

SNH guidance on: Assessing the impact of repowered wind farms on nature

Frequently asked questions – June 2018

Why are you writing this guidance ?

Energy companies are starting to ask for advice on proposals to repower some of the older wind farms in Scotland. We want to develop technical guidance for our staff and for developers to support a consistent and proportionate approach to the Environmental Impact Assessment process for these proposals.

This guidance focusses on assessing the effects on nature. Other agencies will have different requirements. We have worked closely with the Scottish Government to prepare the consultation draft.

What is repowering and why is it important?

Repowering is the process of taking away older wind turbines and replacing these with new ones. It offers an opportunity to increase the generating capacity of existing wind farms by installing newer turbines. This is different from life extension and other changes to existing schemes. We are also working on guidance on life extension and other variations to existing schemes with the Scottish Government. There will be further consultation on this in due course.

Scotland's energy and climate change goals mean that onshore wind will continue to play a vital role in Scotland's future – helping to substantively decarbonise our electricity supplies, heat and transport systems, thereby boosting our economy, and meeting local and national demand.

This important role means we must support development in the right places, and – increasingly – the extension and replacement of existing sites, where acceptable, with new and larger turbines, based on an appropriate, case by case assessment of their effects and impacts.

Why are you suggesting that the existing wind farm is not used as the baseline?

We have set our rationale out in an annex to the draft guidance. This is based on experience of early repowering proposals and a debate at a Sharing Good Practice event in December 2016. But this is a consultation draft - we have an open mind and will listen to feedback including suggestions for alternative approaches.

Aren't some wind farms consented 'in perpetuity'?

Most wind farms in Scotland have a time-limited consent, and conditions which require the removal of the turbines at the end of this period. Scottish Planning Policy requires new wind farms to be located on sites which are suitable for use in perpetuity, but that is not the same as an open ended 'in perpetuity' consent. The existing wind farm is a material consideration, i.e. is a matter that should be taken

into account in deciding a planning or Section 36 application. But the existing wind farm will be removed unless consent is received to replace it or to extend the existing consent.

Isn't offshore wind energy now more important than onshore?

Whilst offshore wind is making a growing contribution to meeting the Scottish Government's energy targets, onshore wind is now amongst the lowest cost forms of power generation of any kind, and is a vital component of the huge industrial opportunity that renewables create for Scotland. The sector supports an estimated 7,500 jobs in Scotland, and generated more than £3 billion in turnover in 2015.

Our energy and climate change goals mean that onshore wind must continue to play a vital role in Scotland's future – helping to decarbonise our electricity, heat and transport systems, boosting our economy, and meeting local and national demand. Onshore wind also plays a valuable role in empowering and rewarding local communities located near developments, with over £12 million in community benefits payments paid out in the last year.

How are you engaging with the industry and wider stakeholders about this?

In response to the first few repowering applications we held a Sharing Good Practice event on repowering in December 2016 where a wide range of participants explored the issues.

We will be launching the draft guidance for consultation at the Scottish Renewables Onshore wind conference on the 12th of June. This will provide an opportunity to discuss the guidance with the industry. The consultation period will run until the end of August.

We will also hold a seminar for developers on the 25th of June to listen to their views and to seek a consensus on the best approach.

We will publish the draft guidance on our website and invite comments from interested stakeholders including NGOs, planning authorities and the wider energy community.