

Dr. Marc Rands
The Royal Society of Edinburgh
22-26 George Street
Edinburgh
EH2 2PQ

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The following are brief comments I have prepared for the Scotland's Energy Supply Inquiry, submitted via both e-mail and hard copy.

Local Consultation and Energy Supply in Rural Scotland: Identity and Perspective, the case of Shetland

As those involved in this inquiry are no doubt already aware, major energy projects can have massive social impacts on small rural communities, particularly those in remote locations as are found in the Highlands and Islands regions of Scotland. These areas often have unique perceptions of local identity and culture which gives them unique perspectives regarding the managing of their locality as well as concerns regarding the preservation of that identity and culture in the face of potentially major industrial disruptions.

My own research has focused on Shetland and how Shetlanders' perceptions of identity (and organising around those perceptions) have influenced interactions with the petroleum industry. Though having travelled throughout the Western Isles, there do certainly appear to be well developed local identities that could be an important factor to consider when planning major energy projects in rural Scotland (or major industrial, commercial, or defence projects of any kind). Barra, in particular, comes to mind, but there are certainly countless others throughout Scotland – a country known for its variety of distinctive cultural histories.

The role of identity in forming constructive arrangements for local consultation and the implementation of advisory panels has been a major focus of my research. Peoples' perceptions of local identity can be an impetus for seeking consultation with those involved in developing energy resources as well as a reason to ensure that adequate consultation takes place. In Shetland, Orkney, and the Western Isles, cultural identities have been developed over hundreds of years, formed in response to their unique historical contexts and physical environments. These local identities are significant cultural assets which, in the face of major industrial projects associated with energy development and the associated 'boom town' impacts (which have been well documented¹ - including overstressed public services and

¹ Just to name a few from a variety of locations:

Gramling, R. and S. Brabant. 1986. "Boom Towns and Offshore Energy Impact Assessment: The Development of a Comprehensive Model." *Sociological Perspectives* 29:177-201.
Strohmeyer, J. 1993. *Extreme Conditions: Big Oil and the Transformation of Alaska*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

infrastructure, increased crime, increased incidence of mental illness, corruption, environmental degradation, etc., etc.), can be seriously damaged as the physical environment changes and migration dilutes native populations. Sensitivity to local identity and culture can help mitigate the impacts of 'boom town' scenarios; development plans can account for minimisation of disruption to areas of cultural significance and tailoring of operations to reduce social and cultural disruption. A strong sense of local identity can also result in a strong civil society. If people see themselves as having a common cause and sense of purpose, they are more likely to be willing to organise on one another's behalf; those who might not face as much disruption themselves may still be willing to come to the aide of those they recognise as being from the same cultural identity. Therefore response to perceived threats may be much stronger and more effective.

Local residents will inevitably have a more in-depth knowledge of potential local risks that can be invaluable to environmental impact assessments, as many will have been employed in areas where they daily face the reality of their natural environment. Fishermen and crofters, for example, are likely to have first hand knowledge of seasonal variations in wildlife, migration routes, and behaviour patterns. They may have witnessed past disruptions and have a general idea of historical trends. This knowledge is likely to be even more useful than wildlife surveys (and the like) that may occur only once development is already planned. By having a good idea of the status of the natural environment prior to plans for development being drawn up, these issues can be taken into account from the outset. However, if plans already exist and wildlife assessments or environmental risk assessments are conducted merely to study whether extant plans will disrupt wildlife or be at risk from environmental factors (currents, unusual wind patterns, etc.), it may be far more difficult to alter those plans. HM Treasury has noted the desirability of 'upstream engagement' to policy makers, rather than 'downstream.'²

In the early 1970's, as North Sea oil finds increasingly suggested that Shetland was to be the host to major petroleum infrastructure developments, Shetlanders and others became increasingly worried that the resulting social and economic disruption would irrevocably damage Shetland heritage and the unique identity Shetlanders maintained. Previously, the primary industries focused on fishing, the wool trade (particularly knit-wear), and some (often subsistence) farming. Shetlanders feared that petroleum development would damage the rural character of the islands and in response, a massive political effort was organised that drastically altered the path of development. Their efforts, combined with those of sympathetic Westminster MP's who were also concerned about the Shetland way of life, resulted in a number of unique arrangements that gave the Shetland Islands Council (SIC) an unusual amount of influence and control over the development plans and subsequent operation of the Sullom Voe terminal (primarily via the 1974 Zetland County Council Act, which essentially devolved a great many powers to the local council). Of particular note was the ability to limit the dispersion of oil infrastructure (keeping nearly all of it at the Sullom Voe site) and worker housing (focused mostly around Mossbank and Brae, but somewhat dispersed in the hopes of not impacting these communities too much, while keeping them well away from Lerwick). The Sic identified the impacts that might have resulted from several terminal facilities and support bases scattered about the islands and acted to prevent

McMurray, D. 2001. *In and Out of Morocco: Smuggling and Migration in a Frontier Boomtown*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

² HM Treasury. July 2004. Science and Innovation Investment Framework 2004-2014. HM Stationery Office. p105.

it. It also allowed the SIC to act as a harbour authority. Unlike other politically similar petroleum-associated regions around the world, Shetland became as much an actor upon the activities of the industry as the industry was an actor upon Shetland.

Interestingly, the threat of cultural disruption has actually strengthened Shetland culture and identity in many ways. While for many the ‘rural character’ of many areas of Shetland has been significantly altered, other areas have seen a great revival. Fears of cultural doom, along with the need to organise the public of Shetland to respond to the perceived threat, inspired a resurgence in efforts to preserve Shetland culture and the resurgence in music, crafts, and such. Assisted by newly available funds resulting from oil development, this has, perhaps resulted in a stronger sense of cultural identity than in the years prior to North Sea oil discoveries, and certainly greater opportunity for music, dance, crafts, etc. to be passed down to younger generations who might otherwise not have the opportunity or interest to get involved. It also helped reverse some of the emigration that has plagued Shetland for so long.

That is not to say that there hasn’t been massive social disruption – there certainly has. The influx of workers created quite a culture shock, and traditional industries have been seriously affected (as youngsters seek jobs in oil or oil-support related fields rather than in fishing or tending sheep). However, these impacts are most certainly less than would have been the case had Shetlanders and the SIC had less say in the development.

It should be noted, however, that Shetland was able to ‘drive such a hard bargain’ and take the actions it did because of its relatively good economic situation at the time and its already entrenched identity politics (arguably a result of an ongoing sense of conflict with intervention from mainland Britain); in rural communities in desperate need of the investment that a major energy project might bring, there would likely be less ability (locally anyhow) to conserve cultural assets. Therefore outside assistance would be extremely useful to the process.

Some measure of local autonomy for Shetland is most certainly desirable in any number of administrative areas and certainly for any major energy project – at the very least in the design and planning stage, if not the actual operation of the project. The active engagement of the people of Shetland and the Shetland Islands Council should be a prerequisite for such undertakings. The cultural intricacies of Shetland, combined with its geographical remoteness make planning projects and administering services from Inverness or Edinburgh somewhat illogical. What works for Oban or Portree or Dumfries cannot necessarily be assumed to work for Lerwick. The SIC, while not always perfect, will certainly have a better perception of the needs of Shetlanders and the unique aspects of Shetland (be they cultural, economic, or environmental) that are likely to be impacted by such large-scale developments, especially given their extensive experience with the Sullom Voe oil terminal and related oil infrastructure.

In summary, a large degree of local consultation is highly desirable in any major industrial, commercial, or defence project that may disrupt the lives of area residents. In rural areas with unique cultural identities, this is even more important given the cultural disruption that may be caused. Fostering environments where such identities can thrive and be mobilised in response to whatever major project is planned can be very positive for the entire process as it can increase the effectiveness of local consultation processes while also benefiting the sense of common identity shared by those in that rural region.

I have kept my comments reasonably brief, as I am unsure how much attention they will actually receive. If anyone is interested in expanded commentary on any of the issues discussed here, please let me know and I would be happy to provide additional material. These views are entirely my own and do not necessarily reflect those of the Environmental Change Institute or the University of Oxford.

Thank you for conducting this inquiry, as the questions it seeks to address are certainly of utmost importance for Scotland, and even, it would be easy to suggest, for Britain, Europe, and the world. I will be looking forward to the inquiry's results with great anticipation.

Many thanks for your efforts,