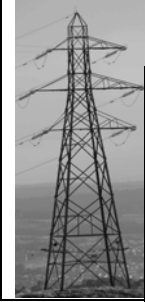


STIRLING BEFORE PYLONS

THE PUBLIC INQUIRY INTO THE BEAULY-DENNY POWER LINE

Strategy Session Wk 4: 27 Feb–2 March '07



This note is prepared for the benefit of community groups and their supporters, with an interest in the Beauly to Denny power line public inquiry. It is NOT a press release.

Week 4 started with the Reporters coming back with their response to SSE's request that the DTI technical adviser ask fewer questions, or give prior notice if he's going to raise awkward issues. It was a lengthy and unambiguous "No!" and must have been a little painful for SSE to hear.

They were however no kinder to the third party request to recall a witness to answer further questions about sub-sea cables, and refused this also.

Week 4 also saw the timetable catch up with itself, mainly because there were few or no questions for a number of the witnesses (those talking about noise, construction noise and vibration, forestry, geology and hydrology). The big-interest witnesses were Mark Turnbull on landscape, William Bailey of EMFs and Health, Keith MacLean on Consultations, David Keddie on Tourism, and Alan Leslie on Archaeology and Cultural Heritage. I offer a few observations on each of these, and others, below – to be read, as always, as a personal impression of what went on and possibly quite different from the conclusions that the Reporters may have drawn.

Mark Turnbull continued to stand up to cross-examination, and didn't budge from his dogmatic stance on what constitutes "sensitivity" (nothing matters much if it's not been designated a National Scenic area – not even a National Park), or his opposition to undergrounding.

William Bailey was there to minimise the importance of the scientific evidence on the harm to health that arises from living close to high-voltage power lines, and was closely questioned by John Campbell QC on behalf of Stirling Before Pylons. Dr Bailey's line was that opinions must be developed only by large panels of acknowledged experts drawn from a wide array of scientific specialisms, assessing carefully the quality and results of all the available scientific evidence. Even so, he is more approving of those panels and individuals who happen to agree with him. He went so far as to acknowledge that it is generally accepted that there is an association between living close to high voltage power lines and getting childhood leukaemia, and that siting power lines close to housing should be avoided (but only if doing so costs little or nothing).

The contrast between the quantities, depth and quality of relevant research available on the Health issues, compared with those available on Tourism, could hardly have been more marked. David Keddie wanted us to accept some rather light-weight research that he had carried out, regarding the possible economic impacts of the power line on tourism, in the absence of any other evidence. His two surveys draw dramatically different conclusions, so heaven knows what the real answer is to the

question of how much impact the power line would have on businesses. Keddie's evidence eventually resorted to a back-of-envelope calculation, based on some rather heroic assumptions, to come up with a best-guess that there would be a 3.2% reduction in tourism-related business within 10 km of the line. Under cross-examination, he acknowledged that perhaps the figure should have ended up as 4.3%, but retracted this later on re-examination by SSE's advocate.

Keith MacLean claimed that he'd carried out a splendid job on consultations, but admitted that his aim had been to find out the range of problems SSE might encounter in putting forward their proposals, rather than having any real wish to let people know what might be landed on them, or addressing their concerns. On being asked if he felt that getting 17,300 objections lodged to the proposals, with just 50-odd letters of support, really matched his claim that the consultation process had been successful and had led to consensus, he became a little defensive.

Alan Leslie outlined the methodology used to assess the impacts of the line on historical and archaeological sites. It turned out that this basically concentrated on archaeology rather than history, and that Historic Scotland themselves share this bias. Leslie acknowledged that local authorities should play a part that is equal to Historic Scotland in relation to sites that are not formally listed or designated, but also acknowledged that it was Historic Scotland, rather than the local authorities, that had been most involved in setting the parameters for the work he did. He also revealed that when it came to assessing the settings of sites, the dominant opinion was that of the landscape architect – and that the definition of “setting” is elusive and its assessment boils down, as in so many other areas of environmental impact assessment, to a matter of personal opinion.

Michelle Clark, from National Grid, had a disappointing day, giving evidence on noise. Clearly well-intentioned, she tabled an amendment giving updated figures for the noise levels assessed for several hundred properties along the line. It was pure misfortune that the property identified as having the highest noise impacts turned out to be owned by one of the people lined up to cross-examine, and worse, that the figures she provided were completely and very misleadingly wrong for all the properties along that stretch of line. It would be worth checking the figures for houses in your area, when SSE send out this document!

Week 5 will start with Gillian Beauchamp, giving evidence on the methodology used to assess Landscape and Visual Impacts – perhaps the most important element of all the evidence. This will be followed by several witnesses on ecology and habitat issues, and SSE's evidence will conclude with its witness on Planning issues.

The Strategy session of the Inquiry, dealing with all the over-arching and generic issues (including the need for the line, the health issues, and the principles of undergrounding, as well as a lot of methodological issues) will continue until 11 May, Tuesday to Friday, between 10 am and 5 – 5.30pm, at the Quality Hotel, next to Perth Station. There will be a 2-week break for Easter.

Local issues will be dealt with at four local sessions, starting in Inverness, and reaching Stirling on 20 November. The Stirling session, and the entire Inquiry, will eventually reach its end on 20 December 2007.

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