SUBMISSION FROM DOUGLAS SMITH

Thank you for providing the opportunity to contribute to your inquiry. Can I say that I would not normally dare venture an opinion to such an inquiry especially when others have done so who are better able and qualified to do so. However, what has motivated me is the huge number, 50% I calculated at the last count, who have merely recycled the WWF/FOE/RSPB template letter to you. If they can not be bothered to express an original opinion then we are in trouble and, furthermore, that letter does nothing other than get over the points WWF/FOE/RSPB wish to make without bothering to follow your remit and terms of reference. Why should we have to read this stuff?

Targets

1) I am assuming that your target is the same as the EU’s 20%? There is a confusing range of targets, with and without heat energy, which, whilst I am sure the Scottish Government does not use to its advantage, makes understanding quite difficult.

This target can only be met by a very high renewable electricity percentage. However, more and more people are objecting to the industrialisation of the countryside which will slow the consent process. But it is not only onshore wind farms which are causing offence; so also are the offshore farms. The offshore farms are, I think, crucial to achieving these targets and I can only see one offshore farm, Argyll Array, where the developer has the capability to push it through in this time scale and just one wind farm, albeit large at 1.8GW, just is not enough.

The development of the English offshore farms is far ahead of Scotland (the sea bed is mostly sand, for a start) and we have not grasped that weather systems are larger than the UK so when, and if, Scotland gets her offshore wind up to capacity, it will occur when the English offshore farms are also running to capacity. Somebody will have to shut down; this is madness.

Whether the grid infrastructure will support such a huge increase in cross border power is not clear at all. The Electricity Networks Strategy Group (Vision for 2020 Feb 2012) talks a good story but when it says that a sub-sea Kintyre to Hunterston link can be available by 2015, one is not impressed. Do they think cable laying ships are idle? The downtime on the Moyle interconnector is not encouraging. The Western HVDC link which is strategically crucial can not even get planning permission through for a substation.

Clearly Independence and a change of regulator will further complicate what is already looking ‘unfixable’.

Therefore, I do not believe this target will be met.

2) I can only say that a useful contribution will be made to reducing CO2 emissions – certainly for heat but there is a growing body of opinion that the intermittency of wind
power requires such a high level of gas powered back-up that the CO2 emission savings may not materialise at all.

3) If you were to follow the logic of what SSE are saying in their interim financial report which is that as prices rise, demand drops to the point where SSE calculate the average consumer spent less in 2011 despite large increases.

4) Obviously, we the consumers will be paying for the huge subsidies that are current.

Challenges
a) Technology
I thought the CEO of Iberdrola could not have put it better when he said that we were installing the most expensive (wind) technology in Europe rather than looking for the cheapest. He was referring to Spain but it could just as easily refer to Scotland.

b) Supply chain & infrastructure
I have referred to the grid above and will not repeat it.
As far as I know, we do not make any part of these wind turbines which is to our shame so a supply chain for whom or what?

c) Planning and consents
The Reporters to Planning Appeals have had no difficulty in emphasizing the national priority. The difficulty you have is that this is an imposition without democratic legitimacy. If you can not achieve your democratically approved target by fair means, resorting to foul (by calling in applications to the centre) suggests that the electorate are no longer convinced.

Douglas Smith
27 February 2012