SUBMISSION FROM WILDERNESS SCOTLAND

This inquiry only recently came to my attention and, as one of the leading tourism businesses in the Highlands and Islands, I would welcome the opportunity to contribute. Having reviewed the written submissions received, there does not appear to be much consideration of the relationship between Scotland's tourism industry and current energy policy - particularly nature-based tourism.

A Scottish Government study in 2010 concluded that nature-based tourism alone generates £1.4bn of revenue per annum and supports 40,000 jobs. This revenue and job creation is achieved with virtually no public subsidy. Nature and adventure based tourism is predicted to grow by 17% per annum to 2020, which compares very favourably to 2-3% for tourism as a whole. Moreover, it is a high value sector generating significantly more daily spend per visitor than the industry average. Development of this sector is wholly consistent with emerging tourism strategy and will be a principal driver of economic growth over the next decade.

To date, there has been no meaningful attempt to examine how current energy policy may impact upon this sector. The only research into impacts on tourism was conducted several years ago when the number of wind farms in Scotland was considerably lower than it is now. As a member of the Tourism Leadership Group and several trade associations in Scotland, I am aware that tourism businesses across the country are becoming increasingly worried about the scale and extent of onshore wind farm development.

I am not suggesting that the Government's current policy will adversely impact upon Scotland's future prosperity as a tourism destination - that is, because I simply do not know the answer. However, until conclusive and contemporary evidence is presented to confirm otherwise, I would argue that the precautionary principle must apply in order to protect one of the most important sectors of the Scottish economy.

If there is a still a possibility to attend the inquiry at this stage, I would welcome the opportunity to do so. Failing that, I hope that the above comments will be of assistance to the debate.

Paul Easto
CEO Wilderness Scotland
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