

Why the £250bn wind power industry could be the greatest scam of our age - and here are the three 'lies' that prove it

By [Christopher Booker](#)

Last updated at 11:20 AM on 28th February 2011

Scarcely a day goes by without more evidence to show why the Government's obsession with wind turbines, now at the centre of our national energy policy, is one of the greatest political blunders of our time.

Under a target agreed with the EU, Britain is committed within ten years — at astronomic expense — to generating nearly a third of its electricity from renewable sources, mainly through building thousands more wind turbines.

But the penny is finally dropping for almost everyone — except our politicians — that to rely on windmills to keep our lights on is a colossal and very dangerous act of self-deception.



Green and unpleasant land: The wind farm at Ingbirchworth, West Yorkshire, one of the landscapes blighted by turbines

Take, for example, the 350ft monstrosity familiar to millions of motorists who drive past as it sluggishly revolves above the M4 outside Reading.

This wind turbine performed so poorly (working at only 15 per cent of its capacity) that the £130,000 government subsidy given to its owners was more than the £100,000 worth of electricity it produced last year.

Meanwhile, official figures have confirmed that during those freezing, windless weeks around Christmas, when electricity demand was at record levels, the contribution made by Britain's 3,500 turbines was minuscule.

To keep our homes warm we were having to import vast amounts of power from nuclear reactors in France.

Wind turbines are so expensive that Holland recently became the first country in Europe to abandon its EU renewable energy target, announcing that it is to slash its annual subsidy by billions of euros.

So unpopular are wind turbines that our own Government has just offered 'bribes' to local communities, in the form of lower council tax and electricity bills.



© PA
Taking over: Europe's biggest onshore wind farm is Whitelee, on the outskirts of Glasgow

In Scotland, the 800 residents of the beautiful island of Tiree are desperately trying to resist Alex Salmond's plans to railroad through what will be the largest offshore windfarm in the world, covering 139 square miles off their coast, which they say will destroy their community by driving away the tourists who provide much of their living.

So riddled with environmental hypocrisy is the lobbying for wind energy that a recent newspaper report exposed the immense human and ecological catastrophe being inflicted on northern China by the extraction of the rare earth minerals needed to make the giant magnets that every turbine in the West uses to generate its power.

Here in a nutshell are some of the reasons why people are beginning to wake up to the horrific downside of the wind business. And since I began writing about wind turbines nine years ago, I have come to see how the case for them rests on three great lies.

The first is the pretence that turbines are anything other than ludicrously inefficient.

The most glaring dishonesty peddled by the wind industry — and echoed by gullible politicians — is vastly to exaggerate the output of turbines by deliberately talking about them only in terms of their 'capacity', as if this was what they actually produce. Rather, it is the total amount of power they have the capability of producing.

The point about wind, of course, is that it is constantly varying in speed, so that the output of turbines averages out at barely a quarter of their capacity.

This means that the 1,000 megawatts all those 3,500 turbines sited around the country feed on average into the grid is derisory: no more than the output of a single, medium-sized conventional power station.

Furthermore, as they increase in number (the Government wants to see 10,000 more in the next few years) it will, quite farcically, become necessary to build a dozen or more gas-fired power stations, running all the time and emitting CO₂, simply to provide instant back-up for when the wind drops.



Not green: Greenpeace activists raise an inflatable model of a wind turbine, but they do not save a lot of CO₂

The second great lie about wind power is the pretence that it is not a preposterously expensive way to produce electricity. No one would dream of building wind turbines unless they were guaranteed a huge government subsidy.

This comes in the form of the Renewables Obligation Certificate subsidy scheme, paid for through household bills, whereby owners of wind turbines earn an additional £49 for every 'megawatt hour' they produce, and twice that sum for offshore turbines.

This is why so many people are now realising that the wind bonanza — almost entirely dominated in Britain by French, German, Spanish and other foreign-owned firms — is one of the greatest scams of our age.

The third great lie is that this industry is somehow making a vital contribution to 'saving the planet' by cutting our emissions of CO₂ - it is not.

What other industry gets a public subsidy equivalent to 100 or even 200 per cent of the value of what it produces?

We may not be aware of just how much we are pouring into the pockets of the wind developers, because our bills hide this from us — but as ever more turbines are built, this could soon be adding hundreds of pounds a year to our bills.

When a Swedish firm recently opened what is now the world's largest offshore windfarm off the coast of Kent, at a cost of £800million, we were told that its 'capacity' was 300 megawatts, enough to provide 'green' power for tens of thousands of homes.

What we were not told was that its actual output will average only a mere 80 megawatts, a tenth of that supplied by a gas-fired power station — for which we will all be paying a subsidy of £60million a year, or £1.5billion over the 25-year lifespan of the turbines.

The third great lie of the wind propagandists is that this industry is somehow making a vital contribution to 'saving the planet' by cutting our emissions of CO₂.



Too many windmills: Holland is slashing its renewables subsidies

Even if you believe that curbing our use of fossil fuels could change the Earth's climate, the CO₂ reduction achieved by wind turbines is so insignificant that one large windfarm saves considerably less in a year than is given off over the same period by a single jumbo jet flying daily between Britain and America.

Then, of course, the construction of the turbines generates enormous CO₂ emissions as a result of the mining and smelting of the metals used, the carbon-intensive cement needed for their huge concrete foundations, the building of miles of road often needed to move them to the site, and the releasing of immense quantities of CO₂ locked up in the peat bogs where many turbines are built.

When you consider, too, those gas-fired power stations wastefully running 24 hours a day just to provide back-up for the intermittency of the wind, any savings will vanish altogether.

Yet it is on the strength of these three massive self-deceptions that our Government has embarked on one of the most reckless gambles in our political history: the idea that we can look to the vagaries of the wind to provide nearly a third of the electricity we need to keep our economy running, well over 90 per cent of which is still currently supplied by coal, gas and nuclear power.

It is true that this target of raising the contribution made by wind by more than ten times in the next nine years was set by the EU.

But it is no good blaming Brussels for such an absurdly ambitious target, because no one was keener to adopt it than our own politicians, led first by Gordon Brown and Ed Miliband and now by David Cameron and the Energy Secretary Chris Huhne.

To meet this target, our Government wants to see us spend £100billion on building 10,000 more turbines, plus another £40billion on connecting them all up to the grid.

According to the electricity industry, we will then need to spend another £100billion on those conventional power stations to provide back-up — all of which adds up to £240billion by 2020, or just over £1,000 a year for every household in the land.

And for this our politicians are quite happy to see our countryside and the seas around our coasts smothered in vast arrays of giant industrial machines, all to produce an amount of electricity that could be provided by conventional power stations at a tenth of the cost.

This flight from reality is truly one of the greatest follies.

But what turns it from a crazed fantasy to a potential catastrophe is that Britain will soon face a huge shortfall in its electricity supplies, when we see the shutdown of conventional power stations, which currently meet nearly 40 per cent of our electricity needs.

All but two of our ageing nuclear power stations are nearing the end of their useful life, with little chance of them being replaced for many years.

Six of our large coal-fired stations will be forced to close under an EU anti-pollution directive, and our Government is doing its best to ensure that we build no more.

There is no way we can hope to make up more than a fraction of the resulting energy gap solely with wind turbines, for the simple and obvious reason that wind is such an intermittent and unreliable energy source.

Meanwhile, this country will soon be facing a colossal energy gap, while relying on politically unreliable countries such as Russia and Algeria for gas supplies.

What we are seeing, in short, is the price we are beginning to pay for the past two decades, during which our energy policy has become hopelessly skewed by the siren calls of the environmentalists, first in persuading our politicians to switch from coal and not to build any more nuclear power stations, and then to fall for the quixotic dream that we could gamble our country's future on the 'free' and 'clean' power of wind and sun.

All over the EU, other politicians are waking up to the dead-end to which this madness has been leading us.

The Danes, who have built more wind turbines per head than anyone, have realised the idiocy of a policy that has given them the highest electricity prices in Europe, while they have to import much of their power from abroad.

In Spain, their rush for wind and solar power has proved a national disaster. In Germany, having built more turbines than any other country in the world, they are now building new coal-fired stations like crazy.

In Holland, meanwhile, they have now given two fingers to the EU by slashing all their renewables subsidies.

Only in Britain is our political class still so imprisoned in its infatuation with wind that it is prepared to court this dangerously misguided pipedream.