

Beaks to probe eagles risk?

By our own
Reporter

SKYE RESIDENTS are prepared to go to court to block the construction of a controversial wind-driven power station near Edinbane.

Despite a record number of objections, the Highland Council voted on 29 November to approve a proposal for twenty-seven 100-metre turbines submitted by construction giant AMEC.

'This application has been a complete shambles and sets a very poor standard for environmental assessment', says a spokesperson from the *Skye Windfarm Action Group* (SWAG), 'In fact it's totally undermined our confidence in the planning system.'

Skye has the highest density of Golden Eagles in Europe and a local conservation group, *Stop the Killing of Young Eagles* (SKYE), is seriously concerned about the impact this development could have on both the Golden and Sea Eagles that use the site.

A SKYE spokesperson said, 'After decades of conservation effort, the eagles of Skye are again under threat.'

'The risks have not been properly assessed and the public has been denied its right to comment on serious environmental issues.'

'Despite repeated requests to Highland Council and AMEC, important flight information was withheld from the general public until the day after the application was approved.'

'SNH voiced concerns over the adequacy of AMEC's eagle data but did not object.'

She continued, 'SNH made a private arrangement with Highland Council to keep its response secret until just before the Hearing'.

VoS News also understands that the RSPB objected that, without flight-line data, it could not assess the impact on eagles. It also warned the Highland Council that approval of the application could be open to legal challenge.

SKYE, SWAG and local residents are seeking legal advice about getting the Highland Council's decision reviewed by the courts and have established a fighting fund.

'It's a shame we're being forced down this route', said a SWAG spokesperson, 'but we're determined to see justice done.'

'And of course we're hoping the RSPB will join us in our fight.'

Contact SKYE at helios@ecosse.net. See www.nrel.gov/wind/26092.pdf for the impact of wind farms on eagles. See also www.scottish.parliament.uk/official_report/cttee/petit-02/pu02-1802.htm

David Bellamy is new VoS patron

New patron David Bellamy sent this message to the recent VoS conference – report, page 5

APOLOGIES that I cannot be with you in person at this crucially important meeting concerning the future of the sustainable redevelopment of Scotland.

It is my considered opinion that the rational development of alternative resources of energy is of key importance to the sustainable future of Scotland – but it must be of the right sort and located in the right place.

This is the key rationale behind sustainability and behind VIEWS OF SCOTLAND, the public voice of a rapidly growing group of highly informed, motivated and caring people who counsel common sense to save the immensely rich common heritage of Scotland.

Landscape-based tourism is already the major creator of jobs and hence cash-flow into rural Scotland. Common sense therefore demands that any new developments and/or the use of any new technologies must:

- create sustainable local jobs;

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VoS News

WELCOME to the first edition of *Vos News*.

It became clear in Perth that the scale and speed of the wind-power bonanza means that ways of keeping objectors and campaigners in touch with each other and with national developments is needed – and quickly.

Vos News is the new committee's first step to realising this aim.

Inevitably, it is experimental but the idea is to make it a vehicle for the *groups* that constitute VIEWS OF SCOTLAND, not the committee.

We aim to publish monthly on the Internet only. This first issue is being sent to a wide range of contacts.

There will be no charge for the newsletter but we shall not, unlike some 'environmental' organisations, be taking advertising from the energy monopolies.

As many can subscribe as wish to but, if you do not subscribe, you will not receive further newsletters.

As well as latest news from the SYKE campaign, our first issue features a report from the meeting in Perth.

There is news on the Executive's withdrawal of the notorious *Public Attitudes to Wind Farms* survey and reports from areas where opposition to inland wind-power proposals has been intense.

These include Inverleiver in Argyll, and Buchan in the north-west. We also cover SWAG's parliamentary petition.

It's you who need to tell *Vos News* what you feel is valuable, not the other way round.

Are reports from the regions useful? What sort of information do you need?

Should we commission technical articles that might inform anyone submitting objections or are they of limited use? What policies should VIEWS OF SCOTLAND adopt on relevant issues? Do we need a newsletter at all?

Oh, and write to us (by e-mail, long or short) and get a lively letters page, sure sign of a thriving publication.

Bellamy's message from page 1

- cause no significant negative impact on local lives and livelihoods;
- provide a better balance of greenhouse gas emissions than that which it replaces calculated over the whole life-cycle of the system;
- guaranteed investment-based assurance that, at the end of the effective life span of the technology, the landscape will be returned to its original or to a more environmentally and socially responsible use.

VIEWS OF SCOTLAND's case rests until these points are satisfactorily addressed in the detail they deserve.

Please don't let the dubious promise of land-based wind power turn Scotland into the biggest scrapyard in Europe. Wind power – yes! but all appropriately off-shore.

'Please don't let the dubious promise of land-based wind power turn Scotland into the biggest scrapyard in Europe'

It is my considered opinion that out-of-sight offshore wavepower is the best way ahead for a sustainable Scotland for the following reasons:

- wavepower would provide an energy source with base load capabilities, enough to allow the rapid development of a hydrogen-based economy and could;
- revitalise Scotland's proud heritage of shipyards and heavy engineering;
- provide safe havens for some of Scotland's beleaguered inshore fish stocks;
- provide a vast range of skilled maintenance-based local jobs in coastal communities;
- firmly place Scotland on the high road to sustainability.

Fight the good fight – I am with you all the way.

How to contact VoS News

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Executive's flagship 'you'll love 'em' survey collapses

Fatal error makes survey worthless says Views of Scotland

IN ITS RESPONSE to Ross Finnie's August 2002 consultation paper, VIEWS OF SCOTLAND examined the Scottish Executive's survey *Public Attitudes Towards Wind Farms in Scotland*.

Conducted in 2000, it has been used to justify detrimental changes to planning guidelines, has been widely misquoted by politicians and developers alike and has given rise to a pernicious myth that, as soon as sites are operational, locals find they love them.

The survey has now been withdrawn following the discovery of a fatal sampling error by VIEWS OF SCOTLAND who reported it to the Executive's Energy Division and the Central Research Unit (CRU).

The CRU had claimed that most of the 215 interviews conducted within 5km of a wind-power site were done at Novar near Inverness – because it had the largest population.

Map reading error

In fact, the surveyors had used a wrong grid reference: hardly anyone lives near the site and even the OS map shows only a handful of houses in the area.

It seems that no-one really knows where the interviewees lived.

We queried this with the surveyors. They consulted with the CRU which then pulled the survey report from the SE website.

Although a new survey has been commis-

sioned for Spring 2003, the CRU claims the responses have been re-analysed and its basic conclusions still stand.

VIEWS OF SCOTLAND disputes this. Apart from the sampling error, the survey was fatally flawed due to bias in the questionnaire and incorrect use of data in forming conclusions.

Meanwhile we have checked the CRU's 're-analysis' and found that it does not hold water. No matter how boundaries are juggled and respondents shifted from zone to zone, the figures do not add up.

We are pressing the CRU to admit to the truth – the survey's data and conclusions are worthless.

We are also trying to get some input into the design of the new survey so that it might properly reflect the feelings of possibly tens of thousands of people who might have to live near to what could well be hundreds of new wind-power sites.

We are also pushing the Executive to acknowledge that the relevant sections in NPPG6 and PAN45 need to be revised.

Meanwhile planning departments should be told of the survey's withdrawal when objecting to any application which quotes the survey.

Anyone who wants any help with this should e-mail gillianbishop@ryelands.co.uk.

● Local Report – Big names step in to endorse Argyll campaign

Wildlife campaigner backs Inverleiver battle

By Chris Metcalfe

Two high-profile personalities have joined the campaign to save Inverleiver – Scotland's ambassador-at-large Sean Connery and respected wildlife campaigner Virginia McKenna. Gaining this support was an emotional roller-coaster!

Scottish Power lodged its application for a 22-turbine site on Inverleiver Forest, near Loch Awe, on December 5. The closing date for objections was December 26, although we were assured (unofficially) that they would be accepted 'down to the wire.'

The proposal is unique – no other project combines the type of local geography with so many big turbines. The site lies over a small 'bowl' housing Loch Avich and we are deeply concerned about noise carrying over the water on capricious winds which are

known to amplify sounds.

ScottishPower's plan is to erect twenty-two 100-metre turbines on the top of a fine upland ridge featuring a complete range of protected peatlands and an acknowledged and equally complete list of protected or endangered bird species.

The impact would be massive. Turbines would be visible from one end of the glen to another, completely overshadowing the landscape – you would never escape their presence. The nearest to us would be only 1,200 metres away. An independent sound consultant will visit us soon and we are fervently hoping for expert 'ammunition'! There is also the possibility of an extra expert bird assessment.

Other sites in the area include Beinn Ghlas

Continued on page 4

SWAG petitions Holyrood

The Skye Windfarm Action Group (SWAG) went to the Scottish Parliament Petitions Committee on 3 December, acutely aware of the failure of the planning system either to address the concerns of local communities or to mitigate environmental impacts.

Here's what they said:

The Skye Windfarm Action Group respectfully petitions the Scottish Parliament for Strategic Environmental Assessment of the Scottish renewable energy programme.

We support the elimination of all unsustainable and polluting sources of energy and their replacement by clean, sustainable sources in conjunction with a widespread programme of energy conservation.

Self-interest

We note with dismay the destructive potential of an energy programme based solely on broad targets and commercial self-interest, relying on site-specific Environmental Impact Assessment, often by developers with poor environmental records and Planning Authorities unable or unwilling to address issues of cumulative impact.

In particular we are concerned about the adverse environmental impacts of the existing Programme on:

- the social fabric of our fragile communities;
- the economic activities on which our communities depend;
- our blanket bog and heathland habitats and
- our protected birds.

As an example, the Edinbane wind farm proposal for Skye has already irreparably split our local community, threatens our

prime industry (tourism) and will damage large sections of an important carbon store as well as our golden eagle population.

That the Environmental Statement was one of the worst seen by Dr Anne McCall (of the RSPB and the Royal Town Planning Institute) and that the application was approved despite Dr McCall's warning that Highland Council was laying itself open to judicial review further highlights the inadequacy of the existing system.

If Scotland, like Wales, is to become the 'back yard' for England's power consumers, it is essential that the immense potential damage from both installations and grid upgrades be properly assessed and minimised.

This can only be done at national level, with a moratorium on all large-scale renewable energy projects until a sustainable strategy for Scotland has been developed.

Strategic Environmental Assessment will be mandatory from July 2004 but, if offshore wind proposals for the Solway, Wash and Thames merit such assessment now, so too, surely, does Scotland.

An interesting discussion ensued and the Petitions Committee agreed:

- To ask the Scottish Executive for details of its work on strategic environmental assessments, when and if Scotland's renewable energy programme will have a strategic environmental assessment and when replies to its recent renewables consultation will be available;
- To ask the Scottish Renewables Forum for its comments and;
- To link the SWAG petition (PE559) to petitions PE564 and PE493 and to raise various questions pertinent to all three petitions (www.scottish.parliament.uk/official_report/cttee/petit-02/pu02-1802.htm)

● Local Report – Inverleiver (from page 3)

(National Wind Power, 14 turbines, operational), Glen Nant (new proposal), Clachan Flats (AMEC, 11 turbines) and An Suidhe (ScottishPower, 24 turbines: PI due to report in February).

Those who have been here before will know the weariness of this last stage – has one turned over every last stone, will there be enough objections, is one's own letter good enough etc, etc.

Our opinion of some journalists has hit rock bottom – thanks for advice and advance warnings from the

VIEWS OF SCOTLAND press office.

The upside has been the extraordinary people met and new friends made. Support from our Community Council was fantastic. We have been surprised and, with hindsight perhaps a little scared, by some of our own abilities, previously unknown let alone used! Remarkably, none of our mistakes has seriously affected the campaign so far – fingers firmly crossed. And that's a good note to end on. Thanks to everyone for their help: it was invaluable.

Views of Scotland now 'up and running'

MORE THAN 60 delegates from 20 groups travelled to Perth for VIEWS OF SCOTLAND's inaugural conference on November 30th. The day was fine, Perth at its autumnal best and the Dewar Centre welcoming.

The meeting gave newcomers the chance to put names to faces, to meet others with the same problems and to exchange ideas. For those who made the preliminary meeting in June, it was a time to catch up. There was plenty of blether. It is a tribute to the conference organiser, Jane Brewster, that a lot of business got done as well.

The opening session dealt with formalities – adoption of a constitution, election of a committee (John Campbell buckled under pressure and is Chairman for the year) and the appointment of auditors. A lively discussion on day-to-day policy saw the new committee instructed to continue the debate. VIEWS OF SCOTLAND is now up and running and can apply for charitable status. Its response to the Executive's paper, *Scotland's Renewable Energy Potential - Beyond 2010*, was ratified in principle.

We then heard reports from objectors to some of the 90-odd proposals for wind-driven power stations on many of our most scenic and environmentally-sensitive areas. Communities all over Scotland who feel threatened by powerful developers and betrayed by the removal of protective planning legislation began to sense the support they can receive from others. A picture of the pan-

Scottish situation began to emerge. Delegates from MAIWAG who had just suffered a setback in their battle to save Marton, Iskam and Ireleth defiantly made the long journey to share their experiences.

Next, we heard a man described by the chair as 'Daniel in the Lion's Den' – guest speaker Ben Maguire, head of the Scottish Executive's Energy Division, who outlined its renewable energy policy. There were few surprises. A lively and at times tense question and answer session followed.

Few delegates felt much need to revise their criticisms and many were alarmed at what seemed a poor grasp of engineering issues at the highest level as well as complacency on environmental and other concerns. As one observer put it, 'It's a shambles. They don't know where they are going or how to get there. It's like crossing the desert using mirages as way points'.

The afternoon saw another useful session on members' experiences followed by 'how-to' workshops on developing campaign strategy and dealing with politicians, councillors, planners and the press. Cult movie classic 'Marilyn Goes to Hollywood' got its second showing.

Heartening news ended what had been a long day. In a strong statement of support, the renowned ecologist Professor David Bellamy agreed to act as a patron of the group. His message appears on page 2.

● Local report – Growing support for sharp fight in Buchan

On 28 October, 14 neighbours were notified about a new wind-power site near Buchan – but nine of these 14 were financially involved in the development!

The proposal, submitted by Dudley Developments Ltd, is for 42 turbines on a site three kilometres long lying between Longside, Longhaven, Peterhead, Hatton and Cruden Bay – with some turbines on the Moss of Cruden.

At the start, only four of us were active. A special meeting of the Community Council was nasty to say the least: about 20 people there with me doing the talking and with one community councillor constantly interrupting, her husband and son joining in.

Our local councillor, Jim Towers, turned out to be a hero as he advised us how to object – even though we had had strong words earlier. He has said that, if just one family is affected by the proposal, he will fight it tooth and nail.

We have since found out that there are people who would be living about only 350 yards from the site but who were not even notified.

We have set up the Buchan Windfarm Action Group which, after two meetings, is some 80 strong.

Some of us went back to the Community Council and persuaded it to vote unanimously against the proposal.

We are planning further meetings, and have invited a local reporter to meet us. We asked his newspaper why Aberdeenshire Council kept so quiet about a Green renewable energy source. Is it because they have had so much opposition from Stonehaven?

We have also asked the developer to come to a public meeting to listen to our concerns and have asked for an explanation of what is meant by a 'problem with swan migration as the geese will fly higher'.

Late News:

We had a meeting at the village hall, Bob doing a presentation. You could not get any more people into the hall – around 200 attended. Two days later I had in my hand over 170 letters of objection (not counting all the others that went before) and the 230 address letters that people took with them for their families plus headed blank letters and generic letters, around 300. I've been on TV, front page of local papers a couple of times and visited a wind farm up at the Black Isle ...

William Mitchell