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Wind Waffle

"Act on Facts" is the name of a global campaign that the wind turbine manufacturer Vestas Wind Systems have launched against what they describe as "a small but well-organized and influential minority that has succeeded in launching some outrageous claims about wind power.

"We have now thrown the gloves and will provide quality rebuttals to our often unscrupulous opponents," declared Communications and Marketing Director Morten Albaek.

But their campaign was hardly launched that Aalborg University's Professor Henrik Moeller, Associate Professor Christian Sejer, and civil engineer Steffen Pedersen sent on June 28th a letter to our editor criticising sharply Vestas' attempt monopolise the truth about wind energy.

Not surprisingly, noise is the central issue in the "Act on Facts" campaign, where Vestas argue, inter alia, that the noise 400 meters from a wind turbine is less than that of the average refrigerator in a kitchen.

With sober scientific precision, the three experts from Aalborg University counter-claimed that wind turbines are noisier than the average refrigerator by 10 decibels. - Let's point out that a difference of 10 decibels is considerable.

Vestas have had to recognise that there was "some confusion" about their claim. It had "its origins in Australia, where there is a requirement for a minimum distance of 800 meters between turbines and residences, and at this distance the figures fit very well," declared their press officer to our editor on July 1st.

But this claim is also untrue, replied the three noise experts from Aalborg University. Even at 800 meters, the noise from a 3 MW wind turbine is six to seven decibels higher than that emitted by the average refrigerator.

What Vestas has never tried to understand is that the resistance to wind turbines is caused by the unscrupulous - to use Vestas' own expression - behaviour of politicians and wind turbine owners.

Politicians, because they unilaterally imposed billions in expenses to families and large businesses by favoring wind energy over others. They did it notwithstanding the fact that, after many years of

experimentation, wind turbines are still unable to compete in the free market, and must be subsidised.

And wind turbine owners: because in their pursuit of tax credits and state-guaranteed minimum prices, they have ignored the interests of the people who - unlike most of themselves - have suffered a greatly reduced quality of life because of the imposition of wind turbines near their homes.

Many people are positive about renewable energy, but when their favourable disposition meets with political arrogance and extravagant public spending, as well as careless handling of the truth by the wind industry, the backlash is bound to be strong.

Rather than invest energy in meeting "outrageous claims" with outrageous untruths, Vestas could usefully focus its research on making wind turbines noticeably quieter than refrigerators, as well as make them so competitive that any form of direct and indirect state aid would become redundant.

It would be real progress, and the task is by no means impossible.

In addition, it would be far more constructive than Vestas' attempt to present arguments which can be

taken apart with scientific elegance by the experts from Aalborg University.