



The Mountaineering Council of Scotland

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Dear Mr Hindson

Proposed Cnoc an Eas Wind Farm, Balnain, Glen Urquhart Planning application 15/02758/FUL

Response to Supplementary Environmental Information, February 2016

The applicant has submitted SEI in relation to six aspects of this proposed development. The Mountaineering Council of Scotland (MCoFS) responds here to the two areas of the SEI relevant to our original objection.

We do not regard the SEI as changing the basis of our objection, and we continue to object to the proposed development for the reasons set out in our letter of 3 August 2015. We make here some brief observations on relevant parts of the SEI.

Planning context

Like the applicant, the MCoFS is mindful of the need to reduce Scotland's carbon footprint. We believe that the immediate priority for action in terms of adding lower-carbon electricity generation must be to reduce the huge backlog of consented, unconstructed wind farms. Giving consent to more additions to this backlog will do nothing to reduce Scotland's emissions at the pace required.

Landscape and Visual

It is argued for several viewpoints that the turbines will have little impact because they will not be the focus of the view. In practice, the movement of turbine blades attracts attention whenever they are within the field of view. It is also not usually the case that the view from a high viewpoint is focussed only in a single direction. For example, at Viewpoint 13 (Carn na Leitire) the view down the Great Glen is certainly one direction of interest. But the view to the Affric mountains is of equal interest and the wind farm is unavoidable within that view.

The reasoning for Viewpoint 9 not to have a significant visual effect fails to recognise the psychological effect of a clearing on a walker. One pauses and looks all around, relieved to be out of the trees for a while. To suggest that the wind farm will not have a negative impact on the walker at this point is not credible. Excitement at emerging from the trees will be turned to disappointment as expectations of a 'natural' view are replaced by large mechanical structures. It is agreed that this particular clearing may, over a significant number of years, close up but others are likely to emerge during the lifetime of the proposed development.

Socio-economic impact

Although packed with numbers, any assessment of the socio-economic impact of a particular development is speculative. Given the very low unemployment rate locally, it is likely that most of the short-term construction workforce would be itinerant and we have encountered Welsh, Irish and other nationalities as contract workers on other wind farm construction sites in the Highlands. There can simply be no guarantee that any of the short-term benefits will accrue to the local area, though some may accrue to the Highland region.

The commitment to purchase the towers from WTSL is qualified by paragraph 3 of the Schedule which states:

3. The Developer shall obtain tenders from at least three wind turbine suppliers for the supply of Wind Turbines. The conditions of the tender will include a requirement for each tenderer to include at least one option involving the supply of the Towers by WTSL and at least one option involving the supply of the Towers from other suppliers. The Developer shall select the Wind Turbines from those tendered in this tender process.

This appears to leave open the option of selecting a tender in which the towers are not supplied by WTSL or any other Scottish-based supplier.

The extent to which any longer term benefits are realised by the local population will depend upon how any ongoing payments by the developer are spent by its recipients. This needs to be set against the intention stated by a growing number of people to seek to avoid areas with wind farms for tourism and mountain recreation. The applicant's presentation of information on tourism is not neutral and fails to take into account temporal change – there is a clear rising trend of deterrence by wind farms – or spatial redistribution of tourism benefits – Glen Urquhart may lose custom while Kintail gains it, giving a neutral statistical effect across the whole Highland area.

Conclusion

The genuinely new content of the SEI covers matters that are not the concern of the MCofS. The SEI content on matters relevant to our objection is not new but merely takes advantage of the submission of the SEI to rework parts of the developer's previously-presented case. The MCofS remains unpersuaded that, on balance, the proposed development is either necessary in this location or desirable. We maintain our objection on the grounds previously submitted.

Yours sincerely

David Gibson
Chief Executive Officer