Paul Wheelhouse
Scottish National Party
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Hawick
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30 March 2021

Dear Paul,

I am writing to you as a representative of the Scottish solar energy industry to request the inclusion of a robust plan of action for the deployment of solar energy technologies in Scotland as part of your upcoming election bid in May.

Scotland has demonstrated leadership in respect to its net zero target of 2045, and its harnessing of certain renewable energy technologies, however it has fallen short when it comes to solar energy, which represents just 3% of all Scottish renewables.

Despite having similar populations and sitting on comparable latitudes, Scotland has less than a third of the solar capacity of our Scandinavian neighbours Denmark. We contribute just 2.5% to the UK's total despite accounting for more than a third of the landmass.

In fact, Scotland lags far behind its neighbours in terms of solar deployment across all key metrics, including per capita and as a percentage of annual electricity consumption. This is despite it being cost completive with wind energy (on a zero subsidy basis) due to the massive reduction in panel prices in recent years.

With an anticipated rise in the electrification of heat and transport, the incoming Scottish Government will need to carefully consider how it manages growing demand for electricity without the need for costly grid reinforcement. Solar energy, combined with battery storage, can complement Scotland's abundant wind due to the fact that solar generation usually occurs during low wind periods e.g. summer months when there is high pressure weather over Scotland.

A direct example of this is the 20MW Whitelee solar farm project that Scottish Power Renewables are progressing which will co-share the same grid connection as the Whitelee Wind farm. This solar farm will provide enough electricity to power around 5,000 residential properties without expensive grid reinforcement works being undertaken.

Unlike wind and other renewable energy technologies, solar is modular in nature so in addition to solar farms being able to generate electricity at a price that is completive with wind farms it can also be installed on residential and commercial rooftops. In fact it is now possible for property and business owners to generate their own electricity onsite from solar (without subsides) at a cost that is cheaper than buying it from a supplier. This makes solar a fundamental technology both in terms of delivering low carbon energy but also ensuring that we prevent fuel poverty. Furthermore due to its modular nature it lends itself to community ownership models as it can be scaled to meet the financial reach of a community.

Greater ambition for solar energy must be exhibited if Scotland is to secure its fair share of solar deployment and make up for lost ground against the rest of the UK and other counties such as Denmark. A number of barriers exist around items such as planning, business rates and grid connection applications that need to be resolved by strong leaders.

With key barriers removed Scotland is well placed to grow deployment to 4GW, more than ten times current levels, by the end of the decade, and an ambitious Government could potentially deliver as much as 6GW. Not only would this contribute towards the country's net zero ambitions but it would also create up to 6,000 highly skilled low carbon jobs for the Scottish economy and inspire a generation.

I invite you to meet with industry members to explore how this can be achieved in more detail, and urge you to set an ambitious target to focus minds and demonstrate leadership on solar energy in Scotland.

Yours sincerely,

Thomas McMillan
Chair
Solar Energy Scotland