

Scottish Renewables written evidence to the Scottish Parliament's Economy, Energy and Fair Work Committee inquiry into COVID-19 – impact on Scotland's businesses, workers and economy

About Scottish Renewables

Scottish Renewables is the voice of Scotland's renewable energy industry. The sectors we represent deliver investment, jobs, social benefits and reduce the carbon emissions which cause climate change. Our members work across all renewable energy technologies, in Scotland, the UK, Europe and around the world. In representing them, we aim to lead and inform the debate on how the growth of renewable energy can help sustainably heat and power Scotland's homes and businesses.

Executive Summary

Scottish Renewables welcomes the opportunity to provide written evidence to the Scottish Parliament's Economy, Energy and Fair Work Committee inquiry into COVID-19 – impact on Scotland's businesses, workers and economy.

Our submission focuses on the following:

- The immediate impact of the COVID-19 on the renewable energy industry
- Future support for the renewable energy industry which may be required due to COVID-19

As the public health emergency develops, we anticipate that other issues may come to our attention and Scottish Renewables will provide an update of this submission to the Committee if necessary.

The immediate impact of the COVID-19 on the renewable energy industry

1. Scotland has chosen to utilise the strength of its natural resource and consequently has a different energy mix from the rest of the UK, with the deployment of renewable technology supporting our nation's ambitious emissions reduction targets.

Renewable energy is Scotland's primary source of electricity, providing the equivalent of 90% of our consumption, and is essential to our energy supply.¹

2. Scottish Renewables welcomed the designation of energy as part of Scotland's critical national infrastructure in the update to the Scottish Government's Coronavirus (COVID-19): business and social distancing guidance on 4 April 2020.
3. Renewable energy generation is based around technology and not fuel, the infrastructure required by our industry – wind turbines, solar panels and more - therefore require appropriate maintenance to ensure their optimal operation and the security of our energy supply.

Government assistance is required to help the public and emergency services understand that the operation and maintenance of renewable technology is essential to our national infrastructure. This could take the form of supportive statements from the Scottish Government with the renewable energy industry working in partnership with Government to establish a process to ensure that renewable energy sector workers can evidence their need to be working out of the home.

This is particularly important in our remote and rural communities where most of Scotland's renewable energy has been deployed. Our industry's key workers will be highly visible in these communities as they work to maintain our energy supply. It is essential that Scotland's population understand that this is vital work and that it is being carried out in accordance with the guidance designed to slow the spread of COVID-19.

4. Future development of renewable energy projects can only take place once the necessary environmental monitoring and impact assessment work has been undertaken. Environmental

¹ UK Government, 2020, *Energy Trends: UK renewables*. [<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/energy-trends-section-6-renewables>]. Accessed 16 April 2020.

monitoring and impact assessment, particularly of bird species, is a time-sensitive activity that must be undertaken at specific times of the year such as nesting season. At present such monitoring activities have been suspended due to social distancing requirements.

Should developers be unable to undertake monitoring activities this year, they will face significant delays and will be unable to produce data from consecutive years as required by the consenting process. This will limit Scotland's ability to move forward with renewables deployment and reduce our capacity to reach the levels of deployment needed to meet net-zero.

The majority of environmental monitoring takes place away from communities and can be completed in such a way that it is possible for such activities to be undertaken in line with social distancing requirements. Support from Government would be welcome to advance the importance of this type of activity and reassurance on the provision of services such as rescue services that would allow the safe completion of environmental monitoring.

5. Renewable energy is a project driven industry and the pipeline of work, including construction, is essential for meeting future net-zero targets.

The onshore wind industry has come together through SafetyOn, the health and safety organisation for the onshore wind sector in the United Kingdom, to develop guidance on how site operation can be undertaken in line with COVID-19 advice from government and the Health & Safety Executive.

We consider the SafetyOn guidance a good foundation for developing Scotland specific guidance and would welcome an update of the Scottish Government's Coronavirus (COVID-19): construction sector guidance published on 6 April setting out how construction can be undertaken safely during social distancing to allow construction of renewable energy projects to recommence.

We would also welcome the prioritisation of renewable energy construction by the Scottish Government, noting it as an important way in which the country could begin to sustainably restart its economy, delivering on both our net zero and economic ambitions.

6. As we look forward in time it is imperative that the Government recognises its role as an enabler of a wider low carbon and resilient energy system driving a sustainable economic recovery. This will require the use of all levers – at local and national level – to accelerate the further rollout of renewable energy technology and systems. Delivering planning and consenting of both onshore and offshore renewables swiftly and consistently is a key way in which that acceleration can be enabled.

Future support for the renewable energy industry which may be required due to COVID-19

7. Renewable energy currently employs over 17,700 full-time equivalents (FTE) across Scotland. In 2017, with 10GW of renewable electricity generation deployed, the industry contributed £5.5 billion to the Scottish economy.²

The Committee on Climate Change calculates that the UK will need to quadruple the amount of renewable electricity it deploys by 2050 in order to meet our net zero climate change targets, with consequent growth of economic activity predicted.³

² Office for National Statistics, 2019, *Home Economy Environmental accounts - Low carbon and renewable energy economy, UK*, [<https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/environmentalaccounts/bulletins/finalestimates/2017>] Accessed 16 April 2020.

³ Committee on Climate Change, 2019, *Net Zero – The UK's contribution to stopping global warming* [<https://www.theccc.org.uk/publication/net-zero-the-uks-contribution-to-stopping-global-warming/>] Accessed 16 April 2020.

Similarly, we have barely started the decarbonisation of our heat sector with renewable heat generation representing just 6.3% of Scotland's non-electrical heat demand in 2018, the latest figures available.⁴ Deploying the renewable energy technologies required to decarbonise heat - heat pumps, solar thermal panels, geothermal technologies and more - will provide significant economic opportunity for Scotland. A Scottish Renewables study in November (2019) highlighted an ambitious programme of new heat networks that could serve up to 8% of Scotland's heat demand by 2030 and would require a multi-billion pound investment.⁵ Around 40% of that spend would be on civil engineering, creating opportunities for local construction supply chains across Scotland.

8. The impact of COVID-19 on Scotland's economy means that it is important, now more than ever, to ensure that industries which offer significant low-carbon growth to our national economy are supported by the Scottish Government to realise their full potential and help aid our economic recovery.

The Scottish Government can work in partnership with the renewable industry to develop a sectoral plan mapping out how to utilise renewable resources to assist in mitigating economic challenges. An integrated approach across all renewable technologies setting the support required will stimulate economic opportunities and job creation, whilst working to meet net-zero targets.

As Scotland transitions away from fossil fuels, the growth of renewable energy provides the opportunity, if done correctly, to ensure every region and community across our nation benefits from a clean, sustainable and home-grown energy supply, with the economic, environmental and health benefits that brings. The renewable energy industry can work alongside Government to strengthen our economic recovery, whilst ensuring that as a nation, we continue to work towards an environmentally-sustainable net-zero future.

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⁴ Energy Saving Trust, 2019, *Renewable Heat in Scotland*, [https://energysavingtrust.org.uk/sites/default/files/Renewable%20Heat%20in%20Scotland%2C%202018%20Report.pdf] Accessed 16 April 2020.

⁵ Scottish Renewables, 2019, *Piping Hot: Building Heat Networks to Tackle the Climate Emergency* [https://www.scottishrenewables.com/publications/527-piping-hot-building-heat-networks-to-tackle-the-climate-emergency] Accessed 16 April 2020.