

MachairWind Offshore Wind Farm

In case you missed reading about this in our June issue, there is growing dismay on Mull & Iona regarding MachairWind's proposal to build a vast offshore windfarm around 13 miles South of Iona, which will be clearly visible from Iona, the Ross of Mull, Staffa, Treshnish and indeed the ferry from Oban! The scale of the proposed turbines is difficult to comprehend, the smallest option at 280m high being almost as tall as the Eiffel Tower - and we are talking around 144 of them! Each of which will be equipped with red flashing lights at night, so goodbye dark skies.

If the development goes ahead it will not only turn our idyllic views into an industrial seascape for the time being, but after decommissioning the concrete will remain on the seabed for ever. The damage to wildlife and the environment will be irreversible too.

The National Trust for Scotland, which owns Staffa and Iona, will be objecting, and has issued the following statement: 'The National Trust for Scotland supports the transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy, needed to both address climate change and to help restore nature. However, we are concerned that the location and scale of the proposed MachairWind windfarm development will cause unacceptable environmental damage. In particular, we are concerned by the anticipated impact on marine life, bird life, and on landscape and seascapes. We consider that these pose significant environmental, social and economic risks. Given these concerns, we therefore intend to object to the proposed development in its current form.'

The RSPB has not made a decision as yet, but made the following comment: "We won't be able to come to a final position on the proposals until we see the full details, but we are concerned about potential impacts on a wide range of bird species, including Corncrakes, Storm petrels, Leach's petrels, Shearwaters and White Fronted Geese. We will therefore be scrutinising the proposals extremely carefully once available to ensure impacts on nature are fully addressed." Spanish-owned developer Scottish Power Renewables (SPR) put in their application to the Marine Directorate for a licence on 22nd June. (marine.gov.scot)

The important thing to grasp here is that the decision on whether to grant permission lies with the Scottish Government, bypassing local planning rules completely. So if you agree that this is a disaster in the making, please start by letting your local Community Council know of your objection - they are statutory consultees. Iona Community Council is already very engaged and has carried out a survey among Iona residents, as a result of which they have joined the Hebridean Horizon group (see opposite page). However Mull Community Council is as yet undecided - it seems they are waiting to see the result of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), and so far they have not had much feedback from folk who object. So if you live on Mull and want to stop this development, please email the Mull Community Council members and let them know how you feel. (A list of members is on page 29 of this copy of R&A)

The next step is to write to our local MSP Jenni Minto, email: jenni.minto.msp@parliament.scot, and we suggest also including all of the Highlands and Islands list MSPs.

(see separate box opposite for a complete list).

Once the application has been validated there will be an opportunity to object - SPR expects this to be in early July. We also understand that a notice of the application must be placed in a local newspaper. This is likely to be the Oban Times. So keep your eyes peeled, and keep checking the Hebridean Horizon website (hebrideanhorizon.co.uk) for a wealth of information, and in due course details of how to lodge an official objection. JCG

Why We Should ALL Care

Why Should People in North Mull Care About the Proposed MachairWind Offshore Wind Farm?

Surely we're all sold on the necessity of renewable energy? And new wind farms have to go somewhere? So why would anyone object to Scottish Power Renewable's (SPR's) pending licence application to build a new offshore wind farm a few miles southwest of Mull and Iona? Like many people, I've always supported renewable energy, so when I heard about SPR's plans to build MachairWind, my initial reaction was simple: if we need renewable energy then new wind farms have to go somewhere.

However, after researching the proposal and the wider context behind it, I found myself asking a different question. Is this development (a) necessary and (b) appropriate here? For those of us in North Mull, it feels like MachairWind will have little impact. We won't be affected that much visually - if you're not standing on Treshnish head, the Treshnish Islands, Staffa or halfway up a hill, you probably won't even see the turbines. That said, if you stand on Calgary beach, you can clearly see the radar station on Ben Hynish in Tiree. Ben Hynish is 141m high and the radar station is 24m tall. Tiree is about 24 miles from Calgary - nearly double the distance that MachairWind will be from the Ross of Mull and Iona...and SPR's turbines will be up to 340m tall...get my drift?

So, what other factors might we consider?

Do we need more power? Electricity demand is projected to double by 2050, as we transition away from fossil fuels, and increase use of electric cars and heating. So yes, we will need more power.

Does Scotland's energy policy stack up? Scotland has a legally binding target to achieve Net Zero by 2045. However, we already *generate* the equivalent of over 100% of our gross electricity consumption from renewable sources. What we need to consider is the difference between *what is generated* and *what we can use*. Our national consumption from renewable sources is 50-60%, so what happens to the rest of the power we generate? The answer is two-fold. On windy days, it gets exported when the grid can support it. When the grid can't transmit the power that could be generated, wind farm owners are paid a "constraint payment" to turn off their turbines. This was over £380 million in 2025 (with a further c.£1 billion paid to gas power stations to turn up capacity to meet demand), and it is recouped through our electricity bills! For perspective, Scotland's largest offshore wind farm, Seagreen, situated off Montrose, only generated 29% of its total capacity in 2025 because the grid couldn't transmit the power to where it was needed (mainly cities in England).

How long before the grid can handle the power we generate? Grid capacity to transmit *what we already produce* is estimated at 10-15 years. So why are we building more wind farms? Even the energy companies are asking this question:

Pete Miller, Octopus Energy's Head of Customer Experience said: *"It's crazy to build wind farms where there's no grid, then pay them to sit idle, and then pay the most expensive fossil fuel plants to generate the power instead."*

Simone Rossi, EDF Energy's Chief Executive said: *"We should stop building wind farms. As a country, we don't need more electricity generation capacity. We need to use the generation capacity we've already got."*

Were Mull communities properly consulted? SPR held consultation events in Iona, Fionnphort and Bunessan. However, no consultations took place elsewhere on Mull despite the development's scale and potential implications for the wider island economy. SPR has confirmed that residents, businesses and visitors to Mull and Iona will not form part of its socio-economic impact assessment. This raises questions about whether the full effects on tourism, local businesses and community wellbeing are being properly considered.

What do we stand to lose? While the full extent is difficult to quantify, there is little doubt that our rich marine biodiversity, unspoilt seascapes, visitor economy and cultural heritage will be affected. By the time the true scale of these impacts is known, the damage will be irreversible. Covering 448 square kilometres, MachairWind is an industrial development of immense scale.

Why this location? That's easier to answer. SPR stated "site selection was based on ease and cost of development."

What about community benefit? SPR has confirmed it will not commit to community benefit before consent is granted. Current indications include potential for grants of up to £500, 5 apprenticeships across Argyll and Bute (not Mull!) and a proposed capacity fund of £500,000. Half a million sounds great until you realise this is across the whole region over 25 years...so £20k per year across Argyll & Bute. How much will Mull receive? Nobody knows, but you can be sure of this...the potential damage will long outlive any community benefit.

So should people in North Mull care about MachairWind? This isn't about whether we should pursue a greener future. It's about where MachairWind should be located, how decisions are made, whether consultation has been adequate and whether impacts on our community outweigh potential benefits. Whatever your view, the whole of Mull should be informed and engaged in a debate that could shape the future of our island for generations to come. When SPR's licence application goes live, I will certainly be checking out www.hebrideanhorizon.co.uk for more information.

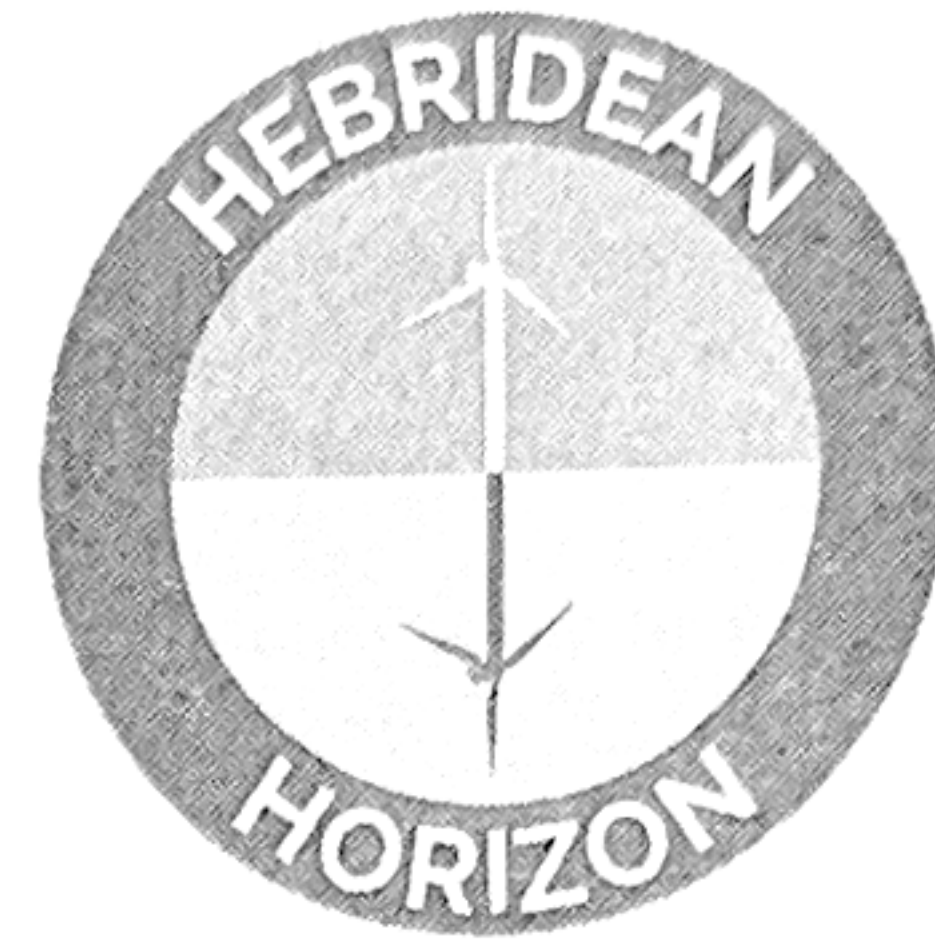
Fiona Brunton, Calgary

HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS MSPs

Victor Currie, Max Bannerman, Ariane Burgess
Kristopher Leask, Morven-May MacCallum
Maree Todd & Tim Eagle

All email addresses follow the same pattern
as our local MSP, Jenni Minto:

Jenni.Minto.msp@parliament.scot



Renewable energy matters
But fragile and unique communities
matter too
Read what MachairWind wind farm
means for Mull and Iona

www.hebrideanhorizon.co.uk

Scottish Power Renewables submitted
its licence application on 22nd June.

Please check the website
for details of when and how to object

Dave Turner

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