

# Myth or Reality? Tackling Rumours on Wind Energy: Insights from social acceptance research



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*Social Acceptance of energy solutions in a polarised world*

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# Outline

- Why are facts an issue?
- 'Facts' (or values?) that drive community acceptance
- Implications and procedural design



# Why are 'facts' an issue?

- 'Facts' and claims to objective reality can be a comfort in a uncertain and changing world.
- ... and claims to facts are crucial in some important contexts;
  - Science, medicine, engineering, and (aspirationally) public policy.
- ... but unhelpful in others;
  - Religious debate, appreciation of art, sexual attraction.
- 'Truth' and power
- Multiple truths in a post-truth world.
- Claims to truth need to be made appropriately and responsibly.



# 'Facts' (or values?) that drive community acceptance

- **Health and environmental impacts**
  - Understanding of local factors and improving project design and siting.
  - *i.e. meaningful access to decision-making.*
- **Perceived distribution of costs & benefits**
  - Improving local multipliers and links to the public interest.
  - *i.e. a sense of distributive justice*
- **Fairness of consenting process**
  - 'Fair process' effect.
  - Aim for 'settlement of differences' rather than strive for consensus.
  - *i.e. a sense of procedural justice.*



# Contexts of Social Acceptance



**'Universal' factors:**

Technological performance (noise, efficiency, cost); alternative technologies; references to wider narratives (climate change, energy security etc).

**'Political/Regulatory' factors:**

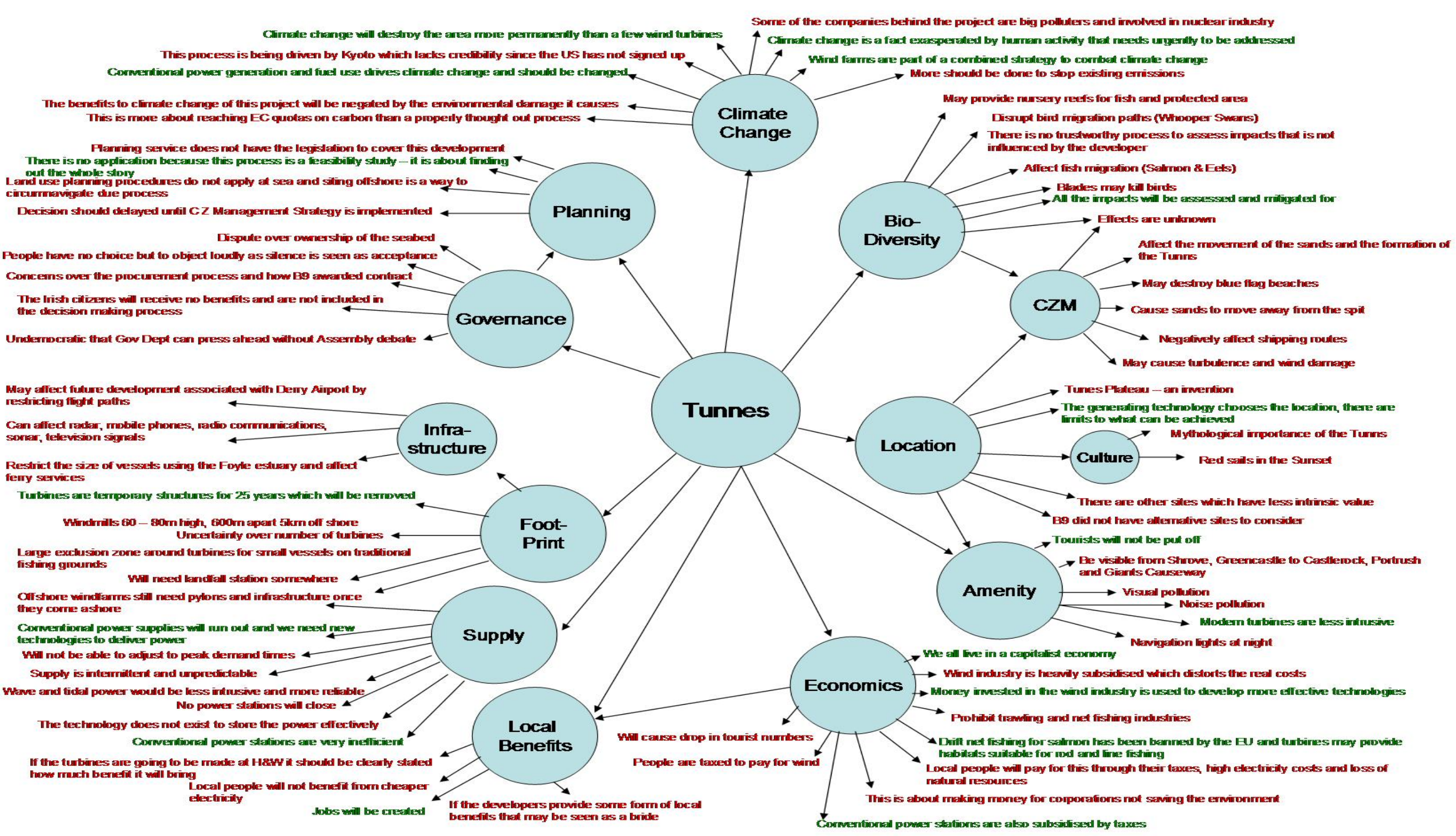
Trust; appropriateness of policy; compensation/subsidies; identification of 'acceptable' locations; defining expectations of stakeholders.

**'Project specific' factors:**

Project size; physical location; cumulative impacts; community make-up and attitudes; developer behaviour.

# Summary of influences on social acceptance

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Key influences</i>	
<b>Individual attitudes</b> <div data-bbox="25 335 445 506" style="border: 1px solid green; border-radius: 15px; padding: 5px; text-align: center; color: green;">                     Inherent characteristics and cultural influences                 </div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Age, gender etc</li> <li>• Strength of place attachment</li> <li>• Political beliefs and voting preferences</li> <li>• Emotional response</li> <li>• Prior experience of wind turbines</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attitudes to environmental issues</li> <li>• Psychological factors including perception of social norms</li> <li>• Individual roles (consumer, landowner etc)</li> <li>• Familiarity with wind energy</li> </ul>
<b>Relationships</b> <div data-bbox="25 556 445 728" style="border: 1px solid green; border-radius: 15px; padding: 5px; text-align: center; color: green;">                     Perceptions; mediated by wider personal beliefs                 </div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Type and level of social capital</li> <li>• Trust in government other public agencies and developers</li> <li>• Proximity to, and visibility of, turbines</li> <li>• Technology-society relationships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time, reflecting the dynamic nature of social acceptance</li> <li>• National-local policy</li> <li>• Regulator-Developer links</li> <li>• Discourses within and between communities</li> </ul>
<b>Contextual issues</b> <div data-bbox="25 778 445 906" style="border: 1px solid green; border-radius: 15px; padding: 5px; text-align: center; color: red;">                     Some 'Facts'; mediated by place perception et al                 </div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cumulative impacts</li> <li>• Project design – turbine height, colour number and massing</li> <li>• Ownership of proposed project</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Range and mix of actors</li> <li>• Specific siting issues</li> <li>• Place attachment</li> <li>• Policy regimes</li> </ul>
<b>Perceived impacts</b> <div data-bbox="25 992 445 1178" style="border: 2px solid red; border-radius: 15px; padding: 5px; text-align: center; color: red;">                     'Facts'; mediated by values and outlook                 </div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Noise</li> <li>• Landscape</li> <li>• Shadow flicker</li> <li>• Property values</li> <li>• Level of economic benefit</li> <li>• Bio-diversity: bats, birds</li> <li>• Infrasound</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Navigation lights</li> <li>• Health concerns</li> <li>• Levels of economic benefits</li> <li>• Efficiency of turbines and wind energy</li> <li>• Distributive justice</li> <li>• Disruption of 'place'</li> </ul>
<b>Process-related</b> <div data-bbox="25 1256 445 1420" style="border: 1px solid green; border-radius: 15px; padding: 5px; text-align: center; color: green;">                     Perceptions; mediated by wider personal beliefs                 </div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trust in institutions involved</li> <li>• Transparency and openness</li> <li>• Procedural justice</li> <li>• Expectations and aspirations of public participation</li> <li>• Availability and quality of information</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Power in the participation process</li> <li>• Value places on lay and expert knowledge</li> <li>• Timing</li> <li>• Discourses of community, developer, regulatory bodies</li> <li>• Fait accompli</li> </ul>



# Supporter Discourses

(from Ellis et al 2006)

- **Rationalising Globally - Sacrificing Locally:**

Deeply concerned about climate change and energy security, suggests that addressing these challenges should override any local impacts.

- **Local Pastoralist – Developer Sceptic**

A more traditional, pastoral view of the environment, unhappy about potential impacts on the North Coast. Offers reluctant support in the recognition of the need for more sustainable energy.

- **Embrace Wind**

Very strong belief in wind power, future-orientated and uncritical of the proposal and wind farms developers.

- **Site Specific Supporter – Energy Pragmatist**

High level of concern with energy issues, a more pragmatic outlook, resulting in site-specific support for the Tunnes Plateau scheme.



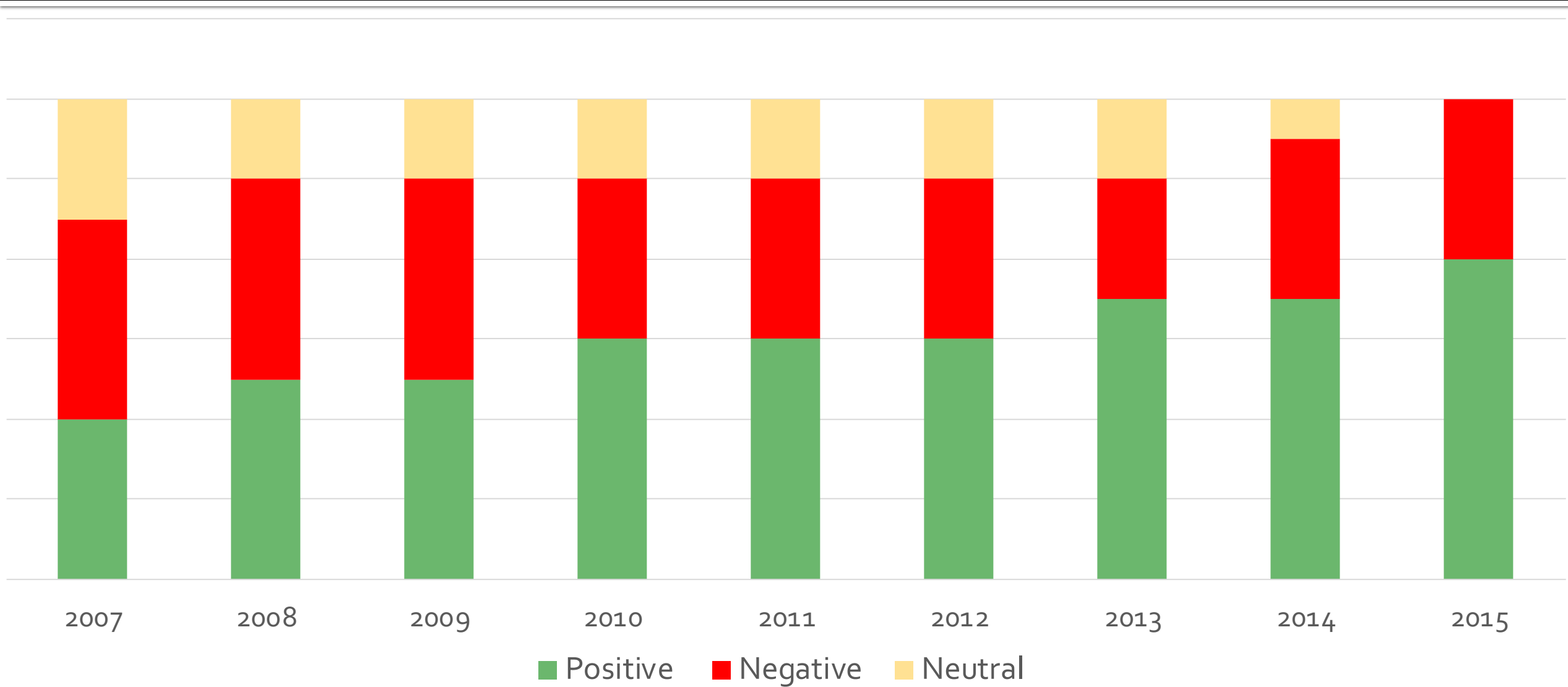
# Objector Discourses

(from Ellis et al 2006)

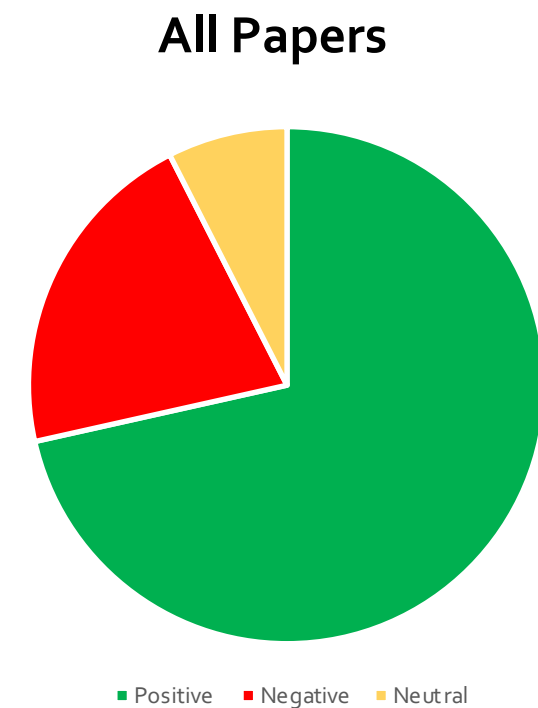
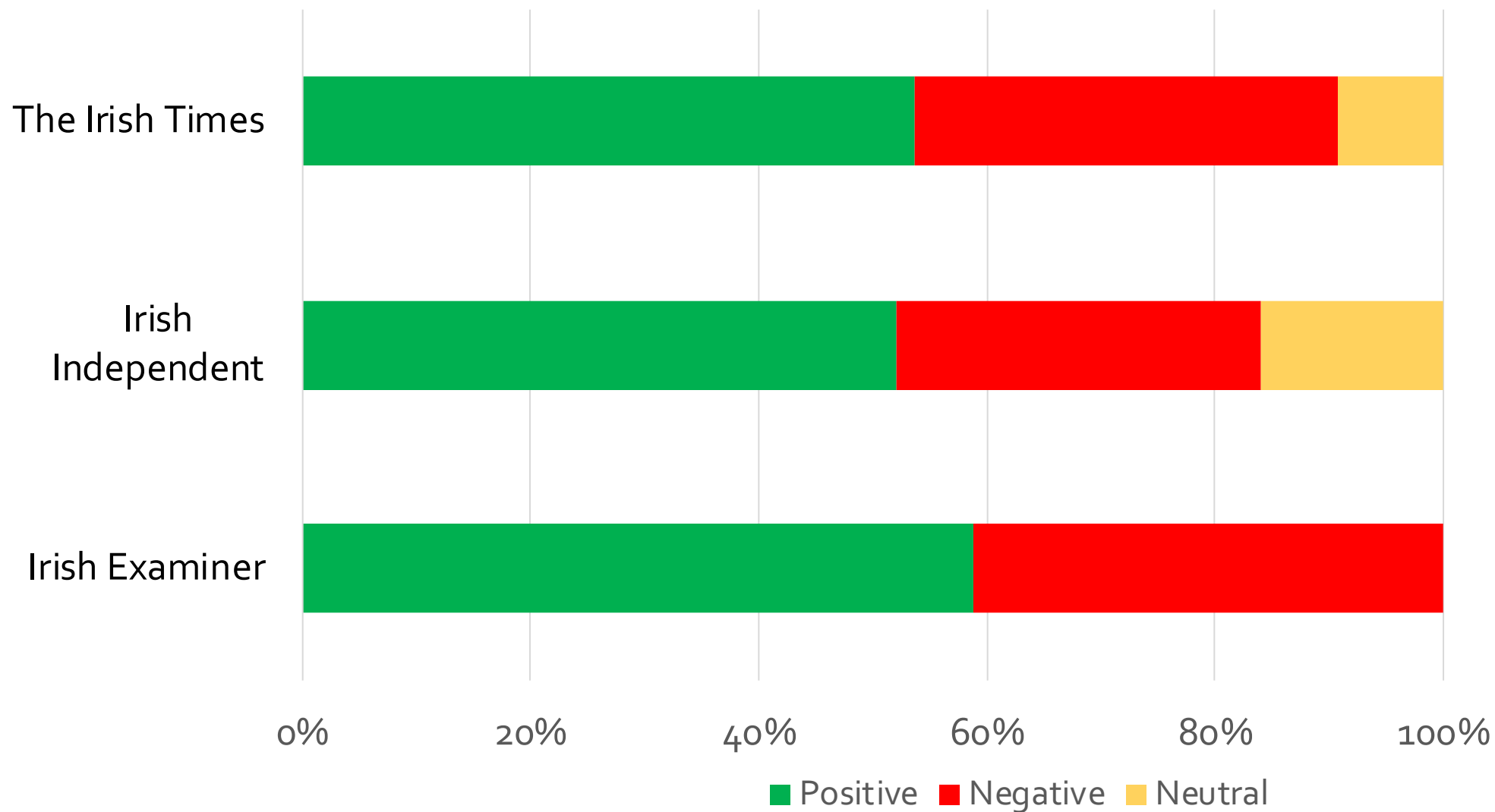
- **Anti-Wind Power - Local Resister**  
Deeply sceptical of the concept of wind power, shows confidence that the project can be resisted through local activism.
- **Wind Power-Supporter - Siting Sheriff**  
Offers support to the concept of wind power but expresses major site-specific concerns related to the Tunes Plateau proposal.
- **Anti-Developer – Local Pragmatist**  
Deep suspicion of wind farm developers, less concerned about “big” issues like climate change, most motivated by the potential of tangible local impacts, such as the loss of jobs.
- **Economic Sceptic- Siting Compromiser**  
Most concerned with shorter term, impacts of the proposed scheme, willing to consider other siting option as and applies a more reasoned, economic rationale to evaluating wind power.

# Overall Discourse: positive, negative or neutral

(3 major Irish newspapers, 2007-2015 sample)



# Overall discourse: positive, negative or neutral (n.200, Nov 2007 - Jan 2008)



# Some implications....

- Emphasising the 'facts' overlooks that a very major component of objection is a clash of 'values';
- A strategy based on the presumption of 'Information-deficit' is antagonistic, ineffective and linked to the regressive concept of NIMBYism;
- Understand the dispute not just the objectors;
- It maybe better to focus on effective project design, good public participation and a deliberative process, possibly using intermediaries;
- Focus on changing overall discourse rather than facts....



# Consequences for Procedural Design

- Forget NIMBY and 'false beliefs';
- Remember the possibility of a 'fair process effect';
- The perception of fairness and previous experience of decision-making;
- Early deliberation rather than late information-giving;
- Wind development as part of a long-term and integrated vision of an area;
- Effective community engagement needs freedom of information, neutral facilitation and technical assistance;
- The need for neutral umpires and intermediaries;
- Good process can cost time and resources;
- Skills and knowledge of all involved;
- .....win by love, not war.



# Thank you

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