

Approved Minutes of BCC meeting held on
Thursday 11th July, 7.30pm-9.30pm
at Bernera Community Centre

In attendance from BCC Committee. Madeleine Macaulay (Chair, BCC), Ella Macaulay Fraser (Vice Chair), Calum Richings (Treasurer), Chrissie Macdonald (CM), Rhiannon Teather (Secretary, RT).

In attendance from Northland Power. Denise Horan – Northland Power. accompanied by Katie Macinnes (Astar, assisting with Gaelic translating and communications), present in a note-taking capacity only. Members of community from Bernera and Uig also present.

Madeleine Macaulay (BCC Chair) introduced Denise Horan representing Northland Power. Denise will give a short presentation and then available to answer questions; Horan noted Katie Macinnes is only present in a note taking capacity. If people have urgent questions that will not wait/likely to forget, acceptable to ask during, otherwise save questions for the end.

Short Presentation / Q&A – Denise Horan (Northland Power).

About the project

- Leaflet in process of distribution – Royal mail delivery; if your neighbour has received one but you have not, you will get it in the post when you have post; the deliveries are being staggered on this basis. More information to follow.
- Project is only proposed at this stage with a long way to go; if it goes ahead – 5-13km; 900MW; equivalent of 1.2 Scottish homes

Audience interjection. Query how this number (regarding Scottish homes) is worked out. Horan responded central statistic figures; annual energy consumption for each factor; 900MW x days in year x 50% load capacity.

Audience interjection. Why is it so close to shore? Horan respond Crown Estate in 2022 initiated ScotWind leasing round for potential sites and N4 was one of the sites selected and we were successful in their bid.

Audience response. 2018 Scotland Island Act cited, the lease granted was illegal; we have been failed by local and national government regarding this wind farm. Appreciate it is not your fault personally but it is a public health disaster. Scotland has highest suicide rate in Europe; lots of vulnerable of people up and down the west side that will not be able to escape this development. It will affect tourism and jobs, who will want to visit. It will ruin the economy. What about the people?

Chair intervention. Please save comments and questions for the end of the presentation from now on, understand people have strong feelings but Denise should be allowed to finish presentation and then people can ask questions. Horan stated she accepted and understand concerns, that it is our community, she probably won't be able to answer all the points raised adequately but will try.

Horan then continued with presentation.

- 1.7 millions of tonnes of harmful C02 emissions ever year.

Audience intervention. Whales can save the equivalent amount of carbon; cheaper ways of generating electricity, these developments are bankrupting governments and community.

Chair intervention. Notes already asked to save questions for the end; understand strong feelings and we can take any views forward if community wants but please allow presentation to proceed. A reminder that the way BCC meetings usually work is that audience observes and save questions for the end.

Timeline

- Large infrastructure project; timeline likely to involve significant delays;
- April 2022 – awarded leases
- 2025 – planning application submission
- 2028 – potential start of construction, will likely take 3 years due to seasonal constraints
- Minimum 33 years life.

Elements of projects – diagrams explanation

- Top diagram - one landfall substation
- Lower diagram - Offshore substation
- Structure shows turbines – array cables – onshore
- 66 maximum number of turbines but could be less than that
- Number of cables to be determined and depends on landfall locations
- Landfall locations identified last year; one now eliminated; two still in play (1) Arnol/Brue area (2) Barvas. If we go with landfall substation, only be one; if offshore substation, 3 (more or less) located among turbines
- Arnish identified as SSEN substation at other side of the island; this will impact where we locate
- The cabling will follow along Barvas moor road

2023 look-back

- More geotechnical and geophysical work to be done
- Aerial bird and marine mammal surveys
- Wind monitoring device; on surface array area – floating LiDAR
- Submitted environmental scoping report to marine directorate; 100 submissions; shared with us and then provided a scoping report
- Feedback to be taken into consideration for environmental impact assessment work
- Capacity increased from 840MW to 900MW due to size of connector
- Public information events last summer; conscious people still feel information vacuum; we are doing more consultations and trying to meet will all community councils

2024

- Consent granted for LiDAR consent; Met mast application in progress – temporary 2-3 years 130m structure, more wind measuring instrument capability; 10 independent cables make it up; apparatus in place to keep birds/wildlife away
- Onshore environmental surveys – whole range – archaeology, sea bed, wildlife

- Metocean survey work
- Project update currently being distributed
- Social Impact Assessment – social conditions, how the project will impact this – positive/negative/neutral; looking to mitigate concerns

Wind monitoring programme

- Met Mast
- Key features
- Installation – weather permitting, subject to planning
- LiDAR – size of wheelie bin; 1m3

2024/5 public consultation

- We had hoped to have first phase of consultation already completed but balance to be struck between providing meaningful information/refined degree of info vs filling information vacuum
- Focused periods of consultation
- First phase – Autumn 2024-5; ongoing
- Consultation on design; array layout (1) Larger turbines, fewer of them (2) Smaller turbines but more of them
- SSEN convertor station announcement in Arnish; helps us site our substation/landfall; cable route areas of search
- Seabed constraints – marine life, fisheries, archeology considerations restrict where cables can be put
- Two options for maintenance over lifetime of turbines (1) small operations base, permanent, small berthing, small boats (2) remote operations, with a big boat that comes in and maintains them

Phase 1 focused consultation – Autumn 2024 / 4-6 weeks

Purpose to share details; virtual exhibitions and information/drop-in clinics and exhibitions

Phase 2 focused consultation, early 2025 / 4-6 weeks; updates on how feedback was considered

Wider engagement and consultation

- Ongoing engagement – we want to start participating in events; having a presence so we are accessible for questions
- Building relationships with community councils; in time with schools/youth groups; seeking to engage with project opponents; if possible we want dialogue and build in feedback
- Social impact assessments. Local company Atlantic58 to carry this out independently, commissioned by Northland; establish baseline of social context; appreciate negatives will not always be mitigated but the idea; developed in conjunction with HIE/gathered/assessed and shared; if you want to engage, sign up.

BCC Secretary interjected there is a sign-up sheet at the back for people if they are interested in forming a group and participating.

Supply chain

- 3-4 global manufacturers of wind turbines globally; large international contractor will build the wind turbines, we are upfront about the fact it will not be a Scottish company but subcontracts can be delivered locally and looking to put supply chains locally if possible

Open floor Q&A.

BCC Chair introduction. Notes still a lot of information/feedback to be gathered but lots of opportunities for people to find out more and ask their questions. Now open floor for audience.

Audience question. I have a couple of questions. Environmental impact assessments are important (1) when you read brochure I note this EIA is put together for planning consents but is it not important that we are consulted about this beforehand? Otherwise we will be obliged to object to the project (2) What could come out of that (EIA), which would result in pulling the plug?

Horan response. On second question, I am not technically qualified to answer that, on what might kill project; but one might be if ground conditions or seabed conditions completely unsuited to infrastructure; my understanding from initial surveys is that that is not the case; regarding your first point EIA will be submitted as part of planning, the two phases of consultation will allow for people to input into that; people to highlight areas of concern; some already taken into account for scoping report; not all of surveys undertaken or completed as yet, but these can be added into as we progress; by the time of phase 2, as options refined, we will be sharing some of the inputs of EIA and data, as this refines how project is progressing; not trying to avoid your question or be evasive, we are going for a comprehensive approach, two phases of consultation pulled into environmental assessment/built into EIA; if we do not do this properly (a) people object (b) application can be refused; EIA takes a long time to pull together.

Q. Does EIA have any independent scrutiny?

R. I do not know; I will check and come back to Madeleine (BCC Chair) on that.

Q. How does Northland make its money out of this?

R. We have to compete for SFD - which is the subsidy - means Northland get a guaranteed price for the electricity for 15 year period but this is only given once consent is granted.

Q. So it is money from government/our taxes then?

R. We get a guaranteed price; if market price is higher, government reimburses, if lower we reimburse for 15 years.

Q. Is that why the electricity cannot be used locally?

R. We do not control electricity market; we harness the wind for the electricity; the grid determines national network and it is highly regulated. We have raised issue of island tariffs but legislative mechanism would need to be changed nationally for this to be possible.

Q. What proportion of Northland income is from subsidy/SFD vs. how much do they get otherwise (15 years guaranteed; then market price)?

R. I do not know. Longer SFD process goes on; the less it will be. The costs of development mean we get a subsidy. I will see if it is possible to find that out. I am not a commercial expert.

An audience member asks to explain, as they are knowledgeable on the subject. Chair grants the floor. Audience member clarifies the contract for difference is a guaranteed income stream in this particular project, we pay that back to the government in our taxes, it is a set thing. Constraints payments are for when they switch off/due to the supply exceeding the usage.

Horan interjects. If the wind blows well and we generate more than 50%, it does not mean can all can be used. It is a complex thing.

Audience member responds 'Not really', regarding complexity. They note when this goes wrong, Ofgem have been fining company for overcharging for customers as it builds profits for power companies. The income from these fines are used to help low income families but it does nothing to lower energy bills of everyone else; we are paying for this out of our taxes.

Horan response. Reality is that developers invest at risk.

Audience reply that they make billions and so do their shareholders.

R. You will not get companies to invest at risk without these incentives.

Audience response. The contract for difference is that.

R. But it is also for consumers.

(Audience member scoffs). It is a common theme. This happens a lot, it would be useful to know how Northland finance/income generators, they all want to make money and they are making a huge profit.

R. Partners want to make a return for this.

Q. Speaking of return on investment. New government is going to change regulations, with respect to England/Wales ban onshore developments. Strange to pursue a project like this, when it can be done for a quarter of the price elsewhere, if they want to maximise project wouldn't it make sense to wait for a development in England, far away from here.

R. I doubt they (Northland) would listen to me regarding their global finance strategy. The announcement you mention only happened last week. Until then offshore was the only option; generally companies look for mixed portfolio; wind resource offshore is greater and so is the volume that can be generated. Wind speeds off west coast of Scotland are good.

Q. You can make more money onshore than offshore. Shouldn't this be investigated before you go ahead?

R. All of this would have been considered, it is not one or the other. Unlikely they (Northland) would backtrack. I do not have the calculations or any evidence that an onshore project would yield similar returns. It is unlikely to be as good.

Q. I know there will be lots of effects. My initial concern, what am I going to see from my village?

R. During first phase of consultation, we'll have 2 layout options, consisting of photo montages along west coast, they will compare proposed development with the existing view; e.g. this is what the view would look like at x height, or 52 turbines at x height. Our hope is to have a 3D visualisations as well for first phase. That will give you a simulation/visual.

Q. Will we have simulation for noise as well?

R. We are doing monitoring for this.

Q. A number of months ago, there seemed to be discussion regarding excess electricity generated being stored as hydrogen?

R. Different process altogether for creating hydrogen, electricity will be stored elsewhere.

Q. Audience member recounted that we had a threat for an ammonia plant in Uig. The ammonia plant was going to be run by N4 by subsea cable, down to Uig – specifically to Flodday island, which is only 100m from shore. Flodday island is part of Common Grazings, because of this I was ambushed to quietly discuss it, by an individual from local council. Clear they had big plans/proposals for ammonia plant. The industrialisation proposed would destroy the island, peace would be replaced by disturbance, industrial scape would take over a piece of common grazings, now uninhabited and very close to shore. The whole of Uig would have been surrounded by 350m longer tankers coming from Germany to collect the ammonia had it gone ahead and off the back of N4. On that initial proposal, people here present should note Kirkbost was mentioned for ammonia plant but later ruled out for being too shallow.

R. There is no proposal for this.

Audience reply. This will follow on from you. There are already air monitored surveys, from Ness down to Uig for 30 miles. If a 10 mile array is granted for N4, it will be extended up to Ness, then south past Uig. If you are concerned about the current proposal now, it will be worse later.

Horan response. Our proposal is our proposal. We are not planning to develop an ammonia plant. If we get consent, it will be to bring electricity across the island.

Audience reply. This is the real threat. We have had consultations in Uig, the biggest public meeting we have ever had, the local council rep. could not believe what it was happening. Everybody said no to ammonia plant. But still the council wrote back, beating around the bush, their response 'ok sounds like dead in the water. But if we do decide, we will do a full EIA to do impact and assess it.'

Horan response. I cannot speak for that. I do not know if it is something that will happen. Ours is an offshore wind project.

Audience reply. This why you will have opposition; we do not want this risk; industrialisation of the heart of Uig, making it permanently lit and noisy.

Horan response. Consultations are an opportunity for information. Social impact groups just starting now; we will be shaping the project and informing proposals; if cannot be done, the detail will be shared.

Chair asks if any of the committee have questions.

BCC Q. More than an aesthetic concern, we are facing depopulation and lack of jobs for young people, will there be some opportunities created by the wind farm?

R. I agree. Some of the benefits associated with the projects include 750-1000 construction jobs, not all at once, or full time. Offshore jobs. Economic benefits, including local facilities used. Opportunity for local companies/local workers to apply for some of those jobs. Secondly, more importantly, 80-120 long term jobs, maintenance/technicians, administrative jobs, business/HR/finance, operational jobs. Skills can be developed so jobs can be taken by locals. There are opportunities for good roles. Then there's the Community benefit fund. We are not talking small amounts of more but multi-million pound fund. The criteria is:

- (a) Needs to be substantial fund
- (b) Must benefit local area
- (c) Not CnES administered

BCC. Firstly will the permanent jobs be impacted by substation being onshore/offshore?

R. No, unrelated.

BCC. Issue of noise, mentioned earlier but a key concern for me personally. In the village where I live, the sound really travels across the water, so I think the proximity of the turbines mean they will be loud. Tanya Davies confirmed at that the last meeting with the BCC that the noise would be substantial, especially due to lack of tree cover. Are you able to clarify?

R. I am not able to provide detail on this. I am not being evasive, just do not know. We have experts that can give a better answer. I recommend making an appointment at one of the drop ins and someone who has the technical information can talk you through it.

Q. Regarding community benefit, will the funding be ring fenced to ensure it only benefits affected communities here? We have a big problem with funding be siphoned off by Stornoway and CnES budgets, as per Crown Estate money.

R. We are working with the West Side Estate group regarding community benefit and taking on their feedback.

Audience interjection. What did you mean by 'here' (referring to BCC question), did you mean Bernera or whole west side? [some confusion followed] It is my understanding Bernera are not included as part of West side. Most people think of West Side as from Barvas to Carloway, Bernera to Uig, but that is not necessary what Northland think.

Horan reply. This is an important point and we are aware of local sensitives. Bernera is included. We are having regular discussions with the Estates group.

Audience interjection that we are not involved in these meetings and do not know what is being agreed; the view of Estates group is not necessarily representative. Query regarding who was attending meetings for Bernera. Clarification provided that BCC not involved previously.

Horan reply. The Great Bernera Community Development Trust rep. was attending these meetings but I understand no longer do, but this predated my role.

Q. Another issue is house prices. A key selling point of my house is the sea view. I know on the website FAQs you have said that a Dutch study suggested no evidence this will reduce house prices but I think it is common sense that putting a huge turbine development next to people's houses will make them less desirable. I moved to the island for the peace and quiet, and I want to have my own family here, but this development will really impact how I feel about that. I could be in a position of being stuck with the turbines but unable to leave because I cannot not sell my house. Is there any proposal for people to be compensated?

R. No evidence house prices are affected but again this is something that should be put forward as feedback as part of consultations. If it is not in consultation feedback, it will not happen. Again, an appointment might be a good idea.

Q. The photo montages you mentioned, do these include daytime and nighttime shorts?

R. Not nighttime shots. Only daytime montages, there are restrictions, they must have particular photo conditions – visibility, all daytime.

Audience reply. Dark skies is a big issue locally and it is important for both residents and tourism.

R. This concern has been raised by a number of people; detailed assessments of lighting to be done; consultation with aviation authorities; statutory consultees; multiple considerations, we are aware it is a particular concern. We will take on feedback and try to mitigate concerns.

Audience follow up. How are you going to mitigate? Wind turbine lighting will be needed for aircraft and sea vessels, especially given the proposed size of the turbines. We do not need to study it to know it will be significant. There will strobe lighting, it will be shining in people's houses. There will be no peace. It is going take away the peace from thousands of people.

R. We will try to mitigate this.

Q. How do you propose to mitigate?

R. [No reply].

Chair notes the time and that it is getting late, it will not be possible to get through our usual business so we will save this for our next meeting. Does anyone have any further questions? Keep them short and simple.

Q. What country will turbines come from?

R. Only 4 international companies are able to make the turbines. Some will be Asia/some in Europe. Tendering not started.

Q. So you have no idea?

R. It's a competitive market. Lots of regulations. The tendering will only start if project approved, so impossible at this point. I am not an expert, I am not being evasive, I just do not have the information.

Audience comment that a lot can change between now and then.

Q. So basically Northland just subcontract everything?

R. We do not make the turbines; we deal with installation, subcontracting and repairs/maintenance.

Chair. We will stop the meeting now, as getting late. Thank you to everyone to coming and to Denise Horan of Northland for her presentation. This has been an informative evening, probably more questions than answers but we hope people will take this forward and continue to look out information. A reminder that the sign up sheet for the Atlantic58 Social Impact Assessment focus groups are at the back and please sign up if you are interested in feeding back. Thanks again to everyone for a useful meeting.

MEETING END