

OUTPUT FIGURES ARE CHALLENGED - TURBINES CAN BOIL 6,667 KETTLES ON BAD DAY

Scottish windfarm industry accused over power claims

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CHANGING LANDSCAPE: Windfarms are springing up around the country but the new report raises doubts over their power potential

A new report has rubbished claims that Scotland's windfarms can play a key role in powering the nation for generations to come.

A study supported by the John Muir Trust conservation charity revealed that schemes metered by National Grid were producing less than 10% of their potential energy output for a third of the time.

Its author said the results of his two-year investigation contradicted claims by industry and government that windfarms were commonly running at 30% capacity – with the average closer to 24%.

The Scottish Government and industry body Scottish Renewables said they had “no confidence” in the findings and the official figure for average output was closer to 27%.

The John Muir Trust said it showed wind “cannot be relied upon” to provide any significant level of energy, and there was an “urgent need” to re-evaluate Scotland's reliance on it for power.

Consultant Stuart Young said on 124 days out of the 791 he monitored, the total output from all windfarms fell below 20megawatts for an average of four-and-a-half hours at a time. That is less than 5% of the maximum expected level – and enough for just 6,667 households to boil a kettle.

During each of the four points when demand for energy peaked during 2010, wind output was extremely low, ranging from 5.5% to as little as 2.5% capacity.

The report also suggested pumped-storage hydro-electric was not the solution to periods of low wind output. It said if all four UK pumped-storage plants were to be run simultaneously at full capacity, the stored water would be exhausted in 24 hours.

John Muir Trust head of policy Helen McDade said: “This report is a real eye-opener for anyone who has been wondering just how much power Scotland is getting from the fleet of wind turbines that have taken over many of our most beautiful mountains and hillsides.

“The answer appears to be not enough, and much less than is routinely claimed.”

Mr Young, of the Caithness Wind Information Forum, analysed electricity generation from all UK developments metered by National Grid between November 2008 and December 2010.

All were in Scotland until three in England were added to the study in July last year.

He said: “Over the two-year period studied in this report, the metered windfarms in the UK consistently generated far less energy than wind proponents claim is typical.

“Wind power is not what it’s cracked up to be and cannot contribute greatly to energy security in the UK.”

Scottish Renewables said the John Muir Trust had joined forces with an anti-windfarm campaigner, whose previous research had been found to have discrepancies.

The industry body said the new information was based on 61 windfarms across the UK, when Scotland had more than 115 developments.

Scottish Renewables director of policy Jenny Hogan said: “We have no confidence in these unofficial figures. We have yet to hear the trust bring forward a viable alternative to lower emissions and meet our growing demand for safe, secure energy.”

She said Scotland was recognised as a world leader in renewable energy, attracting major global companies to invest millions of pounds and create thousands of jobs. “Companies like these do not invest in technologies that don’t work,” she said.

A Scottish Government spokesman said: “In 2009, renewables met over 27% of Scotland’s electricity use, following the steady trend of Scotland’s energy supply becoming greener and cleaner.

Demonstration

“There was a 20% increase in the amount of electricity from renewables on 2008 and Scotland also exported 24% of its electricity.

“Wind power, alongside other forms of onshore and offshore renewables, cuts emissions and contributes to greater security of supply.”

Denise Davis, of Ardblair, who organised an anti-windfarm demonstration attended by about 250 people at the Scottish Parliament last month, said Mr Young’s findings showed the industry was even less efficient than she had imagined.

Ms Davis leads the Druim Ba – Say No campaign which opposes a development between Kiltarlity and Drumnadrochit in Inverness-shire and last night she was attending a protest meeting in Inverness.

She said: “This report backs up everything that we are saying – windfarm developers are destroying our environment for something that doesn’t even do what we are promised.”