WIND TURBINE DEVELOPMENT

Park Important Bird Area UK 224

Eisgein / Muaitheabhal Wind Farm Project

Isle of Lewis · Scotland · United Kingdom

Beinn Mhor Power[1] has applied for development consent to erect 133 125m-high wind turbines in the Park **Important Bird Area (IBA)**, together with an 80 km network of roads and drains, ancillary equipment, transmission infrastructure, and rock quarries. The Eisgein Wind Farm project is also partly in a **National Scenic Area (NSA)** and in close proximity to the North Harris Mountains **Special Protection Area (SPA)** and **Special Area of Conservation (SAC)**, and the Lewis Peatlands SPA SAC **Wetland of International Importance (Ramsar)**. The Lewis Peatlands SPA SAC Ramsar is already the subject of a 234-turbine project by AMEC Project Investments and British Energy (Lewis Peatlands Wind Farm[2]), also currently in development consent proceedings.

The Eisgein Wind Farm is proposed on a site of exceptional conservation value. It is almost entirely composed of peatland habitats **active blanket bog** and **Atlantic wet heath** (both Annex I Habitats Directive, the former of priority Community concern); and it hosts a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) qualifying[3] bryophyte and vascular plant community. The developer's habitats and hydrology survey is cursory, and has no regard for recent developments in the understanding of the impact of wind farms in peatland areas[4,5]. The site is also an IBA classified by BirdLife International[6] for its Golden Eagle population. The upland bird assemblage at the site is of SSSI quality[7], including: **Red-throated Diver**, **Black-throated Diver**, **White-tailed Sea Eagle**, **Golden Eagle**, **Merlin**, **Golden Plover**, and **Dunlin** (all Annex I Birds Directive). The IBA's Black-throated Diver, White-tailed Sea Eagle, and Dunlin populations are of national importance, and likewise its population of **Greenshank** (Annex II Birds Directive). The site's Golden Eagle population is of international importance. In common with the rest of the island, the Park IBA also serves an important biological function in the north-east Atlantic migratory flyway for wintering and staging migrant waterbirds.

The potential impact of this project on Golden Eagle is of extreme concern. Park IBA hosts the second highest density of this species in the European Union. It meets the UK selection criteria[8] for SPA classification but has not been so classified, contrary to Article 4.1 Birds Directive. Golden Eagle is known to be particularly vulnerable to wind turbine impact and is already under stress at the site due to significant habitat deterioration in recent years (overgrazing by Red Deer). The Eisgein Wind Farm developer plans further severe deterioration of this internationally important Golden Eagle habitat. The developer predicts[9] that death by blade strike, breeding range abandonment, population attrition; habitat loss, reduction in prey, disturbance, and reduction in productivity are likely.

Wind turbines do not have to be located in Important Bird Areas. Plenty of alternatives exist. Please help to protect the Park IBA from unwise and unnecessary damage. Please write to Paul Smith **Paul.Smith@scotland.gsi.gov.uk before 24 June 2005, saying that you object to Beinn Mhor Power's Eisgein Wind Farm project because of its likely damage to an Important Bird Area of international significance. For more information please visit www.mwtlewis.org.uk**

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[1] Landowner led development by Eisgein Estate owner Nick Oppenheim
[2] www.lewiswind.com
[3] JNCC *Guidelines for the Selection of Biological SSSIs*: score 415
[4] *Windfarms and Blanket Peat*, R Lindsay and O Bragg, University of East London 2004
[5] www.rspb.org.uk/Images/lewiswindfarmpeatland_tcm5-69783.pdf
[6] Birdlife International, IBA Factsheet: *UK224 Park, Lewis*, www.birdlife.net/datazone/search/sites
[7] Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) *Guidelines for the Selection of Biological SSSIs*: score 46 (BTO Index)
[8] JNCC *SPA Selection Guidelines*
[9] Beinn Mhor Power, *Muaitheabhal Wind Farm Environmental* Statement. The developer's blade strike prediction of nine eagles directly killed is based on an unorthodox model which cannot be verified because site utilisation information has not been disclosed by the developer.