

## **Report on Scottish Parliament debate on Talladh-a-Bheithe (Rannoch) wind farm, wild land and planning, 30 September 2014**

The debate followed Motion S4M-10744 lodged by Mid-Scotland and Fife MSP Murdo Fraser securing cross-party support and becoming eligible for discussion in Members' Business.

The Talladh-a-Bheithe wind farm would comprise 24 turbines up to 125m high in the heart of one of the newly-established "Wild Land Areas". There are thought to have been around 1000 objections to the proposed development, which is also strongly opposed by the government's own natural heritage adviser Scottish Natural Heritage, along with the Cairngorms National Park Authority and SEPA. Vigorous opposition is also being put up by local campaign group Keep Rannoch Wild.

Opening the debate, Murdo Fraser MSP noted that it was unusual to have a debate on a live planning application but that the Talladh case raised important issues and was "a test case to determine whether the Scottish Government is actually serious about protecting our wild land." Mr Fraser cited the strong opposition to this project and the concerns that are being raised about not only the scenic impact but also damage to the livelihoods of locals who run tourist businesses dependent on the natural heritage of the area. Mr Fraser said "the Scottish Government talks tough on protecting wild land, and Talladh-a-Bheithe represents their chance to prove it."

Michael McMahon, the Scottish Labour MSP for Uddingston and Bellshill, said that wind farms have a part to play but that if approved the Talladh case will mean that we continue to lose wild land, one of our greatest natural assets. He expressed concern over the impact of the development on priority peatlands – an important carbon sink – and also on rare birds and species, and reiterated Murdo Fraser's comments about adverse impact on fragile local economies which are dependent on natural beauty as the main driver of tourism.

At the other end of the spectrum, Rob Gibson MSP (SNP, Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) disputed the Motion, saying that socio-economic issues were paramount, and that he believed the wind farm would bring benefits to local people, and also that wind farms such as these are necessary if we are serious about our climate change targets.

Neil Findlay MSP (Scottish Labour, Lothian) said that although this development would not impact on his constituents or region, the consequences of approval would be felt far and wide. He considered it would be impossible to design out the impact of 125m turbines in such a rugged landscape and also expressed concern about economic benefits, considering that any brought by this development would be short-term. He drew attention to how few developments were community-owned, with profits often going overseas. He also spoke passionately about the importance of "sense of place."

Mr Findlay concluded by saying that the Scottish Government risked turning people against renewables through "its ill-balanced and mis-managed approach" to planning for wind farms. In reply to the debate the Minister for Local Government and Planning, Derek Mackay MSP, explained that he was constrained by what he could say given that this is a live planning case and expressed serious concern that it was being debated. He stressed that the new National Planning Framework 3 sets out clear parameters for the protection of wild land and that he is confident that the policy framework is much clearer and stronger than before, and that each case will be considered on its merits. He stressed that research into all aspects of wind farm impacts is continuing and "verifiable evidence will guide development to the right places." He reinforced Rob Gibson MSP's comments about the benefits of renewables investment for remote and rural communities but concluded by offering reassurances that "by no means will all wind farms be acceptable."

Following the debate, Helen McDade, John Muir Trust head of policy, said: "This debate was important in highlighting the serious issues raised by the Talladh-a-Bheithe application, an application that is wholly inappropriate given its impact on wild land and the principles established by the new planning policy. We hope that the Scottish Government's Energy Consents Unit – which has the final say on this application – will recognise this scheme as wholly inappropriate when the time comes for a decision and throw it out.

"We would like to thank everyone who took the time to draw their MSPs attention to Murdo Fraser's motion and the debate, and the efforts they went to to encourage their MSPs to speak out for wild land yesterday."

**Mel Nicoll, campaign co-ordinator, John Muir Trust**  
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