Parliamentary Briefing

Onshore Wind Farms & Climate Change

November 2003

Friends of the Earth Scotland

Friends of the Earth Scotland believes that it is essential to rapidly progress clean renewable forms of energy, in conjunction with major improvements in energy efficiency, in Scotland to tackle climate change and end our dependency on polluting fossil fuel and nuclear sources of energy.

Scotland has made a commitment to making an 'equitable contribution' to the UK Governments commitment under Kyoto, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 12.5% against 1990 levels, by 2008-2012. To date Scotland has achieved a reduction of just 4.9% since 1990 (less than half the 12.8% average achieved by the UK as a whole) and is not on track to deliver our share of the UK commitment of a 20% reduction by 2010 or 60% by 2050, as recommended by the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution and referred to in the Energy Review. The urgency with which we take action to reduce climate change emissions should not be underestimated, for every year that we fail to address the challenge the scale of the resulting threat increases.

The Role of Onshore Wind

Whilst we need to accompany onshore wind with the further development of a range of forms of renewable energy, onshore wind is currently the best developed renewable energy technology and has a critical role to play in pursuing a more sustainable energy policy:

• Scotland has 23% of the European wind energy resource and the resource is much greater during the colder months of the year, when energy demand is at its highest.

• It is highly cost competitive, with many wind farms producing energy more cheaply than nuclear.

• The development of wind energy presents job opportunities for Scotland. The European Commission estimates that a doubling of energy produced from renewables could create between 500,000 and 800,000 new jobs and Scotland is ideally placed to capture many of these with skill bases in both traditional heavy industry and new hi-tech sectors necessary to develop and manufacture renewable technologies.

• Wind energy is one of the most popular energy technologies. Opinion surveys regularly show that just over eight out of ten people are in favour of wind energy, and less than one in ten (around 5%) are against it.

There are a number of issues which deserve consideration in progressing onshore wind energy in Scotland:

Landscape & Location

• 20% of Scotland's electricity needs could be produced by on-shore wind over an area of less than 2% of Scotland, given Scottish Natural Heritage's 'Strategic Locational Guidance' wind farms need not pose a threat to designated sites.

• There is no evidence to suggest that wind farms deter tourists, indeed many wind farms are themselves tourist attractions.

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A Mori poll was undertaken in 2002 regarding wind farms in the Argyll area, 80% of tourists said they would be interested in visiting a wind farm if it were open to the public with a visitor centre. Over 90% of tourists visiting Argyll said the presence of windfarms made no difference to their decision to retum. The UK's first commercial wind farm in Cornwall received 350,000 visitors in its first 8 years of operation.

• The focus for wind development should not solely be on remote rural areas, we should be maximising opportunities to utilise wind near to where electricity is consumed, and encourage development opportunities within Scotland's Central Belt and in brownfield sites.

• Compared to fossil fuel or nuclear alternatives wind energy structures can be more easily dismantled and removed from the landscape.

• If we don't switch to cleaner forms of energy, climate change and acid deposition will severely and irrevocably alter much of our landscape as well as the animal and plant life it contains.

Planning

• Zoning guidance from Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), accompanied by National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG 6 - Renewable Energy Developments) and Planning Advice Note (PAN 45 - Renewable Energy Technologies) provides a sound basis for local authorities to regulate development of wind energy projects in Scotland.

• Additional resources for planning authorities and SNH would assist in the rigorous application of this guidance and ensure that the best schemes were considered on a case by case basis.

• Planning authorities should ensure that they fully consider the cumulative impact effect to prevent specifics hotspots.

• Strategic guidance on renewable energy development could also assist local authorities when making planning decisions and ensuring that they each contribute to Scotland's renewable electricity targets.

• Large scale commercial schemes should be accompanied by bonds to ensure that the infrastructure including the structure, roads and concrete bases are removed at a later stage e.g. at the end of a projects commercial viability.

Communities - Benefit and Involvement

• As many as 9 in 10 wind farms fail to obtain local planning permission and the predominance of large-scale, developer led projects has contributed to difficulties associated with local acceptance of new renewable energy, in particular, wind.

• It is important to improve the role and rights of communities in wind energy schemes, not only by furthering community based initiatives but also by looking at the rights of communities in large-scale developer led proposals. The Scottish Executive should investigate methods to ensure that communities are not only fully involved and consulted, but receive positive rewards and benefit directly from the developments, without this being akin to the community being 'bought off'.

• The proposed green jobs strategy should include opportunities in fabrication and maintenance of wind energy installations.

Conclusion

There are a number of issues which need to be resolved to ensure that wind energy developments progress satisfactorily in Scotland, however a moratorium on development in Scotland would be a retrograde step given the environmental imperative to move away from polluting fossil and nuclear based energy sources and achieve the Executive's commitment to securing 18% of Scotland's electricity from renewables by 2010 and 40% by 2020.

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