

THE DORENELL WIND FARM, MORAY: TOURISM IMPACTS AND IMPLICATIONS

PRECOGNITION OF EVIDENCE BY

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

I am Professor Terry Stevens, Managing Director of the international leisure and tourism consultancy, Stevens & Associates (S & A). I have a BA (Hons) Degree in Geography; an MSc in Recreational Land Management and a PhD in Tourism Management. My professional affiliations and qualifications include:

- Fellow of the Royal Society;
- Fellow of the American Leisure Academy;
- Fellow of the Tourism Society.

I have worked in the tourism and leisure industry since 1974 holding senior positions in various public sector organisations and in 1987 I joined Swansea Metropolitan University, becoming full Professor and Dean of the Faculty of Leisure, Tourism and Health Care Management in 1991.

S & A was established in 1986. I became its full-time Managing Director in 1994 and have worked on strategic tourism projects in 35 countries for public and private sector clients including projects in Scotland. This has included:

- A Walking Tourism Strategy for the Cabrach and Strathbogie areas for the Aberdeenshire Towns Initiative;
- A Tourism Strategy for Morayshire for the Local Enterprise Company;
- A Review of the Geography of Tourism Destinations in the Highlands for Highlands and Islands Enterprise;
- Tourism strategies for (i) Loch Ness and (ii) Aviemore and the Cairngorms.

I have also undertaken research examining the impact of wind farm proposals on tourism in Wales, Cumbria and Scotland.

This evidence is drawn from a report '*The Dorenell Wind Farm, Moray: Tourism Impacts and Implications*', prepared by S & A on 18th October 2010 commissioned by the Speyside Business Alliance to inform the understanding of the potential impact of the proposed Dorenell Wind Farm on tourism and tourists' perceptions of the area. Of particular concern is the potential impact of the development on the brand image and of the key tourism businesses in the area.

THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

The proposed development by Dorenell (UK) Ltd under s36 of the Electricity Act 1989 is for the construction and operation of a 59 turbine wind farm on the Glenfiddich Estate near Dufftown.

The site, occupying moorland between the Blackwater and Fiddich Rivers, is at 400m – 755m ASL in an Area of Great Landscape Value (the adopted Moray Local Plan). The area is the home of a number of whisky distilleries and food producers whose products are the output of the area's natural resources, traditional forms of agriculture and locally defined methods of manufacturer. Many of these businesses have visitor facilities designed to attract and retain tourists in the area. These investments compliment the area's appeal as a high quality, rural landscape for walking, cycling, sightseeing and touring and for outdoor activities, notably fishing.

The combination of a naturalistic, relatively unspoilt and uncrowded environment, together with the ability to experience iconic Scottish products being made, creates the unique sense of place that differentiates Morayshire and Speyside from other destinations.

TOURISM AND SCENERY

Research by VisitScotland consistently highlights the importance of iconic brands, scenery, wild landscapes and unspoilt environments as the key drivers of tourism to the Highlands of Scotland. This is confirmed by both the Highland Council and the Cairngorms National Park Authority who, in a recent report about a proposed wind energy project at Tomatin (Inverness-shire) stated that *“the quality of scenery is the most significant attraction of the Highlands and the key reason why visitors return”*.

Consequently, any erosion of visitors' perceptions of the quality of this landscape is likely to result in a relocation of visitors to another destination. This point is made by Geoff Riddington, one of the authors of the study by The Moffat Centre of March 2008, *'The Economic Impacts of Wind Farms on Scottish Tourism'*.

In May 2008 at the All-Energy '08 Conference, Riddington's presentation stated that:

“The value of scenery to tourists declines with the construction of a wind farm ... most aggrieved tourists will relocate to a place without wind farms and the effects are large enough locally to make

consideration of the implications for tourists a formal part of the planning process”.

VisitScotland's current '*Position Statement – Wind Farms*' also highlights the detrimental impact of wind farms on scenic quality and the potential negative impact on tourism:

“There is, however, evidence that - on balance - individuals (tourists or otherwise) place a higher value on the landscape when a wind farm is not included in the view than when it is. What is less clear though is whether this change in value affects a tourist's decision to visit that location (i.e. whether there is a resultant impact on tourism).”

TOURISM AND THE ECONOMY

Tourism is a vitally important feature of the Scottish economy with the Scottish Executive targeting a 50% increase in tourism revenue by 2015. According to VisitScotland around 15 million tourists took overnight trips to Scotland in 2009 staying for a total of 68 million nights and spending over £4 billion in the Scottish economy. Tourism related employment in 2007 (latest figures) totalled almost 209,000 or 13% of all employment.

Tourism in the Highlands and Islands region is estimated to be worth over £636 million to the economy (15% of the total value of tourism to Scotland) derived from 2.52 million tourist trips (17% of all trips) and 11.37 million overnight stays (17% of all stays).

According to 2008 figures tourism in Moray is worth in excess of £106 million to the local economy, sustaining over 3,700 full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs as a result of hosting 2.1 million visitor trips including over 253,000 day visitors (12%). Almost two thirds of overnight tourists used the area's 10,670 commercial bedspaces.

Tourism is also an important feature of the economy of the Cairngorms National Park. The 2005 '*Sustainable Tourism Strategy*' estimates that tourism accounts for 80% of the Park's economy driven by 1.43 million visitors each year who primarily come because of the area's unspoilt, rugged scenery.

“stillness, tranquillity, remoteness, solitude and a sense of wild land are important qualities that would be affected ...”.

In summer 2008 the Aberdeen Towns Partnership adopted a Strategy to develop tourism in the Strathbogie and Cabrach area. Within this relatively small geographic area it is estimated that 55,000 overnight tourist trips (104,500 bednights) are made each year staying in commercial accommodation. These visitors, together with day visitors and people staying with friends and relatives, generate between £6.0 million and £7.5 million of spending in the area.

This is a significant level of new money entering the economy. For these markets the quality and wild aspect of the countryside is very important for their overall satisfaction with the destination. In a highly competitive marketplace then any factor that could erode this landscape character and could cause serious damage to a 'youthful' tourism industry.

THE TOURISM APPEAL OF MORAYSHIRE

In March 2008 HIE Moray adopted a new Tourism Strategy for the area. The Strategy highlights the importance of the landscape, scenery and environment to the appeal of the destination and it recognises the essential link between the environmental qualities of the area and the destination's brand and market positioning.

Morayshire is the home of a unique cluster of international brands. Eight of the ten brand leaders in Scottish whisky are Speyside malts. In addition, Walkers (shortbread), Baxters (food) and Johnstons (cashmere) all produce lifestyle, high value, consumer goods which are promoted worldwide using various marketing tools that refer to Speyside and its natural and cultural heritage.

Brand awareness research by VisitScotland shows that Scotland has a number of world famous and internationally recognised icons. Three of them are strongly represented in Moray, namely: tartan, whisky and fine Highland landscapes.

Speyside is the heartland of malt whisky with 52 of Scotland's 104 distilleries. Its pre-eminence is the result of the natural environment, pure water and local entrepreneurial spirit – characteristics that lead to marketing campaigns highlighting the '*naturalness*' of the provenance and place. According to the Scotch Whisky Association (April 2010) overall the annual export earnings of Scotch Whisky exceeds £3.1 billion for the UK economy.

The Speyside distilleries attract tourists, both corporate business visitors and leisure visitors. Each year the 15 companies operating in Speyside attract over 30,000 international corporate guests to the area, resulting in 60,000 – 90,000 bednights and over £1 million per annum of direct spending in the local community. The 11 whisky-related visitor attractions open to the public attract in excess of 230,000 visitors per annum.

EXISTING RESEARCH: WIND ENERGY PROJECTS AND TOURISM

There are a number of concerns about the narrow focus of the existing research studies assessing the impact of wind farms on tourism, including criticism of studies undertaken for VisitScotland by NFO System Three (2002) and the Scottish Government by The Moffat Centre (2008).

The research is rather simplistic in its methodology, often failing to recognise the complex interrelationship between visitors' perceptions of a destination, the visitors' decision making processes and their expectations of and from a visit.

Many of the studies fail to address the full range of possible impacts and they fail to explore the tourists' perceptions of landscape and landscape change, resulting from wind farm development.

TOURISM OPERATORS – A CLEAR RESPONSE

Whilst the findings of consumer focused research is unclear and their research methodologies under increasing criticism there is consistent evidence from research amongst tourism businesses, operators and destination managers about the negative impact of wind farms on the tourist economy.

VisitScotland's '*Position Statement – Wind Farms*' highlights research undertaken by Wild Scotland, Activity Scotland and Wilderness Scotland that revealed high levels of concern that wind farms would have a detrimental impact on tourism in Scotland.

Similar findings are reported from research undertaken in Hood River (Oregon), Western Isles of Scotland, Isle of Wight (England) and the Vale of Lune (Cumbria). In each of these destinations tourist industry representatives with a good understanding of their destination's brand appeal and consumer motivations are against wind farm developments.

DESTINATION BRANDING AND POSITIONING

The importance of the branding and positioning of a tourism destination has emerged as a critical factor in shaping the tourists' choice of a destination.

In a paper by Johnson E (2006) for the Carbon Trust there is a discussion about direct impacts on key 'brands' and the implications of mitigation factors such as 'wind farms'. The study highlights destinations that are significantly associated with food and drink being at high risk.

Miles' research at the University of Vermont (May 2008) explores the aesthetics of wind farms in terms of destination imagery and promotion. Miles highlights how the potential of diminished aesthetics resulting from wind farm projects has motivated grassroots opposition accompanied by concerns of reduced tourism. Installations such as "*major engineering works*" that are wind farms directly erode the perception of what Miles refers to as the "*natura-ruralist landscape*".

CONCLUSIONS

- (1) There is widespread and general support for the fact that, from a tourism perspective, wind farms should not be located in primary designated landscape areas or be visible from these primary designated areas.
- (2) The scale (number of turbines and height) of wind farms is a material factor affecting visitor perceptions with larger developments causing a higher level of negative reaction than smaller developments.
- (3) There is evidence of a connection between visitors' perceptions of a destination's image and branding as a 'wild place' and the erosion of this brand as a result of intrusion by 'industrial' developments, including wind farms and their ancillary facilities / structures.
- (4) The tourist industry (operators and key players) consistently express strong concerns about the negative impacts of wind farms on their own businesses and, more significantly, on the tourism profile (brand and position) of their destination.
- (5) In rural areas with limited tourism facilities and services where there is a high dependency upon niche and special-interest markets whose primary reasons for choosing a destination are its wild, peaceful, tranquil and unspoilt

characteristics, then the potential negative impact of wind farms is a genuine concern.

The majority of research studies involving visitors (or potential visitors) to a destination fail to examine the relationship between market position, branding and perception or market motivations.

Moray is a destination that has recognised the need for a more aggressive approach to growing its tourism economy. This will involve working with a range of internationally renowned businesses whose products are the direct result of the area's heritage, culture and environment.

The promotion and marketing of these products (many of which are iconic Scottish brands) to global audiences evokes the essence of the wild, undeveloped open spaces of the Scottish Highland countryside. These images create and substantiate perceptions of Scotland as a place with great unspoilt scenery which, for 92% of tourists to Scotland, is the important reason for them choosing Scotland as a destination of choice.

Wind farms, especially large-scale developments, directly contradict these images and erode the foundations upon which the brand values of the Morayshire and Scotland's tourism proposition is based.

The area of Strathbogie and Cabrach is embarking upon a tourism development strategy based upon increasing the use of local trails for walking, cycling and equestrian activities. These specialist activities are based upon tourists having an intimate involvement with the countryside. One of the strengths of this area is its relative remoteness, wildness and the absence of dominant and intrusive structures in the landscape. These types of development would diminish the 'wild' experience for these emerging markets.

Overall the way Moray is developing and positioning its tourism offer and the interrelationship between tourism destination branding and other consumer brands is critical to the future of the area's economy. The proposed development at Dorenell will prejudice and erode the area's competitive edge in this regard.