

Petitioner submission of 22 April 2022

PE1864/HHHHH: Increase the ability of communities to influence planning decisions for onshore windfarms

Last year Scotland Against Spin explored concerns around the misinterpretation and misrepresentation of polls conducted on behalf of RenewableUK, and the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS), purporting to show overwhelming support for more onshore wind turbines in the UK and Scotland.

It examined a May 2021 YouGov poll which claimed 70 per cent support for onshore windfarms, but the questions did not define either how many turbines comprise a windfarm or even how high the turbines would be. At the time of the poll there were roughly 10,961 onshore wind turbines in the UK with 8,366 or 76 per cent of them in Scotland. Yet of the 1,700 respondents to the poll, only 7 per cent (119) were from Scotland. That is 0.002 per cent of the Scottish population. Of those 119, only 38 (32 per cent) replied that they lived within five miles of a windfarm. That is 0.0007 per cent of the Scottish population. In contrast, there were 192 respondents from London. Why ask Londoners their opinion of living within five miles of an onshore turbine when there is none anywhere near?

Another May 2021 public attitudes poll conducted by BEIS (Wave 37) showed 70% support for on shore wind. But more than three quarters of UK respondents were from urban areas with less than 10% of respondents from Scotland. In response to enquiries, made on behalf of Scotland Against Spin, about Scottish respondents, BEIS said:

“Due to the limited numbers involved, it would be difficult to draw much from the conclusions of such analysis, and would likely not be representative of the true figures.”

Another poll commissioned by RenewableUK was carried out by Survation in October 2021. The results have since been picked up by *The Insider* (a commercial publication), and repeated in the *Express*.

Dr Rachel Connor, on behalf of SAS, tried to look into the background of the statistics in the Survation poll to examine the evidence which

underpinned that newer poll. Survation confirmed that their respondents are paid but did not provide information about how their panel was selected.

This is obviously critical – respondents might all be employees of windfarm companies and their contractors.

On Saturday April 9, The *Times* published the results of another YouGov poll it had commissioned, announcing that three quarters of the British public *would back a local windfarm* and support expansion of on shore windfarms. Again, less than 10% of respondents were from the whole of Scotland, compared to almost 12% just from London. [This is the 'full' poll as sent to Dr Connor on request by YouGov.](#)

The chairman of Scotland Against Spin, Graham Lang, wrote to the *Times* and other newspapers which published the results of this widely quoted online poll conducted using paid respondents.

The key points he raised were:

- The public, in general, do not have much confidence in polls as they understand that meaningful unbiased results are dependent on how respondents are selected for the survey and what questions are asked.
- A small number of selected and paid panellists with a vested interest in the results will produce skewed and unreliable answers. But such polls, often paid for by industry, wanting to evidence their desired “public opinion” are used to shape Government policy.
- Information on how paid respondents are selected by polling companies is not made available.
- There is no information as to where these respondents live in relation to any wind farm. Are respondents recruited from urban areas benefiting from electricity generated out of sight?
- It is easy to say you support wind farms in your neighbourhood if you know there is virtually no chance of you ever having one.

It is not widely known that survey firms select their respondents from a panel and even use outside respondents from other companies. Those respondents are paid. The selection criteria are not published. There is simply weighting applied to factors such as age, gender, socioeconomic status and UK regions, although, in our opinion,

even that is odd, with Wales being lumped in with the Midlands for the YouGov poll.

YouGov says that it makes sure that those without internet are also polled, to be representative, but, in our view, it is difficult to see how that happens in an online survey. Lack of good internet is a real problem for rural communities throughout the UK, but particularly in Scotland. It is many of these communities who are actually hosting and feel the effects of these windfarms on their environment, particularly those within 3km of industrial windfarms with turbines higher than 100 metres. These people are not 'NIMBYs'. These are the people whose opinion should be sought to determine whether there really is support for further expansion of onshore wind.

In our view, it is time that polls really represent the opinion of the people of Scotland and not just those receiving benefit from the Renewable or Survey/Poll industry.