

Scottish Renewables written evidence to the Scottish Parliament's COVID-19 Committee call for written evidence

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 COVID-19 Committee.

Our submission focuses on the following:

- How do we maintain public confidence and support in the public sector response to COVID-19 as determined by The Scottish Government whilst easing current restrictions
- How should different interests in civic society and the economy be involved in the decision-making process about amending restrictions and what would enable the final decisions to be widely supported despite any necessary trade-offs that may require to be made
- Could the current decision-making processes used by The Scottish Government to respond to COVID-19 be improved, and if so how
- How should the messaging strategy be developed by The Scottish Government as we ease parts of the current lockdown (and may potentially need to create other restrictions)

Written evidence

How do we maintain public confidence and support in the public sector response to COVID-19 as determined by The Scottish Government whilst easing current restrictions

1. Clear and effective government communications are essential for maintaining the confidence of the renewable energy industry in the government response to the COVID-19 public health emergency. To date The Scottish Government has issued guidance which has been updated at a regular frequency and has supported the renewable energy industry understand which operations are deemed essential during the COVID-19 pandemic. This has been cascaded through the right channels.
2. Scottish Renewables welcomed The Scottish Government's Coronavirus (COVID-19) prioritisation matrix for key workers to be tested, published on 25 April, which establishes renewable energy workers as key workers.

While the maintenance of generation infrastructure has continued, Scottish Renewables is aware that key workers carrying out these tasks can face questioning by both the police and members of local communities.

The role which renewable energy key workers are playing in the national response will be understandably less recognised than more visible groups such as health and care workers, and the delivery workforce. The public now need to be supported by The Scottish Government to understand the role which renewable energy key workers are performing in maintaining the energy supply and its importance to supporting the national effort to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Scottish Government's public messaging strategy will now need to explain the role which the less-understood key workers, including renewable energy key workers, are playing in the national effort to tackle COVID-19. This could include clear reference in a Scottish Government daily briefing led by the First Minister, as well as public messaging campaigns on broadcast and digital media.

Reflection of this in the government's public messaging is important to reduce stress on police officers and public concern, as well as ensuring members of the public do not mistakenly believe renewable energy workers are continuing in their roles in defiance of the coronavirus social distancing guidelines, and therefore feel more able to ignore the guidelines themselves. This is particularly important in our remote and rural communities where most of Scotland's renewable energy has been deployed.

How should different interests in civic society and the economy be involved in the decision-making process about amending restrictions and what would enable the final decisions to be widely supported despite any necessary trade-offs that may require to be made

3. The Scottish Government's exit from lockdown provides an opportunity to deliver a green recovery which rebuilds our economy, protects our environment and prioritises wellbeing. It is essential to our national wellbeing that we also future-proof our economy as much as possible if we are face to another national crisis of this magnitude in the future. Renewable energy, unlike much of the fossil fuel we consume, is home-grown and is therefore less susceptible to economic shocks and market volatility. Putting renewable energy at the centre of a green economic recovery can help to future-proof our energy needs, ensuring our economy is more stable and resilient.

In Scotland we have acted very early to utilise the strength of our natural resources and to deploy renewable energy technologies, and we already have a head-start on a green recovery. Renewable technologies are generating the equivalent of 90% of Scotland's electricity consumption and supporting our ambitious emissions reduction targets. This has given us the skills that the world will need to make a success of a green economic recovery.

Renewable energy provides the opportunity for investment, improvement of health through reducing pollution and tackling the climate emergency in one, often shovel-ready package. As we transition away from fossil fuels the growth of renewable energy provides the opportunity, if done correctly, to ensure every region and community across Scotland can benefit from a clean and sustainable energy supply.

4. The Scottish Government Economic Development and Energy and Climate Change Directorates can work in partnership with the renewable energy industry to develop a plan to safely unlock the renewable energy industry. This should be done with advisory support from Scotland's energy trade bodies, who represent industry.

Health and safety must always be the guiding principle for easing the lockdown. Decisions for unlocking renewable need to be guided by the best public health practice and should be jointly approved by energy and public health experts. The Scottish Government should also provide regular access for renewable energy industry to public health officials to ensure industry understands the reasoning behind the decisions being taken and can cascade those to its key workers.

5. Seeking a green recovery to lockdown will require the confidence and understanding of the public. The Scottish Government should ensure that public communications establish that a green recovery is being prioritised to protect our future wellbeing and that this it is being

delivered safely in line with expert public health guidance. As raised above, the First Minister's briefing and messaging on broadcast and digital channels offer the best means to deliver this.

Could the current decision-making processes used by The Scottish Government to respond to COVID-19 be improved and if so how

6. The Scottish Government has performed very well despite the significant pressures it has faced due to COVID-19, and recommendations offered here are a way to build on this and enhance any future response to an unexpected crisis. These should be considered alongside points 3, 4 and 5 above.
7. Scotland's critical national infrastructure, of which renewable energy is a part, will form the response to any future crisis. The number of Scotland's energy trade bodies is not extensive and can be engaged with collectively by government Ministers and civil servants through regular teleconferences. The Scottish Government could in the event of a future crisis introduce energy stakeholder calls to understand how to resolve industry issues with legislation and guidance.
8. Establishing a structure of account management for industry engagement during national crises could support government to better understand industry issues ensuring that these are redressed in legislation and guidance. This could be done on a sector-specific basis with a defined government official leading on energy issues. Where responses are required to issues that are across government briefs, this could be elevated to senior officials with action taken on a cross-sector basis.

How should the messaging strategy be developed by The Scottish Government as we ease parts of the current lockdown (and may potentially need to create other restrictions)

9. As discussed above an effective messaging strategy is essential for achieving public trust and support for easing the lockdown. The Scottish Government should work in lock-step with renewable energy and public health officials to ensure a green economic recovery takes place.

May 2020