

**LINK Landscape Sub-group**

**Landscape and Wind Energy Statement**

**The challenge**

1. Climate change is the most pressing environmental threat that humanity faces. But it is by no means the only one. Global warming is symptomatic of a still deeper problem: our abuse of the natural world and failure to live within its limits.
2. Successfully combating climate change requires a change of attitude across society. It requires us to re-evaluate and re-prioritise: to appreciate more and exploit less. For the signatories to this statement – voluntary bodies with between them well over 300,000 members – it demands in particular due recognition of the contribution that Scotland's landscapes make to the quality of our lives and proper care in the way that we treat them. As we strive to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, we should place greater emphasis on maintaining and enhancing the quality of these landscapes, not less.
3. It is with this goal in view that this statement highlights the damage that badly-sited wind farms can do to Scotland's landscapes and sets out the action needed to minimise this.

**Landscape**

4. Landscape is about the relationship between people and place. It is based on scenery, but covers all aspects of our experience of land, water, vegetation and culture. It includes both our personal memories and our shared experience – it is about what we value in our surroundings.
5. Scotland's heritage of natural and cultural landscapes is renowned throughout the world. They are one of the main reasons why people visit Scotland and so form the essential basis of our tourism industry and provide great opportunities for outdoor recreation.
6. While all landscapes matter, certain landscapes are particularly sensitive to change, and others are recognised as being of special significance and especially worth protecting.
7. Our landscapes enhance our quality of life and our well-being; they give us inspiration, refreshment and enjoyment. They contain the record of the achievements and failures of those who went before us; they form a key part of our national, regional and local identity.
8. That is why our thousands of members care so passionately about Scotland's landscapes.

**Wind energy development**

9. Scotland needs to cut its greenhouse gas emissions as part of a global effort to reduce the damaging climate change and other environmental impacts resulting from them. Most of these emissions currently come from burning fossil fuels – for heating, transport and electricity generation.
10. Environmentally, reducing energy consumption and adopting energy conservation and efficiency measures are the best ways of doing this. But modern society depends on electricity and this dependence is likely to increase as we move away from fossil fuels for heating and transport.

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11. Electricity generated from renewable sources produces far lower greenhouse gas emissions than that generated by burning fossil fuels. Despite some drawbacks, notably the intermittency and variability of their output, wind farms are currently amongst the best developed and cheapest sources of low carbon electricity. At least until better technologies are developed, they are bound to form part of any strategy to combat climate change.

### Wind farms and the landscape

12. Wind turbines are metal structures quite at odds in character with the natural components of the landscape and even with most existing built features of the countryside. They usually occupy prominent locations and attract particular attention through the movement of their blades. As the technology has developed they have become ever taller, to the point where over much of Scotland they can dwarf the natural topography.
13. As a result, badly-sited wind farm developments can gravely harm Scotland's landscapes by:
- Industrialising** our countryside and coasts with tall steel structures, large concrete hardstandings and wide roads
  - Dominating** their immediate surroundings and **intruding** insistently on views over very wide areas
  - Cluttering** the landscape with structures of many different designs and scales
  - Eroding** our particularly precious resource of wild land
14. They also give rise to bitter battles between communities, developers and planning authorities across Scotland, thereby generating contention out of what should be the prized shared asset of our outstanding landscape resources.
15. Their potential to transform our landscapes is evident from the fact that the proportion of Scotland from which wind turbines are visible more than doubled in a mere five years - from 20% in 2008 to 46% by 2013 (SNH data<sup>1</sup>).
16. The impacts arising from wind farms themselves are compounded by the fact that the distributed pattern of generation to which they contribute requires significant expansion of the existing electricity grid. The pylons, poles and sub-stations involved are also highly intrusive and contribute to the cluttering and industrialisation described above.
17. Offshore wind farms may in some locations be less concerning from a landscape perspective, though not necessarily in terms of other environmental interests. They too, however, require grid connections and on sites close to the coast can damage the landscape at least as much as onshore turbines.

### Our plea to Government

18. We share the Scottish Government's vision of a low-carbon future; we would not, however, support the objective of making Scotland a major net exporter of electricity at the cost of excessive numbers of turbines, pylons and other infrastructure.
19. Wind energy should not be pursued in preference to less environmentally damaging forms of renewable energy purely on the grounds of lower cost and ease of implementation. To do

<sup>1</sup> Natural Heritage Indicator N3 Visual influence of built development  
 Scottish Natural Heritage, 2014 <http://www.snh.gov.uk/docs/A1064015.pdf>

so would be to repeat intentionally the inadvertent error that has given rise to our current carbon emission predicament: the externalisation of environmental costs.

20. Any new large-scale electricity transmission should likewise use the best practicable environmental option, including subsea cable and undergrounding.
21. The further development of wind energy must take place within a strategic approach and a robust planning framework both designed to minimise the adverse impact on Scotland's landscapes of the necessary drive to de-carbonise our economy and way of life. To that end we call upon:

*The UK and Scottish Governments:*

- to re-double their efforts to encourage the development and uptake of measures and technologies designed to reduce energy consumption and to generate electricity in ways that minimise adverse environmental impacts, especially those affecting our precious landscapes

*The Scottish Government:*

- to honour its commitment to exclude wind farms from our National Parks and National Scenic Areas, and to extend this protection to Wild Land Areas and to substantial buffer zones
- to uphold in its decisions, and in its scrutiny of Local Development Plans, policies drawn up by local authorities to guide wind energy developments to appropriate locations

*Local authorities*

- to base their planning for wind energy development on professionally prepared landscape capacity studies, designed to guide such developments to locations appropriate to their scale and character, and to adhere to these plans and policies in their decision-making.

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**This position paper is supported by the following Scottish Environment LINK Landscape Sub-group members:**

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