

Policy Summary

RENEWABLE ENERGY

Energy from renewable sources such as wave, wind and water power has advantages over that from traditional fossil fuel sources because of the lack of greenhouse gas emissions which are implicated in climate change. Developing renewable energy forms a key component of Government's programme to tackle climate change, alongside measures to increase energy efficiency and reduce demand. However, the potential impact of renewable energy developments on the natural heritage must also be taken into account. Windfarm and further hydro development in particular could have a major impact on landscapes and habitats unless sensitively sited and designed.

SNH's vision is for a strategic approach in which renewable energy development is guided towards the locations and the technologies most easily accommodated within Scotland's landscapes and habitats without adverse impact.

Background

The UK Government is committed to the UN Convention on Climate Change. To fulfil the targets for reductions in emissions of greenhouse gases set at the Kyoto meeting in 1998, it aims to achieve 10% of the UK's electricity needs from renewable sources by 2010. Although present electricity generation capacity in Scotland exceeds demand, Scotland has the best wind resource in Europe (offshore as well as onshore), as well as considerable wave energy potential. There are opportunities for further small-scale hydro power, and energy from biomass is being actively trialled. There is considerable pressure on Scotland to realise its renewable energy potential to help meet the Kyoto targets.

Overall responsibility for energy policy throughout the UK rests with the UK Government, while responsibility for planning and location of renewable energy development in Scotland rests with the Scottish Executive. Early incentives for renewable energy development under the Scottish Renewables Orders (SRO) and Non-Fossil Fuel Obligation (NFFO) schemes are soon to be superseded by a legal obligation on electricity suppliers to source a proportion of their power from new renewable generation. This proportion will rise to 5% by the year 2010, bringing the overall proportion of renewable electricity generation in Scotland to around 17.5%. In addition, renewables development in Scotland may fulfil suppliers' obligations elsewhere in the UK, either by supply of renewable electricity through the interconnectors or by sale of renewable generation certificates which will be tradeable.

Planning policy and advice on good practice is set out in national planning guidance (NPPG 6 and PAN 45). SNH's role includes advice to local authorities and government on the impact of energy generation on landscapes and habitats.

SNH's position

SNH recognises the environmental importance of addressing climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and the role of renewable energy in contributing to this reduction. Renewable energy development can also contribute to wider sustainability objectives including rural employment. SNH therefore supports renewable energy proposals where they can be achieved without a significant adverse impact on the natural heritage. Potential natural heritage impacts may however represent a constraint to the scale and type of renewable energy which can be accommodated in any one area.

There is a risk that renewable energy could be seen as a means of soaking up new energy demand without reducing existing fossil fuel consumption. SNH therefore supports the strong emphasis on seeking energy efficiencies and reductions in energy demand within Government's overall climate change programme.

Since its inception, SNH has had substantial experience in advising on windfarm and small hydro development. While supporting many developments, SNH has also had to register its concern over a significant number of proposals on account of their potential impacts on landscapes, bird populations and habitats, and on people's recreational enjoyment of the countryside. SNH wishes to encourage an improved understanding of how and where renewable energy development can be sited and designed such as to minimise its impact on the natural heritage.

SNH will therefore:

- support the development of renewable energy as an integral part of the Government's climate change programme;
- foster technologies and strategic approaches which seek to fit new developments within landscapes and habitats without undue adverse impact, and which safeguard elements of the natural heritage which are nationally and internationally important;
- encourage scrutiny of all renewable energy schemes for natural heritage impacts; and
- expect renewable energy to be developed in a way which benefits the rural economy.

To achieve these aims SNH's programme includes:

- advising the Scottish Executive and planning authorities on natural heritage considerations to be taken account of in a strategic approach;
- evaluating the capacity of different landscape types to accommodate windfarm development;

- maintaining effective liaison with the renewables industry;
- developing standard methodologies for assessing impacts on landscapes and birds; and
- guiding local staff on the assessment of windfarm and small hydro proposals.

References:

Department of Trade and Industry (DTI); 1998; 'Energy Review: White Paper'; London.

Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR); 1998; 'UK Climate Change Programme: Consultation Paper'; London.

Scottish Office Development Department; Renewable Energy: National Planning Policy Guideline (NPPG) 6; Scottish Office; Edinburgh.

Scottish Executive Development Department; (2002); Renewable Energy Technologies Planning Advice Note (PAN) 45; Scottish Executive; Edinburgh.

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