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Massive conflict of interests, no adequate measurement of noise and deliberate misinformation of residents: a damning report of the Polish national auditor on wind farm developments

The president of the Polish National Audit Authority (NIK) told a parliamentary committee on 12 May 2016 that in up to one third of all the rural municipalities covered by the NIK investigation, decision makers responsible for granting permits for wind farm developments, or close family members of such local officials, were beneficiaries of land leases for these projects.



These are the findings of a multi-year study by the Polish Audit Authority, which sought to investigate if the public interest was adequately safeguarded in the planning and permitting process for publicly-subsidized wind power developments. Krzysztof Kwiatkowski, NIK president, told the parliamentary committee on infrastructure that the study included a total of 70 inspections in 51 municipalities and 19 county-level local government administrations.

In 90 per cent of inspected municipalities, local authority's approval of wind farm developments was made contingent on the developer's funding the preparation of planning documentation or making donations to the municipality. Yet, under Polish law such expenditures must be covered from the municipality's own budget. According to the Polish Audit Authority, such actions may give rise to conflict of interests between the developer's preferences and the interests of municipalities and local communities.

Mr Kwiatkowski also noted that the existing regulations on noise measurement did not guarantee "reliable [assessment] of nuisance resulting from the operation of a wind farm". Specifically, under the existing regulations noise was measured at low speed levels, with wind speed below 5 m/s. However, the noise is most intensive at wind speeds of 10-12 m per second, which are optimal for wind turbine's performance. Furthermore, the

regulations did not require measurements of other impacts such as infrasound and shadow flicker, according to President Kwiatkowski.

The Polish National Auditor also noted that in the absence of clear laws and consistent case-law of courts, wind farms were occasionally built in areas of outstanding landscape value.

The inspections also disclosed that in one third of the municipalities there were conflicts of interests involving "individuals who were primary beneficiaries of wind farm projects", that is people who concluded land lease contracts for wind turbines. Such people tended to be "mayors, members of their immediate families, municipality officials, council members" who had approved changes to local zoning plans enabling the construction of wind farms in the first place.

The Polish National Auditor also questioned the manner in which local communities were being informed about the planned developments. At times, meetings were announced in a manner intended to make it difficult for interested residents to attend and then the failure to attend such meeting was considered to imply consent on the part of local population.

Source: <http://www.cire.pl/item,129196,1,0,0,0,0,0,prezes-nik-w-sejmie-o-nieprawidlowosciach-dotyczacych-lokalizacji-wiatrakow.html> (12.05.2016)