

# The Rural Scotland Convention on Major Energy Infrastructure

## Community Council Round Table

24<sup>th</sup> February 2026

Scottish Parliament, Holyrood



HOSTED BY THE COMMUNITY COUNCILS OF  
KIRKHILL & BUNCHREW, KILTARLITY, SLEAT, MUIR OF ORD, STRATHNAIRN,  
KILMORACK, STRATHGLASS, HALKIRK & DISTRICT, CONTIN AND GARVE & DISTRICT

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## Preface

### **“SPEAK TRUTH TO POWER”**

*The Rural Scotland Convention round table at Holyrood on 24 February 2026 was a first of its kind event, bringing together the very communities expected to host the energy infrastructure, **right into the heart of our own Scottish Parliament.***

*The Convention is made up of elected community councillors, **the first tier of Scottish democracy.** Communities and Councils are overwhelmed by the scale and pace of proposals, and there is an urgent need to avoid a chaotic rollout in the absence of a coherent national energy plan. This Convention **shines a spotlight on that national failure to plan and proposes solutions to put that right.***

*A national transition and industrialisation of this magnitude must not be done to rural communities, no matter what. It should be shaped with them as full partners. In bringing forward these concerns, the Convention seeks to **speak truth to power** in a much needed constructive way.”*

**Councillor Helen Crawford**  
**Chair of the Rural Scotland Convention**

# Unified Statement

**"This Convention:**

- ***RECOGNISES the impact of climate change on our planet but OPPOSES an unjust and unnecessary industrialisation of rural areas.***
- ***CALLS for our elected members to URGENTLY support and protect our communities at NATIONAL level, given that community consultation is inadequate and LOCAL DEMOCRACY is being overridden, with decisions made by Community Councils and local Authorities consistently disregarded by the Scottish Government.***
- ***CALLS upon the Scottish Government to undertake a PLANNING INQUIRY COMMISSION to address the whole cumulative impact of all major renewable energy infrastructure developments, including transmission, storage and generation with all ancillary infrastructure on our communities and landscape, rather than the salami sliced approach which has thus far been taken.***
- ***CALLS for a PAUSE of all major applications, given the impact upon our communities, which may hasten depopulation in some areas until a clear NATIONAL ENERGY POLICY is in place and an ECONOMIC IMPACT ASSESSMENT undertaken given that tourism is currently the backbone of many regional economies."***

## Opening Remarks – Cllr Helen Crawford

**Councillor Helen Crawford, Chair of the Rural Scotland Convention,  
Major Energy Infrastructure, Holyrood 24<sup>th</sup> February 2026.**

Today brings together the Highland Convention, The South of Scotland Convention, the Northeast Scotland Convention and community councils from Shetland, Ayrshire, Perthshire and many in between. Last night we heard from the Community Council of Iona, please may we join?

This convention is not an activist group - it is made up of community councils - elected representatives, **the first tier of Scottish democracy**, we have engineers, environmentalists, architects, teachers, nurses care workers. Reasonable people who care deeply about their landscapes and their communities.

Cabinet Secretary, you are speaking directly to the very communities expected to host the infrastructure that you talk about here in Holyrood - the backbone of rural Scotland.

This convention is **apolitical**. It is made up of community councils of all political parties and none. That is very important to us as a convention, Cabinet Secretary.

We are not here to land a punch on the government. **We are here to propose solutions. What we are seeing is industrialisation being done to our communities, no matter what. that needs to change.**

The Convention recognises the impact of climate change and the need for Scotland to transform its energy system. But what **we cannot support is a chaotic roll out without proper democratic involvement, and without a national energy plan being in place.**

Community Councils are grappling with multiple complex applications for major energy infrastructure. And our planning departments are overwhelmed by the volume and complexity of applications presented to them. The system is failing. And we are calling for a time limited pause.

Even where careful, evidence-based objections are submitted, they are overridden, either by an under resourced local authority or, as we all now expect, by the Scottish Government itself.

The effect is not just local frustration. It is a sense of alienation.

Nearly fifty years ago, in his famous “Alienation” speech, Jimmy Reid described alienation as:

“the cry of men who feel themselves the victims of blind economic forces beyond their control... the frustration of ordinary people excluded from the process of decision making.”

I can tell you now, those words reflect precisely what is happening in many rural communities today. **That is a concern for us as a nation, and we are here to try to map a way ahead to avoid that alienation.**

Our solutions are clear.

First, **a time-limited pause on major applications**, not to halt progress, but to ensure Scotland gets this once-in-a-generation transition right.

This pause will allow Government to bring forward the long promised, standalone national energy policy. At present, major infrastructure is being consented in our communities without a fully coherent national framework. That is absurd because it’s putting the cart before the horse and merely increasing the bill for constraint payments.

Secondly, there is a need **for coherent Economic Impact Assessments to consider the impacts on rural communities where tourism or agriculture is the main driver of the economy**, to understand the impact on those jobs and our food security.

Thirdly, the establishment of a **Planning Inquiry Commission across Scotland**. Such a Commission is provided for in our own Scots Planning Law, for use whenever matters of national planning significance arise. It is difficult to imagine anything more nationally significant than the transformation of Scotland’s energy generation and transmission systems. And Cabinet Secretary, **it merely requires a Ministerial Instruction to get the ball rolling.**

Such a Commission would allow the Scottish Government to hear properly from all stakeholders - including the communities most affected - and to **assess the community and cumulative impacts that are currently being considered only in fragments, in a salami sliced manner.**

And finally, The Strategic Spatial Energy Planning (SSEP) which we expect to see in 2027.

That document is being developed with no input from communities. There is an opportunity now, Cabinet Secretary, to remedy that.

The second phase of the SSEP mentions community engagement but there is no detail about how or when. You are now speaking to the very communities that it is proposed will be impacted by the plan. **Scottish Government is a co-commissioner of the SSEP so you do have influence.**

One solution to ensure that Scottish communities are involved is to **give this Convention a place at the national table.** You can do that by **recognising the Convention as a formal "Planning Stakeholder"** as the SSEP goes forward. We will provide a delegate working group to provide that voice. I respectfully propose that to you Cabinet secretary.

I kindly invite Ms Martin to now respond to the asks of this Convention.

Ms Martin

## Statement & Discussion – Gillian Martin MSP

**Gillian Martin MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Energy**

*[Words taken from the Convention's minutes of the Round Table]*

Thank you very much Helen and thanks to you all for being here. So I think one of the things I want to do is tackle the final issue that Helen raised here because I want to leave you in no doubt that I want to find the best ways to include and involve everyone in the energy transition and to ensure that we're not only spreading the message about the benefits but also the support that's available and how to access them but also I want to make sure that we have more communities and stakeholders in general in Scotland involved in all the decision making around what's happening in the spatial energy plan.

So I have long recognised that more needs to be done. I'll be able to outline some of the things I'm going to say today as to how I've been trying to do that with the UK government and where I've been successful and where I'm yet to be successful, where I have some mood music to report to. I've tasked my officials with taking forward plans to establish a forum to hear directly from communities on issues that matter to them across the energy landscape and that is including on the development of the GB-wide plans such as NESO's Strategic Spatial Energy Plan or SSEP and the Regional Energy Strategic Plan, RESP, for Scotland. It's essential, and I totally agree, it's essential that community voices are involved in that strategic planning as well.

All four nations of the UK have tasked NESO to do a refresh on this and to have the Strategic Spatial Energy Plan. So effectively that final ask there is an absolute yes, pre-empted by us, that we want to make sure that there is a forum in which people can be involved in that. I'll go back to where I was going to start, just thanks for the invitation to attend today.

I recognise that there are many energy developments and many energy developments for infrastructure that is causing a great deal of concern to people, particularly in rural areas where they have not had this development in the past and it's largely been confined to other areas of Scotland. There will be a change in Scotland in how we generate energy

and the type of energy that we consume and I want to make sure that there's positive outcomes to everyone from that. Where renewables development creates wealth, I want to see that that wealth goes to the communities. I want communities having a fair share of the rewards and to be empowered and choose how those rewards are invested. And where new renewable energy projects have developed, I want communities as much as possible to have the option of owning a stake in those developments as well, if that's what they wish, community shared ownership. The transition, of course, I know has many people worried about their particular concerns about the visual impact of infrastructure on Scotland's landscape and I acknowledge that many of you feel that you've not been informed or are part of the process of change in that way.

Energy policy, as you will all know, is largely reserved to the United Kingdom Government and there are issues that I'm only able to seek to influence the UK Government on. But I have recently been able to make a bit of headway, quite a lot of headway actually, on this with the current UK Government after years of trying. We've had recent changes to UK legislation that will allow for the introduction, at last, of mandatory pre-application engagement and I'm very keen in the time that I have left here to hear some views as to what you think that pre-application engagement should look like. Because I've also, as a part of the engagement I'm having with the UK Government, I'm very clear that it's not enough just to say there has to be mandatory pre-application engagement. There has to be good practice principles associated with that. It can't be a tick box exercise because, and I'm making the point to developers all the time, this is good business for them. If they can bring communities with them and have meaningful engagement and take on board communities' views on things and the engineering solutions that they can adopt in their plans, then they are more likely to have a successful development. So I'm hopeful also that after consulting in the last six months or so, that the UK Government will also make community benefit compulsory after many years of us asking for that to be the case. It's voluntary at the moment. Engagement's voluntary and community benefit is voluntary. And what you'll have is a very patchy landscape across Scotland. You'll have areas where people are happy with how that has gone and you'll have areas which has left people very soured.

Regarding the Planning Inquiry Commission, we don't at the moment have any plans to establish such a commission. I'm going to be honest with you. I'll take away your asks. Obviously, Helen gave me a bit of a heads up of some of the asks in here. But we've got no plans at the moment. And obviously, you'll know that I can't discuss particular applications today.

But I want to listen to the views of the representatives of the convention today to hear about how better engagement, what that might look like, what better community benefit might look, and areas in which you think the processes can improve. Because really, I am here to hear from you with the solutions. And I'm so glad that Helen said this. You want to come up with the solutions. I'm very much in the solutions business. We know the challenges. We know the difficulties. We've got an opportunity to shape how things come in the strategic energy plan. And I'm here to listen to what you've got to say about how we do that.

**[Helen Crawford]**

Thank you so much. Thank you. Really appreciate that. Just to clarify on your wording there. It sounds to me as if you're agreeing that you will go forward with the convention being recognised as a planning stakeholder in the SSEP?

**[Gillian Martin]**

I would have to come back to you. But certainly, there will be the opportunity for stakeholders to be involved in the forum that we will have, where we are actually putting forward the views of the forum. But listen, my officials are here. They're taking notes on what it is you're looking for. But we're taking plans for that forum to hear directly from communities.

**[Helen Crawford]**

Just to be very clear then. The specific ask would be that the convention is recognised at a forum along with, for example, renewables developers who will be themselves planning stakeholders. So that the convention itself will also be a planning stakeholder at that table sitting with NESO. So that is specifically the ask that this convention has regarding that.

**[Gillian Martin]**

I'll take that away.

**[Helen Crawford]**

Thank you.

You've spoken very much about what does better engagement look like. I would respectfully like to suggest that better engagement looks like the unified statement and the asks, the solutions. That's what it looks like and that's what we want to discuss today.

Again, we appreciate what you say about that communities should have more benefits and so on. But again, we're not here to discuss that. And we're also not here to discuss community ownership. For many of the communities represented here today, community ownership is for the birds. It's already gone. Their areas have already been industrialised. So unless legislation is going to be brought in that is retrospective in nature, the deal is already done for many parts of the communities that are represented here. So I would just respectfully want to put that to you.

What I'm going to now do is I'm going to open up the floor and I'm going to call upon and please cap if you can to three minutes. Andrew Robinson, please. And one thing I would like to say is if I call your name and you don't have a seat at the table, if someone could kindly vacate so that that person from further up the back can take that seat, that would be great. Andrew, over to you, please.

**[Andrew Robinson]**

Thank you. Thank you. I'm Andrew Robinson from Skeabost & District Community Council on the Isle of Skye.

It's good to hear that there are strategic spatial plans in the pipeline. I think what would probably trouble many of us around the table today is that decisions on massive energy infrastructure are being made on a daily basis before those plans are in place. They're being made without any reference to the overall scale of need or the continuous supply of electricity or the different types of electricity that will be needed in order to keep the lights on in Britain.

It makes no sense to make huge strategic energy decisions across Scotland when we don't know what the overall plan will be for energy in this country. Why are we continuing to push through wind farm applications, to push through pylons, to push through giant substations when the National Energy System Operator last December declared that we already have four times the amount of energy infrastructure projects in the pipeline that will be needed by 2030 and 2035. If more wind farms join the queue, they're not going to get connected. That's what the National Energy System operator have said recently. So it makes, at this stage, complete logical sense for there to be a moratorium on any more approvals of power infrastructure until we know what the plan is. Otherwise, we're going to see wind farms built all over Scotland that have no way of connecting.

We're already in the crazy, ludicrous situation of constraint payments, where wind farms are being paid to switch off. There's a wind farm just down the road from me in Edinbane. It pays about £70,000 a year in community benefit and it gets £1.5 million a year in constraint payments.

It makes no sense. We have to pause now. There needs to be a moratorium. There needs to be an enquiry commission to look at both need and impact of all these proposals before more strategic decisions are made.

On a local level, community councils, local authorities are absolutely inundated with applications. We are failing locally to be able to get our heads around all the different applications we've faced. We've got nine wind farms on Skye in the pipeline. We've got substations, pylons, cables, quarry pits, huge workers' camps. All of these planning applications have been salami-sliced, so the local authority and the community councils don't get to see the whole picture.

The recent Wull Muir decision last week, when that wind farm was sent back to be reconsidered, was sent back because the application did not include the grid connection. On Skye, the wind farms that we face, none of them include the grid connection. The Skye overhead line didn't include the workers' camps, it didn't include the quarry pits, it didn't include the substations in the planning application. When the Highland Council were asked to consider that, they had no idea that these substations, these quarry pits, these workers' camps were coming behind. My question to you

would be, why are we going to continue to consent applications while we wait for these energy strategies to come into play? How can that be logical, to push forward with more when we don't know what the strategic approach is going to be?

**[Gillian Martin]**

I can't answer questions on behalf of NESO. You've made reference to NESO and the Strategic Spatial Energy Plan, and indeed it has been delayed over the last six months.

These are all valid issues about how we're actually preparing for the amount of energy that we are going to be putting into the grid and the grid infrastructure that's needed. There is actually a plan, the UK government's plan, Clean Power 2030, which is effectively the blueprint that NESO have been working to. It's a UK government document, and that is what they're working to in order to actually upgrade the grid and bring all of these developments.

Indeed, on the developers' side, the developers are asking the same questions of NESO. Why are we not getting a grid connection? Where is the grid connection coming? Previously, there were zombie developments in the queue, and they've reordered the queue in order to bring on the more mature developments that are ready to go. So these are really questions for NESO as well.

**[Helen Crawford]**

Can I just ask one point there, Ms Martin, if I may? Why, therefore, are our devolved planning departments and the Scottish Government consenting then?

**[Gillian Martin]**

Well, we're consenting because we've got a duty to respond to applications that have been made.

**[Audience]**

You can say no. Just say no.

**[Gillian Martin]**

So, I understand why you're asking this, but I have to be upfront with you. Applications come in to the Scottish Government, and there are processes that have to be gone through. A great deal of environmental impact assessment has been taken, and lots of other impact assessment has been taken, and there is a procedure that takes place. Effectively, what has been asked today is that we have a moratorium on any onshore developments of any type of energy.

**[Audience]**

Yes

**[Gillian Martin]**

I'm going to be upfront with you. I don't think that that's a sustainable position.

**[Helen Crawford]**

Why not?

**[Gillian Martin]**

Because there are hundreds of thousands of jobs involved as well.

**[Audience]**

Oh, come on!

**[Gillian Martin]**

Well, I did agree to come here to listen to views. I've listened to views, and we've only got two minutes left.

I would like to hear some other points, and I did take you at face value in saying that you were coming with solutions. But if the only solution is stop energy developments, there have to be solutions that come forward, which means that the communities are coming forward with solutions as to how this process can be better reflective of the needs of those communities.

**[Helen Crawford]**

The solution surely is bring forward a national energy plan before consenting, blindly consenting and consenting and consenting.

**[Gillian Martin]**

I don't believe that we're blindly consenting to anything.

**[Andrew Robinson]**

You're certainly consenting in the face of objections from many community councils, many local authorities. You're ignoring the local democratic voice, pushing through applications. Communities have clearly spoken and said, we don't want this. NESO shows we don't need it, and you're pushing through applications when communities and local authorities have said, we don't want it. I don't see how you build back from that for community consultation.

**[Gillian Martin]**

There are very, very strict guidelines as to how the Energy Consents Unit look at applications. Nothing has been pushed through without due regard to all the things it needs to take regard to.

**[Andrew Robinson]**

The Scottish Government uses its planning powers to have an ipso facto ban on nuclear and on fracking. So you could equally well use that to...

**[Gillian Martin]**

So the ask is that no energy developments happen in Scotland for that period of a number of years.

**[Andrew Robinson]**

No, the ask is that there's a pause, a temporary pause on it while we work out what is needed. NESO is saying there's already too much consented. So consenting more is going to make the problem worse.

**[Gillian Martin]**

Am I able to take another view before I go, because I do have to go.

**[Helen Crawford]**

Yes, thank you.

Mr Smart, Bill Smart.

**[Bill Smart]**

Thank you. I understand where you're coming from on you can't stop this because the renewables are required. But it's the format that it's happening in. NESO have been appointed by OFGEM. They're public now. National Grid used to handle that. But I think NESO are being used as a scapegoat by OFGEM in some respects. They've got a hard job to do. They've got to control this. They need a new national centre built down in England to control the whole of the grid. That's not built yet. So that will probably be coming out from then, sometime this year. So that is to handle all of these projects and make it sensible how you can utilise all the renewable projects.

But you come back to what SSEN are doing. They're the licensee where we are, Scottish Power in the southern belt. The way they are tackling some of the projects needs a review. They've got very good Tier 1 contractors underneath them who are very experienced in this type of work. But these projects are too big for SSEN the way they're going about it. The front end engineering is kind of poorly handled. When they go to the communities, they visit landowners, they talk to communities. Then they say they've had a consultation, but they haven't listened. That's the trouble with it.

We've got two big substations, one just been approved up in the Highlands: Bingally. Fanellan got turned down. It could still be built, but they need to readdress the design of it. Because it's not a great design. It's been in the wrong place. This is the way with some of the wind farms as well. Yes, build them, but listen to people when they say, well, go and position it somewhere else.

It's the same with the overhead lines. They've got a different team and it comes under a different planning. It's Section 37 planning, so it's totally different from substations. So at the moment, they're looking at the substation. Now they're saying, when they get questioned, they're going to bring in the overhead lines. But we still have to come to planning in

Section 37. They could be looked at the locations of them, the routes that they take. They need to move this and more to the Tier 1 contractors underneath them who are actually going to build these things.

SSEN are a principal designer. You could say there's questions to be asked of could this design be better.

**[Gillian Martin]**

Thank you for that. I do have to go, but thank you for those very helpful suggestions. I think that that's the sort of thing that is helpful to me and my officials. Actually hearing some of the specific issues that have been with the views of the community, which are not against necessarily developments, but want to be able to influence the positioning of them and what the application contains.

I'm sorry I have to go, but I thank you for coming down and the opportunity to hear at least some of the views.

Thank you.

## Statement from The John Muir Trust

I accept and respect and agree with all the concerns from communities throughout Scotland that are questioning the costs and benefits of this industrialisation, that goes without saying.

The John Muir Trust as a charity, which I'll say more about in a second, welcome and support the need for a pause.

I won't use any superlatives to try and describe how ridiculous the situation is.

However, I also accept that officials and as the Cabinet secretary said, they're working within a decision-making framework that has been given to them.

The problem is, from our perspective, that decision making framework is deeply flawed and it was deeply flawed as a result of the National Planning Framework 4, which opened the door for development on what we would call Wild Land areas.

We don't need to debate the detail of that.

So what I would like to say is as a charity, we are the only charity in the UK that's solely dedicated to protection of Wild Places, places where nature and natural processes, natural landscapes are free to flourish.

Flourishing communities and Wild Place can exist quite happily alongside each other.

The problem we all face is the rate of industrialisation, the changes to NPF4, and the absence of any effective consideration for those iconic Scottish landscapes that are being stolen.

So the cabinet Secretary is right, the officials are making decisions within the framework provided, but they are no longer considering what's happening to Scotland's landscape at a strategic scale.

I'd just like to close with one astonishing fact, Scotland now has only two Munros left where you can't see wind turbines. That isn't a decision that the people of Scotland consented to.

The people were never asked whether we wanted to change our landscapes to that extent.

The vistas that you used to get from Munros and the Highlands, they've gone.

So more power to your elbow in bring a halt to indecent haste.

Thank you.

# Statement from Action to Protect Rural Scotland (APRS)

Thank you for inviting me to speak today – I am Kat Jones, Director of APRS which is Scotland’s countryside charity – we are small, just 3 part time staff, but we work on a range of issues, particularly related to planning, but also recently we led the campaign for a deposit return scheme and for new national parks in Scotland.

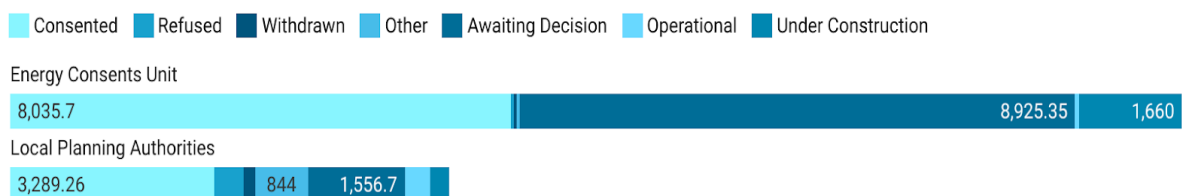
We started looking into battery storage because we saw a huge uptick in enquiries from communities seeking advice on BESS in inappropriate places, particularly Greenbelt, which is one of our key priority areas. [Our research](#) looked at the database of renewable energy which is held by UK Government, and the data set we were looking up ran up to the end of June 2025, we also looked in detail at the planning paper work and decision making for every ECU BESS that was consented and a sample of the largest local authority consents (all 49-49.9MW).

Here’s some of what we found:

There is a huge amount of battery storage in the pipeline –

## Battery energy storage system capacity (MW) by decision status

Includes standalone developments and those co-located with renewables

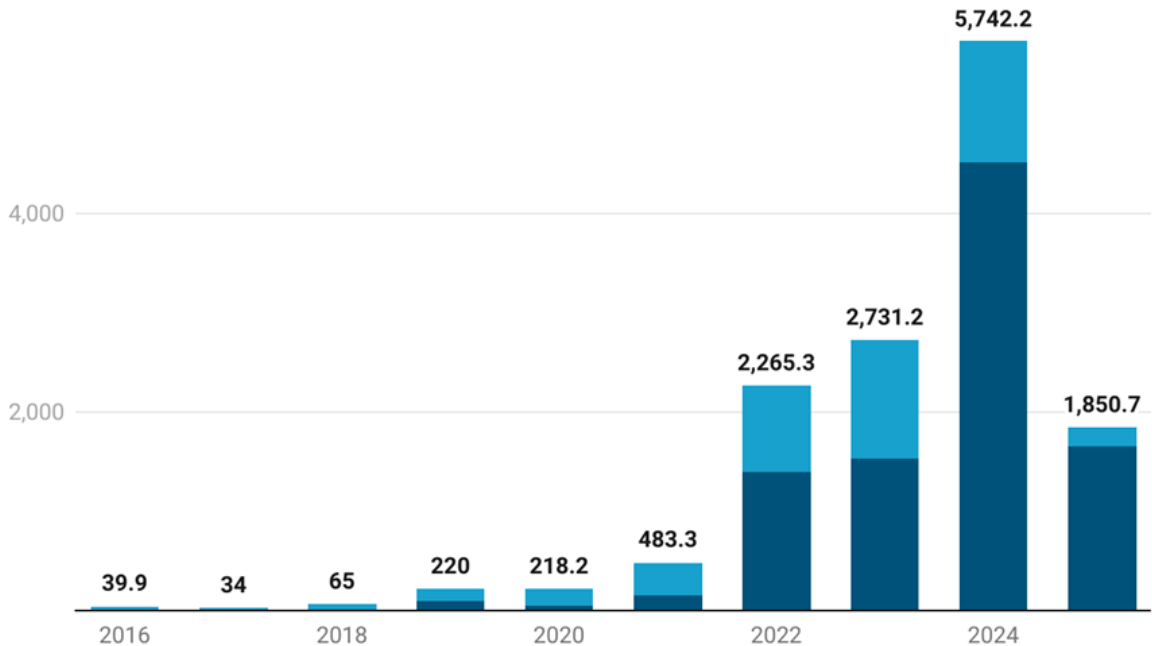


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And that the amount coming through to ECU is getting bigger and bigger. We found ECU had never turned down a BESS application. I checked the consents issued between end June 2025 and when we published Nov 2025 and this held true at that time. Developers know this, and so more and larger BESS are going into the system.

## BESS approved capacity (MW) by year

■ Energy Consents Unit ■ Local Planning Authorities



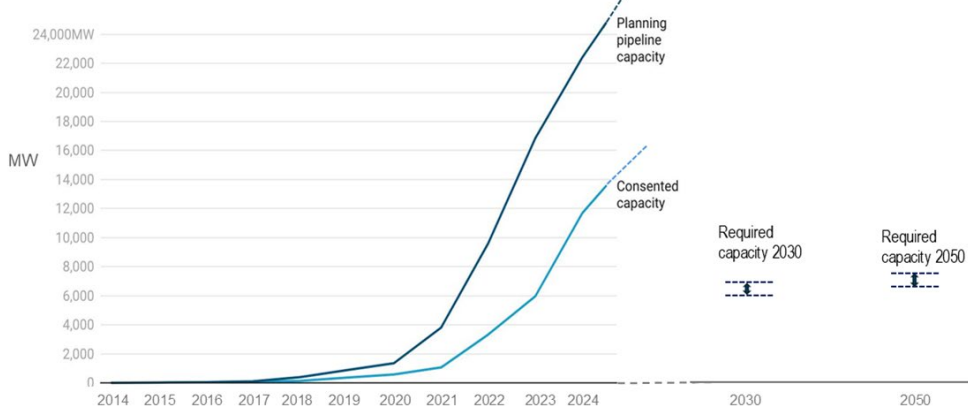
Note: 2025 data to end of Q2

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We have already consented three times as much (Nov 2025 figures) than we need for net zero. And that there is enough in the pipeline for 5x. (these are the figures from NESOs Future energy scenarios 2024 – the 2025 figures we Fol-ed and they are a little bit lower for 2030 (3.4-5.3 GW) and between 7.8-8.7 GW by 2050.

## BESS consented and pipeline capacity (cumulative)

Planning pipeline capacity includes projects awaiting permission, granted and under construction.



Note: 2025 data to end of Q2. All capacity cumulative.

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Since everything gets consented in the present system – we are ending up with a huge oversupply of consented battery storage much in completely inappropriate locations.

4 days after we published our report and called for a moratorium on battery storage [NESO announced](#) the results of their review into grid queue reform and declared that only 15% of requests to join the grid queue in North Scotland could be granted and 20% in south Scotland – the rest will need to wait until the grid queue reopens. A very swift answer to our calls for a moratorium on BESS! There are similar figures for **onshore wind**-only 20% North Scotland and 28% south Scotland.

I haven't time to say anything about the detailed analysis of each application but we were extremely concerned that NPF4 is being ignored in ECU decision making. In a FoI we did find that ECUs are not even asking for information on whether a site is in green belt – the same is for Brownfield sites (from another FoI). They routinely do not include conditions requested by the local authorities and, something we are particularly interested in, they are excluding conditions related to biodiversity enhancement even when developers offer it – thereby Scotland is missing out on millions of pounds for nature.

There is a consultation at the moment on [amending the threshold](#) by which decisions go to ECU. At present it is 50MW. In England all decisions on Battery storage go to local authorities, that should be the same here – but we think that argument can be made for all onshore energy.

We would like to see the threshold should be very much higher - in fact we believe that all decisions on onshore energy should go to local authorities and that energy should be included in Local development plans.

If this is the case there is the advantage that they can then go onto Local development plans and there will be spatial planning **and** local accountability. And a plan led approach, as our planning system is supposed to be. NESO can be a consultee on the LDPs which will bring in the element of linking to energy network planning and it will make the whole system far more efficient.

The theory with having a national body responsible for energy consenting is to get a national strategic approach – this is not happening in any form. Let's take planning for onshore energy into local development plans and then we will get both the national planning element AND the local democracy that we so desperately need.

More on the [consultation to change 50MW threshold](#) – **deadline for consultation responses 27<sup>th</sup> March**

<https://aprs.scot/news/call-for-all-energy-decisions-to-go-to-local-authorities-and-be-on-local-development-plans/>

[Our Battery Storage Report](#)

<https://aprs.scot/press-release/bess-report/>

## Community Council Statements

Written statements submitted to the Convention were as follows:

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## 1 – ARDGAY AND DISTRICT CC

### Bill Lockyer

I want to speak about cumulative impacts on the locations of Creich Community Council and Ardgay and District Community Council on and around the Kyle of Sutherland. I am authorised to do so by those Community Councils.

#### First of all, the Legal Position:

The very recent case of Wull Muir Wind Farm near the village of Heriot before the Court of Session with judgement given on 17th February 2026 makes it clear that considering a wind farm planning application on its own without the associated grid connection can be irrational. As Lady Wise emphasised in endorsing Lord Justice Andrews' comments in the Ashchurch case, "The two go hand in hand, you cannot have one without the other".

The environmental impact of both needs to be considered in addressing the merits and demerits of the anticipated completed development. Weight is given, in all planning applications for wind farms, on the wider benefits once connected to the grid, ie renewable energy and climate change benefit. So it is only logical that all the demerits are accounted for. This should give the Scottish Government an opportunity to pause these major applications to examine the piecemeal ('salami slicing') approach currently adopted, by agreeing to the proposed Planning Inquiry Commission.

#### Cumulative Position on Climate Benefits

Moving on to the climate benefits, these are phrased in terms of carbon savings from renewable energy displacing fossil fuel's electricity generation in the grid. The calculations supporting the touted carbon benefits (reductions in tCO<sub>2</sub>e from burning fossil fuel) are pure fantasy.

The last six wind farm planning applications I have reviewed proposed over 13,700,000 tCO<sub>2</sub>e savings from the Scottish Government's Carbon Calculator tool whereas in reality, using real-world measures, they are *emitters* of over 1,000,000 tCO<sub>2</sub>e from the start. This is mostly based on the Scottish and Westminster Governments' policy to have a zero carbon grid by 2035. So it is

impossible to measure any carbon saving against carbon in the grid as there is to be none after 2035. So again, the Scottish Government needs to pause to examine the reality of the position, as construction of these wind farms just adds to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, this should be part of the Planning Inquiry Commission remit.

### Cumulative Position on Transportation

On transport, I have examined the cumulation of effects on Abnormal Indivisible Load (AIL) movements for 14 wind farm applications, giving 4,363 AIL traffic movements along one road, the A839 from the A9 to Lairg.

No developer, in their Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), actually considers the duration of impact on a location in their traffic assessments, they just examine potential construction overlap in the proposed construction phases. This takes no account of the considerable other traffic, deliveries by HGV, worker movements to and from sites which will clog our roads, single track and others.

This again, should give the Scottish Government pause for thought. Why do residents of the Highlands have to put up with such disruption over a 74 month period of continuous AIL deliveries? When is enough, enough? Again another issue to be addressed by the Planning Inquiry Commission.

### Contaminants from disturbed peatlands

It is outrageous that such infrastructure is proposed for remote locations up a hill on peatland. There are undoubtedly heavy metal and Cs-137 contaminants already in Scottish peatlands, to say nothing of potential contaminants from the proposed Lithium-ion BESS when a thermal runaway occurs.

Each developer's EIA just looks at their own potential contaminants, really just sedimentation, nothing on heavy metals, Cs-137 or BESS contaminants reaching watercourses. However minute amounts of contaminants will build up from each development during construction and operation, which will all end up in the Kyle of Sutherland, resulting in chronic impacts on the protected species that live there.

Why have we not got a fit-for-purpose Carbon Calculation Methodology, proper and thorough cumulative impact assessments in all EIAs on a regional basis for

all issues, with full and proper BESS safety protocols based on the specific locations where BESSs are to be constructed?

## **2 – BERRIEDALE & DUNBEATH CC**

### **Diana Royce**

My name is Diana Royce, a Community Councillor, and here representing Brora, Helmsdale, Golspie, Rogart and Berriedale & Dunbeath Community Councils on the East Coast of Sutherland and Caithness.

We have had extensive experience of wind farms since 1995, when developers were British and turbines were 68m, 15 applications have come and 12 have gone, refused by Reporters because of the value of our landscape and the tenacity of our people in its defence. Such battles have taught us much but have also cost us dear, both financially and in terms of social cohesion within our small communities. Currently we host two large extended wind farms and serried ranks of offshore turbines within the Moray Firth, all very high in the constraint payment league table.

I want to tell you why our community councils are pressing for the PAUSE and the national PLAN our motion demands. For the last 30 years there has been no overall national renewable strategy, just a few installed capacity aspirations, and arbitrary target dates. Development characterised by a subsidy driven feeding frenzy with the Highlands seen as a soft touch with lots of space – never a sound basis for planning a new nationwide generating network. For all that time the cart has continually been well ahead of the horse. Planning has been willy-nilly, despite the best efforts of our planners, with most proposals now under Section 36, Highland input is reduced and is too often overruled by a remote consenting structure. The advent of NPF4 has made it even more difficult for decision makers to be selective or strategic. Local democracy is gradually being squeezed out of the system because it is time consuming, inconvenient, “nobody lives up there anyway” and Net Zero apparently requires undue haste. How to stop and even reverse this antidemocratic trend is something that this Convention seeks to address.

Looking back within Highland, we can but wonder how we have managed to make such a ill-considered mess of a transition to renewable generation. How have so many eggs ended up in one basket and in a location at the furthest point from where they are needed? Why has the network of generating sources been so uncontrolled, and SSEN, our Distribution Network Operator, simply compelled to connect regardless of where they are located? Why with such an excess of

power generation in the Highlands are developers now piling in on an unprecedented scale to build even more, often on less favourable sites and creating huge concentrations of now giant turbines of over 200m with major cumulative effects across the Highland landscape?

To top it all comes a controversial transmission upgrade, with sprawling substations which will be the largest and longest development ever proposed in Highland, tearing through our scenic places, and imposing a profound and irreparable effect on our environment, way of life, fragile transport network and local tourist economy.

At last, we are told that a Regional Energy Strategy for Scotland is coming – but it is at least 20 years late. The Highlands, our people and indeed, our planners, desperately need a PAUSE and a REVIEW to try to get this transition right before the character and quality of the Highlands is changed forever.

### **3 – BRORA CC**

**Diana Royce**

See contribution from [Berriedale & Dunbeath Community Council](#).

## 4 - COCKENZIE & PORT SETON CC

### Ben Morse

I speak to represent a rather different community to many of the others represented. Our community of Cockenzie and Port Seton in East Lothian is still rural, but also suburban. We boast a small fishing fleet while also being close enough to Edinburgh to have Lothian Buses. 10 years ago our skyline, and local employment opportunities, changed forever with the demolition of the (coal-fired) Cockenzie Power Station, built on the site of the former Preston Links colliery. Ours has been an energy community for centuries, none of this is new to us.

Yet, our community does not ask for guidelines or a moratorium because we want to go back to the ways of the past or want to ignore the challenges before us. On the whole the majority have no issue with the onshoring of two offshore wind farms to use the existing infrastructure at the Cockenzie substation and welcome action to protect our climate through reducing CO2 emissions. Our area is seeing major threats from climate change: our neighbours in Prestonpans are listed as the second highest area for climate vulnerability in Scotland, while we nearly lost one of our historic harbour walls due to Storm Babet.

Our community is represented here today, sadly, because it is too late for us, but from our pain and frustration others may yet be spared. Our local authority, the Energy Consents Unit, and both the Scottish and UK Governments have failed us, leading to Scottish parliament petition 2157. A BESS system consented in Cockenzie has been allowed to go ahead despite being too close to our community based on other developers' own guidelines and a dearth of centralised guidance. Our community understood the connection opportunities at Cockenzie, but pleaded with both the developers and local authority (as both landowner and planning authority) and ECU to choose an alternative, actually suitable, site – even within the vicinity. No part of the system was willing to hear our pleas and construction began on the 342MW facility exactly 3 weeks ago.

This is all despite the lack of any clear need for additional BESS in Scotland, especially the South East, based on NESO's CP30 we are already 4x over capacity based on what has been consented. The developer-led system has failed and a gold rush of big money has been allowed to turn our and many other opportunities into a klondike.

## 5 – CONTIN CC

### John Heathcoate

#### Introduction

Dr John Heathcote, Secretary of Contin Community Council, Highland. My last employment was as a Principal Specialist at Dounreay. I've been professionally involved in adaptation to climate change and I'm convinced that we need to do something about it. I've built myself an eco-house.

Contin is planned to host the Spittal to Beaully overhead line, and the Western Isles Link underground line.

#### Starting point

We want low carbon electricity to be

- reliable,
- affordable, and
- we want a prosperous Scotland

#### Reliability

I'm going to address reliability. The wind is not reliable, and neither is the sun in Scotland.

To understand wind's unreliability, I've considered a hypothetical wind turbine in Caithness, using real wind data for 2017.

- It delivered its rated output – the number everyone quotes – for only 2.4% of the time
- The average over the year was 34% of its rated output. This is very typical for an onshore turbine.
- Energy generation is typically less than average in summer, and more than average in autumn and winter.
- For 17% of the time, it delivered nothing.
- The longest continuous run that year of delivering nothing was 35 hours.

We need a source of electricity for the time when wind is not generating at least its average power. This can be some other source of power that is reliable, such as gas and hydro, or it can be energy from storage.

The current plan appears to be that Scotland will have 50-60 GW of wind generation giving 15 GW at 30%, 0.9 GW of gas (Peterhead 2) and there's about 1 GW of long-term hydro-electric. Scotland's future power demand, assuming that everything goes electric, is estimated to be around 15 GW (around 12 GW in 2024) so that's OK. But how will we source 15 GW when there is no wind and no sun?

Battery energy storage schemes are typically designed to deliver for 2 hours. The 2017 data I discussed had 35 hours with no wind, and there's the need to get through the summer months with below-average wind generation too, although solar can help with this during the day.

The Royal Society has estimated storage need. The amount of storage required for the UK is truly huge – ~100 million MWh. A big BESS does 600 MWh, so 170 thousand BESS for the UK, around 14 thousand for Scotland, *pro rata* by population. Or Loch Ness × 6000 m for pumped storage, 4.5 × Ben Nevis is 1343 m.

I have not yet seen a government strategy document that demonstrates any understanding of the storage need. They do not even discuss it using the correct technical terms. They talk about how quickly electricity can be delivered from the store (GW), but not about how big the store needs to be (GWh).

The current plan can't work. We need to pause and think.

## 6 – CRATHES DRUMOAK DURRIS CC

### Anne Shearer

Good afternoon, I'm Anne Shearer from Crathes Drumoak Durrus CC in Aberdeenshire.

The current approach to energy infrastructure planning is fundamentally flawed.

Pathway to 2030 is a nation-wide programme of infrastructure development yet planning authorities, whether local councils or the ECU, are restricted to considering individual applications for component parts in isolation. Local councillors are specifically warned against bringing the wider impacts of co-dependent projects into consideration. In spite of Chief Planner advice that, in the case of an application for an overhead line, the project should include generation, transmission and ancillary equipment (substations), the developer continues to separate out these applications, obscuring the true cumulative impacts from view and thus proper consideration. The developer claims the cumulative strategic benefit of the entire national programme for each application, yet the environmental impact consideration is limited to specific local impacts. This amounts to procedural unfairness and renders the planning balance meaningless. Indeed, in an opinion delivered just last week from the Lord President of the Court of Session, this approach was deemed irrational.

Local communities and Community Councils are aware of the impact and yet have very little input into the system, being limited to raising objections once the planning application is in, or given a 5 min slot to speak at local authority meetings. Meanwhile the developers meet frequently and extensively with planning authorities, so it is no wonder that planning authority reports are one-sided, representing largely the developers input, and so preventing councillors or ministers from making balanced decisions.

In addition, we have extensive feedback from our local community stressing immense pressure on communities and community council volunteers to keep pace with the number of applications being submitted and the volume of documentation involved. This is clearly an unbalanced system.

Local councils rely heavily on applying conditions to mitigate the environmental impact of infrastructure developments and yet have no resources to follow them up or to ensure they are implemented. Requiring the developer to engage an Environmental Clerk of Works is essentially asking them to mark their own

homework and does not ensure delivery of conditions that protect our environment and our wildlife.

In conclusion, developers give all the input to planning departments and they quote national benefits against local impacts; they salami slice applications; developers have of hundreds of people working on each development whereas community councillors are volunteers with work and family commitments; and the conditions stipulated to mitigate the impact of developments are not independently enforced. So planning balance does not exist.

This process needs to be paused until a National Energy Policy is in place and a full assessment of how the grid upgrade is being implemented can be addressed: how planning balance can be achieved; how fragmentation can be removed and how a genuine overall assessment of environmental impact can be made.

Thank you.

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## **Jonathan Rose**

Chair, members,

I want to focus on one central issue:

**Scotland's climate ambition is not matched by a system that is accountable, coherent, or demonstrably effective.**

There are now over 4,000 onshore wind turbines operating in Scotland.

Their deployment has been driven by market mechanisms designed to reduce investor risk.

That has accelerated construction. But speed is not the same as strategy.

Responsibility for security of supply does not sit clearly within Scotland, while generation targets and locational decisions do.

No single authority in either country is fully accountable for matching supply with demand in real time.

That disconnect matters. It means we pursue capacity without resolving integration, storage, and backup in a transparent way.

At the same time, communities — who experience the direct impact of these developments and are its hosts — have no seat at the decision-making table. Their only meaningful recourse is through the planning system, which demands time, expertise and financial resources which they generally don't have.

That is not Partnership; communities have to resort to reactive defence.

There are also serious questions about carbon accounting in certain contexts. The Hill of Fare case last year raised evidence that a large windfarm on peat-rich land may not repay its embedded carbon emissions within its operational lifetime .

When the emissions associated with extensive transmission infrastructure are included the net benefit becomes even less clear.

If developments are proceeding without fully resolving those questions, then ambition risks outpacing both evidence and expertise.

That is why we - Community Councils have called for a pause.

Not to weaken climate action.

Not to deny the importance of emissions reduction.

But to ensure that what is being built genuinely reduces emissions, strengthens energy security, and commands democratic legitimacy, so we can be seen to be pursuing a common enemy TOGETHER.

A pause would allow:

- Independent scrutiny of carbon payback assumptions
- Transparent assessment of grid and backup requirements
- Consideration of fuel poverty alongside headline targets
- And meaningful engagement with communities before decisions are effectively irreversible

If the current pathway is robust, it will withstand scrutiny.

If it is not, it must be improved.

Our land is not simply an asset class in the hand of a few.

It is the foundation of rural communities and long-term environmental stewardship.

Climate leadership requires more than numerical targets. It requires coherence, accountability, and public trust.

Without those, progress becomes performative, characterised by tick boxes, rather than substantive progress for the good of all our people.

## **7 – CREICH CC**

**Bill Lockyer**

See contribution from [Ardgay and District Community Council](#).

## 8 - DEER CC

### Geordie Burnett Stuart

- 1 The ideological pursuit of Net Zero is destroying industry, jobs and lives.
- 2 Yet the origins of the 'settled science' are increasingly disputed by large numbers of reputable scientists.
- 3 CO2 is a benign gas - not a pollutant. The more there is in the atmosphere the less effect it has.
- 4 Of course the Climate is changing but not so fast as to threaten humanity or the world as we know it. Many people continue to confuse weather with climate.
- 5 These big infrastructure projects were conceived many years ago. They were designed to move renewable power south where it is required. But the money and the enthusiasm is drying up globally and these big wind projects may never be built.

SO a PAUSE is necessary to clearly consolidate energy demands and needs. New infrastructure projects should not proceed blindly because they have been planned some years ago. Britain is responsible for 0.8% of global emissions. Our massively expensive plans are unaffordable and make us the laughing stock of the entire world..

## **9 – FAIRLIE CC**

### **Rita Holmes**

As chairwoman of Fairlie Community Council, a rural coastal community in North Ayrshire , I want to bring a specific topic before this convention.

It is one of Industrial noise, and more specifically, Infrasound Low Frequency Noise. (ILFN)

In Fairlie we have been no strangers to noise. Our beautiful village is a lovely place to live. It is a gem on the Clyde with a backdrop of hills to the east.

Peel Ports is our immediate neighbour to the south along with two decommissioning nuclear power stations 5km further to the south of us.

We have endured audible, but temporary noise from cable laying vessels, as well as noise from past operations at the long jetty 900m to the west of us

Noise emanated from the unloading of iron ore and then coal from abroad.

Redundant moored drillships and various other noisy operations have been experienced as well as the usual trunk road traffic noise for those close to the A78.

However, nothing can compare to the torture we were subjected to due to noise from the two offshore-sized wind turbines located 3.5km from us on the Peel port`s Hunterston construction yard site .

Fortunately, the two 200m high 6MW + wind turbines operated intermittently and usually for short periods of time.

All wind turbines propagate ILFN, the larger the wind turbine the more intense the ILFN.

ILFN is below the threshold of hearing ie below 20 hertz and is known to be injurious to health.

I am reporting to you about our personal experience, but all over rural Scotland more and more people, families, are finding their homes unlivable in. They are being deprived of sleep, subjected to constant torturous frequencies that damage their central nervous system and health, whilst the operators deny there is any problem and malign complainants as imagining effects because they do not like the look of wind turbines!

My neighbours and I experienced severe debility every time they turned , even when they were just idling in the breeze.

When they were operational ie “generating electricity” the effects were tantamount to torture. My neighbours were affected as was I. There were those further afield in Largs negatively impacted.

At its worst, we could not walk properly, talk or think clearly.

The effects were instant , as soon as they turned we were ill, as soon as they stopped we were fine. That was without being able to see them.

200m wind turbines should be many tens of kilometres from people to minimise health impacts. ILFN cannot be mitigated.

There are regulations to govern audible noise. Noise above 20 hertz.

There are no regulations governing ILFN, so no protection for “receptors”.

The developers, acousticians and those in charge in government like it this way. Most of them know that these machines are causing ill health and that people are being expected to live under torture, day and night, anytime these monstrous machines are turning.

ETSU 97 regulations on noise from wind turbines is no longer fit for purpose as it fails to recognise ILFN at all.

We want this problem with these large powerful machines acknowledged and new regulations that effectively protect the public and animals introduced.

Individual Community Councils and cash strapped Local Authorities do not have the financial resources to submit a challenge through courts.

## 10 – FEUGHSIDE CC

### Eileen West

Thank you, Helen, and Ministers.

I am Eileen West and I represent Feughside Community Council, Deeside — one of many rural communities overwhelmed by energy infrastructure and we fully support the Unified Statement and the call for an independent mechanism to question the current system for the following reasons.

This is no longer a transition. It is an industrial land grab.

Hundreds of kilometres of pylons, vast wind farms, substations the size of small towns, battery storage and hydrogen plants and access roads are being driven through communities — often stacked one on top of another with no strategic planning.

This permanently reshapes landscapes, fragments habitats, changes established land use, alters local economies and fundamentally changes how people live. It is being done through a planning system communities no longer trust.

#### **This should alarm you.**

The Unified Statement is not rhetoric. It is evidence that the system is failing where it matters most — public consent and social license.

Communities are told, repeatedly, that projects are “of national importance.” But

- when engagement is reduced to a “done deal” box-ticking exercise”...
- when unpaid volunteers in their spare time are expected to analyse millions of words of technical applications in 30 days...
- when decisions are driven by policies that are outdated and blind to lived reality...

... people conclude — understandably — that the consultation process is legitimising decisions already made. Transparency is questioned. Trust collapses.

The language we hear is stark. *Contempt. Derision. Disrespect.*

Communities understand the urgency. But urgency does not excuse injustice to those carrying the burden. It does not accelerate progress. It sabotages it.

Communities feel sacrificed when benefits flow elsewhere, resistance hardens. Projects are delayed. Legal challenges multiply. Developers lose credibility. Ministers lose public confidence.

That is the trajectory we are on.

We need new infrastructure. But is government willing to confront that a fundamental reset is needed.

One that independently examines balancing climate goals with nature, landscape and wellbeing — or if government targets override everything by default.

One that tests if consultation is meaningful, early and influential — not procedural and performative.

One that ensures communities have timely and affordable access to expertise, not developer narratives.

One that assesses “honeypot” cumulative impacts on a spatial scale

One that exposes regulatory gaming that is salami slicing and inadequate oversight to enforce so-called mitigation promises.

Without this, conflict, opposition and delays will intensify. Confidence in the legitimacy of the entire planning system will continue to erode.

With it, Scotland has a chance to deliver a fair, democratic and durable transition.

YOU govern with our consent. That consent cannot be assumed. We must not be treated as collateral damage.

Please place community voices at the heart of how our future energy is planned before already entrenched mistrust is irreversible.

Thank you for listening.

## **11 – FORDYCE SANDEND AND DISTRICT CC**

### **John Anderson**

Firstly sincere thanks to the organisers of NESCCC and to all involved in making this happen.

I am John Anderson and currently act as Secretary for Fordyce Sandend and District Community Council.

Moray West wind farm made landfall in Sandend Bay at Redhythe point. Via a directionally drilled conduit going out to sea.

This was after a strong campaign from SOS Save Our Sandend that fought Ocean Winds who wanted to bring the cable directly up the bay as this was the cheapest option.

The cabling then runs underground for 31km through some of the most productive Scottish farmland – taking the generated power to the onshore substation at Whitehillock by the A96 and on to the connection point with the National Electricity Transmission Network at the Blackhillock substation outside Keith.

The 882MW project is the second offshore wind farm to be developed and delivered by Ocean Winds in the Moray Firth with the other being their 950MW Moray East project. Their next project in the same area will be their 2GW Caledonia offshore wind farm which is currently going through the planning system. All these wind farms have separate landfall.

Moray West is a joint venture between ENGIE a French multinational electric utility company, headquartered in La Défense, Courbevoie and EDP Which was founded as Electricidade de Portugal headquartered in Portugal.

The Moray West offshore wind farm reached full power and was officially switched on by the Secretary of State for Scotland, Ian Murray, at Ocean Winds control room facility in Buckie.

The Rt Hon. John Swinney MSP, First Minister of Scotland, marked the opening of the new Operations & Maintenance (O&M) base in Buckie that will service the Moray West Offshore Wind Farm, developed by Ocean Winds (OW).

At no time did either gentleman consult with the communities impacted by the development in any way shape or form, but it got a mention in the press.

Sandend is not only scenic with significant importance as a feeding area for Dolphin, Orca and other cetaceans. It is also one of the best surfing beaches in Scotland.

The whole project has been very disruptive both offshore and onshore. Offshore for the fishing fraternity and other shipping and onshore as the pipeline burial entailed laying a 31 km hardcore road through the farmland. With lorry load after lorry load of hardcore being transported on the narrow rural roads resulting in many impacts on the local population.

I had my windscreen smashed by one of the lorries spewing rocks as it thundered to the delivery point. Smashing into the windscreen just in front of my son who was a passenger in the car.

The roads were subsequently dismantled with traffic going the other way.

The windfarm Consists of 60 Siemens Gamesa turbines, each delivering a capacity of 14.7MW, on large monopile foundations weighing in at 2,000 tonnes of steel per substructure. Only the turbine blades were manufactured in the UK.

The monopiles were fabricated at Navantia Seanergies shipyard in Fene, Northwest Spain

The project did utilise two of the ports in the Inverness and Cromarty Green Freeport during construction of the project.

Belgian offshore construction company DEME, used its vessel Orion to install the monopiles.

Cadeler installed the turbines it is a part of BW Group Bergesen Worldwide Ltd which is headquartered in Oslo and Singapore.

Virtually all the big spend is outside the UK. There is a tiddly bit of employment within the UK but is insignificant when compared to the over two hundred thousand jobs lost from the battered oil and gas industry. Why not emulate the Offshore Supplies Office which was set up in 1973 to support British industry's share of the burgeoning oil and gas sector.

The wind farms remain an exclusion zone to fishing and shipping.

As a heavily impacted CC we have had to go cap in hand to get a dribble of funding to buy some community resilience equipment and some benches.

The farmers received some compensation, but other than that the local communities and Scotland in general and the UK get diddly squat from the huge developments.

We recently had SSEN visit the area looking for potential landfall sites for their offshore wind farms. If there was any proper plan then they would all have been forced to combine with one of the other landfall sites.

Alternatively a short hop along the coast is Peterhead power station. The power station is largely redundant, but has a large capacity connection to the grid.

If there was a properly thought through plan for the mass electrification of Scotland and the UK, surely it would be a much better route to make landfall in Peterhead for many of these developments.

It could be stated that all developments have to deliver offshore power to a central receiving platform and then onward transmission to Peterhead, or other places.

If we really addressed this whole sorry mess in a well thought through plan perhaps Scotland and/or the UK could financially benefit via a government owned company similar to BNOC British National Offshore Corporation which morphed into Britoil which was subsequently sold off. By comparison we all know how the state owned company in Norway fared and generated the wonderful sovereign wealth fund they now enjoy.

IF we really looked at the wider impact of offshore wind we could perhaps electrify the offshore oil and gas industry, which whilst being the most environmentally conscientious industry in the world is castigated and beaten into early demise, whilst its production remains sorely needed.

In conclusion we maintain that we definitely need to decarbonise, but this totally incoherent mad dash for zero is of no lasting benefit to Scotland, or the UK. It causes resentment and civil unrest and pitches differing communities against one another. Most notably urban versus rural. It is certainly of no benefit to local communities and rural communities in particular.

## 12 – GARVE AND DISTRICT CC

### Sadie-Michaela Harris

Thank you, Chair, and thank you to the MSPs who have taken the time to attend.

We are here today not because we oppose action on climate change, we recognise it, we live with its impacts, and many of our communities have supported renewable energy for decades.

We are here because what is happening across the Highlands is no longer transition it is industrialisation, imposed at scale, without consent, without coordination, and without a national plan.

Community Councils are statutory consultees. We represent local democracy at its most direct level. Yet again and again, our objections are noted and then disregarded. Decisions are taken elsewhere, impacts are felt locally, and communities are left to live with the consequences.

Those consequences are real and cumulative:

- a growing sense that rural Scotland is being treated as a sacrifice zone for national targets.
- permanent landscape change in areas that underpin tourism and local identity
- deep peat damage and carbon release
- pressure on fragile roads and infrastructure

What makes this worse is the *salami-sliced* approach to planning. Individual applications are assessed in isolation, while everyone in this room knows the reality on the ground is multiple wind farms, substations, pylons, battery storage sites and access tracks all converging on the same communities.

There has been no national cumulative impact assessment.

No national economic impact assessment.

No spatial plan that answers the most basic question: *how much is too much, and where?*

Tourism remains the backbone of the Highland economy. Yet decisions are being taken that risk undermining it, without any credible assessment of long-term economic harm.

Our Unified Statement is not radical. It is reasonable.

We are calling for:

- a pause on major applications
- a national energy plan
- and a Scotland-wide Planning Inquiry Commission that looks at cumulative impact properly.

This is about fairness. It is about democracy. And it is about trust.

So, my question to MSPs is this:

**If community councils are ignored, if cumulative impacts are never assessed, and if national policy continues to be delivered through piecemeal local decisions where, in this process, does local democracy actually count?**

Thank you.

## **13 – GLENGARRY CC**

### **Ken Brown**

Two years ago Glengarry Community Council were briefed on works that were to take place along the scenic, single-track road to Kinlochhourn, often claimed to be Britain's longest dead end. 98 "improvements" were to require 30 weeks of road closures, in order to make ready for the Skye Reinforcement Line. Materials would be brought in by three convoys (each of five trucks) per day, not arriving before 7.30am.

Within days the 30 trips per day became 64 and their arrival to 6am. 30 weeks has become two years and the notice of road closure has just been extended to September.

Once these works are completed, the "enabling" works begin. 53 new access tracks. More restrictions, more trucks.

Only then can their real work begin.

East along the A87, the Coire Glas PSH project will build a new bridge across the River Garry to serve the upper works, switching station, tunnel portal and grid connection. Slices of the salami omitted from the original application. This concurrent with the doubling of the width of the Kilfinnan road, itself another year of disruption.

Only then can their real work begin.

This new bridge will also serve the Loch Fearn PSH project which requires the upgrading of the forest track for 23km along the south side of the Glen to join the above mentioned Kinlochhourn road. Sadly, the improvements for the Skye Reinforcement Line Project are insufficient for the Loch Fearn Project and a 2.5km section will have to be closed and temporarily bypassed whilst a wider way is created.

Only then can their real work begin.

When their real work does begin, a cumulative six million additional traffic movements will take place through Invergarry where the speed limit is 40mph, not the usual 20mph.

When their real work does begin, five or more workers' camps will house a cumulative total of over two thousand staff. Glengarry's population will increase

sevenfold and we will shoot up the Highland population league, easily surpassing Beaully, Dornoch and Ullapool, Newtonmore and Kingussie -would that the same was true of our Shinty Club- sweeping past Portree, and challenging Aviemore.

Renewables projects and associated infrastructure? We have them, windfarms - new and expanding, a 20 football-pitch sized switching station, miles of pylon lines, even a battery farm.

Pumped storage schemes. Two. Huge. Touted as integral to a National Energy Strategy that does not yet exist, essential for when the wind don't blow, the rain don't fall, the sun don't shine and the tides don't turn. A cynical view is that they buy cheap electricity, pump it high, and sell it expensive, profiting from the very non-existence of that National Energy Strategy.

I have only touched on two of the cumulative ramifications we face. Surprisingly, we have much in common with the developers. We too must plan. We too must mitigate impacts and capitalise opportunities. We too need skills, time and resources. We too need investment commensurate with the tasks before us.

And we need it now. Only then can our real work begin.

## **14 – GOLSPIE CC**

**Diana Royce**

See contribution from [Berriedale & Dunbeath Community Council](#).

## 15 – HALKIRK & DISTRICT CC

### Matthew Reiss

Thank you MSPs and the organisers for this opportunity.

I am here representing Halkirk and District CC in Caithness and the Far North more generally. May I start by making it clear our Community Councils are NOT dogmatic and certainly not political.

200 years ago, the Highlands suffered grievously during the Clearances- money and profit were put above the local public.

Forward to the 1970's and 80's- vast areas of peat in the Flow Country were deep ploughed to plant sitka spruce and lodgepole pine taking advantage of lucrative subsidies and tax breaks- money and profit again put above the local public.

2026 – Caithness is being swamped by turbines, substation buildings 600m in length, BESS, pylons, tracks and a disingenuous planning system, impenetrable to ordinary people, or should I say “receptors”? Money and profit put above the public – an ANGRY public,

Caithness people are fiercely proud of their unique big sky landscape and natural environment. I was a police officer “up there”- used to regularly meeting angry people but never this quiet and simmering fury. And I would feel that way if I was being cleared off my family land -this is actually happening, on a small scale, in the Halkirk area. (I was also the Chief Inspector in charge of wildlife crime enquiries - ironic?)

How ironic that we we have severe depopulation and the undamaged parts of the Flows are now an UNESCO World Heritage site- yet even there the developers are moving in. Ironic too, that the Banniskirk Hub or sub station, a proposed building over 600 metres long will not provide a single job in Caithness once built- so much for the Saudi Arabia of the North.

Renewable energy, including nuclear, has its part to play but in an organised and **compassionate** way- a word that does not exist in NPF 4, at present it is a free for all and its all about money. Wild land designations, SSSIs and all the rest are being bulldozed. A Planning Inquiry Commission would get a grip, pause the tsunami and face up to the rank injustice being perpetrated by Governments- plural.

I was going to say to the Minister if she'd been here that we need to work together, with similar motivation but I am going to say this- many of the people here have travelled hundreds of miles and for her to only be able to give thirty minutes to this tells me a lot about her priorities -very very disappointed. Our motive is to protect people and their health, environment and to pause the lunacy.

Thank you.

## **16 – HELMSDALE CC**

**Diana Royce**

See contribution from [Berriedale & Dunbeath Community Council](#).

## 17 – HERIOT CC

### John Williams

Good afternoon, I am John Williams representing Heriot Community. Heriot is a small, scattered community midway between Edinburgh and Galashiels in the Gala Water valley. It lies between the Lammermuirs and the Moorfoot Hills.

I was co-opted to Heriot Community Council in 2010 to deal with wind farms – specifically the Rowantree application, between Heriot and Oxton. Other local communities were also involved, and I acted on behalf of seven CCs at the PLI. Scottish Ministers accepted the Reporter’s decision to refuse consent.

Ironically we are now faced with an application on exactly the same site for far larger turbines, a solar farm and a BESS. This is an excellent example how developers repeatedly attempt to wear down community opposition, exploiting the planning system. Since 2010 Heriot CC has continuously endured at least one active application in our area.

We stopped a wind farm at Gilston – that took three PLIs and a Judicial Review to achieve. Needless to say, Heriot CC could only undertake such enormously expensive legal proceedings because we had generous financial support from a local Estate. How can that be fair? How can Scottish Ministers say local communities will have their views taken in account?

Recently we have had to participate in the THIRD iteration of Wull Muir wind farm, so three PLIs, each one attempting to persuade ANOTHER reporter to allow this wind farm. The third iteration moved the turbines far closer to Heriot village so there will unquestionably be visual and noise impacts on many local people. The Reporter considering that scheme discounted all we said on this subject and allowed the appeal. That decision has just been set aside in yet another JR. But referred back to yet another PLI.

How many times are communities supposed to be subjected to this overt bullying? We are currently dealing with SEVEN major applications – and the threat of huge new pylon lines.

Since 2010 Heriot CC has also stopped another five wind farms in our area – all involving a PLI. On one of them we won costs due to the unreasonable behaviour of the applicants.

Whilst I dealt with all these applications and PLIs, may I make it plain that I could not have done so without the unstinting support of John Campbell KC, who gave his support again and again pro bono. How many communities can possibly expect that sort of assistance?

I wrote to Scottish Ministers after the recent Greystone Knowe PLI , held in early 2025, pointing out the disparity between the applicants very large team of experts at the PLI, Landscape architect, noise consultant, planning expert, large solicitors team and Marcus Trinnick KC (who represents many applicants at PLIs, as I know full well) – and our small team of three, yet again John Campbell KC still helping us. I stated that there MUST be financial assistance for local communities if Scottish Ministers are going to continue to state that communities' views are always taken into account.

Naturally I soon received a brush off from Ivan McKie MSP telling me how fair the PLI had been, how the Reporter allowed us full say, and no of course there is no question of communities getting financial assistance.

Finally s36 applications and ECU. These applications have always made it difficult for local communities to participate – slow posting of documents, tight deadlines to deal with huge EIAs that require hours of study and so on. But now made far worse by ECU's attitude towards local authorities. Deadlines imposed for consultation replies – and if exceeded ECU refusing to allow an objection to trigger a PLI. We know that SBC Planners are overwhelmed with work – the result of repeated cutting of finance from SG.

ECU staff are civil servants, who rotate through the department. They are not qualified planners and should not therefore be making planning decisions.

We have just had that treatment over the Ditcher Law application – which Heriot CC objected to – with ECU proceeding direct to a decision without a PLI. Their decision letter contains severe flaws – not least their very strange reasoning why the many nearby properties to the turbines do not trigger the RVAA threshold. If that wind farm is constructed some 50 properties will be devastated by visual impacts – and noise. The ECU decision never even mentioned noise. A totally unfair and unreasonable decision. It should have been considered in full by a Reporter – and NOT by civil servants lacking the requisite skills.

So another JR? And how can local people finance that?

One last example. Oliver Forest wind farm in Tweedsmuir C.C. area. The proposed turbines are so close to Tweedsmuir that most of the village will suffer excessive noise levels well above 35dB. Under ETSU-R-97 rules, as it is the whole community rather than a few houses, the lower level of 35dB should have been mandated. It was not – instead the developers have claimed 40dB, which astonishingly was not challenged by Scottish Borders Council.

Tweedsmuir faces a PLI shortly – they clearly need expert help. Where will that come from?

One last point. An attempt to be constructive. Landscape Capacity Studies. These are an invaluable tool, having been drawn up by highly skilled landscape architects, and subject to extensive consultation. Ironside Farrar drew one up for the Scottish Borders.

which became approved supplementary planning guidance in 2016. However since NPF4 came into force LCS have been downgraded in importance. They should be used to identify areas where large turbines can be accommodated – and of course help rural communities by giving them expert guidance on the landscape in their areas.

Thank you.

## 18 – IONA CC

### Shiona Ruhemann

Iona Community Council strongly supports the case that you (as meeting chair) and Highland Community Councils will be taking to the 24 February meeting with the Cabinet Secretary, specifically calling for:

**An immediate pause to the “chaotic rollout” of extremely large energy infrastructure projects,** to allow -

- Rapid creation of a robust national energy policy
- A pan-Scotland Planning Inquiry Commission to assess cumulative impacts
- A high quality Socio-Economic Impact Assessment, recognising tourism as an integral part of our economy and sustainability
- Democratic consent and respect for local voices

For ~two years so far, Iona has been “engaged with” by Scottish Power Renewables (SPR) on their proposed major 2GW off-shore wind development, MachairWind. We’ve been unable to secure specific, significant, meaningful evidence of benefit to the community (vs generic “clean energy” and grants of £500), or of consideration of the risks to island communities - to quote SPR when asked if there was any consideration in their proposal of risks to islands' sustainability (e.g. impacts on the crucial visitor economy): “that’s for you to tell us”.

Like other communities, ours has a track record of being strongly pro-renewables. But the Scottish Government cannot relinquish onto small voluntary island bodies SG’s own responsibility to protect the socio-economic sustainability of island communities and the precious, fragile cultural and natural environments and wildernesses in which they exist.

We very strongly support your call for consideration of these mega-schemes to be put in a robust, balanced, responsible and *safe* strategic framework with protection of remote communities and Scotland’s natural and cultural heritage at its centre.

## **19 – Kilmorack CC**

### **Andy Fraser**

It doesn't seem that long ago that I was a representative of 4 Community Councils meeting in a village hall in rural Inverness-shire to discuss these very issues. But here we are in the Scottish Parliament with representatives from the length and breadth of Scotland, which is testament to the significant strength of feeling, nationally, on this important issue.

We can't all be wrong!

It's pleasing to see MSPs in attendance and encouraging to see that our message appears to be finally getting through. Community Councillors, like MSPs, have been elected to serve our communities, and we are here to represent these communities and also to try to help and support our MSPs. But it would be remiss of me not to remind everyone present that there are elections to this very parliament later this year!

Now I've seen various figures regarding current energy production in Scotland, varying between 2.5 and 5 times our actual usage. Even allowing for future needs, including population and usage growth, these figures provide plenty of freeboard over and above our requirements. Most of the targeted increased future energy production appears to be heading south of the border, whilst households in Scotland, and particularly the Highlands, incur higher costs than down south. And the current proposals for associated power stations, battery storage systems and overhead transmission lines will adversely affect Scottish tourism, housing, agriculture, forestry, standards of living and possibly health.

A case of all pain and no gain for the Scottish Highlands!!

2030 targets are often quoted, but why does Scotland have to be the first to meet them? We contribute around 0.2% of global energy use, so our current headlong rush to net zero will not save the world, whilst it will trash large parts of rural Scotland.

And why put all our eggs in one basket? We can't afford to rely totally on wind and wave power, and become totally reliant on these sources of power. We need a cohesive plan with a combination of all different power sources in our future plans. Because who knows what the effects of climate change will be on wind and waves? And battery storage currently only produces power for around 2

hours, no doubt at exorbitant cost to the general public, so is neither a significant help nor a sustainable, cost effective solution.

So let's cool our jets, take a step backwards and look at the bigger picture. If other significant national projects impacting the Highlands, such as the A9 dualling, can be delayed by around 10 years, so can our journey to net zero.

## 20 – KILTARLITY CC

### Susan Ogston

My name is Susan Ogston, and I am here today representing Kiltarlity Community Council.

I have served on my Community Council since 2017. I originally joined because the committee was considering ending the OAP Christmas lunch — I never imagined it would lead me to be standing here in Holyrood, but today I am here for one reason only: the massive industrial development proposed on my doorstep, and the profound strength of feeling across my community.

No one is more aware of the irony of this situation than Highlanders themselves.

Just days before Christmas, the First Minister chose Scotland’s natural landscape as the backdrop for his festive message. He spoke warmly about our “uniquely beautiful natural environment,” encouraging people to get outdoors for their wellbeing. He spoke of peace and clarity found beside a loch, surrounded by nature.

Yet those of us who actually live in these landscapes are now fighting to protect them — not as postcard scenery, but as living communities whose futures are being reshaped without our consent.

The reality on the ground is very different.

I recently accompanied local councillors on a site visit to the proposed development in our area. The shock at what they saw was palpable. Standing there — seeing the scale, the proximity, and the permanent change being proposed — it was clear this is not something that can be understood from behind a desk.

Answering emails, posting scripted social media messages, or meeting developers for photo opportunities is no substitute for engaging meaningfully with rural communities. It does us a profound disservice.

And I can say this on behalf of all the communities represented here today: come and see the places we are lucky enough to call home — and then come and see what is being proposed in their place. I doubt anyone here today would willingly choose to live beside developments of this scale.

We are told this is for our children’s future.

Nationally we contribute around 1% of global carbon emissions. Even if we meet every target, global outcomes will still be driven by the world's largest emitters. Rural Scotland is being asked to carry a disproportionate burden for uncertain global gain.

We are told this will bring cheaper energy.

But rural households are seeing higher bills, not lower ones. Transmission charges, grid constraints, and infrastructure costs are passed directly to consumers.

We are told this will improve reliability.

But when storms hit and power goes out, it is rural areas that wait the longest. Intermittent generation without adequate storage does not build resilience — it exposes weakness.

And we are told this protects the environment.

But we see peatlands disturbed, habitats fragmented, wildlife displaced, and landscapes altered forever.

Kiltarlity is not opposed to progress — but rural Scotland is not a blank canvas.

As a country, we need to take a breath and reassess the plan. Look at the number of your constituents represented here today. That means something. It reflects the depth of concern across communities the length and breadth of Scotland.

You need to listen.

Rural Scotland is not just a backdrop for messages.

It is our home.

Thank you.

## 21 – LEITHOLM ECCLES BIRGHAM CC

### Bob Hope

In common with many other communities, the impact of the transition to renewables hit us out of the blue with no warning nor support. We recognized the impact of Climate Change on our planet and accepted that we needed to play our part. We did not object to the extension of the strategically placed Eccles Substation, nor three subsequent battery storage applications. Collectively, these will cover an area of 75 football pitches of prime agricultural land adjacent to the substation.

At this point our community very loudly stated – enough is enough.

We looked to Scottish Borders Council for support, they directed us to the Scottish Government. Their only advice was to read the Government Policy as contained in NPF4!

Even Gillian Martin, Minister for Energy and the Environment (her then title) hasn't read that document as she refused to meet with either ourselves, or our MSP to discuss the policy. The Chief Planning Officer also refused to meet with our MSP, both claiming a need to be fair to developers and quoting the Ministerial Code.

The Minister had no such problems attending a developer's event in Wishaw about that time. A complaint lodged by us was then answered by a member of her staff from Energy Consents advising that her actions were OK.

We spent many hours consulting and writing our Place Plan, having been told that this would influence planning decisions only to have Ministers backpedal and SBC Planning Officers ignore it. At this time there is no democracy in Scotland – I understand that the ECU have granted 90% of Section 36 applications in the past year despite opposition from local authorities and communities. Public Inquiries are led by Scottish Government appointed Reporters and are a farce.

Our issue is with battery storage. The UK needs between 23 and 27 GW to meet future requirements. Under construction in our area at this time there are about 1GW of BESS – 4% of the UK total need. NESO has divided the country into regions – our region South/Central Scotland has been apportioned 3.9GW of BESS. At that time there was 38GW in the planning queue. At this time there is 3.6GW either in production or construction. The Scottish Government continue to accept and process BESS Planning applications.

We don't just need this to Pause – we need it to Halt. In the first instance we need a Planning Inquiry Commission. Somewhere down the line, I believe that we need a criminal enquiry to look into a UK wide scandal which is not dissimilar to that

experienced by Post Office Managers. Our politicians urgently need to be held to account.

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## **Laura Bird**

According to a 2022 Scottish government paper on the constitution, Devolution allows: “Scottish decision-making on key issues in line with the choices of people in Scotland.”

It goes on to say that devolution has: “brought decision-making about devolved matters closer to the people affected.”

But in Scotland, most months, the Scottish Government imposes yet another unwanted sprawling electricity installation on some of the most beautiful landscapes in the world. Even when local people, who know and love these places, have made clear that it is the wrong development in the wrong place.

Just last week, the Energy Consents Unit in Glasgow, overruled Scottish Borders Council and granted permission for eight turbines, up to 200 metres tall, at Ditcher Law in the Lammermuir Hills. A legally recognised (or so we all thought) Special Landscape Area.

Remote, unaccountable politicians and officials approved the devastating industrialisation of a rural community they have never (or barely) set foot in.

There isn't time now to list the considerable local and supply chain environmental cost of this Ditcher Law windfarm. That should be explored in a Public Inquiry. Would the loss of nature be worth it? What value do we put on Scotland's forests, bogs, moors and biodiversity? In theory, National Planning Framework 4 takes account of nature. In practice, Section 11 puts yet more sprawling, inefficient energy schemes above all other considerations.

The Unified Statement laments a current energy transition that is unnecessary and unjust. It also asks for a plan. In that plan we need genuine environmental cost benefit analysis. Wind, battery, solar and grid projects have badged themselves as 'green'. Thus foreign financiers justify grabbing subsidies from our electricity bills.

The Scottish Government currently oversees a speculative free for all. Developers are given all the time they want to submit and amend applications. While rural Local Authority planning departments drown under a tsunami of applications.

A genuinely democratic process would yield different results at different times. Otherwise, what is the point? The Scottish Government must give decision making back to local communities. Starting with a Public Inquiry into Ditcher Law windfarm.

## **22 – ROGART CC**

**Diana Royce**

See contribution from [Berriedale & Dunbeath Community Council](#).

## **23 - SKEABOST & DISTRICT CC**

### **Andrew Robinson**

Local communities across rural Scotland are being swamped with applications for wind farms, pylons, substations, battery storage and workers camps. It is impossible for Community Councils and Local Planning Authorities to keep up with this tidal wave of projects - let alone to play a meaningful role in the planning process. Community opinions are being ignored and overridden by the Scottish Government and the Energy Consents Unit.

Recent announcements from the National Energy System Operator (NESO) show that there are far more energy projects already approved and in the pipeline than the UK needs or the grid can cope with. It's time for the Scottish Government to use their planning powers to impose a moratorium on any more energy infrastructure proposals until Scotland has a clear national plan for energy in place. Most of the energy infrastructure currently being built in Scotland is unplanned, opportunistic and ultimately owned by overseas investment companies. The profits do not stay in Scotland. This is a crazy situation. Our beautiful rural landscape is being sacrificed on the altar of "net zero" for no good reason - even NESO say no more is needed. It's time that Gillian Martin, the Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Energy listened to us and Scottish Government stopped forcing through unnecessary energy infrastructure in the face of clear opposition from the communities impacted.

## 24 – STRATHGLASS CC

### Humphrey Clarke

#### NET ZERO OBJECTION

Recent planning decisions have seen Critical Energy Infrastructure overruling all else in decisions, regardless of the cost to the beauty of the Highlands, the health and prosperity of its small businesses, many of which are dependent on tourism.

Humans have not done well in looking after the planet however, Net Zero as currently envisioned, is not a credible solution, its stated aims are:

- Decarbonizing the grid, (shorthand for preventing climate change by cutting our carbon emissions.)
- Providing reliable energy supplies
- Reducing the price of electricity.

In all of these objectives it has already failed or is doomed to do so.

We cannot draw a curtain around UK; we share our atmosphere with the rest of the world. To suggest that cutting our 1 to 2 % of the world's CO<sub>2</sub> emissions will make any discernible difference in Scotland or anywhere else in the world is ridiculous when developing nations are building new coal fired power stations at a rate of one a week.

Few people really believe that wind is a reliable source of energy; we all know that wind does not respond to grid demand. BESS and pumped storage only provide back up for hours, not days or weeks as we sometime require in winter when demand is high and wind is low or absent. To cover this gap additional generation capacity is required that is otherwise idle and so is a duplication of capital expenditure, (for which we are paying,) and it is earning nothing for much of the time. Continental interconnectors are a bright idea but depend on there being spare power in Europe when we need it and no ghost ships or Russian submarines cutting the cables!

In terms of costs, we have more renewable energy now than ever and our electricity prices are the highest in Europe. Our manufacturing industry is dying and moving to cheaper energy areas, boosting their economies and jobs, cutting ours and generally increasing the world carbon cost because they have cheap

dirty power stations. There is no chance of our prices dropping because the prices agreed for new wind farms are index linked for 15 to 20 years to figures that already exceed the NESO projected prices for 2030

NESO's recently released estimate for the cost of Net Zero until 2050 is £7.6 trillion; (for comparison the UK GDP is approximately £4.2 Trillion). The Institute for Economic Affairs, (which is not government funded or controlled,) points out that this figure is a significant under-estimate because it is based on costs that have proved to be wildly optimistic. This represents a cost to the approximately 20 million households in UK of at least £350000 in increased costs, taxes or energy tariffs, that is £1200 per month per household. I suggest Net Zero as set out now is not going to happen.

We need more power but it must be cheap and reliable rather than expensive and unreliable.

## 25 – STRATHNAIRN CC

### Rob Atkinson

A) The Problem

B) Why is this happening

C) The Alternative

We have something like 193 turbines either built or in some stage of development and we understand more are coming.

We are sandwiched between the Cairngorm National Park and a large “area of significant protection” to the north.

This leaves our area zoned as an area “with potential for wind farm development”

The result is a feeding frenzy of land owners and developers applying to build and building large numbers of turbines.

These turbines are of ever increasing height and visual impact and are now being proposed to have tip heights of 230m.

This seeming unstoppable industrial development is transforming our strath into an industrial landscape accompanied with the almost continuous roar from the turbines whenever a community is downwind.

We are deluged with technical documentation and struggle to make representation to the planning authority due to the number of major energy related applications and the highly technical content of the documentation.

#### **Why is This Happening:**

As a community we believe in the need for human activity to be sustainable in order to protect the planet for our children and future generations.

Net zero is a waypoint on that path and we support it as a target.

However we don't believe the proliferation of onshore turbines in the Highlands is a fair, sustainable or necessary strategy to achieve net zero.

This is supported by the Analysis of Responses to Consultation July 2022 that notes that in response to question six the largest numbers of respondents saw a need for a more holistic approach to target setting and also to other renewable energy forms, in particular offshore wind.

Currently there's approximately 10 GW of installed onshore wind in Scotland. The Onshore Wind Policy Statement 2022 is calling for a minimum of 20 GW of onshore wind to be installed by 2030 – approximately double the current installed capacity.

This onshore target is driver for the proliferation of windfarms and leading to approving windfarms despite passionate and reasoned objections from local communities.

It's hard to imagine a Highlands with double the number of onshore windfarms but that seems to be the way we are heading.

### **There are Alternatives:**

As already said we are not climate deniers we support the target of net zero but to achieve it through continuing to develop our offshore wind sector.

By continuing with the existing onshore strategy we are destroying one environment to save another - Offshore wind offers the opportunity to save both.

We note and wholeheartedly welcome that at the Offshore Wind Conference the government announced an increase in the offshore wind target to 40GW but this needs to be more.

We also note that The Green Industrial Strategy calls for Scotland to generate three times the domestic consumption by 2045 – this must only be achieved through offshore wind – there should be no requirement for another turbine to be installed in the Highlands when considering the opportunity that exists in offshore wind.

In closing the Strathnairn community council welcomes and supports the Unified Statement of the Convention of Community councils.

## 26 – STRATHY AND ARMADALE CC

### Francesca Aub-Robinson

The people of Strathy and Armadale are not Far Right wing Nimbys. The Community were enthusiastic about hosting windfarms, even demonstrating in support of one! These were compatible with the Community's tourism plans because they gave relatively little impact. We now host 3, with a total of 81 turbines, the Community felt they had pulled their weight in the drive to Net Zero. However, since then, the Community has had 4 more proposed developments dumped on them. 2 are windfarms with turbines of 149 to 200m, sited very close to homes and tourist accommodation. The other 2 involve rerouting of the Grid Connection from what we were given to understand, and a surprise switching station. The Community Council are also statutory consultees for 7 other energy developments out-with the area but having potential impact. **The Community feels they have had enough and support the unified statement.**

**This salami slicing approach** to planning is backfiring. As in the case of Strathy, the uncertainty about approval of each individual project creates chaos for all stakeholders. The SSEN Transmission Reps looked a little embarrassed and undermined when their carefully-prepared information boards were invalidated by a new windfarm proposal launched a few days before their community meeting. They are still waiting before confirming the final route. It is very likely to be "lining" the part of NC500. Final details of transport/load management and needed roadworks aren't even in the planning documents. Some of these can cause significant impact to many road users and property owners; as well as being risky. Finally, this fragmentation hasn't made these developments any more sensible or palatable to "receptors".

### **Community Consultation**

I recently piled the full planning documents for one project up, they reached half way up my washing machine. Allowing only 6 weeks to read and respond to them looks more like one of Sir Humphrey Appleby's tricks than true community consultation in a Scottish Democracy. Scoping documents from developers seem rushed without much proof-reading or knowledge of the area beyond what's gleaned at their workstations. If specialised professionals working on these projects full time seem to be unable to manage the timescales and volume of work, what hope do your citizens have?

## **Case for a Pause and Clear Energy Policy**

The UK contributes a tiny proportion of emissions compared to bigger polluters who are more relaxed about fulfilling their obligations. Along with the consequences of salami slicing mentioned above, Scotland could end up in the worst of all worlds- damaged communities/ landscapes; less energy generated AND making little difference to the predicted consequences of Climate Change.

The opportunity given by the pause to compile a clear energy policy would enable all stakeholders to catch up, assess the strength and weaknesses of the current approach. We could take advantage of innovations to fulfil goals more effectively and efficiently. All leading to a just transition to Net Zero.

## Closing Remarks – Cllr Helen Crawford

"I now need to close. I want to touch upon one item not covered today and it is actual loss that people are incurring in relation to the value of their homes. And the fact that there is **no compensation fund available for the people that are impacted by that**. That is a travesty and that is another example of where we are going wrong nationally on all of this.

The Cabinet Secretary came for half an hour. We are grateful for that. She said, "**Help me understand what better engagement looks like**". It certainly does not look like 30 minutes in a Round Table, with folk who have travelled from across rural Scotland, who have been grappling with this day in day out. Some for years and some for decades.

We will continue to press the case. What is detailed and laid out in the Unified Statement is evidence based, based on your actual experience of dealing with this. It is reasonable. It is coherent. It is a **range of solutions which will help our own Scottish Government to get this right**.

This is not going away. **It's just becoming a bigger and bigger national issue**. The strength of this Convention should not be underestimated. Up until this point many of you have felt you have been dealing with these issues day in, day out on your own. And it is very easy to pick off small, underpopulated rural communities. You have now found each other.

I was looking at press coverage today of this Convention and it spoke about the "three branches of the Convention" - South of Scotland, Northeast Scotland and The Highlands. Well, you are growing by the day. More and more community councils are coming on board, and I suspect we will see more Conventions happening across the impacted areas of rural Scotland.

**This is not going away. Scottish Government needs to get a grip and deal with it.**

Thank you