

# **Question to the Scottish Government on the Effect of Windfarms on the Kintyre Peninsula**

## **1.The Question**

“We, the Community Councils of the Kintyre Peninsula and our neighbouring community, South Knapdale, have a duty to the communities we serve to protect our wild and beautiful landscapes, the well-being of our constituents and their future economic prospects.

We are alarmed at the trend among some windfarm operators and developers that are indicating they will not pay community benefits to our communities or partake in meaningful community shared ownership schemes or are renegeing on current agreements to do so.

We are also concerned that the volume of windfarm applications allied to the height of turbines being proposed will create a major scar on our landscape.

We therefore ask the Scottish Government if they will call a moratorium on any further developments and planning applications for Renewable Energy Projects on the Kintyre Peninsula and adjacent areas until they have held a full, independent, public enquiry.

The enquiry should be tasked with an assessment of the current and future effects on the economy of our unique lands; the economic and social well-being of our communities; and the health of the remarkable environment in which they live and work.”

This request is sent on behalf of:-

**Campbeltown Community Council**

**East Kintyre Community Council**

**South Knapdale Community Council**

**Southend Community Council**

**Tarbert and Skipness Community Council**

**The Laggan Community Council**

**West Kintyre Community Council**

## **2.Background**

Windfarm development has been happening on Kintyre since the 1990s. In the initial stages it was generally welcomed. It brought with it the exciting prospect of a Vestas factory producing wind turbines and 100+ new and much needed jobs to our economically challenged area.

Subsequently the factory has changed hands several times and has virtually ceased operation.

Wind farm developers also made Community Benefit funding available to the communities within Kintyre that were affected by wind farm development. This was assisted and improved by the Scottish Government recommendations for Community Benefit and

encouragement of community shared ownership schemes using the community benefit as the communities' investment capital.

This situation continued until around 2019 when some, more predatory and ruthless, developers reneged on promises, refused to consider community benefits or community shared ownership schemes. They are able to do this because the Scottish Government recommendations have not been made mandatory.

Operational windfarms offer few, if any, employment opportunities to people in our communities. The only work which is given to local contractors is during the construction phase.

It now seems that windfarm developers want to use our remarkable wild lands without offering anything to the people who live and work here.

### **3.Current Community Concerns**

#### ***Community Benefit and Community Ownership***

The recent trend by developers to refuse the option of compensating the communities affected needs to be reversed.

- Our communities believe that if even one developer fails to offer community benefit then others will follow suit.
- If the current windfarm operators see new applications offering no community benefit then they will also withdraw from the current voluntary scheme.
- Communities have no legal means of changing such decisions.
- Undoubtedly the current voluntary scheme for community benefit and community shared ownership are no longer fit for purpose.
- Our communities want to see community benefit made mandatory and a much tougher commitment to community shared ownership.

#### ***Community Consultation***

The volume of applications for windfarms and their infrastructure on and around Kintyre has accelerated, particularly during lockdown.

- These applications are submitted under the Sections 36 or 37 of the Electricity Act 1989. Much of the information in them is of a highly technical nature and uses language which is riddled with jargon and technical concepts which are beyond the ability of the lay reader to glean a clear understanding and thereby be able to visualise the effect they will have on their environment.
- They require applicants to consult with local communities. However, this seems limited to a public meeting, advertisements in local newspapers for 2 successive weeks and a printed copy of the proposal (usually kept in a cupboard in the local Post Office. It does not set out how they should consult nor what information should be provided.
- The requirements do not lay down any standards for community engagement. One developer recently told us that, because of Covid "There are no statutory alternatives to public meetings". Thereby confining community engagement to

online presentations, thus excluding those in our communities who don't have internet access.

- We believe that their approach to community engagement is neither inclusive, transparent nor effective.
- The Scottish Government **HAS** set out those standards in the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015. Our enquires indicate these standards are not applied to section 36 and 37 planning applications.
- Community Councils have asked for specialist assistance from Argyll and Bute Council to deal with these legally complex and lengthy applications. None has been forthcoming.
- It is clear from comments from our constituents that they are becoming resigned to having their environment industrialised and spoiled by wind turbines and pylons wherever they look. They feel that their voice has been unheard or ignored by those who make the decisions.
- There is a feeling in our communities that Kintyre has reached its capacity of windfarms. People are saying "Enough is Enough".

### ***Increasing Height of Wind Turbines***

Current applications are including wind turbines 200 to 230 metres high.

- It is our understanding that this size of wind turbine has only been used offshore in the past.
- Previously the largest wind turbines here were under 150 metres.
- The effect of a wind turbine of 230 metres on any landscape will be substantial.
- In one case 230metre turbines are being proposed in a landscape where the highest point is only 170 metres.
- Many seem to be sited so as to be visible in historic landscapes such as those visible from Tarbert and Skipness Castles.

### ***Tourism and Hospitality***

Kintyre's most valuable asset is its landscape.

The tourism and hospitality industry is the biggest private sector employer in the area. It provides 13% of employment.

- The Scottish Government's 2008 research report highlights a request that as part of the planning process for such developments tourism impact statements should form part of the Environmental Impact Analysis.
- VisitScotland in their response to scoping requests for several wind farm applications in this area strongly agreed with this advice of the Scottish Government and states *"Given the aforementioned importance of Scottish tourism to the economy, and of Scotland's landscape in attracting visitors to Scotland, VisitScotland would strongly recommend any potential detrimental impact of the proposed development on tourism – whether visually, environmentally and economically – be identified and considered in full. This includes when taking decisions over turbine height and number"* and continues by stating *"the importance of impact statements should not be diminished, and that for each site considered, an independent tourism impact assessment should be carried out. This assessment should be geographically sensitive and should consider the potential impact on any tourism offerings in the vicinity"*

- To date no developer of proposals for the Kintyre Peninsula have ever undertaken such an independent tourism survey relevant to Kintyre and its tourism economy. Instead, they have relied heavily on out-of-date surveys or those that include one Argyll Community windfarm not on the peninsular or surrounded by many other developments. Given the number of developments that have taken place on the peninsula since these reports were published, we believe it is time developers undertook such an independent survey to confirm or disprove the effect it may have.

### ***Community Well-Being***

Our communities are proud to live in such a beautiful area.

- Many people moved here, or remained here, because of its remoteness and the natural beauty of its wild landscape.
- During the Covid pandemic we have considered ourselves lucky to live here among our remote and rural environment.
- Similarly, during lockdown, the major perceived threat to our safety has been the teams of workers from all over the UK who have descended on our area to construct powerlines and windfarms while we were locked down.
- Walks in the comparatively unspoiled hills, woodlands and even forestry plantations have been a great way to exercise and appreciate the wonderful landscapes.
- De-population has been a major issue here in Kintyre. We believe the rate of emigration will only accelerate if our environment becomes increasingly industrialised.

### **4. What Needs to be Done**

- All further wind farm development needs to be delayed while a study of the effects it is having on the Kintyre Peninsula and South Knapdale is carried out.
- Community benefit and shared ownership must be made a mandatory requirement of all future planning proposals for windfarm development.
- The Scottish Government should revise section 36 and 37 legislation to incorporate the standards of community engagement shown in the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015. Funding to provide professional consultancy, should be made available to all Community Councils that are affected by section 36 and 37 planning applications.
- The Scottish Government must explore alternative arrangements for the re-opening of the Machrihanish wind turbine factory with a view to getting it back into full production at the earliest possible date.

We ask that the Scottish Government supports these reasonable proposals thus ensuring a fairer balance between the needs for greener power and the needs of the remote and rural populations who live and work in the lands needed to generate it.

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