



media release



UK can have wind power and wildlife

RSPB and IEEP call for big increase in onshore wind to tackle climate change

The UK could greatly increase the number of onshore wind farms it builds without trashing wildlife.

So says an RSPB-commissioned report from the Institute for European Environmental Policy (IEEP), which found the UK lagging far behind in the drive for wind power.

The report calls on the Government to step in to ensure better and quicker decisions on wind farms, while protecting wildlife and winning the backing of local communities.

Wind turbines met just less than two per cent of the UK's electricity demands in 2007, though deployment levels varied, with Scotland significantly outperforming other parts of the UK.

The UK was thirteenth in a European league table of wind power per head of population, trailing behind tiny Estonia and only just ahead of Belgium.

The three countries at the top of the league table were Germany, where wind met 15 per cent of demand, Spain, where it accounted for 20 per cent, and Denmark, where it met 29 per cent of demand.

After looking at the ways in which those countries had facilitated onshore wind through their planning systems, the report drew up conclusions on how to protect wildlife and deliver wind power on a large scale.

It recommended:

- The planning system should take a strategic approach, identifying both those areas where new turbines are given priority, and those where they are most likely to conflict with wildlife.

- This should be informed by clear and detailed information about which areas are of most concern to conservationists. Bird sensitivity maps are already used to guide developments in Scotland.
- The Government should provide strong leadership to tackle the lack of specialist know-how in local authorities, set local targets for wind turbines and make sure planning decisions take account of the fact wind power is a national priority.
- There should be an expectation that developers and other interested parties discuss proposed developments before planning applications are submitted to reduce conflict.
- More ways for communities to benefit from the wind farms on their doorstep should be promoted to win public support. This could be through direct ownership of the turbines, reduced bills, improvements to the local environment or money for local facilities.

Ruth Davis head of Climate Change Policy at the RSPB, said: “The need for renewable energy could not be more urgent. Left unchecked, climate change threatens many species with extinction. Yet, that sense of urgency is not translating into action on the ground to harness the abundant wind energy around us.

“The solutions are largely common sense. We need a clear lead from government on where wind farms should be built and clear guidance for local councils on how to deal with applications. We must reduce the many needless delays that beset wind farm developments.

“This report shows that if we get it right, the UK can produce huge amounts of clean energy without time-consuming conflicts and harm to our wildlife. Get it wrong and people may reject wind power. That would be disastrous.”

David Baldock, Director of the IEEP, said: “The development of renewable energy in Britain has to accelerate greatly if new binding targets are to be met. This means that the planning system must facilitate a step change in the construction of wind power. The best experience elsewhere shows that this is possible. Damage to birds and other wildlife can be minimised by a strong or proactive approach – guiding turbines to the right sites. Good planning can facilitate development appropriate for the long term”

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