



Proposed coal fired power station at Hunterston

Member's debate S3M-06923: Hunterston Not the Way Forward for Carbon Capture

Opposition to the proposed 1852MW (gross output) coal fired power station at Hunterston in North Ayrshire is widespread at a local, national and international level, and includes many people in the communities that would be directly affected. A coalition of environment and development NGOs share this concern and have come together to campaign against the proposal. RSPB Scotland, WWF Scotland, Friends of the Earth Scotland, the Scottish Wildlife Trust, the World Development Movement Scotland, Oxfam, Christian Aid Scotland and the Church of Scotland are all in agreement that the proposal would result in **unacceptable climate change impacts**. Members of this coalition with an environment remit also oppose the proposal on the basis of unacceptable direct biodiversity impacts.

Around 16,000 objections have been submitted to the Scottish Government to date – already one of the highest numbers ever received in response to a development proposal in Scotland. A majority of MSPs voted to support a motion opposing the proposal in a debate on 18 March in the Scottish Parliament¹. We welcome Ross Finnie MSP's motion and member's debate as a further opportunity for Parliament to debate the issue and allow MSPs to voice their concerns. The Scottish Government has set a welcome target for reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 42% by 2020, leading the world in showing that we are prepared to take action on climate change. The plant at Hunterston is likely to lead to a significant increase in overall Scottish emissions. In this context, approval of the Hunterston application would dramatically undermine the likely effectiveness of the Government's Public Engagement Strategy on climate change, required by the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009, through its de-motivating effect on individual action. Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) would be far better trialled on an existing power station where real emissions reductions could be achieved.

Climate impacts

Unabated coal is the most carbon dioxide intensive of all fossil fuels, making it a leading contributor to greenhouse gas emissions, and thus climate change. Climate change will have devastating impacts on ecosystems and species, and it is one of the most challenging issues facing vulnerable communities around the world. By 2015, an average of over 375 million people will be affected by climate-related disasters each year². We know that climate change threatens to erode human freedoms and limit choice. The efforts of the world's poor to build a better life for themselves and their children are being thwarted by increased exposure to drought, to more intense storms, to floods and environmental stress. Excessive greenhouse gas emissions violate the rights of millions of the world's poorest people to life, security, food, health and shelter. Developing countries have contributed the least to the problem, are the least able to finance adaptation, yet are disproportionately suffering its effects now. In contrast, industrialised nations like Scotland, which bear the historical responsibility for climate change, have the greatest capacity to deliver an equitable global solution to the problem. The Scottish Parliament recognised this when it passed the world-leading Climate Change (Scotland) Act. This demonstrated

¹ <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/officialReports/meetingsParliament/or-10/sor0318-02.htm#Col24826>

² http://www.oxfam.org.uk/resources/policy/climate_change/downloads/forecasting_disasters_2015.pdf

that Scotland was willing to take its fair share of the global effort required to prevent catastrophic climate change. The Hunterston proposal is incompatible with that intention.

Biodiversity impacts

Building a new power station at Hunterston would destroy a substantial part of the Portencross Coast Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), which has nationally important eelgrass beds and the best remaining inter-tidal mud and sandflats left on the outer Clyde – important feeding grounds for a huge range of waterfowl and waders. Southannan Sands is one of the best areas for wildlife in the whole of the Clyde Estuary. The proposed development at the Hunterston site would extend across 104 hectares, equating to an area roughly the size of 148 football pitches. The buildings themselves would be significant in size with the highest building approximately 115m tall and the air emission stack approximately 155m – just over 500ft. In addition, there will be uncertain environmental impacts from thermal and chemical pollution of the water around the site, which could have additional impacts on biodiversity – for example through proliferation of invasive non-native species. Coal fired power stations also produce large quantities of ash and the developer has assumed that a use will be found for all of the ash produced by the plant. However, if this is not the case, it seems likely that ash lagoons would be needed, resulting in further loss of important habitat.

CCS and Scotland's future energy supply

Scottish Government policy on CCS requires that new coal fired power stations will have to demonstrate CCS on 300MW (net) of capacity from the first day of operation. However, for a 1852MW proposal like Hunterston, this still means **over three quarters of capacity would be unabated**. The development would result in a new source of CO₂ emissions of between 42 Mt and over 300 Mt over its 40-year lifetime, depending on when and if full scale CCS is implemented. This would make a mockery of Scotland's emissions reduction targets. Retrofitting CCS technology on existing plants, such as at Longannet power station in Fife, would result in an overall **reduction** in emissions and will help demonstrate the commercial viability of this new technology. We would urge the Scottish Government to prioritise CCS demonstration on existing plant for environmental, economic and innovation reasons, and in order to move Scotland towards a low-carbon energy supply rather than provide for a 'business as usual' approach by industry.

Research by Garrad Hassan³ has shown that Scotland's energy needs can be fully met using well-sited renewables, without building new coal fired power stations. The report looked at five scenarios for our future energy supply, and established that by 2030 renewable energy could meet between 60% and 143% of Scotland's projected annual electricity demand, depending on the level of investment in energy saving and new renewables. It shows that it is entirely plausible that no large-scale fossil fuel fired generating capacity would need to remain online by 2030. The report also concluded that new unabated fossil fuel capacity would severely compromise the likelihood of delivering our climate change targets.

This proposal at Hunterston would cause direct environmental harm and result in significant additional greenhouse gas emissions, and should not go ahead as currently proposed. We do not believe that new, largely unabated coal fired power stations are appropriate in light of our necessarily ambitious climate change targets.

For further information please contact:

Julia Harrison, tel 0131-311-6538 or 07912-667874, email julia.harrison@rspb.org.uk

³ http://www.rspb.org.uk/Images/PowerofScotlandRenewed_tcm9-222405.pdf