

Rural Scots told to brace over plans for dozens of wind farms

By Daniel Sanderson
SCOTTISH CORRESPONDENT

RURAL Scotland has been warned to prepare for an onslaught of wind farm applications amid claims the country is seen as a "soft-touch" by developers.

Figures released by the Scottish Government show that there are plans to build more than 1,700 onshore turbines, which, if approved, would increase the current total by almost 50 per cent and add 84 wind farms.

The SNP has set a target of generating 50 per cent of energy from renewable sources by the end of the decade, and has vowed to make it easier for clean energy projects to be approved. The wind farm projects in the pipeline include 19 in Dumfries and Galloway, 24 in the Highlands and six in the Borders.

The Scottish Government said that onshore wind energy was cost-effective and a "vital" tool in its efforts to reduce emissions.

However, Iain Milligan, a spokesman for the Save Our Hills campaign group, warned that the plans would mean hundreds more "enormous turbines" blighting the countryside.

"Communities right across Scotland need to prepare themselves for an onslaught of wind farm applications," he said. "These figures show there are dozens of wind farm applications in the offing made up of hundreds of enormous turbines. This proves that developers see Scotland as a soft-touch when it comes to onshore windfarm planning permission."

He added: "They know the UK Government won't stand for applications that are damaging to the scenery and unpopular with the communities who

have to live with them. It's time the Scottish Government took a similar approach and stood up to this barrage."

There are nine onshore wind farms in the "scoping phase", in which early consultation is carried out with local authorities, conservation groups and residents. A further 33 have passed that stage, and applications have been submitted in another 42 cases.

If all were built, Scotland would have an extra 1,742 turbines, on top of the 3,869 already operating.

Although wind farm applications are decided by local authorities, developers can appeal to ministers to have decisions overturned if councillors reject plans. In the past decade, 223 appeals for multi-turbine developments have been made to SNP ministers, and in 95 cases the original decision has been overruled and developments have got the go-ahead despite local objections.

Nicola Sturgeon has made reducing emissions a priority, appointing a Cabinet minister for "net zero" and bringing in laws committing Scotland to net-zero emissions of greenhouse gases by 2045.

A spokesman for the Scottish Government said that onshore wind was "vital to Scotland's future energy mix as we transition to a net-zero economy".

He added: "However, wind energy developments must strike the right balance between using Scotland's significant renewable energy resources while protecting our finest scenic landscapes and natural heritage. That is why assessing the effect on landscape forms a key part of all wind farm applications and why Scotland has some of the most stringent environmental impact regulations anywhere in the world, with a say for local communities."