

# WILD LAND NEWS 60

Spring 2004



## COMMENT

Article

### *The wild land is full of noises*

We go into the wild places for peace and quiet, but we don't expect complete silence. The sounds of the wilds are few and mostly familiar - especially the wind and the water. Then there is the wild life. Not often animal, except in the rut, but it's a bad day if you go without hearing birds. Plover up on the moors and sandpipers along remote loch shores are particular delights, while the knowing, intelligent croak of the ravens is a harsher taste to acquire. Grouse, though, just get ever more annoying, with their clatter and unvarying alarm cry; it is their uphill cousins who are to be admired for their calm presence and varied burblings - in the spring, the male tarmachan can distinctly be heard muttering 'here comes the bride' through clenched gullet.

Just occasionally, the sounds die away. Drennan Watson reminisced with us recently of an evening returning from behind Lochnagar when he became convinced he was being followed. After stopping for a third time to find no-one behind him, he realised that in the stillness of dusk the loudest sound was his own pulse keeping pace inside his skull. It is rare enough for the wind to fade to nothing, but well nigh impossible to escape the sound of water, which can carry for miles from quite modestly tumbling burns. A hard freeze can bring true silence, if you can stop long enough to appreciate it, but to lie back and savour it in warm sunshine is a recollection for a lifetime. You might best seek it where a depression on a broad summit gives acoustic shelter from valley waters and crest breezes. Such a place is the saddle of Meall nan Eun, otherwise the least distinguished of the Etive Munros (obviously the birds after which it is named must have flown elsewhere that July day).

We bring our own sounds into the hills with us, of course. Boot on rock, through heather, in squelch; best of all, crunching across what I like to call 'velcro snow'.

Those sounds can become intrusive - the clatter of Leki poles on stony ground, or that maddening srish srish of some people's gaiters or waterproofs (no, you don't know who you are!). And chit-chat of course - your colleague (how do they have breath to spare when you don't?), other parties (you don't know how far your every word carries!), or your own (when you find you are talking to yourself after a few days out).

So when does sound become noise, in the wilds? Scientists have a nice way of using 'noise' to describe data that doesn't fit their nice graph, or equation, or theory - clutter and distraction caused by impurities or other things going on, which have to be filtered out to arrive at the perfect experiment, or wilderness trip. We seem to be less bothered by noise intrusions than visual intrusions in the hills. Perhaps visual changes such as bulldozed tracks or telecom masts grate so much because they are sudden and raw, whereas noise tends to build up over time, or be a passing disturbance. It is unusual for a new development to be resisted on noise grounds - the helicopter flights round the Cuillins being a classic case, and admirably resisted.

An intriguing if depressing study in England into 'Tranquil Areas' showed how over several decades the countryside free of noise intrusion (motorways, airports, stadiums, urban zones, etc) had shrunk drastically. It is almost extinct in the South-east. We might think this is not a

problem in Scotland outwith the Central Belt, but think on't. Over 50 Munros are in earshot of a busy trunk road with fast traffic, whether at the summit or for much of the way up - notably the Arrochar, the Crianlarichs, Glencoe, Drumochter, and Glen Shiel. Another dozen are much affected by 'honeypot' ski resort car parks and clatter, winter and summer.

Traffic levels have built up subliminally over the years, so perhaps we regulars get accustomed. It took a rare hill visit with my son (over from the hurly-burly of Mexico City and looking for some Highland peace and quiet) to point out that on a superb, calm, blue sky winter day over An Caisteal and Beinn a' Chroin we were never out of earshot of the continuous traffic on the A82. There is not a lot we can do about this source of noise, although resurfacing with 'whisper tarmac' will help - you can hear the difference on the M9 east of Linlithgow - and this should be made a priority on trunk roads in the National Parks and Scenic Areas.

There is a particular brand of traffic noise which seems ten times more intrusive than the regular trucks and cars. It comes from the strings of motorbikes which like to test fast-but-winding main roads such as Callander-Crianlarich and the A87 'Cluanie racetrack'. Your Steering Team have told me not to be a killjoy for others' recreations, so the line is they are welcome to pit their skills, but maybe they should turn the volume down. Either the decibel limits on motorbikes are not being enforced, or they need tightened up (with indirect benefits for road safety too). It is notable that the convoys of big beefy German tourist bikes are scarcely audible - much more impressive!

With a quarter of our Munros no longer 'tranquil' from these causes, we need to be watchful against other noise encroachments. In the remoteness of Affric the other week, cloudless if a bit brisk, the only human sounds were from aircraft. Now I have always loved the reassuring rumble of the twice-daily old turbo-props to Stornoway. What is new is the frequency with which transatlantic jets cross the Highlands - and can be quite audible in certain conditions. It is now almost impossible to look up and not see the contrail of one, or three. (Actually, it must be a bit of a sickener to be on the Greenland icecap, say, and always have these things overhead.) And several times there were sudden ominous roars over in other glens, but happily they never emerged onto my stage. that's another story, to which we might return - and your comments would be very welcome.

Perhaps the greatest potential airborne threat to wild tranquillity is coming from recreational light aircraft - these are now a feature of any fine weekend on the hills close to the Lowlands, if still surprisingly rare in the Highlands proper. By way of a foretaste, a recent all-day hike to a hut in arctic Sweden was not enhanced by the arrival of a helicopter with a foursome and copious refreshments for an evening by the lake. This may be an issue which needs a code of good practice similar to the Access Code, or even pre-emptive regulation, before it becomes yet another unchallengeable intrusion into the wilds.

At least mechanical noise tends to die away at night, so that tranquillity can be experienced by bivviers and bothiers. Except that when Richard invited me up Ben Lomond the other July after work for a birthday treat, we were assailed the whole way by an amplified DJ and disco music from the campsite at Luss - there's one for the new National Park! And as we fade back across that fuzzy boundary between noise and sound, I recall Richard once cursing 'the coathanger bird' which so disturbed our sleep in the Mullardoch-Elchaig col, and again at Kinlochaffric. This nocturnal miscreant he so named because it was like someone incessantly sawing logs with a coathanger. After prolonged study I have deduced that this is the 'noise' of the snipe, whose ethereal drumming is surely the finest sound our wild places hold for us - and so unloud that you can only hear it on the stillest, quietest early summer evenings.

From September 2004, the UHI Millennium Institute (to become the University of the Highlands and Islands) will be offering part-time on-line courses in Managing Sustainable Mountain Development. The course leader is Martin Price, Director of the Centre for Mountain Studies at Perth College, and the modules are being developed by staff from across the UHI network.

The flexible course structure means that it is possible to exit with a Postgraduate Certificate (PgCert) after completing the four core modules, or continue studying to gain either the Postgraduate Diploma (PgDip) or the MSc Managing Sustainable Mountain Development. Individual modules can also be taken as stand-alone courses towards Continuing Professional Development (CPD).

The four core modules are 1) Environmental and social issues in mountain areas; 2) Sustainable development; 3) Policy frameworks and analysis; 4) Developing communities. The range of optional modules is planned to include: Biodiversity management; Developing potential through placement; Developing research capability; Environmental impact assessment; Geographical information systems; ICT and professional development; The Information Society and rural development; Sustainable tourism and interpretation; Water management. Students continuing to the MSc carry out a piece of independent research into an issue of their choosing, selected in consultation with a supervisor, and present the results in a 10-12,000 word dissertation.

For an application form or to find out more contact:

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Or request details from <http://www.cms.uhi.ac.uk/course/>.

**Shieldaig hydro scheme refused***Article*

*John Digney reports.*

We all breathed a sigh of relief on 16th March when the Scottish Executive announced it was to refuse the application by Highland Light and Power (HLP) for a small-scale hydro-electric scheme in the Shieldaig and Slattadale Forests of Wester Ross. This spectacular area, in the shadow of the Torridon mountains, had been under threat from hydro development since 1996, when HLP had proposed a scheme to involve damming three lochs in the Shieldaig Forest. This went to a Public Inquiry, which was abandoned at a late stage in 1997 when HLP suddenly withdrew their application.

The more recent proposal required a fourth loch to be dammed. 848 letters of objection were received by the Executive, and only six in support. As Highland Council had not objected, the Executive were not obliged to hold another Public Inquiry and were able to exercise their discretion to determine the application themselves.

The deciding factors in the refusal were the probable impact on wildlife as well as wild land. The scheme would have involved piping water between catchments, and a prime concern was for the effect on the colony of freshwater pearl mussels in the River Kerry, considered to be possibly the densest such colony in the UK. Another major anxiety was the effect on

birdlife, notably the black-throated divers breeding on the three Shieldaig lochs. Unnatural fluctuations in water levels would be expected not only to have an adverse impact on the nesting sites, but also to interfere with the food chain on which the birds rely to feed their chicks.

For us in SWLG it was encouraging that landscape considerations figured prominently. The letter to the developers stated: *Ministers are of a view that this proposal is likely to have an adverse impact on the core values of an NSA, that is the values for which the area was designated, and that this impact is not outweighed by social and economic benefits of national importance. Whilst it is accepted that wild land is not designated in conservation terms, planning guidance cautions planning authorities to ensure that proposed developments do not compromise the wild land character of these areas.*

The decision to refuse this application is crucial not only for this very special area, but as an indicator for future proposals. Had permission been granted it would surely have sent a signal to developers that renewable energy schemes are acceptable just about anywhere, no matter how fine the landscape and how insignificant the generating capacity of the project.

This was the right decision and we applaud the Executive for taking it.

## Deer cull in Glen Feshie

Article

The Deer Commission Scotland took the unprecedented step of carrying out an emergency cull of over 300 deer in Glen Feshie early this year. This controversial action was taken to protect areas of naturally regenerating native pinewoods under threaten from an incursion of over 300 hinds which had moved onto the lower ground. Section 10 of the Deer Act gives the Deer Commission powers to take emergency action for natural heritage reasons and at long last the Commission has decided to flex it's muscles.

A team of trained stalkers was flown in by helicopter to cull the deer over a few weeks and the helicopter then used to remove the carcasses. It was reported that both Glen Feshie and Mar Lodge Estates gave their full co-operation and assistance - maybe not surprising when it seems that the cost is being borne by the public purse through the Deer Commission.

SWLG welcomes this assertive action by the Deer Commission to tackle the serious over grazing and erosion problems caused by excessive numbers of red deer and we would like to see more trained teams of stalkers deployed in this way in other parts of Scotland. However as this approach is applied more widely in future we see no reason why landowners can't pay for their own land management.

*Anne Macintyre*

## Scotland's future landscapes?

Article

*David Jarman reports on a LINK seminar*

Alarm bells should ring when SNH puts a question mark on whether Scotland will have any landscapes in future! This was the title for their first major consultation on the subject. We went along to Battleby to hear all about it at a seminar convened by LINK, and have now submitted our own full response, as well as endorsing LINK's (drafted by Bill Wright of the Cairngorms Campaign). Copies of both are available by email from [david.jarman914 at virgin.net](mailto:david.jarman914@virgin.net).

Here are just a few of our key points:

- **rewilding** - apparently this is the new jargon word for restoring places whose wildness qualities have been desecrated. We know it can be done - NTS with the Beinn a' Bhuidr bulldozed track, SNH rewooding Creag Meagaidh, FCS taking out young plantations at Affric (join us there in June to see the benefits). Now it needs to be made a standard requirement for every organisation/landowner/ developer spending our monies/receiving our grants/getting our permissions. Just think how many obtrusive hydro installations, electricity pylons, and telecom masts could be screened by native woodland - if they can pay the landowner rent for the pylon site, they can rent a bit more and fence it off. Imagine how unsightly the West Highland Railway must have been when first cut - yet because it is fenced off from livestock, parts of it are now a ribbon of almost-natural woodland.

We called this 'redressing the mistakes of the past'. Here is one example. The **power line to Skye** is surely the worst case of pylons intruding into remote, wild landscapes (and sadly one of the most recent). It marches along and across Loch Quoich, through the magnificent pass to Kinlochhourn and across the ravines behind it, along the remarkable fault line, over a 500m pass behind Beinn Sgritheall, across Gleann Beag of the brochs and beautiful Glenelg, before taming magnificent Kyle Rhea with a pair of extra-high towers. Plus vehicle tracks up to many of the pylon sites. How did we let them get away with it? It would be easy to plant or regenerate scrub woodland along much of the route, but the longer-term aim should be to remove it. Skye could be a model of green energy, especially with marine hydro potential all around it, and it doesn't need a link to the National Grid any more than Shetland does.

- **value of wild land** - remarkably, the SNH paper scarcely notices that Scotland's scenery and wild land is an incredibly valuable resource. It doesn't just underpin much of our tourist industry - as the boss of Perthshire Tourist Board said, that's 8% of our jobs, and the vast majority of visitors to Scotland are coming to see the landscape or go walking in it. It is also one of the few reasons why people with energy and talent might choose to stay in Scotland, or to invest here, rather than in less peripheral and less climatically-challenged parts of Europe. This is a theme we may well return to - what do you think? LINK is uneasy about overdoing the economic measurement of scenic value, because it can too easily be manipulated to start charging us to enjoy it!
- **new threats** - SNH asked what we saw coming over the horizon. We suggested that renewable energy will soon start to go off-shore, which we support, but brings risks to views out to sea from wild coastal cliffs and hills, and also of shore installations and transmission lines. The east coast should be the priority - where the infrastructure already exists, and is closest to the cities. We also warned of increasing suburbanisation of road routes through wild and remote places. Have you seen Achnasheen by night recently? It is now an orange glow from miles around, Highland Council in its great wisdom having found cash not only for a roundabout at the old T-junction for Kyle (formerly a dreadful hazard and hold-up, not) but to illuminate it motorway-style.
- **making our voices heard** how can we do this if we don't know what is proposed? Groups like us are not consulted on new plans and applications, and we only pick up on them if someone local tips us off. This is a real problem - MCoFS are hiring someone just to monitor proposals for windfarm applications and the like. At a recent liaison meeting with 'recreation groups' SNH mentioned that Highland Council had put on its website a Draft Plan for the Wester Ross National Scenic Area - none of the groups there had heard of it, and it was too late for us to respond. On a related point, at Battleby SNH said that Ministers would not take Landscape seriously unless postbags bulged with responses. Obviously politicians don't realise that one reason people join groups like the Ramblers and even us is in the hope that they are 'voting' for the landscape to be looked after. So a letter or best of all a visit to your MSP is worth as much as your annual sub, if not a lot more.

Responding to such consultations can easily become a full-time job (said with feeling). Another important one recently was from Forestry Commission Scotland, on what to do with their vast land holdings now that (unwritten sub-text) the bottom is falling out of the market for expensive-to-produce Scottish timber. Again, our response is available.

Another vital consultation in March was the power company proposal to upgrade the transmission line from Beaully to Denny. This would become a full-scale whopper, like the biggest in the Central Belt and down to England. Parts of the route are very sensitive - over Corrieyairack, across Laggan, through Drumochter, past Ann Gloag's castle windows (sorry, but that was what Scotland on Sunday thought would most catch public attention!!). The issue should not be where it goes or what bits to underground (a likely prospect) but that it must be resisted at all costs. If built, it will open the door wide for exploitation of the Highlands for windfarms and more hydro schemes and unsuitable marine energy locations. Who will lose out, in the long run? The people of the Highlands - which covers many of our members.

## Scottish Outdoor Access Code

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The draft code has been produced by SNH and has been sent to the Scottish Executive. They are currently considering it and there is no doubt some behind-the-scenes lobbying over the proposed content. The eventual document will be presented to the Scottish Parliament, who can either accept it or reject it in its entirety (i.e. they can make amendments from the floor of Parliament).

In the meantime the Scottish Executive is consulting on draft guidance to Local Authorities and National Park Authorities on the access rights created by the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003. The consultation period ends on May 7. This document needs to be finalised, together with the code above, before the access rights come into force. This is likely to happen later in 2004.

*Alistair Cant*

## Developments in Renewable Energy since October 2003

*Article*

*An update by Fiona Anderson and Anne Macintyre*

The Chief Executive of Shell Renewables, speaking at a lecture at the Macaulay Institute, Aberdeen, said that the Scottish Executive's plan to generate 40% of Scotland's electricity from renewables by 2020 is "rather an ambitious aim", and Scotland will need to develop a mix of renewables options, ensuring they are appropriate to the needs of local communities. Provided appropriate incentives are put in place and carried ahead with vigour, Scotland's potential for RE should be realised.

Lewis Macdonald, the depute Enterprise Minister warned at the Convention of the Highlands & Islands in Stornoway that pressing developers for any more money could drive them to develop windfarms in, for example, Wales and it is for local authorities and local enterprise companies to work with and on behalf of local communities in dealing with developers. Simon Fraser, of the north areas board of SNH said that without strategic planning guidance and having local arrangements thrashed out, it will be difficult for communities to secure more than the crumbs from the table, and the only answer is an equity stake.

**Shetland Islands Council** is to go into partnership with RE generating companies, sharing the risk as well as the benefits. A 150 turbine, 300MW windfarm is planned at Lang Kames by Viking Energy, to be community owned. The project will strive at all times to address any concerns the community may have. A sub-sea cable connecting Shetland to the National Grid

should be in place by 2008, depending on major upgrading of the power lines between Beaulay and the Central Belt.

**Highland and Western Isles Councils** have received the draft of a report by IPA Energy Consulting and Brodies, evaluating the viability and profitability of hydro, wind and wave power schemes. It says that developers have a "walk-away price", where they consider a scheme to be uneconomic because of the amount of community benefit demanded. The present going rate is £1,000 per MW, but communities near the proposed development at Beinn Tarsuinn in Sutherland are currently negotiating £2,500 per MW and the Council is pressing for £5,000 as a going rate. (Highland Council have prepared a draft toolkit for community councils entitled *Can your community benefit from RE developments?* which includes how a community can develop its own scheme.

The IPA report also says that a 200MW **offshore** windfarm showed a profit of £640m over 20 years, averaging £45m a year. For most the capital cost was repaid after four years. A 100MW **onshore** windfarm showed a profit of £225m over 20 years. IPA also showed that planning permission is easier for developers to get in Scotland, with a 90% approval rate compared to 50% in England.

The **Western Isles** Alternative and RE Partnership is proposing a Western Isles Community Wellbeing Trust to further sustainable development and distribute the benefits. All such projects should be subject to a restoration bond. An application is due to be submitted to the Executive in June 2004 following a series of public meetings in **Lewis** for the largest windfarm in the UK for 300 turbines by Amec and British Energy on **Barvas Moor**. Local organisations favour the development for its employment advantages and the Stornoway Trust is negotiating for £5,000 for the community. RSPB is making a formal objection as the moor is full of birdlife and covered by EU designations. The turbines will be 360 ft high, three times the height of the local lighthouse, with blades 240 ft long, so access tracks are likely to be required to each one through the peat. RSPB points out that it may take 25 years before any reduction in carbon emissions is made. Alternative proposals for a 20-30 turbine scheme is also being discussed closer to settlements on common grazing land.

Concern has been expressed about the proliferation and scale of windfarms in **Caithness**, planning consent having been issued for three, with 8 further proposals under consideration. Caithness West Community Council has objected to a 10-turbine scheme on the coastal strip near Dounreay Power Station and to an anemometry mast near Scan Airigh. It wants Highland Council to suspend all new bids for wind masts and windfarms until a strategy is drawn up to guide future development in Caithness.

AMEC is planning a 160 turbine windfarm at **Durness**, assuming a subsea cable to the Grid will be laid from Lewis to a landfall near Kylesku (before proceeding through two National Scenic Areas to Ullapool.) It is close to a large SSSI. A 24-turbine windfarm has been submitted in Strath Brora, **Sutherland**, in an area with regional and international designations.

SNH withdrew its objection to a 20-turbine windfarm proposed at Beinn Tharsuinn near Ardross, **Easter Ross**, after Scottish Power amended the plans to reduce the likely impact on the part of the Dornoch Firth National Scenic Area. Changes were made to the access route and to the positions of four of the turbines.

SNH has also withdrawn its objection to proposals by National Wind Power for a 45-turbine windfarm on the Glen Kyllachy Estate at **Farr** [as described in the Autumn issue of Wild Land News](#). NWP reduced the number of turbines to 40 and produced a detailed otter and water vole report for the 17km length of access track which satisfied SNH. (No account was taken of the massive loss of peat identified by SWLG which could mean that it might take possibly 20 years before there is any reduction in carbon dioxide emissions.)

**Orkney Island** councillors have agreed to defer approval of new wind turbine applications until a planning policy is agreed for their siting. The council is to set up a special consultative group to liaise with Orkney Tourist Board about potential visual impacts. Yet **Perth & Kinross Council** moves for a windfarm embargo until the completion of a RE policy have been blocked on legal advice. They held a seminar in January to help decide future policy. A Councillor referred to a "Klondyke mentality" among landowners and developers, with ten sites being assessed in the eastern Ochils alone.

Glendevon Energy appealed last year against deemed refusal of three 118m high wind turbines at **Balado** Activity Centre near **Kinross**. The subsequent public local inquiry dismissed the appeal. What is significant in this case is that this application was turned down on landscape reasons with the Reporter concluding:

*"The turbines would be very tall and they would appear out of scale and out of keeping with all other elements in this rural landscape. The flat landscape of the Loch Leven basin is not capable of absorbing them, and they would dominate a large area. They would also breach the skyline of the attractive hills that surround the basin. In these circumstances I agree with Perth and Kinross Council that they would have a substantial adverse impact on the landscape character of the Loch Leven basin."*

It is not the principle but the scale that is at issue here so maybe there's a lesson to be learned for the future development of wind energy in Scotland.

Wind Energy Ltd has lodged 6 planning applications with Highland Council for anemometer masts in Morven, Ardnamurchan and Mull.

**The Forestry Commission** is involved in 24 windfarm developments in Scotland, either by leasing land to energy companies for turbines or for access to sites. The Director for Scotland said recently that given the potential public benefits from allowing wind farm developments they do not feel they should take an "in-principle" stance against them. FC has also said in response to an article in the Independent that it has no statutory duty to protect the landscape and the FC are within their rights under their Act to dispose of land as they see fit, and that in seeking to promote RE they are following government policy. In the past 20 years they have tried to follow a sensitive landscape policy in contrast to previous blanket afforestation: a decision not to plant trees on a mountain top is a decision for the FC; a decision to site a windfarm there is one for the planners.

An independent report on the Clashindarroch Windfarm for AMEC near **Huntley, Aberdeenshire**, commissioned by the River Deveron Fisheries Board claims that the FC is acting illegally by allowing windfarms on its land. The proposal will require the felling of almost 2 square miles of immature trees and the creation of an access road through an SSSI. Runoff plus access road construction will also silt up and destroy spawning habitats.

However, Aberdeenshire Council has decided to support the development to the Executive because of the creation of jobs and access routes.

Renewable Energy Systems have appealed against refusal by **Moray** Council of a windfarm development at Drummuir on the grounds that more consideration should have been given to significant economic and employment benefits for the community.

**Cairngorms National Park Authority** board has agreed draft guidelines for public consultation that will not allow large-scale windfarms, HE schemes and other major RE projects to be sited in the Park; small-scale schemes that do not have adverse environmental impacts will be accepted if all power lines are routed underground. They wish to be consulted on major windfarm projects visible from the park area, while upgrading of the National Grid lines through Drumochter could be problematic.

Scottish & Southern Energy has identified the preferred route for the new 400,000V **National Grid** line between Beaully and Denny, replacing the existing 132,000V line. 75% of it will follow a similar route. The changes are through Guisachan Forest instead of Strathglass, between Strathmashie and Dalwhinnie, and between Dalnaspidal and Trinafour where it will be less visible from the A9 and the railway. The new line will have lattice steel towers 40-50 metres high, spaced approximately 300m apart. Protected wildlife sites could be affected south of Beaully and between Laggan and Dalwhinnie. The cost of putting the line underground would be 10 times more than overhead cables but SSE would have no technical objections. They are hoping to submit an application to the Executive in autumn 2004 for consent to start construction in 2005. It could be operational by late 2007. Bidwells, the property consultancy, which has been involved in 60% of planning applications for windfarms submitted in Scotland, has urged Scottish landowners considering windfarm projects to develop any sites quickly before saturation occurs, and that sites should have proximity to the National Grid and an absence of opposition.

**Fintry** Community Energy Initiative was congratulated at an open day in Stirlingshire for taking control of the design and operation of windfarms in its area. Airtricity has applied to the Executive for a 22-turbine windfarm on Corlick Hill overlooking **Greenock** in Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park. There have been local objections as well as by SNH and Glasgow Airport, and Inverclyde Council officials have also recommended objection.

The Scottish Executive has approved Scottish Power's application for a 142MW windfarm at Blacklaw, South Lanarkshire, and Scottish & Southern Energy's plans for a 130MW windfarm at Hadyard Hill near Girvan, Ayrshire.

The MOD has said that any windfarm development within a 50 mile radius of its seismological observation post at **Eskdalemuir** would not be permissible. It is part of a network of stations to monitor the test ban treaty. Five applications in Dumfriesshire could be affected, plus others in Cumbria, the Borders and South Lanarkshire. The Royal Society has said that continued opposition from the MOD to windfarm developments could jeopardize the government's RE targets. They reject any application within 74 kms of air defence radars. The British Wind Energy Association says that they objected to 34% of all onshore applications in 2002 and 48% in 2003 and that the Government needs to come up with a technical solution with MOD.

A British Wind Energy offshore conference also warned that the UK's budding offshore wind industry could be nipped in the bud if ministers heed conservationists' concerns. The RSPB claims that all of the sites licensed for the second round of offshore windfarms are in areas identified by English Nature as potentially internationally important for birds. This does not apply to **Robin Rigg** windfarm project in the Solway Firth which has been taken over by Powergen. It is expected to start in 2005.

**Orkney Islands Council** is supporting a hydraulic study to assess the possibility of using the Churchill Barriers which connect the mainland with South Ronaldsay for tidal generation. A proposed tidal power station costing £50m could generate 300MW of electricity. A feasibility study has also been commissioned for a full-scale tidal energy system off **Luig** in Argyll. A fixed link is proposed for the narrows at Cuan which separate Luig from the island of Seil.

## SWLG objection to new power lines across the Highlands

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The Steering Team have written to Scottish Hydro Electric Transmission Ltd to register our concern over the proposal to upgrade the existing 132,000-volt overhead line to 400,000 volts, using 50m high pylons for 220km between Beaully and Denny. Although 75% of the route will follow the existing line, we believe the new towers will have a much more serious visual impact across wider areas of countryside. In addition, we are concerned about the

impact of associated construction work including the proposal to build temporary roads for erecting the new pylons.

We also believe the rationale behind this upgrade to be flawed. The introduction to the Consultation Document makes it clear that the purpose of the new line is to provide grid connections and capacity for the anticipated rush of electricity generation from renewable sources in the north of Scotland. This would appear to be putting the cart before the horse at a time when the whole issue of renewables is so contentious, and when new technologies for power generation are rapidly emerging.

We deplore the state of affairs which assumes that the fine landscapes of Scotland must be sacrificed to meet the increasing energy demands of the UK.



More info: see the [Highlands before Pylons](#) campaign.