

Finnie's Folly or DTI ploy:

Does Dough-for-Blow scam herald comeback for nuclear?

Make no mistake. The Breeze Wheeze is a cover for a Nuclear Revival.

Westminster has decided to cover Scotland with wind turbines and export their flaky product down south to meet England's meaningless Kyoto targets. It's well on the way to doing it.

The consequences to jobs in Scotland's tourism and conventional energy sectors are irrelevant. The damage to the environment is of no interest to anybody. Considerations of the engineering viability of the scheme are a tiresome bore. The lessons of the energy disasters in Denmark are just too dull to contemplate.

It has nothing to do with cutting CO₂ emissions (the Danish experience is that excessive reliance on wind power increases emissions). It has everything to do with ecological totemism — and the political rehabilitation of the nuclear power industry.

The big guns in the environmental movement have fallen for the DTI line. They get their 'green' symbols (and some of them — the RSPB for starters — even stand to

turn a shilling as commission agents for wind generators).

Meanwhile, the power companies get to run the oldest, most profitable and dirtiest coal-fired plant in the country to provide the power that the turbines appear to be producing. And our chums in the power sector get to make a bob or two on the way thanks to Renewables Obligation price fixing.

What on earth for? Almost every power engineer in the land has told the government it won't work. The Scottish Executive, charged with turning Scotland into England's windfarm, has ridden roughshod over local authorities, NDOs, objectors' groups and the rest in their frenzy to do Wilson's bidding.

Because the government plans to rehabilitate nuclear power, not now but in its third term of office probably with a new generation of imported US technology.

We analyse below two recent policy documents — the DTI's Energy White Paper (published in February 2003) and Ross Finnie's *Securing a Renewable Future* (March 2003) to chart the progress of this scheme.

Is wind power a stalking horse for nuclear's comeback?

In the same issue, VoS News reviewed the DTI's energy White Paper: *Our Energy Future – Creating a Low Carbon Economy* published February 2003.

THE DTI's *Energy White Paper* is neither policy nor plan but seeks merely to soothe public concerns about global warming.

It seems doubtful whether there was a power engineer within ten miles of its drafting and it is difficult to analyse in any meaningful sense of the word.

We are led to believe that the government is striding forward into a brave new 'low carbon' future. We already have smart bombs and smart cards. Now we have 'cleaner, smarter energy'.

Ruses like highlighting 'positive' phrases in bold get the casual reader 'on message'. Confusion is woven into the text by the use of the word 'energy' in its widest sense in

some paragraphs but referring to electricity in others.

The banality of the writing can be staggering. A concluding snapshot of the UK's proposed energy system for 2020 argues that:

'Energy efficiency improvements will reduce demand overall, despite new demand for electricity for example as homes move to digital television and as computers further penetrate the domestic market. Air conditioning may become more widespread.'

No, we did not make this up.

The paper identifies three challenges:

- Addressing the threat of climate change

- Dealing with reduced domestic oil, gas and coal production
- Updating the energy infrastructure.

Four goals are set to address climate change. They are laudable but, sadly, mutually exclusive:

‘to put ourselves on a path to cut the UK’s CO₂ emissions by some 60 per cent by *about* 2050, with *real progress* by 2020’ [emphasis added];

Second: ‘to maintain the reliability of energy supplies’. The public at large might see this as non-negotiable but a heavy reliance on intermittent generation reduces it to an aspiration;

Third: ‘to promote competitive markets in the UK and beyond, helping to raise the rate of sustainable economic growth and improve our productivity’. This presumably refers to energy markets but we are later told that we will soon be importing three-quarters of our energy supplies;

And finally: ‘to ensure that every home is adequately and affordably heated’. Tricky, as renewables can only raise electricity costs.

The second challenge is the decline of indigenous energy supplies. (In Finnie’s paper, ‘indigenous’ means ‘wind’ and definitely not coal. But for the DTI, it seems to mean ‘oil, gas, nuclear [honest] and coal’. But definitely not ‘wind’.)

We are reassured that becoming a net importer of three-quarters of our energy is really not so bad since, of the G7 countries, only the UK and Canada are energy exporters.

Renewables, we are told, can make us less vulnerable to security threats.

The third challenge is to update much of the UK’s energy (actually its electricity-generating) infrastructure over the 20 years but exactly where is unclear.

It is explained that during the 1990s there was significant investment in generating capacity, especially gas-fired plant. But much of this has since been mothballed and interest in building new plant other than renewables has declined.

European measures to limit emissions are likely in time to force modernisation or closure of most older coal-fired plant. So perhaps the updating will be here.

Renewables will become *the* source of electricity as we seek to tackle climate change.

Definitely not the ‘N’-word

But not nuclear. Definitely, certainly, no messing, not nuclear. Nuclear’s share will shrink: there will be only one nuclear plant still working by 2025. Remember this.

In short, the Dash-for-Gas is yesterday’s news (so ninties, darling), even though an almost total reliance on imported gas, panned by the engineering establishment, was the central plank of the PIU’s *The Energy Review* published only last year.

Now, everyone is talking about the Breeze Wheeze. Turbines are *de rigueur* for the chattering classes – and very lucrative they are too. Provided, of course, you are

not working in Scottish tourism or are unlucky enough to live near one.

But, despite all this, the white paper sets no targets for the share of supply to be met from different fuels as it is ‘not equipped’ to do so.

It prefers to ‘create the right incentives’ to find the balance that will most effectively meet its overall goals. The ‘market’ will make the key decisions on fuel mix and price, sustainability and security of supply.

Much as it did, presumably, on the railways. Forget the fact that if you provide ‘incentives’ for a market, then the market ceases to ‘decide’, it just follows the cash.

The ‘N’-word

All lovely stuff. But, in stressing its priority to strengthen the contribution of energy efficiency and renewables over the next 20 years, there come two odd statements. First:

‘We believe such ambitious progress is achievable, but *uncertain*.’ [emphasis added] and, second:

‘We do not make specific proposals for building new nuclear power stations. However we do not rule out the possibility that at some point in the future *new nuclear build might be necessary if we are to meet our carbon targets*.’ [emphasis added]

On the role of coal, and looking at what it says is an as-yet-unproven technology, we are told:

‘We will continue to support relevant research projects to develop options for cleaner coal technologies and for carbon capture and storage.

‘Coal-fired generation will also have an important part to play in widening energy diversity provided ways can be found materially to reduce its carbon emissions. Domestic coal production is likely to continue to decline ... we will introduce an investment aid scheme to help existing pits develop new reserves.’

Interestingly, the IChemE disputes this, saying that clean-coal technology is viable and mature, in regular use in the US and elsewhere.

A carbon emissions trading scheme will be at the centre of our energy markets from 2005 onwards.

The paper mentions in passing that the national grids, metering systems and regulatory arrangements were created for large-scale, centralised power stations. They will need restructuring over the next 20 years to support renewables and distributed generation.

A month later, OFGEM gave a go-ahead for a major multi-million cable linking Lewis to the mainland for old-style, centralised distribution down into England. And lastly, a word of warning to the English:

‘The future energy system will require greater involvement from English regions and from local communities, complemented by a planning system that is more helpful to investment in infrastructure and new electricity generation, particularly renewables.’

Our advice: Come and visit the turbines – before the turbines come and visit you.