



Eisgein Windfarm Objection

The Scottish Executive,
Consents and Emergency Planning Unit,
2nd Floor,
Meridian Court,
5 Cadogan Street,
Glasgow
G2 6AT

5th May 2005

Dear Mr Smith,

Muaitheabhal Windfarm, Eisgein Estate, Western Isles

The John Muir Trust wishes to confirm its holding objection sent on 14th December 2004 and lodge a **formal objection** to the planning application of Beinn Mhor Power to develop a wind farm at Eisgein in the Western Isles. Our objection relates to impacts on **wildlife, wild land**, and the implications for the **local economy**.

The JMT supports the development of small-scale, sensitively sited renewable energy schemes, in areas adjacent to existing settlements, which demonstrate that renewable energy may be sourced without significantly impacting on wild land ([1](#)) or wildlife. The JMT, while generally in support of the development of renewable energy systems, opposes new developments where they *significantly* threaten wild land.

The great majority of proposals to develop renewable energy schemes in Scotland have, to an extent, avoided the most sensitive and most iconic areas of wild land. The Eisgein proposal is blatantly irresponsible in that regard. To place the significance of this scheme in context, it should be noted that of the many schemes proposed in the UK in the last five years, the John Muir Trust has formally objected to only three: Shieldaig and Slattadale hydro, Lewis windfarm, and the Muaitheabhal windfarm.

Wild land and Landscape

The area covered by the proposal is one of the most remote and, by default, one of the wildest expanses of land in the UK. A useful map indicating the particular significance of the Pairc peninsula can be found in Scottish Natural Heritage's Wildness in Scotland's Countryside policy statement (2002). Map 2 Remote Areas showing 'distance from public and private roads'. It is striking in that it clearly indicates that the Pairc peninsula contains by far the

largest area of remote land in the UK. The proposed scheme cuts right into that remote area.

It is not without good reason that a large proportion of the area chosen for this development is designated within a *National Scenic Area*, and is cited as a zone of the HIGHEST sensitivity in the Scottish Natural Heritage Policy Statement (02/02) on *Strategic locational Guidance for the development of onshore wind farms*.

The map below, from the John Muir Trust's [Wild Land Policy](#), provides an approximate indication of the wild land areas that the JMT considers to be of prime importance in the Western Isles. These are "key areas of wild land", a unique asset to Scotland, of immense public significance.

Given the location, a scheme of any scale would have serious implications for both wild land and wildlife. The proposed windfarm is vastly out of proportion and not sympathetically designed. The installation of 133 turbines and all their associated infrastructure in this area implies a complete lack of respect for the landscape value and conservation interest.

Community Issues

There is strong evidence that the scheme is not supported by a large proportion of the Western Isles community. This must be taken into account.

The effects of the scheme on the neighbouring communities in particular across Loch Seaforth on North Harris are of particular concern. It should be noted that the John Muir Trust is supportive of wind farms that provide real benefits to communities. We are actively engaged in assisting the North Harris Trust in obtaining a sustainable income from renewable energy by developing a windfarm on a scale (possibly just one turbine), which has a *minimal* impact on landscape, wild land and wildlife.

The John Muir Trust fully appreciates the employment and socio-economic needs of many the communities in the Western Isles; hence we are greatly concerned about the negative impacts this scheme may have on the islands' reputation as a premier world tourism destination. We recognise that there are mixed views on the impacts of wind farms on the landscape, but in this location, by any assessment, the impact is wholly negative.

The Eisgein Estate owner's intention to set up a Muaitheabhal Windfarm Trust Fund is a means for providing some local community benefit to partially offset the damage to the local community's interests. But setting a time limit on the community to become members, while



Figure 1: Eisgein (blue) in relation to key areas of 'wild land' in the Western Isles

the development is still going through the planning process is an unacceptable method of wheeling local "support".

Golden Eagle and White-tailed Eagle

The Pairc peninsula supports increasingly important populations of white tailed eagle, although only one pair has been recorded on the immediate vicinity of the proposed development area. Their distribution and range has been expanding in the area in recent years. This quietly celebrated and highly desirable expansion of one of UK's most prized wild species would undoubtedly be seriously limited by the proposed developments.

The fate of the six pairs of golden eagles breeding in the immediate vicinity of the site, is no less serious. The anticipated collision risks of approximately one eagle every 5 years at a 95% avoidance rate are not acceptable.

The habitat disturbance and collision risks to a wide range of other protected bird species such as the Merlin, Red-throated Diver, Black-throated Diver, Greenshank, Golden Plover, and Dunlin and are also unacceptable in such a sensitive and otherwise undisturbed area.

As it stands, the proposal contravenes, the *EC Council directive on the Conservation of Wild Birds (79/409/EC)*, the *EC Council Directive on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and Wild Fauna and Flora (92/43/EC)*. It is contrary the *UK Biodiversity Action Plan* and the *Wild life and Countryside Act 1981* and the more recent *Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004*.

For the sake of the reputation of Scotland: as an advocate of the sustainable management of natural resources; and for the sake of the reputation of the Western Isles as a premier, world class, destination of *outstanding* natural beauty, the John Muir Trust strongly urges the Scottish Executive to dismiss this application.

Yours sincerely,

Will Boyd-Wallis,
JMT Policy & Partnerships Manager

1 "Wild Land" is described as "Uninhabited land containing minimal evidence of human activity" and defined in detail within the Trust's [Wild Land Policy](#) (2003)