

National Assembly for Wales' Environment and Sustainability Committee's inquiry into Energy Policy & Planning in Wales.

Pembrokeshire County Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Committee's inquiry into energy policy and planning in Wales.

In the letter dated 2 August, 2011, the Chair of the Committee invites respondents to comment on the implications for Wales and current Welsh policies if consenting for major offshore and onshore energy infrastructure projects remains with the UK Government.

This submission comments on a range of issues related to energy policy and planning in Wales.

Decision making process

The decision making process in terms of energy development appear to be fragmented and uncoordinated.

The key issue in terms of reaching an informed decision on energy development is that of protecting the national interest in terms of maintaining a sustainable and affordable energy supply against the environmental impact any infrastructure may have on local communities and the environment.

A framework to fully assess the impact of energy developments should be established. Such a framework would include an integrated assessment model which measures the effect of energy developments on communities and their local economies. For example, such an assessment model would assess the impact of transmission lines on other important sectors such as tourism.

Consenting

The consenting process, including licensing from the Crown Estates, needs to be simplified and transparent.

Businesses investing in sustainable energy research projects require responsive, speedy and above all proportionate consenting systems. Consent to place temporary, experimental devices in the marine environment should not be required to comply with the full regime. The present arrangements are lengthy and costly.

The number of consenting authorities should be reduced. Joined-up government is required for quicker decision making.

Emerging technologies

The current mix of “clean tech” energy technologies is diverse and over time it is reasonable to assume more new technologies will emerge. It is important that “green” policies and targets are reviewed on a regular basis to keep them up-to-date and compatible with both the commercial and the emerging technologies.

In this context it is important that Wales recognises the potential contribution of marine energy technologies and invests in the necessary infrastructure to enable Wales to compete with Scotland, South West England and mainland European Countries who have established research and development centres.

Wales urgently needs to establish a Marine Energy Centre to encourage the development of wave and tidal technologies and the important supply chain companies that will be required. A number of companies are already planning to deploy devices in the sea off Pembrokeshire, with the support of the Welsh Government.

Carbon energy sources

Whilst renewable energy technologies represent the long term future, the current carbon energy sources will still be important in medium term. Investment should therefore be encouraged for businesses and academia to research, develop and commercialise a combination of new technologies (e.g. Shale gas extraction, Coal-bed methane, clean coal and carbon capture) as well as improvements to the production and use of fossil fuels to reduce their environmental impacts.

Investment should also be made in developing acceptable bio-fuel alternatives that do not impact on the food chain. (e.g. by growing algae and seaweed in salt water conditions)

Welsh Government

The Welsh Government need to engage with National Grid to maximise opportunities for improving energy resilience and creating new grid connection opportunities for wind, wave and tidal energy sources.

The Welsh Government should consider a spatial approach to energy clusters in Wales. For example, nuclear in Anglesey and marine renewables, refining and gas in Pembrokeshire. This approach should be supported and complemented by other policy interventions such as enterprise zones to stimulate economic growth.

Pembrokeshire is at the forefront of carbon and renewable marine energy. This clustering of energy expertise and locational advantage should be an opportunity

for the Welsh Government and Pembrokeshire County Council to work together to maximise the economic and technological benefits.

22 September, 2011.