

MachairWind - The wrong project in the wrong place

By Elizabeth Kucinich

The climate crisis cannot be solved by applying the same extractive philosophy that created it. Replacing fossil fuels with renewable technologies while retaining an economic model based on industrial scale, ecological sacrifice, distant ownership and the export of wealth does not represent transformation, it represents the continuity and morphing of it.

A regenerative future requires us to rethink not only what powers our society, but how, where, by whom and for whose benefit energy is produced.

Scotland has an extraordinary opportunity to lead the world, not simply in renewable energy, but in regenerative energy and underpinned by regenerative thinking and truly regenerative systems.

ScotWind should champion projects that strengthen communities, respect ecological limits, honour cultural and spiritual landscapes, and ensure that the enduring benefits of the energy transition remain with the people who steward these places. That is the leadership the world now needs.

MachairWind is an industrial development of unprecedented scale, promoted by a foreign-owned multinational energy company, that would irreversibly transform one of the world's most treasured seascapes. Covering approximately 448 square kilometres of sea which is an area just over half the size of the Isle of Mull.

The proposal would introduce 91 wind turbines reaching up to 340 metres in height, each taller than the Eiffel Tower. Scotland's west coast should not become an industrial energy landscape serving distant markets while local communities bear the environmental, cultural and economic costs.

ScotWind should not be advancing projects that industrialise Scotland's natural and cultural heritage for the benefit of foreign-owned multinational corporations and distant energy markets. Scotland's land and seas are a public trust, not industrial sacrifice zones. Public policy should serve Scotland's people, places and long-term ecological wellbeing, rather than enabling outside interests to extract value while local communities bear the consequences.

Iona is internationally recognised as a place of pilgrimage, peace and spiritual renewal. For more than 1,500 years people have journeyed here seeking silence, wildness and sanctuary. The surrounding seas and uninterrupted horizons are inseparable from that experience. These values cannot simply be relocated or mitigated once this landscape has been industrialised.

The proposal raises serious concerns about impacts on fishing communities, marine ecosystems, seabirds, marine mammals, navigation, tourism, the cumulative effects of subsea infrastructure and associated electromagnetic fields on marine species, and the enormous environmental footprint of constructing, maintaining and ultimately decommissioning an offshore development of this scale.

The vast quantities of steel, concrete, specialist vessels, export cables and other materials required to construct and maintain a project of this magnitude should form part of any honest assessment of its environmental impact. These issues deserve rigorous, transparent and independent scrutiny.

Scotland already faces significant constraints in transmitting renewable electricity, with substantial volumes of wind generation routinely curtailed because the grid cannot accommodate it.

Before sacrificing domestically and internationally important landscapes and seascapes, we should prioritise modernising the grid, improving energy efficiency, expanding energy storage, and developing appropriately scaled renewable generation closer to where energy is consumed. Living systems are resilient because they are diverse, distributed and rooted in place. Our energy systems should learn from those same principles.

A regenerative energy future is about far more than replacing one source of electricity with another. It asks deeper questions about appropriate scale, community ownership, ecological integrity, cultural heritage, resilient local economies, landscape and justice. It recognises that how we produce energy is every bit as important as the technology itself.

Technology is not inherently "green." It becomes truly sustainable only when the materials from which it is made are responsibly sourced, its manufacture minimises ecological and human harm, and its application respects the carrying capacity, ecology and cultural significance of the places in which it is deployed.

So-called "green technology" alone does not make a project renewable, sustainable or guarantee a regenerative future. An extractive model wrapped in renewable technology remains extractive. True regeneration is measured not simply by the electricity a project produces, but by whether it restores life, strengthens communities, enriches ecosystems, protects cultural heritage and leaves the places it touches healthier and more resilient than before. A regenerative energy future should generate both clean power and the conditions for life to flourish.

The transition to clean energy must respect nature, culture, community and place. A truly sustainable future requires renewable energy that works with our landscapes, not against them.

MachairWind presents an extractive model of industrial development as green infrastructure when what Scotland needs is genuinely regenerative infrastructure. This proposal should be refused. Scotland can, and must, do better. This project, and others like it, should be stopped.

This project, and the public response it is inspiring, provide Scotland with an opportunity to adopt a new framework for assessing energy developments, a framework that measures success not only by megawatts generated or carbon displaced, but by whether a project regenerates ecosystems, strengthens communities, protects cultural heritage, builds local prosperity, and leaves the places it touches healthier and more resilient than before.

Scotland is in a unique position to lead by example, demonstrating that the transition to renewable energy can also be a transition to a regenerative future. The Hebrides and the world need that leadership now.