

25th February 2015

Scottish Government Energy Consents and Deployment Unit
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Dear Sir/Madam

PROPOSED CAPLICH (SUTHERLAND) WIND FARM IN STRATH OYKEL ref: 15/00197/S36

Ramblers Scotland is writing to object to the above application to construct 20 turbines up to 132m in height at Caplich, Strath Oykel. While Ramblers Scotland is in principle supportive of renewable energy, we object to this scheme on the grounds of its significant negative impacts over a huge tract of land in the North West Highlands, which is of national importance in terms of landscape and to recreation and tourism interests, and in particular on its impact on three core areas of wild land. Wild land is identified by the Scottish Government in its National Planning Framework 3 document as a nationally important asset.

The main reasons for our objection are as follows:

1. The Environmental Statement and Landscape Visual Impact Assessment demonstrate that there would be significant negative effects on the landscape in an area of considerable natural beauty from the construction of these large industrial structures and associated 15km of new access roads.
2. The development falls partly within Core Wild Land Area 34 Reay Cassley, from which the turbines would be widely visible. It would also be highly visible from Wild Land Area 29 Rhiddoroch – Beinn Dearg – Ben Wyvis, and Wild Land Area 32 – Inverpolly - Glencanisp with the result that the wild characteristics of these areas would be severely diminished. The siting of this development in this sensitive location would therefore lead to the reduction in the areas of core wild land within this part of Scotland. Wild land is recognised by the Scottish Government as a nationally important asset, and Scottish Planning Policy guidance on appropriate locations for wind farms states that wild land is an Area of Significant Protection. While SPP recognizes that wind farms may be appropriate in these areas in some circumstances, it states “(f)urther consideration will be required to demonstrate that any significant effects on the qualities of these areas can be substantially overcome by siting, design or other mitigation.” (SPP, p39). In addition to the visibility of these turbines from core

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areas of wild land, the developer's Landscape Visual Impact Assessment demonstrates clearly that the wind farm will be seen from some of Scotland's most iconic mountains, including Suilven, Canisp, An Teallach and the Fisherfield mountains, and Seana Bhragh. The widespread visibility of this development therefore demonstrates the impossibility of mitigating its effects and safeguarding the wild land character of this area. It should also be noted that the proximity of 9 other windfarms (operational, consented or in application) within 35km of Caplich, as shown in Fig 4.9, will lead to a considerable cumulative impact across this part of Sutherland.

3. Although situated just outside the Assynt-Coigach National Scenic Area, the Landscape Visual Impact Assessment shows that there would be a significant impact on large areas of the NSA, and also the Fannichs, Beinn Dearg and Glencalvie Special Landscape Area.
4. This area has high value for outdoor recreation activities, most of which are dependent on the relatively natural or wild character of Assynt-Coigach and surrounding areas. These activities include those people using the Cape Wrath Trail/Scottish National Trail which passes close to the windfarm, and those who are climbing the iconic mountains listed above. These values will be diminished if a wind farm is developed in this location. Scotland's landscapes are extremely important to the economy, and this is especially the case in rural areas. A 2010 report by Scottish Natural Heritage, the Value of Nature-Based Tourism, looked at activities such as wildlife watching, walking, enjoying the landscape, adventure activities and field sports, and estimated their value to be worth £1.4bn to the Scottish economy, supporting 39,000 jobs. The Environmental Statement recognises the value of tourism in this area of Scotland, and we believe that if this wind farm were to be given consent, it would massively impact on the enjoyment of people visiting the North-West Highlands, with a subsequent impact on the businesses and communities in the area which currently benefit from tourism expenditure. Tourism in areas such as this depends on the maintenance of a reputation for unspoilt, natural beauty which would be seriously impaired by the proposed development.
5. The North West Highlands have a world class reputation for their relatively unspoilt wildness and absence of artificial structures. With Caplich located on the edge of this special tract of land and water it is especially important to safeguard the approaches to the area from the east and the views from the high ground to the west. Constructing wind turbines in such a location will bring no benefits to the scenery and considerable disbenefits in terms of impacts and perception of the beauty of the Assynt-Coigach area.

We would be happy to discuss this matter further at your convenience.

Yours faithfully

Helen Todd
Campaigns & Policy Manager

Ramblers Scotland is the representative body for walkers in Scotland and recognised by **sportscotland** as a governing body of sport. Our charitable aims are to promote walking, secure and facilitate access to land, and to protect the countryside. We have around 6,500 members in Scotland and 54 local walking groups, all run by volunteers.

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