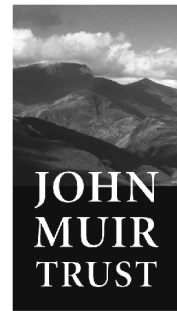


PRESS RELEASE

Bias in Favour of Onshore Wind Farms will be to the Detriment of the Highland Landscape, says Trust.



For immediate release: 23 January, 2006

Fears that a “heavy bias towards onshore wind farms” in Highland Council’s proposed Renewable Energy Strategy will be detrimental to the Highland landscape and wild land, were expressed today by the John Muir Trust, the country’s leading wild land conservation charity.

“The proposed strategy also prejudices moves to increase significantly the implementation of other green energy technologies that have less impact on landscape and wild land while increasing sustainability and predictability”, says the Trust.

However, the John Muir Trust welcomes the strategy as a “much needed attempt to co-ordinate the development of renewable energy whilst protecting the interests of communities and the environment”. The Trust also agrees with many aspects of the strategy while calling for aspects of it to be considered further.

“The council is to be commended for taking this initiative particularly as there is no national strategy for it to nest in”, said Trust director Nigel Hawkins.

“We believe the Scottish Executive should urgently produce in a transparent and consultative way an energy strategy for Scotland including the electricity distribution network. In this way, all relevant factors – social, environmental and economic – can be weighted up throughout Scotland. This would then provide a national framework for planning decisions allowing prioritisation of renewable energy development to less sensitive areas”.

The Trust says it is concerned about the effects of climate change and the impact of global warming on landscape and wild land – and supports Government moves to reduce carbon dioxide emissions into the atmosphere through increasing the proportion of energy from renewable sources while reducing energy consumption.

“This should be done appropriately and with due respect to the national importance of one of Scotland’s key assets – its wild land”, says Mr Hawkins.

Setting out the Trust’s response to Highland Council’s proposed Renewable Energy Strategy, trust policy officer Helen McDade says: “The Trust supports the recognition of the importance of wild land given in the strategy document.

“But there is a heavy bias towards onshore wind farms throughout the document. Not only is that likely to be to the detriment of the Highland landscape and wild land, but it prejudices real moves to significantly increase the implementation of other technologies that have less impact on landscape and wild land and at the same time

increase sustainability and predictability. Highland Council have missed an opportunity in producing a Renewable Energy Strategy when they could have produced a wider Energy Strategy looking at energy saving measures. 40% of energy use could be saved by conservation measures.”

Ms McDade says the targets set in the strategy for Highland Council area are greater than those of the Scottish Executive for the whole of Scotland – with a very significant proportion being onshore wind. The Scottish Executive has a renewable energy target for 2020 which requires another 3,400 MW in Scotland. The Highland Council Renewable Strategy sets a target of over 4,000 MW from new renewable energy.

“This does lead to questions about whether this strategy is a balanced look at all aspects of renewable energy and whether the assessment of potential development has come from an onshore wind developer’s perspective. The targets do not take account of 300MW of current hydro production which is classified in the strategy as “non-renewable””, says Ms McDade.

“The Highland Council targets do not seem to have been strategically set in relation to factors outside the Highlands but look as if they are based on the maximum possible installation based on the most liberal planning regime”.

The Trust warns that the effect of giant projects on the local tourism industry could be “devastating” and that an assessment of the potential impact of the strategy on tourism should be undertaken before the strategy is adopted.

The Trust says it is commendable that major national developments are to be concentrated in a few preferred areas thus leaving a large proportion of scenically attractive land free from large scale developments.

However three of the 11 areas selected for major developments are on, or encroach on, wild land – Balmacaan, and Monadhliath and the Trust is opposed to these. The Trust is also concerned about the extent of areas classified as primary and secondary possible development areas as many impinge on wild land.

The John Muir Trust’s full, detailed response to Highland Council’s Renewable Energy Strategy can be viewed at www.jmt.org

For further information please contact:

Nigel Hawkins, director John Muir Trust 01796 470080 mob 07903 853348 e-mail director@jmt.org

Or

Helen McDade, policy officer, John Muir Trust 01796 470080 mob 07787 995319 e-mail policy@jmt.org

The John Muir Trust is a conservation charity which owns eight estates in the Highlands and Islands including Ben Nevis, Scotland’s highest mountain. The Trust works closely with local communities and is partner in the community ownership of land in Knoydart, North Harris and Assynt. The Trust supports renewable energy

schemes which are in sympathy with the landscape and which bring direct benefits to local people.