



[REDACTED]

19 September 2023

Dear [REDACTED]

Freedom of Information request: FOI2023/00647

Thank you for your Freedom of Information request received on the 26 August in which you requested the following:

Your request:

EXPERIMENTAL HYDROGEN PLANT AT GORDONBUSH WIND FARM

I wish to ask questions under the above Act regarding SSE Renewables' plans to build an industrial hydrogen plant at Gordonbush Wind Farm in Strath Brora, Sutherland. I understand that SSE is seeking money under the UK Government's Net Zero Hydrogen Fund which you administer.

QUESTION 1.

How much money have SSE applied for from your fund, and how much will you give them?

QUESTION 2.

SSE has already received in excess of £22 million of public money in constraint payments, purely for the windfarm at Gordonbush. They have also received a grant of £304,000 from the Scottish Government for this industrial hydrogen plant, and are now seeking even more money from you under this fund.

Given that the company has a reported a profit of £2.53 billion (of which SSE Renewables contributes £580 million), how does giving this non-British private enterprise yet more cash from the public purse represent good value for money?

QUESTION 3.

Today Strath Brora, in which Gordonbush Wind Farm lies, hosts 73 wind turbines and a hydroelectric scheme. We already shoulder a disproportionate burden for renewable energy, both in real terms and on a per capita basis.

If the UK Government backs the principle of Fair Net Zero how is supporting the over-development of Strath Brora considered equitable?

QUESTION 4.

We believe that this project is ill-conceived and will have a hugely negative impact on our quality of life, the peaceful enjoyment of our homes and consequent stress and disruption.

How can you justify supporting this project which clearly breaches basic human rights?

QUESTION 5.

We who live in the Scottish Highlands pay amongst the highest electricity prices in Britain, whilst at the same time

have the worst conditions contributing to fuel poverty: longer, colder winters; shorter winter daylight hours; older housing stock that cannot be brought up to modern standards. From our homes we also see chains of wind turbines producing 'renewable' electricity which goes anywhere but here.

How does your body justify further financial support to SSE PLC which contributes to the excessive fuel prices we experience in rural areas?

QUESTION 6.

There is enormous local opposition to this project in our rural community and, thus far, we have seen no public engagement from your body.

a) How can those of us who will be negatively affected by this scheme contribute to your decision-making process?

b) If you determine to support this project, what influence will your contribution of financial support have on the independence of the planning process?

QUESTION 7.

SSE's ambition for the production of hydrogen here in Sutherland defies all logic; viz:

- The hydrogen from Gordonbush would be produced dozens of miles from the market for the product. It can only be delivered in massive 44-Tonne tankers, creating further damage to our already crumbling infrastructure and adding unnecessary carbon to our environment, whilst "decarbonising" elsewhere.*
- The tanker movements on 8 miles of unfenced, single-track road with more than 20 blind bends, pose an obvious danger to crofters' livestock, wildlife, cyclists, runners, horse riders, leisure-seekers etc etc etc.*
- Nobody visits the Highlands to experience heavy industry or giant tanker movements, six days a week on single track roads. The prosperity of our tourist economy will be directly threatened by SSE's project.*
- SSE wants to abstract millions of litres of water from a local burn, and when that runs out pump it from our groundwater. We rely completely on private supplies from the groundwater for our domestic supply whilst SSE has a known history of damaging water supplies.*

How do you justify supporting such an incongruous and destructive scheme purely on the self-interested claims of a profit-motivated developer?

Our response

I can neither confirm nor deny whether UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) holds the information you have requested under section 41(2) information provided in confidence.

Section 41(1) of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) provides that information is exempt from disclosure if such disclosure would constitute an actionable breach of confidence. Section 41(2) provides an exclusion from the duty placed on a public authority such as UKRI to confirm or deny the existence of the information if the act of confirming or denying would itself result in an actionable breach of confidence.

We believe that is the case in regard to question 1 of your request.

To explain further, Innovate UK's guidance states that if applications are successful that their information will be published. It is therefore implied that all organisations can confidently apply to IUK and information relating to their application will be kept confidential unless they are successful. To confirm that an application has been received, but not funded, would be an actionable breach of this confidence. To confirm that an application has not been received would make it possible to determine if an unsuccessful application is submitted in the future.

Section 41 is an absolute exemption which means there is no requirement to consider the public interest test in neither confirming nor denying whether or not the information is held.

The fact section 41 of the FOIA has been cited should not be taken as an indication that the information you requested is or is not held by UKRI.

We are unable to provide information in response to questions 2 through 7 as these questions do not fall within the scope of the FOIA. Whilst the FOIA provides a right of access to recorded information held by public authorities, it does not require public authorities to generate new information to answer questions, including providing commentary or opinion, unless this is recorded information that we already hold. We are therefore unable to comment or provide an opinion on questions 2 to 7 of your request.

As part of our duty to advise and assist under the FOIA, you may find the following publicly available information of interest. Innovate UK publishes information on all its funded projects [here](#)¹ where you can search by participant to find information on funding to any organization you are interested in.

Regarding the 'Net Zero Hydrogen Fund', information on successful applicants for strands 1 and 2 of round 1 of this competition is published [here](#)².

Round 2 of this competition is still under assessment.

If you have any queries regarding our response or you are unhappy with the outcome of your request and wish to seek an internal review of the decision, please contact within the next 40 working days:

Head of Information Governance
Email: foi@ukri.org

Please quote the reference number above in any future communications.

If you are still not content with the outcome of the internal review, you may apply to refer the matter to the Information Commissioner for a decision. Generally, the ICO cannot make a decision unless you have exhausted the review procedure provided by UKRI. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: www.ico.org.uk.

If you wish to raise a complaint regarding the service you have received or the conduct of any UKRI staff in relation to your request, please see UKRI's complaints policy: <https://www.ukri.org/about-us/policies-and-standards/complaints-policy/>

Yours sincerely,


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¹ <https://www.ukri.org/publications/innovate-uk-funded-projects-since-2004/>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/net-zero-hydrogen-fund-strands-1-and-2-successful-applicants/net-zero-hydrogen-fund-strands-1-and-2-summaries-of-successful-applicants-round-1-april-2022-competition>