

JFC/SD

05 July 2005

Professor Maxwell Irvine FRSE
The Royal Society of Edinburgh
22-26 George Street
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Dear Professor Irvine

RSE INQUIRY INTO ENERGY ISSUES FOR SCOTLAND

The Chief Executive asked me to coordinate the Council's response to your letter of 13 May 2005 sent to her predecessor. The under-noted comments reflect a consensus view of Senior Managers within the Council and hopefully will assist your Committee in its deliberations.

As requested, a copy of this response has been sent to The Royal Society by email.

Yours sincerely

J F Crawford
Head of Protective Services

CC Fiona Lees, Chief Executive

- Q1. It was felt that there should be considerable support for a move towards sustainable forms of energy generation, for example the use of bio-mass fuel. Increasing consumption of fuels results in a need for additional research to investigate the feasibility of improved combustion associated with reduced pollution potential: e.g. Clean Coal Technology. The current drive towards maximising diversity of fuel sources e.g. oil, coal, wind, wave, nuclear, ethanol, bio-mass etc should be supported.

- Q2. Scotland should be aiming towards self sufficiency in energy in general and in electricity in particular. This approach would ensure that economic growth is less hampered by external forces. The potential for maximising hydro-electric generation should be exploited, together with the support of strategies which minimise the effect of external forces.
- Q3. Reliance on imported oil and gas for energy needs leave Scotland and the UK open to external forces which in turn can affect economic plans, development and well-being. The recent conflict in the Middle East coupled with the economic expansion of the Far East will undoubtedly affect oil costs over the next few years and has ramifications for Scotland and the UK.
- Q4. The range of responses here is such that the Council is content to leave these to acknowledged experts within the particular fields.
- Q5. As a result of external factors/forces it is very difficult to forecast trends, uncertainties, availability and cost of energy sources over the next 20/45 years.
- Q6. In addition to the direct costs associated with the supply and distribution of energy, indirect costs (such as the effect on health of pollution associated with some energy-generating systems/global warming etc) have to be included in calculations of this nature.
- Q7. While so far there is little if any evidence to associate health risks with overhead electric power lines, the Council is aware of certain sections of the community where these lines give cause for concern and can see a case for more research and development into this issue.
- Q8. The Council is of the view that energy availability and price, while in strict economic terms not being inter-dependant on demand, will play a crucial role in Scotland's ability to compete in the International market place.
- Q9. The Council would highlight an increasing age profile within the population which in turn must generate an additional demand for supplies of energy to sustain comfortable living environments. At the same time the Council is aware that despite a reduction in population, there is an increase in the number of individual domestic households which in turn will generate increased demands for space heating.

Part of the increased demand could be met by more efficient creation, and distribution of energy while at the same time improved insulation of domestic premises. In the last two decades, private sector housing has now increased to approximately 70% and while all new homes are required to meet prescribed standards of insulation (via the building regulations) there is a considerable stock of older properties which cannot meet these standards. At present the Council is unable to quantify the associated costs of improved insulation for such properties.

- Q10. The public's continuing (and perhaps increasing) reliance on the private car (as opposed to improving public transport facilities) means that the demand for energy for transportation in Scotland must increase. The Council can see a case for increased investment in research into alternative fuels for vehicles which reduce pollution and in turn global warming.
- Q11. The Council is aware of continuing concerns within the public about mineral extraction, sewage and waste disposal. While these issues are fundamental to society in general, each generates particular concern (and in many cases opposition) whenever new facilities are proposed.
- Q12. The Council view is that environment improvement and economic growth cannot be met without a major increase in energy costs. This view is based on the need for energy generation to be more sensitive to its effects on the environment and that the cost of funding research and development into alternative and more sustainable energy sources will be significant.

Central Government is in an excellent position to alert the public to these matters but the biggest challenge will be to ensure that individual members of the public are aware of the consequences of their having an improved quality of life (as they see it). For example the cost of developing a more environmentally-friendly family car might be significantly higher than that of the current models which tend to be associated with pollution and global warming.

- Q13. At the present time energy generation and distribution appears somewhat remote to most members of the community and the Council can see a case for some local energy generation and distribution which would create employment and also focus attention on the links between pollution and the local environment.

East Ayrshire Council.

The Council would stress however that energy affordability is a big issue for a significant section of the community, particularly those on low incomes/benefits. The Council feels that part of the Committee's deliberations should focus on the ability of these sections of the community to afford the new technologies and that recommendations should be made to the Government on how the affordability issue should be addressed through the benefits system.