SUBMISSION FROM IAN WOOLLEN

I object to the proliferation of wind farms in areas of renowned beauty throughout the UK and particularly where encroaching on residences in the scenic Scottish Borders, where I live.

I have had serious concerns about wind turbines and the amount of energy they produce following a proposal in May last year by German company Enertrag for a wind farm only several hundred metres from my home in Whitfield, near Eyemouth (Blackmains wind except farm proposed at Cairncross). The wind farm is near Ayton and Reston just east of the A1). Prior to that date, I was generally in favour of wind energy, although I never saw it as a major energy supplier. Indeed, I had never seen a wind turbine. I was completely ignorant of any downsides of wind energy, it sounded ideal, but since I learned that I could be living next to one I thought I should investigate wind energy and learn more.

The first thing I did was read a book recommended to me by a friend. If you haven't read this book you should. It is called The Wind Farm Scam by John Etherington (September 2009). It uses all kinds of sources. Over the ensuing weeks I was able to follow up on many of these sources and confirm them as credible. I was helped by my long experience as a commercial energy analyst. There are detractors of the book, but nothing can take away from it the evidence of misrepresentation by the wind industry, e.g. it (still) talks about wind farm ‘capacity’ without pointing out that the actual energy produced is a fraction of its capacity rating. Misrepresentations are widespread. A favourite of the industry (Enertrag, Berwickshire News, 2011) is that wind turbines produce energy 85% of the time. What they don't say is that for much of that time very little energy is being produced, since when wind speed drops by 50%, energy falls by almost 90%. You should also read Stuart Young Consulting's Analysis Of UK Wind Power Generation, November 2008 To December 2010 published by the John Muir Trust in March 2011 to see the problems of intermittency and low energy production that bedevil the wind energy in the UK.

I did my own research into Ireland’s wind generation data over the past few years, using Eirgrid’s web site. Eirgrid reports wind generation every 15 minutes. The wind energy is random and completely intermittent, never agreeing year-on-year, month-on-month or day after day. Here is our wind energy neighbour enjoying the same weather systems that cross Scotland. In the first part of 2011, only around 15% of capacity was generated.

The Wind Farm Scam book demonstrates clearly the problems with wind turbines and wind energy: unreliability, intermittency, low generation, randomness, insecure supply; need for 100% back-up conventional generation, threat to energy security; poor economics and fiscal impact; questionable green credentials; negative impact on landscapes and wildlife, house values, tourism, competitiveness, jobs; turbine noise, shadow, flicker, reflection; fire, mechanical and blade failures, ice throw. They are a dangerous distraction to motorists on roads. The list goes on...

But there are submissions from more eloquent and better-informed people more expert than me. I can only tell you that I have visited wind farms and they are noisy, they do ruin the landscapes, they make my wife feel physically sick, and I get a
feeling of malaise seeing these rotating monsters in a static landscape. So I object to them. They could adversely affect my health. So I object to them. They are exacerbating fuel poverty, they won’t make any difference to climate as Asia, Africa and the Americas rush to burn ever more fossil fuels – it’s worse than everyone rushing down to the North Sea and bailing with buckets expecting the global sea level to fall. So I object to them. It is diverting limited resources away from better solutions. And so I object to them.

In the Scottish Borders, we at Whitfield near Eyemouth can see the wind farm (Black Hill) at Longformacus north of Duns almost 20 km away. They ‘glint’ in the sun as the blades rotate. You can’t see them from Duns because they are separated by hills, but we can see them because we live in an area of sweeping lowland vistas. And these turbines are relatively short (around 80 m), not the 125 m of the ones proposed by Enertrag at Blackmains.

When I visited Longformacus and other wind farms in the Borders and in the Lammermuirs, I was reminded of the song Yellow Taxi by Joni Mitchell – you really don’t know what you’ve got ‘till it’s gone.

Please don’t make the same mistakes. Stop the proliferation of wind farms in areas of renowned wild beauty and in the scenic Scottish Borders, encroaching on residences.

Ian Woollen
28th February 2012

PS. Looking at the letters of support for wind energy submitted on your site, I can’t help but detect a strong pro forma influence. I hope you will consider the evidence of each of the experts on its merits, rather than on volume.

See Appendix below....
Appendix

Targets

☐ Are the 2020 renewables targets (for electricity and heat) achievable?
If you spend enough money and cover enough of Scotland with wind turbines, anything could be possible. Fortunately, there are better, potentially cheaper and more ethical solutions.

☐ What contribution will achievement of the 2020 renewables targets make to meeting Scotland’s CO2 emissions targets (a reduction of at least 42% by 2020 and an 80% reduction target for 2050) under the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009?
The Act was a mistake. Pursuance of the targets is a pointless waste of money and resources, since the rest of the world will be burning ever more fossil fuels. We will just waste our money to the benefit of foreign developers, and become ever less competitive as a result. Any benefit to the world is a meaningless gesture. It is like us all going down to the beach with a bucket and bailing the North Sea, expecting global sea level to fall significantly.

☐ will increase in demand from electric heat and transport be offset by efficiencies elsewhere?
Not under current policies. Who will drive the efficiencies? Will we just keep paying higher electricity prices until it becomes unaffordable and has to be shut down. This is not an acceptable ‘efficiency’.

☐ Has the Scottish Government made any estimation of the overall costs of achieving the targets, and identified which parties will bear them? Probably. I have not seen the overall costs. The public will bear the costs, rich and poor alike.

Challenges

(a) Technology

☐ Is the technology to meet these targets available and affordable? If not, what needs to be done?
We need to develop more reliable sources of energy, whether it is fossil fuels or renewables. Wind energy does not fit into that since it is not always available and increasingly unaffordable.

☐ Are electricity generating or heat producing technologies compatible with the need for security of energy supplies?
The most secure energy supplies come from oil and gas pipelines and global markets by sea (oil tankers, LNG). Shale gas should also be properly investigated in the UK. Wind energy threatens security of supply since it is random and intermittent, and it threatens the integrity of the grid. Conventional fuels will still be required for back-up generation, but may not be so easy or cheap to obtain, particularly as a stressed buyer without long-term contracts.

☐ Are our universities and research institutes fully geared up to the need for technological development, innovation and commercialisation?
No. Some universities only seem geared up into supporting wind energy and its purported mitigation of climate change. Whatever happened to research into cleaner nuclear generation?
(b) Supply chain and infrastructure

- Is the supply chain in Scotland in place to meet the targets?
  It is not required. There is no benefit there. Too many foreign companies are falling over themselves to supply the UK markets – unless that changes.
- What further improvements are needed to the grid infrastructure or heat supply networks both at a national and a local level? Additionally, are we confident that the necessary infrastructure can be developed and financed so that Scotland can export any excess electricity generated to the rest of the UK and/or the EU? What is the role for the Scottish Government here?
  The grid needs upgrading. The public will pay for the upgrading either through indirect subsidies or taxation. Scotland exporting intermittent energy to the rest of the UK may be overly optimistic, especially if the weather systems and intermittency are similar? Denmark’s experience of having excess electricity from wind energy was to lose on exporting and lose again on importing when there were shortages (stressed seller/buyer).

(c) Planning and consents

- Is the planning system adequately resourced and fit for purpose?
  No. There is evidence that planning authorities in the Scottish borders, as an example, are overwhelmed with wind farm applications. They neither have the human or financial resources to cope. The system is also heavily weighted against the local communities by the approval and appeal policies in favour of deeper-pocketed developers. There is simply no level playing field. Democracy comes at a price that we cannot afford, unless there is greater protection than we have at present.
- How can national priorities be reconciled with local interests?
  Reconciliation with local interests? The balance is going in the opposite direction. The planning guidelines and processes have undergone successive changes to strip the local communities of any protection they once had. This process is continuing. The only local interests being ‘reconciled’ are those of the farmers who receive payment from the wind developers for the placement of wind turbines on their land, without regard for their neighbours, who receive nothing for their loss of visual and other amenities, and threat to health, and have ever-higher electricity bills as a result.

(d) Access to finance

- Will sufficient funds be available to allow investment in both the installation and the development of relevant technologies? What can the Scottish Government do to influence this?
  There should be a ‘Green Fund’ to which all developers should contribute under a licensing scheme rather like similar programmes in the international oil industry. It could be under the control of governments or independent expert advisors, to develop the best solutions and invest in research. A few foreign wind energy companies invest in research only to promote their own wind businesses in the UK.
- What will the impacts be on consumers and their bills?
The impact will be on the developers under a licensing scheme. Bills need not rise to the extent that they are.

(e) Skills and workforce development

- Will Scotland have sufficient home-grown skills to attract inward investment? Are current policies producing the desired move towards Science Technology Engineering and Maths subjects at schools and universities? Is the skills transfer from the oil and gas sectors being realised?

Foreign developers dominate the higher-end jobs in the wind industry.

(f) Energy market reform and the subsidy regime

- Are the reforms of the energy markets and subsidy regimes at both UK and EU level sufficient to meet the challenge of the Scottish Government’s renewable targets?

The subsidies are way too high for such low-risk investments as wind energy. Even pension funds are now investing in wind energy. The Scottish Government should first concern itself with the essential reforms in conventional EU energy markets to secure the necessary energy supplies. The UK also needs to increase its energy storage capacity, specifically gas, to avoid paying higher prices at times of higher demand, and which is a real threat to energy security.