MARINE RENEWABLES

THE WILDLIFE TRUSTS IN WALES

POSITION STATEMENT

October 2012
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ON MARINE RENEWABLES
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Context

The UK and Welsh Governments are committed to increasing the proportion of energy we use from renewables, and marine renewables will have a vital role to play in this. The UK Government is committed to generating 15% of energy from renewables by 2020. In order to reach this target, a substantial and unprecedented increase in development will be required in the UK’s marine environment to create energy generators and the associated infrastructure.

Marine renewable energy can come from three main sources; offshore wind, wave and tidal movement.

Information on the predicted impacts from marine renewables on the marine environment is limited but is developing. However, with the increase in size and number of offshore wind farm developments and the relative infancy of the wave and tidal industries the actual impacts of these developments remain uncertain.

Wales has 12,000km² of coastline, with an estimated marine renewables generating capacity of 6.2 GW¹ (and over 10GW if including the Severn Estuary).

Policy Line

Wildlife Trusts Wales believe that marine renewables have a key role in meeting the UK’s commitment of generating 15% of its energy needs from renewables by 2020. In principle, Wildlife Trusts Wales supports the development of the marine renewables industry. However, we recognise that uncertainties exist regarding the levels of impacts of these technologies on Welsh marine biodiversity and therefore a precautionary approach needs to be applied to their development. Furthermore, the impacts of marine renewables on land from support infrastructure must also be considered. We acknowledge that different technologies have different potential impacts and therefore, it is vital that the right technology is developed in the right place.

Wildlife Trusts Wales believe that all marine renewables development must deliver a net reduction in carbon emissions, while maintaining the integrity and function of marine and land-based ecosystems, and avoiding damage to nationally and internationally important features. Where appropriate and possible, marine renewables development should be designed and located to benefit marine biodiversity. A healthy and functioning marine environment will help to support the sea’s capacity to provide important ecosystem services such as oxygen production, carbon storage and food production.

Wildlife Trusts Wales believe that steps must be taken to ensure that renewable energy production does not adversely impact on the environment, both on land and at sea, and is in accordance with the principles of sustainable development:

¹ http://wales.gov.uk/topics/environmentcountryside/energy/renewable/marine/?lang=en
• All developments should be the subject of an Environmental Impact Assessment, which includes the identification of a suitable ‘end use’ where the appropriate level of decommissioning is identified which causes the minimal disturbance to the environment and allows restoration of habitats if needed;

• All developments which may have an effect on a Special Area of Conservation, Special Protection Area or Ramsar site must undertake a Habitats Regulations Assessment;

• Licence and consent agreements for marine renewable energy installations should include conditions requiring ongoing development, monitoring and management of the site to be responsive to best practice recommendations emerging from research programmes;

• The Marine Strategy Framework Directive should be used as a tool to help direct marine renewable developers and the licensing authorities towards marine sustainability;

• Wildlife Trusts Wales urge government, industry and environmental organisations to work more closely together, sharing data to establish better baseline data and assessment of cumulative impacts, thereby minimising the uncertainties that exist with regard to marine renewable installations.

Wildlife Trusts Wales fully support the sustainable development of marine renewable energy generation as part of the Wales’ and the UK’s energy policy, if taken alongside measures to reduce demand, conserve energy, decentralise supply and promote micro-generation. We believe that given the above, marine renewable energy generation can be compatible with a healthy natural environment.

Wildlife Trusts Wales believe that renewable energy schemes should support our aspirations for A Living Seas and Living Landscape by being planned, sited, designed, installed, managed and decommissioned in such a way that they do not compromise the ability of wildlife and people to adapt to climate change. This means the location, scale and type of marine renewable energy schemes should be determined by proper environmental assessment.