

**Ms Pauline Hendry,
Directorate for Planning & Environmental Appeals,
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Dear Ms Hendry,

**TOWN & COUNTRY PLANNING ACT; APPEAL, HILL OF
STROUPSTER WIND-FARM APPLICATION, CAITHNESS; REF. NO;
P/PPA/270/431.**

I understand that an Inquiry under the Planning Acts into the refusal by Highland Council to grant consent to Npower Renewables (a subsidiary of RWE of Germany) for a 30 MW wind-farm consisting of 12 aero-generators at the above 'remote' location is to be held in Caithness commencing on Tuesday, October 27, 2009.

I write to state that I am willing to give evidence at the above in favour of the above application. I had the honour of serving the electors of Ward 5, N.E. Caithness (broadly the populated coastal strip from Dunnet to Staxigoe on the coast plus some adjacent inland areas) for four terms as their Regional Councillor on the Inverness h.q. local authority and was an active member of the (main) Highland-wide and Caithness divisional Planning Committees for 16 years.

In private life, I studied Town & Country Planning as part of my degree course at Edinburgh University, while much of my adult career was spent in writing/commenting on nuclear, oil & gas and latterly renewables matters; I am a Fellow of the Energy Institute.

I am thus aware that the energy field has been dominant in the economy of the Highlands & Islands throughout the post-War era and has provided since 1945 many thousands of (mainly) technical jobs, which by and large have been reasonably well-paid.

I refer to the hydro-electric power stations of the 1950s/60s (and associated tunnels, dams etc); the construction and operation from 1956 onwards of the Fast (Breeder) Reactor at Dounreay and its successor the 250 MW Dounreay Prototype Fast Reactor in the late 1960s/early 1970s and the development of offshore oil & gas fields from the early 1970s onwards with associated onshore North Sea oil terminals (Flotta is visible from here), platform fabrication yards and others providing specialist in-field pipelines, such as the SubSea 7 yard at Wester, near here.

In Caithness this has, over the past two decades, provided the background for the establishment of several energy-related high-tech

engineering companies, most of whose principals are known to me, that comprise an important sector of our local economy.

Whilst these have mainly been in the nuclear plus the oil & gas fields, there has recently been some attention given to tidal stream energy, with three locally-conceived patented prototype generating devices at various stages of development.

I am also aware that an improved design of poured concrete 'anchors' for land-based wind-farm towers has recently been jointly developed by two local companies here; and that this innovation could be finding favour UK nationwide.

As a Councillor, I gave every encouragement to the first 'desk-top' study of the tidal-stream potential of the Pentland Firth by the Harwell-based Energy Technology Support Unit (ETSU); report published in 1993. Highland 'Ward 5' incorporated the southern shores of the Firth.

The ETSU narrative has served as the base-line for all subsequent practical and theoretical studies/ proving works; as I write, engineers and seafarers on board the FPV *Scotia* are conducting their third major Pentland Firth research 'cruise' of 2008/9, electronically collecting and collating images of the sea-bed together with checking samples of materials recovered from known parts of the sea-floor.

In any matters of planning determination, the question regarding any application must always be; 'Does the proposal represent a suitable land-use for the applicant's site?'

My answer is 'yes'. Stroupster is perhaps the finest site for a wind-farm in my entire native Canisbay parish; a place where stiff breezes are the norm, not the exception. It is also well away from the nearest homes. I understand that approval will mean an 'incoming investment' of c. £20 million, the largest that this area will have ever seen and surely welcome during a world-wide recession, when jobs on major construction projects are at a premium.

My understanding is that the Scottish Government has set itself a target of producing 50% of the country's electricity from non-CO₂ polluting sources by 2020, a task made more difficult by a seeming ideological/dogma-driven opposition to nuclear electricity.

There is a growing concern amongst the world's scientific community that man's activities are enhancing 'global warming'.

To reduce the prospects of unwelcome 'climate change', the concept of replacing the exhaust emissions of 'greenhouse' gases as a result of burning hydrocarbons (coal, lignite, natural gas etc.) for electricity generation and replacing those with renewable, non-polluting, sources is widely accepted.

It is generally agreed that it will prove less difficult to provide a substitute for hydrocarbons burned to produce boiling water, and so superheated steam to spin turbines in electricity power stations, than to replace conventional fuels (petrol, kerosene, diesel etc.) in engines used in the transport field, such as ships, motor-cars, aircraft and in most forms of public transport.

There is no doubt that onshore wind will be a significant part of the future 'energy mix' in Scotland/UK during the 'lifetime' of the proposed Stroupster aero-generators.

Indeed, it is impossible to see how the Scottish Government's target can be met without substantially more onshore wind-farms being constructed. Those, by and large, produce electricity at one-third of the cost of adapted wind-towers piled into the seabed offshore in (relatively) shallow-water arrays; the Beatrice oilfield wind-farm, offshore Caithness, is purely experimental. Given that UK electricity consumers fund the price-gap between 'green' and conventional sources, is it really necessary to load needless extra costs on such as pensioners?

The fact that land-based wind is, as yet, the only form of renewable electricity generation that is broadly economically competitive with burning hydrocarbons has been widely recognised throughout the world.

Over the past few years this has led/is leading to a dramatic and continuing increase in aero-generation capacity in major countries including Germany, Spain, China and the United States. Indeed such had the demand been, that established turbine manufacturers world-wide have had to ration supplies.

As a native of the Pentland Firth coast, I have long championed tidal stream electricity, although obviously I was not around when playwright/socialist philosopher George Bernard Shaw first proposed the concept back in 1907; I am vice-chairman of community-owned Gills Harbour, where a small vessel used for tidal stream surveys/research is usually based.

But I am equally aware that no tidal stream, nor for that matter wave-power, electricity generating device is, as yet, beyond the prototype stage; thus emphasising the desirability/essential nature of harvesting Scotland's best wind farm sites (of which Stroupster is one) over the coming decade, if the official 'renewables' electricity target is to be met.

As stated above, there is a long tradition here in Caithness of engineering excellence, leading to innovations.(e.g. when the 'flow-line-bundle' pipeline system was developed at the Caithness yard at Wester,

it added c. 20/25% to the world's total of recoverable offshore oil & gas reserves).

It is a fact of life that most aero-generators are manufactured by companies with h.q. in countries such as Denmark, Germany and India; that resulted from a withdrawal of Government funding during the late 1980s from a well-known Glasgow engineering firm, that was attracting world-wide attention to the pioneering large-scale tower-mounted aero-generators that it was developing. It had to leave this field as research & development monies from UK taxpayers' monies were no longer available.

That withdrawal left the field open to foreign competitors, whose Governments did not take such a short-sighted view.

The grinding slowness of the UK planning process is also, with justification, being blamed just now for a foreign company closing the only UK aero-generating manufacturing plant; where a workers sit-in is currently happening.

It is now almost four and a half years since the initial application for Stroupster was filed by Npower Renewables. I feel certain that any 'guidelines' drafted by the Highland Council in regards to the generality of planning for aero power-stations has no statutory basis.

But I must say that I am impressed with both the gracefulness of modern wind towers, as well as by the technical innovations, such as carbon-fibre rotor-blades and computerised operating systems seen in the turbines. From the illustrations I have seen, that will be true also of Stroupster, if your Reporter approves the project, as I would strongly urge him to do.

The presence on the ground of these attractive towers in a rural area is a clear sign that a caring people lives there; communities that do not shirk from a realisation that they are assisting, in their own small way, in meeting the 'pressing' global challenge of reducing CO₂ outputs.

Much has been made by opponents of the fact that, even in Caithness, there can be calms and thus no electricity generated. The 'problem' of intermittent generation from Dounreay's PFR (because of its predicted regular closures for experimental reasons) was largely solved by contemporarily building a 'twin', the £%0 MW pumped storage hydropower station at Foyers, on Loch Ness-side; it also included some 'real' hydro capacity.

I recently noted that, immediately after the official opening by HM Queen Elizabeth of its new Glendoe (near Fort Augustus) hydro power station, a spokesman for Scottish & Southern Energy was quoted as stating it was investigating other possible 'secondary hydro' sites along Scotland's Great Glen; water pumped to upper-level reservoirs is one of

the best ways of 'storing' electricity and so helping to eliminate 'peaks and troughs' from demand on a daily or longer-terms basis.

This would help 'even out' generation from Stroupster, while the long-awaited upgrade of the transmission line from Beaully to Denny would provide additional capacity for wind-farms in the Far North of Scotland. This would be prior to any proposed high-voltage DC cable which may be laid sub-sea, along Scotland's East Coast, if Pentland Firth tidal stream electricity proves to be viable on the large scale anticipated.

If the UK were to have a higher capacity electricity inter-connector with continental Europe's main transmission grids, then this could be an answer to 'intermittency' of wind-farm supply; it is unlikely that calms will prevail over the Highlands at the same time as (say) Cornwall, the North German Plain and the Iberian peninsula.

Returning locally, I would urge the Reporter to find in favour of the applicant because this will also provide some financial community benefit.

I spoke to Mrs Catherine Robertson, of Roadside, Auckengill, after she was quoted in the local weekly newspaper as being concerned that the chair of Dunnet & Canisbay Community Council would be giving evidence against the Stroupster proposal at the Inquiry; that is his/its prerogative given the result of its consultative ballot. I told her that I was willing to support the application at the Inquiry, in person or by arguments laid out in writing, as here.

She, in turn, got in touch with Millicent Matheson, of Park View, Auckengill, who supplied me with background procedural papers and stated in a covering note of 25.07.09: 'We would be grateful of any help at all'.

It is a fact that approval will mean significant financial benefits for the N.E. Caithness (traditionally crofting) communities. There is indeed an argument for having this somewhat skewed (where practicable) towards Auckengill, as this is the nearest populated district to Stroupster.

The co-operation of Auckengill's folk was publicly praised last week by former UK shipping Minister Rt. Hon. Malcolm Sinclair, Earl of Caithness, who chairs the Caithness Archaeology Trust, at the opening of the Caithness Broch Centre in Auckengill's old primary school building. He stated that the community worked closely with the National Museums of Scotland (which has provided a number of loan exhibits) and with the relevant departments of the Highland Council to see the project through from conception to reality. Much archaeology work remains to be done in the Auckengill area and some monies from Stroupster could provide 'seed' funding for that purpose.

The current proposals to harness the tidal streams of the Pentland Firth has reminded local people of the magnificent skills of the sea-pilots, not least from Nybster, Auckengill, who used their intimate knowledge of its sea-currents in various parts of the Strait and at different times in the twice-daily tide-cycle to safely guide windjammers through the potentially hazardous Pentland Firth, in the days before powered cargo ships or certificated ships' masters.

A modicum of money would allow their efforts to be interpreted so that a new generation could learn of the depth of their knowledge at time when they provided a key service to the international trade & commerce of the UK and NW Europe.

From the section of A99 'Red Road' over the southern slopes of the low Warth Hill's moors to John O'Groats, very fine views can be obtained over the Gill Burn peat-moss and the forest-clad gentle slopes of Stroupster Hill, where I hope that the your Reporter will approve the wind-farm; indeed I believe that its rotating blades may add interest to this panoramic view with the 'mountains' of the Paps of Caithness range (Morven, Scaraben etc.) in the far distance..

The Gill Burn, which contains c. 10 million tonnes of peat, is described as an 'outlier' of the so-called Caithness 'Flow Country'.

But the above stretch of road is the only one in Caithness where motorists/cyclists/ hikers can obtain enough elevation to see over such a 'blanket bog'.

It would be fine to think that the company, assuming its proposal is approved, would co-operate with parties such as Scottish Natural Heritage and perhaps Forest Enterprise, to provide an interpretation facility just off the A 99 that would allow interested parties, including visitors, to learn more about wind-generated electricity, about the characteristics of the Gill Burn moss and about the r.& d. efforts of 1960s/1970s foresters to find species that would thrive in the mild winters of the North Highlands' in windy, acidic, sodden peaty areas.

This could even include past local uses for the Gills Burn basin, such a the summer herding of cattle, or even illicit distilling!

The aim of forestry here was to provide fast-growing (due to lack of hard winter frosts) relatively 'soft' timber as raw material for the manufacture (e.g. at the mill at Dalcross, near Inverness) of whitewood board for the construction industry, to substitute for plywoods made from hardwood tropical species.

Now a new plant at Invergordon is also involved converting such 'secondary' wood (including forest thinnings) into fuel pellets to be

automatically fed into boilers for rural domestic (i.e, not on gas-mains) households, as well as for heating commercial and industrial buildings.

The search for suitable trees involved numerous Caithness trial plots for planting Pacific Coast coniferous softwoods, some in the Causewaymire Wind-farm; all funded by taxpayers' money through the Forestry Commission.

The initial trials were with seed-stock from the San Francisco area of California, but those proved prone to 'bowing' in Caithness's windy climate.

Eventually foresters obtained cone-seed for lodgepole pine and sitka spruce from Queen Charlotte Island, in British Columbia, just south of Alaska that fitted the need more or less exactly.

The so-called QCI stock was then planted in a three X three grid pattern, thus allowing mature sitkas to be harvested at 40/45 years. The lodgepoles were the 'nurse crop' doing their task by fixing nitrogen from the atmosphere to firm the ground surface, but which became overwhelmed by the sitkas in c. year 15, thus dying off and providing extra growing space for the more valuable spruces.

The planned pensioner's DayCare Centre in Canisbay, to serve both Canisbay and Dunnet parishes is as yet some way off its financial goals; about 18 months ago I was pleased to have been asked to help judge a (fund-raising) sell-out local version of 'Stars in Your Eyes' in Canisbay Hall; I recall reflecting on how a contribution from community funds spun-off from Stroupster could help make this project a reality sooner than later, rather than having to rely on village hall functions to raise cash.

There is a well-organised anti-wind farm lobby group throughout the UK, with local affiliates. Typically these bombard the local media with biased 'press releases'. Without any evidence, they invariably complain that wind-farms damage tourism.

I founded what has grown to become, under other family members, the largest tourism enterprise in John O'Groats.

As stated above, I feel that many of our visitors come to the same conclusions as myself and see the presence of well-sited aero-generators locally as being signs of a caring community.

I thus do not believe that aero-generators will adversely affect tourism, perhaps indeed the contrary; I myself have observed the interest provoked amongst visiting passengers on board the RO;RO ferry ex-Gills Harbour when the vessel sails past the major energy industrial complex at the Flotta North Sea oil terminal on its thrice-daily route to St Margaret's Hope, Orkney.

I would also hope that Npower Renewables would help train interested local young persons in necessary maintenance etc. skills and assist with bursaries for University degree-level training; electrical engineers with wind-farm capabilities will remain in good demand for the foreseeable future.

I will be happy to co-operate with other parties in providing positive evidence to the Inquiry and to be cross-examined on any of the above.

Yours sincerely,

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