

ROGER CROFTS CALLS FOR A BIODIVERSITY OFFSETTING SCHEME FOR WIND FARMS IMPACT ON THE SCOTTISH UPLANDS

Wind farms have a significant cumulative effect on the biodiversity of Scotland's uplands, but there is no mechanism to switch resources from the profits of wind farm operation to the improvement of Scotland's internationally important habitats and species. This is needed and could be easily established if there was willingness between the Scottish Government and the wind farm operating companies.

Wind turbines and their associated infrastructure result in loss of biodiversity (habitats and species) and interruption of ecosystem services, and loss of carbon. At present, there is no way of mitigating these effects beyond any conditions attached to planning permissions for each approved development.

The theory and practice of biodiversity offsets to compensate for loss arising from developments is now well established world wide and there is sufficient experience to allow this approach to be used effectively in Scotland.

The obvious areas for offsetting are other parts of the Scottish uplands which are suffering from overgrazing and under grazing arising from agricultural policy changes and from poor stewardship.

It is therefore proposed that a mechanism is established for transferring resources from operators of currently operating, approved and to be approved in the future upland wind turbine companies to fund a biodiversity offset programme to ensure the restoration and effective environmental stewardship of Scotland's degraded uplands.

Three steps are suggested to progress this proposal:

1. Establish a data base to assess the type and amount of biodiversity loss (lead SNH);
2. Identify offset areas (large in size: measured in sq km) where ecological damage is unacceptable and also has negative downstream and downslope effects (leads SNH, SEPA, JHI); and
3. Engage with wind turbine companies to identify funding for the project (lead Scottish Government).

In its recent response to the Scottish Government's consultation on biodiversity, the Royal Society of Edinburgh commented as follows, in the light of advice from Roger Crofts, one of the authors of the RSE response:

"As its thinking in this area develops, the Scottish Government might consider opportunities for trialling large scale biodiversity offsetting and biodiversity banking in Scotland. For example, the extensive development of onshore wind farms for electricity generation does have a net negative effect on biodiversity at the site and the cumulative effects from existing, approved and planned development will be very significant. The development companies are only providing funds for community benefit and no funds have been sought for biodiversity benefits. The Scottish Government could consider developing a scheme for offsetting the biodiversity losses at upland wind farm sites by inviting the development companies to establish a fund for supporting the improved management of upland habitats on an extensive scale."

Roger Crofts

September 2012