions tend to be opposed and therefore do not reflect the true state of public opinion. The New Zealand Wind Energy Association (a membership-based wind industry association) suggested that it would be useful to examine whether this was actually the case,

in respect to wind farms in particular. As researchers we were also interested in the broader question of why non-submitters might not be participating in formal planning processes, so we developed our research to address two questions: (a) how do non-submitters' perspectives of proposed wind farms differ from those of submitters; and (b) why do non-submitters not make submissions?<sup>1</sup>

While these questions are relevant to all development proposals, wind farms are an excellent context for inquiry because they are highly visible, and thus potentially have an impact on a geographically widespread population, and because they are known to create strong feelings of support or opposition (Wolsink, 2007). Wind power repeatedly polls among the New Zealand population as the most preferred form of electricity generation, with 76% being 'supportive' or 'very supportive' of wind energy in a June 2011 poll (Energy Efficiency and Conservation Authority, 2012). However, public reactions to specific energy development proposals do not reflect the same pattern. Wind farm resource consent applications are surprisingly highly controversial compared to those for other forms of renewable electricity generation (Stephenson and Ioannou, 2010).

This article reports on exploratory research into the perspectives and motivations of both submitters and non-submitters to two wind farm proposals, at Kaiwera Downs, Southland, and Mill Creek, Wellington. Here, we briefly explain the submission process in New Zealand and enlarge on the context of the research questions, discuss literature relevant to the research questions, describe the methodology, and then describe our findings in relation to each question in turn. We finish with a brief discussion of the implications of the findings. The research is more fully reported in Hoffman, Lawson and Stephenson (2009).

### **Submissions and participation**

Sections 95A and 96 of the Resource Management Act 1991 require that certain planning applications (generally those with potential adverse effects on the

environment that are 'more than minor') must be publicly notified for submissions by the relevant planning authority. (There are some situations in which more limited notification occurs, but these are of little relevance in this context.) The proposal is advertised for submissions in newspapers which circulate in the area and on signposts on the site; those who are considered to be potentially adversely affected are personally sent an information pack and invitation to make a submission. In contrast to most other planning jurisdictions internationally, in New Zealand anyone

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can make a submission (either in support or in objection): there is no requirement for the submitter to have been personally notified, or to establish that they are personally affected or that they represent some relevant aspect of the public interest. Making submissions on planning applications is a relatively simple action which can be carried out by any person. While submissions must be in writing, there are no costs, and no requirement to appear before a hearing panel unless the submitter chooses to do so.

From a policy perspective, understanding the attitudes and motivations of those who choose not to actively voice their opinions in submissions, compared to those who do, could be of great value to policy makers, planners and developers. Public participation is widely accepted as essential to sound planning processes (Conrad et al., 2011) and many planning systems worldwide have introduced reforms in recent years to increase public involvement using a range of participatory techniques (Brownill, 2009). Yet within New Zealand, written submissions (and the consequent right to speak at a hearing) are the only legally

required avenue for the general public to have input into planning applications. Leaving aside for now the question of whether the submission process is sufficient or effective as a means of public participation, the case remains that for much of the public it is the only means of input. Notwithstanding that a number of planning authorities in New Zealand are voluntarily engaging the public in less formal and more innovative ways (Thompson-Fawcett and Freeman, 2006), the formal submission process is still in most instances the only gateway for the

public to air their views on development proposals.

When planning proposals are publicly notified, the right to submit and be heard is intended to provide an equal opportunity to all, but this involves an assumption that the process will be equally accessible by all. When people do not make a submission on a proposed development in their vicinity, there is no means of gauging their views – so their voice is effectively silent. If they do have a viewpoint to share, but have not done so, this raises the question of whether they may have been prevented from submitting by barriers that should ideally be removed. These matters go to the heart of a fundamental premise of New Zealand's planning law (Young, 2001) and indeed contemporary international law (Zillman, Lucas and Pring, 2002): that civic engagement is an essential component of resource planning and that the public have a democratic right to be heard if they so choose. By taking into account the submissions received, decision-making authorities expect to be well informed as to the public's concerns (albeit that there is no expectation in law that submissions

will provide a representative sample of public opinions). The problem we seek to explore in this article is whether the non-submitting public do represent a different set of perspectives from the submitting public, and, if they have opinions that they would like to express, why they are failing to do so.

#### Motivations to make submissions

A review of submissions to three New Zealand wind farm proposals

## Perceived negative aspects of the submissions process included the perceived tendency for decision-makers to have predetermined attitudes ... and lack of transparency in the eventual decisions.

(Graham, Stephenson and Smith, 2009) revealed that factors commonly raised in opposing submissions included the size and site coverage of the wind farm, negative landscape effects, construction effects, concerns about the developer, environmental effects, cumulative effects, acoustics, place-identity and energy policy. Supporting submissions referred to a positive attitude to wind power in general, perceived local or community benefits, enjoyment of the look of wind turbines, and the national good. These findings are similar to the abundant international literature on public reactions to wind farms, in which visual effects (Warren et al., 2005), noise pollution (Ellis, Barry and Robinson, 2007) and disruption to people's attachment to place (Devine-Wright and Howes, 2010) are prominent concerns.

At a lay level there is belief that those who feel negatively about a proposal are more likely to make submissions. A representative of the New Zealand Wind Energy Association, for example, noted that '[supporters] in general are not necessarily coming forward in formal processes e.g. RMA hearings ... It's about risk and reward. People are not going to make it a priority as they think others will speak. Opposers are going to be

more motivated to take action' (quoted in Stephenson and Ioannou, 2010, p.70). The obverse belief, that the non-submitting public is generally in favour of proposals, is also in evidence. This perspective was evident in the explanation used by a former minister of energy to justify the disparity between the high levels of public support recorded for wind energy in the abstract and the often intense opposition to concrete wind farm proposals:

Just two weeks ago, EECA [Energy Efficiency and Conservation Authority] released its survey of the public's attitudes towards different types of generation. I am sure that many of you were delighted by the results with wind coming out most preferred with an approval rating of 82 per cent. The general public are often the silent majority when it comes to all sorts of developments. Now their views are known.<sup>2</sup>

Despite exhaustive searches we were unable to discover any published research which specifically set out to compare the perspectives of those who make submissions on planning applications with those who do not. Research investigated either submitters' views or the views of the public generally. However, there is evidence that those who oppose proposals are often more willing to be active and vocal than those who support them (Beddoe and Chamberlin, 2003; House, 1999; Walker, 1995; Wolsink, 2000). In the absence of specific prior findings, we put forward a tentative hypothesis that non-submitters will be generally supportive towards proposed wind farms in their vicinity.

In relation to the second research question – why non-submitters do not make submissions – more research has been undertaken. House, discussing citizen participation in water management processes, suggests that formal consultation and submissions processes can lead to 'the more vociferous minority within the community ... participating in the decision making process with the "silent majority" too intimidated ... to take part' (House, 1999, p.126). Carpenter and Brownill suggest that a distrust of the planning process, combined with 'apathy and a perception of disenfranchisement' (Carpenter and Brownill, 2008, p.234), creates barriers to participation. Van der Horst similarly suggests that the adversarial, 'us versus them' nature of many planning procedures, such as public hearings, may put people off participating (Van der Horst, 2007).

Within New Zealand there are no published studies on whether planning processes discourage people from making submissions, but Forgie's (2002) research on people who made submissions on local authorities' annual plans (the council's intended expenditure for the coming year) provides some relevant insights. Submission-makers were asked to identify those aspects of the submissions process seen as positive or negative. Perceived negative aspects of the submissions process included the perceived tendency for decision-makers to have predetermined attitudes; the volume and complexity of information; impersonal and intimidating processes; and lack of transparency in the eventual decisions. Forgie concluded that while submitters recognised a range of advantages in being involved in the annual plan process, they were also frustrated by these aspects. Such perceptions could be influential in dissuading people from making submissions, although this was not assessed in Forgie's study.

Public responses to developments are also strongly influenced by the quality of consultation processes, community engagement and the level of information provision (Birnie et al., 1999; Wolsink, 2007). There is evidence of a two-way reinforcement between engagement and a sense of political self-efficacy. Activities

such as open discussions of issues, identification with politically-oriented groups, and involvement in democratic decision-making processes can strengthen individuals' beliefs that they can influence political processes (Levy and Zint, 2012). As noted above, these matters are receiving greater attention internationally as planning approaches shift to more collaborative, inclusive approaches with the aim of achieving greater public trust and democratic legitimacy in planning decision-making (Hindmarsh and Matthews, 2008).

In a different but comparable context, political studies literature has long grappled with the question of non-engagement in voting. Studies explain the reluctance to participate in the electoral process as stemming from factors including a lack of group affiliation (Shyrane, Fieldhouse and Pickles, 2007) and alienation from the process because the values and interests of the political parties are too far removed from those of the individual (Merrill and Grofman, 1999). Shyrane, Fieldhouse and Pickles cluster non-voters into three categories: non-conformists (people who abstain because elections do not appear to provide for a satisfactory expression of their political preferences); alienated and indifferent non-voters (people who lack belief in and support for the political system, lack affinity with major parties, and/or have a low level of political awareness); and involuntary abstainers (people who fail to vote for circumstantial reasons rather than deliberately).

From this material we anticipate that we will identify a wide range of potential drivers of non-submission behaviour and barriers to making submissions. These include personal factors (Shyrane, Fieldhouse and Pickles, 2007), level of knowledge and engagement (Birnie et al., 1999; Wolsink, 2007), level of perceived positive and negative impacts (Devine-Wright, 2010; Beddoe and Chamberlin, 2003; House, 1999; Walker, 1995), degree of political or social engagement (Merrill and Grofman, 1999; Shyrane, Fieldhouse and Pickles, 2007; House, 1999), reactions to planning processes (Carpenter and Brownill, 2008; Van der Horst, 2007;

Forgie, 2002) and degree of self-efficacy (Levy and Zint, 2012).

#### Methodology

To address our research questions we undertook two exploratory case studies of proposed wind farm developments, at Kaiwera Downs in Southland (for 240 megawatts, up to 83 turbines), and Mill Creek in Wellington (for 71 megawatts, up to 31 turbines). Kaiwera Downs, in a farming district approximately 20 kilometres from the nearest small settlement of Matura, had attracted 65

of 15 kilometres to 20 kilometres from the proposed development site, we found only three non-submitters who were willing to be interviewed. There were also 16 refusals amongst Mill Creek non-submitters. At both sites many were not forthcoming with reasons for refusing, or said they were 'too busy' or 'not interested' – similar reasons, we later found, to why many had not made submissions. In contrast, no Kaiwera Downs submitters and only one Mill Creek submitter declined to be interviewed.

The sample included 15 men and 18

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submissions, and Mill Creek, less than 10 kilometres from Wellington city, attracted 776 submissions (see Table 1 for a breakdown into supporting and opposing submissions). Both were granted resource consent at the council level in 2008, so that at the time the field research was being undertaken (January–March 2009) the submission process and council hearings were complete. Both were subsequently appealed, and final consents were granted by the Environment Court in 2009 and 2011 respectively. Construction began for Mill Creek in mid-2012 but has not yet begun for Kaiwera Downs.

Thirty-three in-depth interviews were conducted with residents in the vicinity of the sites, selected by random sampling methods. Our original objective had been to talk to ten submitters and ten non-submitters in the vicinity of each site, but finding non-submitters willing to be interviewed proved to be problematic, especially at Kaiwera Downs (24 refusals). Kaiwera Downs is a sparsely populated rural area, and although we widened the selection area from a radius

women aged between 30 and 79. The largest group (13) were self-employed, seven were retired and two were full-time homemakers. The rest were in part- or full-time paid employment. Annual household income levels ranged from \$20,000 to over \$100,000, with ten respondents earning more.

The respondents were asked a series of open-ended questions on such matters as: their opinions on wind as an energy source, support or opposition to the wind farm, sources of information on the proposed wind farm, whether they considered submitting, their awareness of the call for submissions, why they chose not to submit, and any changes they thought would make it easier to make a submission. These were followed by a series of questions designed to produce quantitative data. Respondents were invited to nominate their overall evaluation of the wind farm based on a five-point rating scale, from 'very poor' to 'very good'. They were then asked to nominate how concerned they were, choosing from a list of 14 potential

negative impacts of the wind farms, and how important they felt each of 15 potential positive impacts to be. The lists were derived from the literature and discussion with industry experts before the study was conducted.<sup>3</sup> A short survey at the end of the interview gained basic demographic data.

The Kaiwera Downs interviews were carried out face-to-face, and the Mill Creek interviews (for logistical reasons) occurred over the telephone. The interview lengths were comparable and there appeared to be no significant difference in the level of detail provided by the two interview methods. The surveys and transcribed interviews were analysed to identify emergent themes, while the rating scales were examined using appropriate exact tests in SPSS software to accommodate the small sample size and high levels of tied data.

**Non-submitters' opinions of wind farms**

All but one of the non-submitters were supportive of wind energy in the abstract, although some of this support was qualified, particularly in relation to location and density: 'in certain areas I

submitters, based on their self-designation during the interview, the submitters were relatively evenly spread between either opposition to or support for the wind farms, while the non-submitters spread between support, opposition and ambivalence (Table 1).

There was no significant difference between submitters' and non-submitters' evaluation of the wind farms based on the five-point scale (very poor to very good). However, some differences were identified in relation to perceived positive and negative impacts of the wind farms. The key differences between submitters and non-submitters related not to the average scores assigned to different impacts, but to the variance of the responses, with submitters having a wider range of opinions compared to non-submitters. Across both positive and negative impacts, non-submitters had less extreme views than submitters. They were not as concerned as submitters about the potential negative aspects of the wind farm, and less enthusiastic about the potential positive aspects. In general, the 'ambivalent' group of non-submitters were more similar to supporters of wind

However, in the main the non-submitters' comments reflected their relatively weak opinions: 'it's not something that really concerns me. The only problem with wind farms is the visual effect, but even that I don't find too unpleasant' (MNS1); 'View-wise it didn't worry me ... I had ... maybe a noise concern, but it wasn't a big enough issue for me to feel that I had to submit' (KNS2). Their less extreme opinions of wind farms often appeared to translate into ambivalence about the development: 'I don't care one way or the other whether it goes ahead. I'm more than happy for it to go ahead and I'm not vehemently opposed to it' (MNS7), 'I don't really have an opinion one way or the other, but as I said, it's not in my backyard (MNS3); and indifference: 'It [the wind farm] is of no consequence to me' (MNS2).

Based on our findings we conclude that it cannot be claimed that non-submitters are generally supportive of proposed wind farms in their vicinity. While almost all were supportive of wind energy in the abstract, our participants expressed a range of supportive, negative and ambivalent views in relation to the actual wind farms. Compared to submitters, they displayed less extreme views towards the wind farms: they were less likely to strongly oppose or support, and more likely to not have a strong opinion either way. But, as discussed in the following section, the existence of weaker opinions appears to be an insufficient explanation for why these people did not make submissions.

**Reasons for not making submissions**

Analysis of the open-ended questions revealed a range of reasons why the non-submitters had not made submissions. Some of these were offered as responses to the direct question, 'Why did you choose not to submit on the XX wind farm proposal?', and other potential explanations emerged from our analysis of the transcripts as a whole.

In some instances the lack of interest in making a submission appeared to be directly related to ambivalence – 'I wasn't even interested in bothering, to be honest' (MNS8) – or lack of importance in the context of their lives – 'I didn't think this

haven't got an issue with it, but I would hate to see it on some of our tourism places' (KNS2); 'I don't want to go past one every 20km ... or have the whole natural landscape blighted by them' (KNS1). The support for wind energy did not translate into a similar level of support for the specific wind farms. Comparing the overall attitudes of submitters and non-

farms when it came to their perceptions of negative impacts, and more similar to opposers of wind farms when it came to perceiving positive impacts.

A few did express strong opinions, both positive and negative, from 'I just think it's a great idea, get it up as quickly as possible' (KNS3) to 'They are ... a blot on the landscape, but that's me' (MNS4).

**Table 1: Submitters' and non-submitters' opinions of the wind farms**

		Total	Support	Oppose	Ambivalent/ Neutral
Kaiwera Downs					
	Total submissions	65	26	27	12
	Submitters interviewed	10	4	6	0
	Non-submitters interviewed	3	1	1	1
Mill Creek					
	Total submission	776	364	408	4
	Submitters interviewed	10	4	6	0
	Non-submitters interviewed	10	3	1	6



was important enough to decide that I was opposed to it, I guess' (MNS9). Several explained that they chose not to submit because they did not feel personally affected: 'It's not actually going to affect me personally ... I can't see it from where I live' (MNS10). In contrast, submitters generally did feel affected, either personally or were concerned on behalf of the wider community: 'we fought this as a community ... and we want something to benefit the community' (KS7). Submitters had opinions and they appeared to be more motivated to express them: 'I didn't want to sit on the fence, as I do have an opinion on it' (MS6).

Most submitters were in possession of a good deal of information about the proposal, and many had had high levels of engagement in public meetings, open days and/or site visits. Even those who had not been personally notified by the council or the developer had sought out information, had been provided information by their networks, and/or had attended meetings.

In contrast, non-submitters were far less well-informed and engaged. Two non-submitters received information packs from the developer, and one of these also received the public notice in the mail, but the remainder got no information from either source. Only a few non-submitters had noticed the call for submissions in the newspaper, and none reported any personal contact from the developer. Non-submitters were not necessarily complacent about this lack of information: 'We've had no communication from the Council, and one communication from the developer. We'd hardly know it was going ahead, it's been hopeless' (KNS1). This lack of information appears at least in some cases to be responsible for ambivalence and thus the lack of engagement: 'I don't know enough about it, to be honest, to be able to say either way' (MNS6). One non-submitter directly linked their lack of action to minimal awareness: 'Something public in the paper probably doesn't do a lot to stimulate me to do anything' (KNS1). However, some well-informed people were also non-submitters: '[at the open day] there was open question time, there were photos ... of existing wind

farms and information on noise levels ... You could go ... and talk to the people, it was very good' (KNS3).

Making a submission requires a degree of self-efficacy, and it is evident that this was lacking for at least some of the non-submitters: 'I'm not necessarily the type of person who stands up and says anything ... I leave other people to do that [make submissions]. If it goes ahead, it goes ahead and if it doesn't go ahead, it doesn't go ahead' (MNS1). Some were aware of groups making submissions and opted out because they considered that those groups were more capable than they were: 'Local environmental groups ... will be putting forward the argument much better than I would' (MNS10). Others held back because they were not directly approached by others: 'No I didn't [make a submission], because I knew there were some people doing it and I thought they would have been in contact with us, and they haven't' (KNS1).

Apprehension about the formality of submissions and hearings also appears

to have played a part in a reluctance to become involved: 'I've found the planning process to be] quite disempowering, really. There's a level of inside knowledge that you need. It's sort of like, in some ways, the first time you go into a courtroom – everybody else knows the rules and the games, besides you' (MNS5). Only four of the non-submitters had made a submission previously (and not all in relation to planning processes). Some were unclear about the process: 'I don't know whether there's a form you pick up that's half done or quarter done or whether you start with a blank sheet of paper for this process, I don't know' (KNS1). Others felt they could do it if necessary: 'I'm sure I could figure one out' (MNS6). Two supportive non-submitters incorrectly thought that submissions could only be in opposition to a resource consent application, not in support.

Regardless of their views, some did not become engaged because they felt powerless to influence the outcome of the planning process: 'In the end it's going to

**Table 2: Summary of findings**

<b>A: How do non-submitters' perspectives of proposed wind farms differ from those of submitters?</b>	
<b>Expectation from literature:</b> Non-submitters would be generally more supportive towards proposed wind farms in their vicinity than submitters.	<b>Findings:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Almost all non-submitters were supportive of wind energy in the abstract.</li> <li>• In relation to actual wind farm proposals, non-submitters were overall no more or less supportive than submitters, and expressed a range of supportive, negative and ambivalent views.</li> <li>• However, compared to submitters, their views were less extreme: they were less likely to strongly oppose or support, and more likely to express ambivalent views.</li> </ul>
<b>B: Why do non-submitters not make submissions?</b>	
<b>Expectation from literature:</b> Influential factors would include:	<b>Findings:</b> Influential factors include:
Personal factors	Lack of personal interest; having other more pressing priorities in life
Level of engagement	Less engaged and informed than submitters
Perceptions of impacts	Not feeling impacted by the proposal
Level of political and social engagement	Not being engaged with action groups
Feelings about the planning process	Feeling apprehensive or ill-informed about planning processes Feeling powerless to influence planning decision-making
Degree of self-efficacy	Lacking self-efficacy

happen, as these things usually do, so I think, oh well, why bother' (MNS8); 'I kind of feel, with things like that, it wouldn't matter what I say, it wouldn't affect the end result anyway' (MNS9).

Finally, some non-submitters just had other priorities. 'They were having some meetings ... I think they went ahead, but ... we were doing something else so we didn't even go' (KNS1); 'If I look around the suburb there are people here who've got a lot of things on their mind, like the family, staying alive and feeding the kids, and things like that that are of much more immediate relevance than a proposed wind farm' (MNS8).

In summary, we could not identify any single reason for not submitting that was common amongst all non-submitters, but rather a number of influential factors. The primary ones were a lack of personal interest, feeling unaffected by the proposal, being less engaged and informed than submitters, lacking self-efficacy, not being engaged with action groups, feeling apprehensive or ill-informed about planning processes, feeling powerless to influence planning decision-making, and having other more pressing priorities in life. These themes bear a close relationship to the various literatures discussed earlier, as indicated in Table 2. The findings are not unexpected, but do reveal that there are very diverse influences on people's willingness to engage in the formal submission process.

#### Discussion and conclusion

It must first be stressed that this was an exploratory study involving two case studies and a limited number of participants. Nevertheless, the degree of concordance between our empirical and qualitative data gives us confidence that the findings are reliable. A broader study involving more participants could help determine whether the same findings are applicable across other locations and development types.

We were surprised at the wide range of opinions expressed by non-submitters. It is clear that it is not safe to assume that non-submitters are generally supportive of proposals. Although they may not express their views as forcefully as submitters, many of the non-submitters

had concerns about the wind farms, while others clearly supported them, although ambivalence appeared to prevail. While our findings confirmed that the majority of non-submitters supported wind energy in the abstract, the received wisdom that the silent majority supports specific wind farm proposals as well is untenable. This may well be the case in some instances, but our work certainly calls into question the blanket application of this assumption.

Apart from their personal circumstances, a number of the factors which appear to be dissuading non-submitters from making submissions are within the realm of influence of planning authorities and/or developers. Mitigating measures would include providing adequate information, providing a variety of means of inviting engagement on the issue, demystifying the submission process, making planning processes less formal and daunting for the public, and making decision-making processes more transparent.

But are more submissions really the answer? Can planning authorities and developers instead expand their repertoire from the one-way participation of submissions (McGurk, Sinclair and Diduck, 2006) to include a much wider variety of consensus-building approaches, thus engaging a wider public than can be accessed through submissions alone? These processes and techniques are characterised by early involvement, full information, transparency, inclusiveness, deliberation, participant diversity and partnership in agenda setting (Hindmarsh and Matthews, 2008). Techniques to encourage dialogue include citizen forums, roundtables, inquiry groups, world cafes, deliberative polls, and the use of visual communication technologies (Cronin and Jackson, 2004). A New Zealand example relating to wind farms is the range of tools utilised by the Blueskin Energy Project, a proposed community-owned wind turbine cluster near Dunedin. Mechanisms employed here included a community workshop to develop a vision for the future, running lively events to build energy literacy and broad community engagement, utilising multiple paths (public meetings, hui, online surveys, face-to-face discussions,

independent research) to elicit community feedback, and running a series of events in community halls with interactive displays and multiple forms of response (Willis, Stephenson and Day, 2012).

Such techniques can mean that a wider proportion of the public is engaged and providing feedback than simply those motivated to write submissions. They help address the shortfalls in information, engagement and self-efficacy that is evident in driving at least some of the non-submitters' lack of action. However, unless they are used actively to shape the development in a meaningful way, they do not guarantee that the proposal that is eventually publicly notified will be a true product of consensus-building. This brings us back to the problem of the limited number of the general public who are likely to want to make submissions should a consultative process fail to 'get it right'. While our work is not designed to devise alternative methods to incorporate public views into formal decision-making processes, we believe that this is an area worthy of further research so that the perspectives of non-submitters can be taken into account by planning authorities.

In conclusion, non-submitters' views, even if not as strongly held, are as legitimate as those of submitters. At a time when greater attention is being paid to the importance of civic engagement and participatory decision-making (Hindmarsh and Matthews, 2008), it seems ironic that those with 'weaker' views are effectively closed out of the decision-making loop. In New Zealand's situation, where submissions are the only legally mandated way in which public views are conveyed to decision-makers, this would appear to disenfranchise a significant portion of the population with valid perspectives.

1 The research was funded by New Zealand's National Energy Research Institute.

2 Former New Zealand minister for energy, Peter Hodgson, in a speech at the New Zealand Wind Energy Association Conference in 2004, <http://www.beehive.govt.nz/node/20336>.

3 Options on the six-point Likert scale ranged from 'no concern at all' to 'very great concern'.

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