

Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee Inquiry into the Scottish Government's Renewable Energy Targets

Response by Stuart Young

Introduction

My name is Stuart Young. I am Chairman of Caithness Windfarm Information Forum, but this is my personal response. I have taken part in three Public Local Inquiries related to wind farm development in Caithness and also the Beaulieu Denny transmission upgrade PLI and Muatheabhal Wind Farm PLI as a witness on behalf of the John Muir Trust. I am author of "Analysis of UK Wind Power Generation, November 2008 to December 2010" ("the John Muir Report").

Response

Targets

Has the Scottish Government made any estimation of the overall costs of achieving the targets, and identified which parties will bear them?

Not to my knowledge.

Challenges

- **Technology**

Is the technology to meet these targets available and affordable? If not, what needs to be done?

Neither available nor affordable. The targets should be abandoned and a policy based on engineering possibilities and sound economic judgment should be substituted.

Are electricity generating or heat producing technologies compatible with the need for security of energy supplies?

Wind energy is not compatible with security of supply. Between November 2008 and December 2010, the wind generation on which National Grid had operational metering (average around 1600MW) produced less than 20MW on 124 occasions including 56 occasions when the output was 10MW or less. (*Analysis of UK Wind Power Generation, November 2008 to December 2010*)

- **Supply chain and infrastructure**

Is the supply chain in Scotland in place to meet the targets?

What further improvements are needed to the grid infrastructure or heat supply networks both at a national and a local level? Additionally, are we confident that the necessary infrastructure can be developed and financed so that Scotland can export any excess electricity generated to the rest of the UK and/or the EU? What is the role for the Scottish Government here?

This assumes that there is a market for Scotland's excess renewable electricity whenever it is available. What research has been done to prove this market? What assurances have been given that our excess generation will be welcomed?

Will Scotland fund the necessary transmission infrastructure to get our excess renewable energy to these supposed markets?

Given that the renewable energy will only be generated if supported by the Renewables Obligation and its cost will reflect this, why would commercial suppliers of electricity buy more than the quota required to satisfy the Renewables Obligation?

The Scottish Government's role is to ensure security of energy supply at reasonable cost. Unfortunately it has abandoned this basic requirement in favour of politically inspired aspirations.

(c) Planning and consents

Is the planning system adequately resourced and fit for purpose?

No. Local authorities and organisations such as SNH and SEPA do not have adequate resources to process windfarm applications. There is also a widely held belief that Government funded organisations are actively discouraged from close scrutiny of wind farm planning applications. Developer's Environmental Statements are accepted as written. Developers commission ES. They get what they want in return. If Planning Authorities commissioned independent ES with funds obtained from Developers, that would go a long way to addressing the current absence of scrutiny of Developers' plans.

How can national priorities be reconciled with local interests?

Scottish Planning Policy overrides local interests. *There is nothing in Scottish Planning Policy which says in law that a community's views on a windfarm proposal have any weight or merit.*

I ask that the Committee use the resources at its disposal to attempt to disprove this statement.

(d) Access to finance

Will sufficient funds be available to allow investment in both the installation and the development of relevant technologies? What can the Scottish Government do to influence this?

What will the impacts be on consumers and their bills?

The present impact on consumers is being understated at both Holyrood and Westminster. The figure of £15 per annum on the average domestic electricity bill is put about as the cost of renewable energy to domestic consumers. This relies on the fact that only a lesser portion of all electricity is paid for directly by domestic customers, the rest is paid for by industry, commerce, service agencies, government and the like.

All the cost of electricity borne by these organisations is ultimately paid for by the people, the consumers.

The cost of the Renewables Obligation in 2010 was £1,100,000,000 (£1.1 billion pounds). This was paid for by 62,000,000 people. Each person's share was £17.74. The average household bore £42.58 of cost directly attributable to Renewables in 2010. It is shameful that Holyrood and Westminster conceal that fact.

The equivalent sum for 2011 is likely to be around £60. Feed-in tariffs will significantly add to that in 2012 and for the next 20 years.

(f) Energy market reform and the subsidy regime

Are the reforms of the energy markets and subsidy regimes at both UK and EU level sufficient to meet the challenge of the Scottish Government's renewable targets.

The remit of this Inquiry is "An inquiry into the achievability of the Scottish Government's 2020 renewable energy targets, **the merits of the targets** and what the risks and barriers are to realising them."

None of the questions asked challenge the merits of the targets. I would pose these questions to the committee:

- Why do we have these targets, what is the main purpose?
- Apart from meeting the targets, what would be judged a success?
- Why are Scottish targets so much more "ambitious" than anyone else's? What is wrong with a realistic target?
- Why is the Committee only now seeking views on whether the targets are achievable instead of having researched the facts before setting the targets?
- What will happen when the collective view of the respondees inevitably concludes that the targets are not achievable?
- Where is our target market for surplus generation and has a business plan been prepared?
- How much influence does the Scottish Government have over the international bodies and communities whose investment is essential to securing the transmission infrastructure to allow Scotland to sell overpriced unreliable wind energy to them?

Stuart Young
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