

Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism

**Statement on the determination of the Beauly to Denny
overhead power line applications**

Wednesday 6th January 2010

Presiding Officer, I would like to make a statement to Parliament on my decision in respect of the applications from: Scottish Power Transmission Limited and Scottish Hydro-Electric Transmission Limited for

- consent under section 37 of the Electricity Act 1989; and
- deemed planning permission under section 57(2) of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997
- to install a 400kV double circuit overhead line connection between Beauly Substation and Denny Substation.

This seeks to upgrade and replace the existing line.

In addition to this statement, I am writing to the 3 Parliamentary Committees with an interest in the applications (the Economy Energy and Tourism Committee, the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee and the Public Petitions Committee).

I have also placed copies of the decision letters and the Report of the Public Local Inquiry in the Scottish Parliament Information Centre and on the Scottish Government website. These are now available.

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Appendix I Planning Paper 9 5 February 2010

I have sought to make a statement to Parliament because of the importance of this decision for

- our sustainable energy future,
- our energy sector,
- Scotland's position at the forefront of renewable energy development,
- our environment and cultural heritage
- and for the communities & groups along the length of the proposed line.

It is clear our electricity grid network needs further capacity to carry the levels of renewable energy that will be generated in Scotland in the coming years.

Equally, to protect Scotland's energy security and deliver that energy potential, we need a transmission network that is fit for purpose.

Given its scale, the Beaully to Denny upgrade is the most significant and important electricity infrastructure reinforcement project in a generation.

But in view of the spectrum of interests involved, important infrastructure decisions can be difficult.

Therefore, it is absolutely right to fully consider all of the issues – and all views.

Especially, in a proposal of this scale, detail and complexity.

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Appendix I Planning Paper 9 5 February 2010

It is the right approach in an issue of such importance to our energy future, our economy, our environment, our climate change efforts and to the communities along the line.

I have therefore given the most careful consideration to the applications.

I have considered the detailed and extensive submissions made to the Public Local Inquiry, **and** the representations made since the inquiry closed.

And I have considered the findings of the Reporters and **their** consideration of the issues raised.

In reaching my decision, I have balanced the macro-economic need and benefits of the upgrade of the existing line **and** the visual and landscape impact at locations along the whole route.

The Reporters found compelling need and technical justifications for the overhead line solution.

The Reporters recognised the pressing need to reinforce the electricity grid to accommodate renewable electricity in the north of Scotland.

Crucially, they also found the economic justification for the proposal was strong.

I agree with the Reporters on all of these issues.

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Appendix I Planning Paper 9 5 February 2010

On balance, I conclude there are strong arguments for a whole line solution, which outweigh withholding of consent for the line – or sections of the line.

I have therefore granted consent to upgrade the power line between Beaully and Denny, which is key to unlocking the vast renewable energy potential in the North of Scotland.

But in consenting these applications – in giving consent for the project - I have not given a blueprint for unrestrained development.

Consent is subject to a detailed and comprehensive range of **conditions**, including material mitigation of the impact of the line on the surrounding areas.

This is proof positive that the Reporters and I have listened to the representations that have been made and the interests of communities along the line.

The aim is to balance delivery of this important project with the protection of the vital interests of:

- communities,
- the environment,
- our cultural heritage and
- Scotland's tourism sector.

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Appendix I Planning Paper 9 5 February 2010

The key to this, and to ensuring the development is delivered appropriately throughout, **is the ongoing engagement of local communities, their representatives and other key interests.**

The conditions I am attaching to the consent require this.

The details of the conditions are set out in the decision letters.

They are extensive, thorough and detailed. That is entirely proper in a project of this scale and importance.

The existing 132Kv overhead line will be dismantled and I will require the power companies to bring forward a range of improvements to the wirescape and undergrounding of a number of existing lines around and connecting to the line along its length.

As a result, **86.5km of existing wirescape can be removed** or improved at a potential capital cost of over £50m.

In addition, to the five mitigation schemes recommended by the Reporter, at;

- Muthil,
- Balblair,
- the Cairngorm National Park,
- Errochty and
- Stirling

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Appendix I Planning Paper 9 5 February 2010

I have also asked for further measures to mitigate as far as possible the visual impact of the line:

- in the Stirling area,
- at Glenside near Plean and
- at Auchilhanzie House near Crieff.

I want the applicants to be as flexible as possible in their approach to mitigating the impact of the line in these additional three areas. I also want them to consult closely with the key parties – and with the local authorities in particular.

In addition, I have imposed conditions to protect the interests of communities, the environment and further mitigate the landscape and visual impact.

These include:

- an **environmental liaison group** to advise on mitigation, construction, restoration and habitat measures as the development progresses;
- a **tourism, cultural heritage and community liaison group** to;
- advise on mitigation of the impact of the line on tourism and historic and cultural heritage; and
- make recommendations on the potential wider benefits the development will bring.

The developers will need to put in place a Construction Procedures Handbook – setting out how the development will be constructed and managed.

This will cover important issues relating to the protection of our natural environment such as waste minimisation and management, watercourse crossings, wildlife and Natura site protective measures.

This **will ensure the construction phase is as responsible and sensitive as possible** to the spectrum of local and community needs and interests.

The conditions are stretching – but in view of the significance of this development and the importance of the environmental and community issues that have been raised – they are wholly appropriate.

In addition, a range of other conditions will require the developers to:

- safeguard against pollution;
- provide landscaping plans;
- minimise construction noise and traffic; and
- provide support for local businesses & community engagement.

The balance I have sought, has been between developing and delivering Scotland's energy future and protecting environmental, cultural heritage, economic and community issues.

CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY
Appendix I Planning Paper 9 5 February 2010

The route of the line has been arrived at after consideration of the existing long established pylon route from Beauly to Denny, and extensive consultation.

The route of the line has also been the subject of extensive discussion during the largest Public Local Inquiry in the history of this Parliament.

I want to take a moment to pay tribute to the Inquiry Reporters and the Technical Assessor for their diligent, detailed and professional approach.

I pay tribute to the organisations, groups and individuals who contributed to the Public Inquiry, and who have contributed since. The scale, detail and range of that input are testament to the passion and commitment of all of those involved. That input has been vital in helping shape the Report, the conditions and my decision on this important development.

As Parliament knows, the overhead line will be 220km (137 miles) long. The reinforcement of the line will see the existing number of pylons reduced by over a quarter - from 815 to around 600 - and will follow the existing line for most of the route.

However, it is also important to focus on the broader benefits that this upgrade will bring to Scotland.

Before Christmas, World leaders met in Copenhagen to discuss how to tackle the challenge of climate change – arguably the biggest challenge facing mankind.

And Scotland's world leading climate change legislation and the actions we are taking to meet our climate change targets has put us at the heart of that discussion.

And it is vital that Scotland plays its part to deliver the low carbon, secure, renewable energy future that we all aspire to.

To do that credibly – we, in Scotland, need to take the important decisions that will help to deliver this.

The Beaulieu to Denny line, which is key to unlocking the renewable energy potential in the North of Scotland, is one such decision.

But - let's be absolutely clear about the scale of the opportunity we have within our grasp.

With a quarter of Europe's wind and tidal power resource and 10% of Europe's wave power Scotland has a massive renewable energy potential. Building on the legacy of our oil and gas and other energy industries Scotland has the potential to be a European leader in clean green energy.

Yet, Scotland has a unique opportunity to do so much more.

Consequently, I believe that we have an obligation to future generations to do much more.

The fact is that connecting and transporting Scotland's renewable energy is crucial to both the UK and the rest of Europe.

The Beaulieu Denny overhead line will help meet that aim, providing a circuit onto which much of the generation in the north of Scotland and along the line from Beaulieu to Denny can be connected.

The upgraded line will see the capacity increase from being able to transport 1.5 GW of energy to at least 2.5 GW of renewable generation, and support wider grid capacity reinforcement to transport up to 5.2 GW in the North of Scotland grid.

As at October 2009, based on figures provided by National Grid, there are over 50 projects totalling around 4.2 GW queued behind the grid system boundary above the Beaulieu – Denny line.

Hence, this decision today is another significant steps towards becoming Europe's clean green energy hub – providing what the Reporters noted to be the “strong link for the connection of renewable generation along the route of the proposed Beaulieu to Denny line”.

Let me be absolutely clear. Today's decision provides

- an **important and necessary** grid upgrade
- in addition to, **rather than as opposed to**, an upgrade of existing infrastructure,
 - including reinforcing the grid down the east coast of Scotland, and sub-sea cable development.

So, to conclude Beaully-Denny will help unlock Scotland's onshore and offshore energy potential.

It is the most significant and important electricity grid infrastructure reinforcement project in a generation.

I have granted consent for the project with a range of conditions that recognises the legitimate concerns of communities along the length of the line.

I have granted consent that recognises the wider context, the wider benefits and the wider challenges of a development of this scale and opportunity.

I welcome this opportunity to share my decision with Parliament today.