



Fergus Ewing MSP, Minister for Business, Energy and Tourism
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
Scotland
EH99 1SP

Greifswald, March, 1st, 2016.

Dear Minister,

The Flow Country – Strathy South Wind Farm Proposal

I am writing to you on behalf of the International Mire Conservation Group (IMCG) in order to express our deep concern about the proposal to construct a wind farm in the heart of the Flow Country at Strathy South in Sutherland.

In 1986 the IMCG visited Scotland as its second-ever Biennial Field Symposium in order to see the Flow Country for itself because the area had already begun to develop an international reputation as an extraordinary peat landscape, but one which was apparently under serious threat from rapidly-expanding afforestation schemes. The IMCG members included authoritative peatland specialists from a wide range of nations, including Canada, USA, Finland, Sweden, Austria and Ireland. These specialists concluded that the Flow Country was indeed a peatland landscape of substantial international significance but one which was being seriously harmed by the rapid expansion of commercial afforestation across what had until that point been a largely treeless landscape.

The IMCG wrote to the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Scotland immediately at the end of the Field Symposium, emphasising the international importance of the area and expressing grave concern about the effects of the afforestation upon such a peatland landscape. The IMCG was gratified to see, two years later, that the tax incentives which had been driving this afforestation were ended and that a substantial proportion of the surviving Flow Country would be afforded protection under domestic, and more recently, European legislation.

Since then, evidence for the importance of peatland areas generally, and particularly large peatland landscapes, has become more compelling on a global scale. Peatlands have therefore featured increasingly within inter-governmental treaties such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Ramsar Convention. On a more local level, evidence has also been accumulating of the impact which the afforestation schemes have been having on the peatland systems of the Flow Country, and the IMCG is therefore further heartened to learn of the significant investment now being made by the Scottish Government and the EU supporting work to restore many of these afforested areas to actively-growing peat bogs.

It is therefore with some bewilderment and dismay that the IMCG has learned of the proposal to construct a windfarm at Strathy South in the heart of the Flow Country. While the construction of windfarms is an understandable response to the need for the generation of

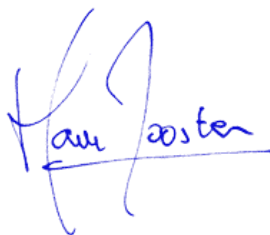
energy from renewable sources, placing such a development within the heart of the Flow Country landscape risks repeating many of the acknowledged mistakes made during the era of forestry expansion into the Flow Country.

The long-term effects of road construction, excavated turbine bases, the turbines themselves, and other associated infrastructure on the range of features which make the Flow Country such an important place are not yet known because such developments are relatively new and our understanding of how to measure any such effects is still developing. Experience gained in restoring afforested areas of peatland in the Flow Country shows us, however, that such restoration work is not cheap and has yet to demonstrate that achieving something approximating to the original state is likely to take a long time.

Furthermore, placing such a highly-visible development within the heart of the Flow Country would significantly alter the visual character of the Flow Country which is, by its very nature, a considerable landform expanse characterised by low-growing vegetation which affords very extensive and uninterrupted views of the peat-dominated landscape. This is a particular and internationally relevant feature of the Flow Country. As such, the proposed development could also have a significantly negative impact on any formal application for the area to be considered for World Heritage Status, which we note is a possibility given that the Flow Country is currently on the UK Tentative List for WHS designation.

In the light of the original decision to conserve the peatlands of the Flow Country, together with several more recent and laudable Scottish Government initiatives for Scottish peatlands in general and the Flow Country in particular, the IMCG believes that the Scottish Government understands the very substantial value accorded to the Flow Country by the international community. The IMCG therefore strongly urges the Scottish Government to refuse the application to construct a wind farm at Strathy South. The IMCG instead urges the Scottish Government to continue its support for more appropriate initiatives capable of ensuring the long-term future of this very special place together with its essential character, its particularly distinctive wildlife, its peatland ecosystem services and of course its local communities.

Yours

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Hans Joosten". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. Hans Joosten
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