

11.04.21

Windfarm ambitions

Scots companies planning major renewables projects far outnumbered by European firms

Exclusive

By David Bol
Political Correspondent

ONLY one-fifth of onshore windfarm projects being considered by the Scottish Government have come from Scottish-owned developers with ministers accused of selling off renewable assets overseas.

The SNP's Energy Minister has boasted that Scotland has "unrivalled renewable energy potential", with around one-quarter of Europe's renewable resources enjoyed by Scotland.

But only eight out of 39 proposals in front of the Government, which are either too large for councils to determine or are subject to appeal, are from Scottish firms.

Statistics show that 19 of the bids have been submitted by overseas companies and another 10 are from English-owned firms.

Campaign group Save Our Hills said the statistics show that the SNP Government was viewed as a "soft touch" by foreign-owned developers keen to make money from renewable energy. The group claims the figures refute any claims that all onshore windfarms provide economic benefits for Scotland, when so many of these plans would result in profits either going abroad or south of the Border.

Among the foreign-owned companies to look at Scotland for windfarm development are those from Canada, France and Germany. Major firms owned by the Norwegian and Swedish governments are also involved.

Rapid expansion

SCOTLAND currently has an onshore wind capacity of around 8.5GW. Plans are in place to



rapidly expand offshore wind capacity to 11GW, as part of a blueprint to transform the country into a carbon neutral nation. But short-term capacity increases for renewable energy will come from onshore wind - with 4.45GW of capacity already approved and another 4GW in the planning stage.

Iain Milligan, spokesman for Save Our Hills, said: "It is clear from these statistics that foreign-owned energy companies consider Scotland a soft touch when it comes to windfarm development.

"They are lining up to cover our landscape in turbines in the hope of making considerable profits at our expense.

"It is a complete myth to suggest

Scotland always stands to benefit economically from the seemingly limitless spread of windfarms. It's time the Scottish Government stood up to these developers. We're at saturation point with windfarm development, and ministers must now consider other forms of renewable energy for the sake of our economy - which is so dependent on tourism - and our precious landscape."

But experts have stressed that renewable energy through offshore and onshore wind power will provide both economic and environmental

benefits for Scotland. The Scottish Government's statutory adviser, the Committee on Climate Change, has said the Government should focus on ensuring "a favourable planning regime for low-cost onshore wind" and maintain electricity generation from renewable sources at high levels if targets are to be met.

Investment

THE SNP Government's updated climate change plan points to a pledge by Scottish Power to "invest over £10 billion in North Sea renewables in the coming decade".

The document also highlights a "new renewable, all-energy consumption target of 50% by 2030, covering electricity, heat and transport", adding that "there will also be a substantial increase in renewable generation, particularly through new offshore and onshore wind capacity". But the BiFab fiasco over wind-turbine contracts has ignited anger that Scottish jobs and supply chains promised as part of boosting the country's

wind capacity have not materialised. Co-leader of the Scottish Greens, Lorna Slater, said: "We have a wealth of potential here. What we need is the will to invest it and at the same time, make sure that investment is benefiting Scotland.

"In the past, there's been a real disappointment that the Government has had a very hands-off approach. They handed our valuable resources, wind energy and so on, to massive global corporations and said get on with it."

Scottish Labour leader Anas Sarwar said: "It seems the SNP have created green jobs - just not here in Scotland. The SNP has learned nothing from its failure at BiFab and Scottish workers deserve better. My climate recovery plan puts economic recovery and climate action hand in hand. To secure new green jobs here in Scotland, we need a bold industrial strategy to ensure the growth in domestic renewable energy production and to deliver a local-first approach to procurement and business support."

Paul Wheelhouse, the SNP's Energy Minister, said: "With the limited powers at our disposal we have taken steps to boost locally-owned and community renewables onshore, as well as strengthen the requirements on developers offshore to use local supply chains.

"However, key powers in areas such as markets and revenue support mechanisms that can help shape the development of the sector still lie at Westminster where UK ministers have failed to deliver the actions requested to support Scotland's energy sector and jobs.

"Only with the full transfer of energy powers through independence can we ensure that Scotland's massive renewables potential is properly realised and that economic impact is maximised."



Paul Wheelhouse, the SNP's Energy Minister



We have taken steps to boost locally-owned and community renewables, as well developers using local supply chains