

Environment and Sustainability Committee

Inquiry into Energy Policy and Planning in Wales

EPP 169 – Country Land & Business Association



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National Assembly for Wales' Environment and Sustainability Committee Inquiry into energy policy and planning in Wales

Response from the Country Land and Business Association

The Country Land & Business Association (CLA) represents 4,000 members in Wales. They are individuals, businesses, and charities and other land managers who collectively manage and/or own about half of all rural land. In the process of managing this they generate jobs, provide land and buildings for investment and housing for local people, participate in, and deliver, environmental land management programmes, and represent some 260 different types of rural businesses. Many are involved in the renewable energy sector, as feedstock suppliers and providers of land for renewable development and, in increasing numbers, as generators of renewable heat and electricity supplies.

What are the implications for Wales if responsibility for consenting major onshore and offshore energy infrastructure projects remains a matter that is reserved by the UK Government?

If large energy infrastructure projects remain a matter reserved by the UK Government there is the risk that Wales could end up with a very unbalanced mix of renewables and seen as a supplier to the UK with the damage to environment here for benefit elsewhere. Due to the relatively low population of Wales and the extensive upland rural areas and coastal areas there is a possibility that Wales could be over-burdened with the provision of green energy to support a UK commitment relieving the more heavily populated centres in England of some of their responsibilities.

That said for UK planning policy on major energy projects to have any credibility within the context of a national renewable energy framework, it is essential that there should be consistency in the decision making process for projects in both England and Wales. Such consistency across England and Wales might not be obtained if control was transferred to Wales.

It is absolutely essential that Welsh issues are fully considered in major infrastructure applications following the abolition of the Infrastructure Planning Commission. Until now this just hasn't been the case and as a result Wales has ended up with large scale projects which are not popular with the public and are not practical for feeding back to the grid. It is not for Westminster to impose schemes on Wales without thorough consultation with the Welsh Government and the process for doing this needs to be more transparent and comprehensive.

How does this affect achievement of the Welsh Governments aspirations for various forms of renewable and low carbon energy as set out in the Energy Policy Statement?

The Welsh Government are currently making very slow progress on renewable energy and are not giving clear signals on micro renewables at present. We therefore question their ability to deal with larger scale projects. WG needs to demonstrate better leadership on the devolved powers it already has with regards to generation of power. The impetus should be on empowering farmers and landowners to maximise the amount that small and medium scale generation can achieve, through in particular wind and hydro.

An enormous number of excellent sites in Wales are stifled not only by the planning system, but by the availability of 3 phase grid to make them commercially viable. The best thing the WG can do is incentivise the power companies to extend their grid network cheaply to such sites. To emphasise, we are not suggesting controversial HV pylons, but simple 3 phase grid. In Wales we have excellent wind and water resources and we ought to be extending opportunities to generate small to medium scale renewable schemes to take advantage whilst not despoiling our landscape.

Mountain Water is one of the key natural resources widely available in most locations throughout Wales. This coupled with the natural topography of the country, results in both large and small hydro schemes being a natural choice as key contributors to a renewable energy policy. One major obstacle to such projects is that most suitable sites are found within SSSIs or SACs and it is here that good co-operation and understanding between the agencies is vital.

The inter-relationship between the numerous agencies involved with large scale energy projects is a critical factor in operating an effective and efficient energy policy. All too often there is poor communication between the different agencies, and with each agency, following its own particular objectives without reference to the national energy policy. This can result in conflicting views and result in long delays in progressing projects and in extreme cases can result in projects, which could make a useful contribution to the national policy, being cancelled. We have many examples of this from our membership.

It is clear that the Welsh Government have not handled the delivery of large scale wind farms under TAN 8 competently. A formal review of TAN 8 would be welcome, particularly to take account of the impact of high voltage power lines on welsh communities and to ensure undergrounding and offshore routes are properly considered.

How does this affect delivery of the Welsh Governments target for a 3 per cent reduction in Green House Gas emissions per annum from 2011?

Please see comments above regarding smaller scale schemes.

What will be the impact if consenting decisions on major infrastructure projects and associated development are not all taken in accordance with Welsh planning policy?

With the appropriate consultation through the Welsh Government at a very early stage, decisions should not be made (by the body replacing the IPC) that are not in accordance with Welsh Planning policy. The 50MW limit should be discussed. Why should the limit be 50MW and not 100MW?

The CLA would welcome the opportunity to give oral evidence

