

ARGYLL'S OFFSHORE WIND FARMS – LOCAL IMPACTS TO BE STUDIED

“Argyll Renewables Communities” (ARC), comprising the community-owned Islay and Kintyre Energy Trusts, and the Tiree Community Development Trust, are pleased to announce the next phase of their social and economic impact assessment (SIA) of the proposed Argyll offshore wind farms. This follows a successful funding application to EU LEADER for £32,852, which will be matched by contributions from ScottishPower Renewables, HIE, SNH and the RSPB. The work will be carried out by a team including representatives of the local communities, the consultants SQW Consulting (authors of the ARC SIA Scoping Study), and Dr Jill Shankleman, a consultant sociologist with 25 years experience of social impact assessments, and will be completed in early 2011.

ARC was established to safeguard and enhance local community interests in the development and operation of the proposed Argyll offshore wind farms: the Crown Estate has signed exclusivity agreements with SSE Renewables for projects off Kintyre (378 MW) and Islay (680MW), and with Scottish Power Renewables off Tiree (1500MW). These are extremely large scale projects, capable of generating over one quarter of Scotland’s peak electricity needs and involving total investment estimated at between £7 and 9 billion. There will be potential opportunities for local businesses, job creation and investment in local services and infrastructure. However, there will also be issues related to the sustainability and fabric of the respective local communities which will need to be understood and sensitively debated.

The key issues for local communities are firstly, to understand all of the potential impacts of the development and operational activities associated with these wind farms, and secondly, how to maximise positive benefits and minimise negative outcomes. The SIA will enable local communities to develop their own opinions from a position of knowledge, and allow them to participate on an informed basis in discussions with stakeholders, especially the developers, the consenting authorities - Argyll and Bute Council and the Scottish Government, and the Crown Estate. It will also give local communities the confidence that their voice is being heard, that they are fully involved in the development process and that well-balanced judgments can be reached.

It is ARC’s contention that genuine collaboration between communities, corporate interests and consenting authorities can lead to both enhanced value for the developers and optimisation of benefits to communities. This should also facilitate the passage through the statutory consenting process in a constructive manner. “This is believed to be the first time local communities have commissioned an SIA for projects of this nature” said Philip Maxwell, Chairman of the Islay Energy Trust. “We are delighted to have secured the necessary funding to take this important study forward, and are very grateful for all the support we have received from many sources which endorses our participative approach. I look forward to a level of corporate-community cooperation which, along with the active support of the consenting authorities will ensure long term social, economic and cultural sustainability for the local communities.”

For further information, contact

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