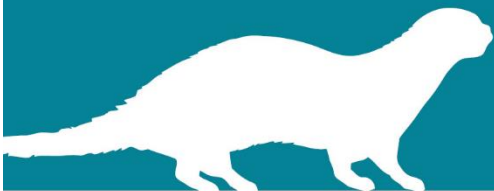




The
Wildlife
Trusts

Energy Security Bill: Second Reading Briefing

The Wildlife Trusts' briefing



Nature must be at the heart of the UK's vision for energy security

We are living through a time of great uncertainty, with geopolitical instability making itself felt here in the UK. Increases in the price of energy, on top of existing rises in the cost of living, mean millions of households are struggling to heat their homes and pay their bills.

The UK Government's Energy Security Bill is slated as a response to this crisis. Unfortunately, its approach of fast tracking renewables and ignoring easy wins like energy efficiency, will keep bills down at the cost of the natural environment.

Another way is possible. We can increase energy security, cut carbon and protect the natural environment.

Tackling the climate and nature crises together

At The Wildlife Trusts, we know we need to rapidly transition to renewable energy sources if we are to reach net zero. However, the world also faces an ecological emergency, which is inextricably linked to the climate crisis. Habitats and ecosystems not only store carbon away from the atmosphere, but also help us to adapt to the effects of rising temperatures.

We want to see renewable energy flourish, but it is essential this shift does not have unintended impacts for wildlife. For example, offshore wind will play a crucial role in the transition to a greener society, but with up to a 14-fold increase in offshore energy production a vast amount of new infrastructure will be built in the delicate marine environment. Whether built offshore or onshore, the installation, running and decommissioning of grid and cabling for offshore wind can cause disturbance and loss of vital habitats and food for species like badgers, bats, reptiles, water voles, fish, seals, porpoise, dolphins and whales. The infrastructure required to bring the estimated 140GW of energy onshore by 2050 must be shared and well-coordinated if we are to avoid drastic damage to the environment.



The Wildlife Trusts are concerned that the fast-tracking of renewables proposed in the Energy Security Strategy will not allow for new energy infrastructure to be carefully planned to avoid damaging nature. Rather than avoiding damage to the natural world, developers will be allowed to offer compensation instead, which is too often an inadequate substitute for the habitats that have been destroyed.

Efforts to reach net zero which jeopardise the health of our natural environment will not only fail, but will increase energy insecurity by worsening the effects of climate change. This was formally recognised by both the 197 Parties to the COP26 Glasgow Pact, and all 195 member governments of the IPCC.

Energy efficiency

Being energy efficient means reducing our overall demand for energy. We become more energy efficient when we use less energy, or switch to more efficient energy sources, like renewables.

The greenest energy is the energy we are not using. Even the greenest energy will have an impact on the environment, so we need to move towards energy conservation.

We can all take individual action to start using energy more efficiently by making simple choices like walking or cycling rather than driving or turning off lights when we leave a room. Much more crucial though, is for the UK Government to make interventions at a national-scale to increase efficiency. **The simplest, most cost-effective route to reducing our reliance on global gas markets would be to embark upon a nationally funded, locally led programme to insulate every home in the UK.** Not only would we save energy, but the government could lift millions of people out of fuel poverty.

Just as the phase out date for petrol and diesel cars has been pulled forward, it is time to upgrade our ambition for homes. The Wildlife Trusts want to see government setting a target to get as many homes as possible to Energy Performance Certificate Level C or equivalent by 2030.

A new programme for home insulation must also include:

- A minimum standard of energy efficiency for homes being sold or rented
- Funding for low-income households
- Technical and practical support for those improving their home's efficiency
- A bold government-backed communication campaign to get public buy-in
- Loans and other financial provisions for homeowners and landlords to make improvements, as recommended by the Green Finance Institute

Community energy

Alongside improvements in energy efficiency, changes are required to unlock the power for local energy markets to support communities to build onshore wind and solar.

Energy which is generated close to where it will be used is more efficient – the greater the distance that energy has to be sent through the electricity grid, the more energy which is lost in transit. By empowering communities to generate their own green energy, the UK Government can increase energy efficiency whilst also giving local people ownership over their transition to greener lifestyles.

The need for green renewables

In response to the energy crisis, we have seen acceleration in oil and gas licencing in the North Sea. This is short sighted and dangerous. In the midst of a climate and nature crisis, the last thing we should be doing is increasing our extraction of fossil fuels.

Now more than ever, we need to move towards more renewable, cheaper sources of energy generation, such as solar, wind and wave power. New onshore renewables are six times cheaper than the cost of running gas plants.

We are pleased the UK Government has committed to a 40% reduction in gas consumption by 2030 within the British Energy Security Strategy, but this is not enough. We urgently need clear commitments from government on the phase out of oil and gas. The Government has made a commitment to reaching net zero carbon emissions by 2050 and wants to be the first to leave the environment in a better state for the next generation. Achieving either of these targets will be impossible without a domestic phase out of oil and gas.

Producing green energy, protecting nature

The Wildlife Trusts want to see the Energy Security Bill protecting nature, tackling the climate crisis and keeping energy bills down. We want to see the following included in the Bill:

1) A presumption against development in protected areas

More must be done to avoid impacts from renewable energy developments in the first place. The mitigation hierarchy – the principles of avoid, reduce, mitigate and then compensate – must be strengthened and enshrined in law through the Energy Security Bill. To support this, the UK Government must state a presumption against offshore wind farm development and associated infrastructure within Marine Protected Areas. This will have the result of reduced consenting delays and reduced risks to the environment. Indeed, costs would also be reduced which are eventually passed to the energy user, which is critical when faced with a cost of living crisis.

2) Best practice design standards

In addition to a legally-enshrined mitigation hierarchy, industry must be encouraged to develop innovative design and technology which avoids and minimises environmental impacts. This will be supported through the development of nature-based design, but industry must be incentivised to do more.

3) Cable corridors for offshore developments

The Wildlife Trusts have for many years proposed the development of cable corridors for offshore energy development. The careful spatial planning of these corridors would allow cabling infrastructure to be placed in the most effective locations to reduce impacts on the environment and conflicts with other sea users. We propose no cable protection within these corridors to eliminate the need for compensation. To provide safe transmission of energy within the corridors, we propose exclusion zones to damaging activities such as fishing and anchoring. This would have the twin benefit of creating nature recovery zones along cable corridors. All of this would reduce consenting times and cost. The lack of cable protection



An arctic tern eats a sandeel in Northumbria - sandeels live in the seabed which can be damaged by cables (Richard Steel)

would result in a cost saving to developers and ultimately the consumer.

4) Grid needs to be designed with nature in mind

The new infrastructure required to tackle the climate crisis and provide energy security must be carefully planned, and designed with nature and communities in mind. Without this, projects will continue to be contentious and the government will fail to meet both their net zero and nature recovery targets.

For example, National Grid's recently published Holistic Network Design – which is supposed to explore the options for coordinated cabling of upcoming offshore wind developments to reduce the impacts felt by communities and the environment – will result in more infrastructure being put at sea, not less. We need to create a new green and sustainable energy network that will serve generations to come, and we need to make sure that nature is put at the heart of its design.