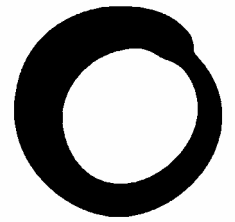


Briefing Note



Climate change is real, support wind energy

**Friends of
the Earth
Cymru**
**Cyfeillion
y Ddaear
Cymru**

Climate change is REAL

Climate change is now widely regarded as the biggest threat we face this century. The mounting scientific evidence shows that urgent action has to be taken if we are to avoid catastrophic consequences.

The UK Government's chief scientific adviser, for example, has pointed out that there is now more carbon dioxide, the main 'greenhouse' gas, in the atmosphere than there has been for the last 55 million years. This is enough to melt all the ice on the planet, and to submerge coastal cities like London and New York (and presumably Cardiff).

What do we need to do?

Changing to clean renewable energy sources, such as wind, solar, water and biofuels, is essential in addressing the problem of climate change. We need to show our support for renewable energy to the people who represent us – our Assembly Members in Wales, our Members of Parliament in the UK, and our Members of the European Parliament. We are in the majority in supporting renewable energy, but we are also a silent majority who needs to start making our views heard, rather than being drowned out by a tiny group of vocal opponents.

What's happening right now?

One of the main renewable energy sources in Wales is wind. An offshore wind farm proposed in Swansea Bay, Scarweather Sands, has been provisionally approved by the planning decision committee of the National Assembly for Wales. It's likely that it will be discussed by all Assembly Members in early October. We need you to show your support for this important wind farm application.

What's the issue?

The National Assembly has set a target for 10% of electricity generated in Wales to come from renewable sources by 2010. Friends of the Earth Cymru supports this target and we envisage a doubling of the current number of wind turbines in Wales as a contribution towards it. A failure to meet this target would strengthen the case for building new nuclear power stations as these are responsible for far less 'greenhouse' gas emissions than fossil fuel ones. An opinion poll, conducted by Market Research Wales in 2002 for Friends of the Earth Cymru, found that 87% of the respondents would prefer offshore wind farms to nuclear power stations. 71% of the respondents also said they would support a doubling of onshore wind turbines in Wales.

Friends of the Earth Cymru inspires solutions to environmental problems, which make life better for people.

Friends of the Earth Cymru:

- is dedicated to protecting the environment and promoting a sustainable future for Wales**
- is part of the UK's most influential environmental campaigning organisation**
- is part of the most extensive environmental network in the world, with over 60 national organisations across five continents**
- supports a unique network of campaigning local groups, working in communities across Wales**
- is dependent upon individuals for over 90 per cent of its income.**

To join or make a donation call us on 0800 581 051

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What are the benefits?

Wind energy is non-polluting and endless. There are no harmful health effects, unlike fossil fuels which damage the natural environment, fuel climate change, cause ill health and kill people. Opinion polls show that the majority of people see their visual impact as a positive rather than a negative.

Bursting anti-wind bubbles

The cost of wind energy has tumbled in recent years and is now close to competitive with conventional energy sources. The cost of the environmental and health damage of fossil fuels and nuclear energy is huge and subsidies to these are far greater than to wind energy. Wind turbines do not generate electricity all the time but contribute most when the demand is greatest during the winter. Other forms of energy, such as nuclear, also suffer from 'outages' when they have to be shut down unexpectedly. Back-up power has to be provided for all forms of electricity generation, not just an intermittent source such as wind. This does not become a problem until about 20% of electricity comes from wind and we are nowhere near that figure at present. Noise is no longer a problem. If sited away from nesting sites and migratory routes wind farms have little impact on birds. The bigger picture is that climate change is going to destroy far more populations of birds, by destroying their habitats.

What's happened so far?

The Scarweather Sands proposal went through the usual period of public inquiry involving the local community, experts, and groups such as Friends of the Earth Cymru. A report on the proposal was then compiled by the public inquiry inspector for the Assembly decision making committee.

The public inquiry inspector concluded in his report on Scarweather Sands wind farm that this scheme would make "a significant contribution to the reduction in greenhouse gases".

Despite loud claims from a few that this wind farm would cause considerable harm to the local economy, the inspector came to the opposite conclusion stating that "there would be benefits to the local economy both in terms of new employment and the use of existing services".

The inspector also did not support the doom and gloom predictions about harm to the local tourism industry. He concluded that it was not possible to make certain predictions as the evidence was contradictory. Research suggests that tourism would not be harmed. An opinion survey by Greenpeace amongst tourists in Porthcawl last summer found that thirteen per cent would be more likely to return as opposed to just four per cent less likely to with the wind farm offshore.

However, the inspector did recommend the scheme for refusal on the grounds of visual impact. Friends of the Earth Cymru do not agree with the inspector's recommendation that the visual impact, particularly from the golf club, is a sufficient reason to turn down the application. The significant environmental and economic benefits identified by the inspector should outweigh this concern. People's reaction to the visual impact of wind turbines is a highly subjective issue with independent opinion polls consistently showing an approval rating of about three to one.

Our message today

The very real threat that climate change poses to our children's future should ensure that projects which offer substantial cuts in greenhouse gas emissions should not be blocked because of the seascape concerns of a few. The Scarweather Sands wind farm would make an important contribution to Wales' aim of generating 10% of electricity from renewable sources by 2010 and to reducing 'greenhouse' gas emissions. Giving it the go-ahead would send an important message to renewable energy companies that they are welcome in Wales.

The Assembly's planning decision committee should be congratulated on their decision to recommend approval for the Scarweather Sands wind farm. We ask you to support their decision.