



Green Investment Bank

Scottish Government Debate

Summary

RSPB Scotland recognises the potential benefits of locating the Green Investment Bank (GIB) in Edinburgh, given the importance of Scotland in a UK context to the expansion of renewables and meeting environmental objectives through land management. It should provide a reliable funding stream for well sited renewables projects – an important measure in moving towards a low carbon economy and in helping the UK to meet the targets in the Climate Change Acts. The real challenge for Scotland and the UK is to ensure that climate and renewables targets are met sustainably. A new report from Birdlife International¹ shows that, with a strategic approach, renewable energy need not cause environmental harm. The GIB should also lever in investment for energy efficiency measures, micro-renewables, community renewables projects and assisting a variety of sectors with reducing their demand for energy. We do not believe that investment should be geared towards energy projects which claim environmental credentials yet would result in increased emissions or cause harm to the most important areas for wildlife. **Putting environmental sustainability at the heart of the GIB would assert Scotland and the UK's position as leaders in the sustainable development of renewables.**

We also believe that the GIB should consider environmental priorities beyond energy projects and reducing emissions. It should also provide funding to establish 'green infrastructure' projects to help us *adapt* to climate change, such as 'managed realignment' of the coastline, restoration of peatlands, wetlands and woodlands.

Energy and Climate

The Climate Change Acts, particularly the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009, are already having a positive influence on ambitions around the world for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The threat of climate change can be best addressed through a combination of demand reduction, energy efficiency, investment in low carbon technologies and land management aimed at reducing emissions. Renewable energy delivered in the right places will be an essential component in the fight against climate change and will play a key part in moving Scotland and the UK towards a truly sustainable future. Scotland has a massive renewable energy potential, and is well placed to meet the Scottish Government's target for 100% of electricity to come from renewable sources by 2020. Research such as the '*Power of Scotland Secured*'² report, has shown that meeting our emissions targets is possible without the development of new fossil fuel or nuclear power stations, but will require significant investment in R&D for less well developed technology. While large scale renewables projects make financial sense for the big energy firms to invest in, ambition on smaller scale and community projects is limited by a lack of credit and the financial risk to those involved, and so the GIB could provide real value in making these possible.

It is crucial that investment is only directed towards renewables projects which do not cause environmental harm. This will require careful strategic planning both onshore and offshore. There is sufficient area available to accommodate onshore wind without damaging important sites for wildlife. A strategic approach to planning and development in the marine environment, including the National Marine Plan and the creation of a network of Marine Protected Areas, will be particularly important in securing the success of the emerging marine renewables industry. The potential for development of the industry in Scotland is enormous, and could contribute not only to meeting our climate change targets, but also as a significant energy export. **Financial levers are key; so decisions by the Green Investment Bank should ensure the avoidance of sensitive sites from the outset.** It is imperative that lessons are learned from other sectors, and that we become a world leader in developing a sustainable

¹ http://www.rspb.org.uk/Images/Renewable_energy_report_tcm9-297887.pdf

² http://www.rspb.org.uk/Images/POSS_FinalReport_tcm9-272152.pdf

industry. An expansion in the renewable sector must be accompanied by a reduction in emissions resulting from the thermal energy generation sector. In order to do this, we support the principle of an Emissions Performance Standard (EPS) for all new fossil fuel plants. RSPB Scotland recognises that carbon capture and storage (CCS) may well have an important role in our route to a zero carbon future. However, priority should be given to implementing CCS at existing thermal plant where installation will result in a net decrease of carbon emissions, rather than using CCS as justification to build new plant where only part of the emissions would be captured, such as the proposal at Hunterston – which would result in a net increase in overall emissions.

The increasing recognition of the importance of shifting to a low-carbon economy with thousands of green jobs as part of economic recovery measures is welcome, but until now has focused largely on renewables. **The current focus on energy generation jobs could be broadened to include other sectors, such as environmental management and wildlife tourism, energy efficiency, especially in relation to housing stock, demand reduction programmes, and land management.** It is also vital that measures to create jobs do not lead to any short-term economic fixes at the expense of the environment and thus damaging sustainability in the longer term.

Green Infrastructure

Green infrastructure can be incorporated in both urban and rural areas, and supports economic regeneration by attracting inward investment, increasing land value and attracting visitors to pleasant wildlife-rich places, where people want to live and work. Physical and mental wellbeing and life expectancy are being increasingly linked to access to a high quality natural environment. Glasgow University research published in *The Lancet*³ showed that exposure to the natural environment has an independent effect on health – populations that are exposed to the greenest environments have the lowest levels of health inequality related to levels of income deprivation. More recently, research by a partnership of Scottish universities has demonstrated that greater access to green space reduces stress levels.⁴ This demonstrates the link between social and environmental justice and health.

Futurescapes⁵ is the RSPB's contribution to landscape-scale conservation, a growing effort among conservation groups to provide more large-scale habitats rich in wildlife, and diverse, green spaces for people to enjoy. With continued biodiversity loss and the effects of a changing climate, we must redouble our conservation efforts and up the scale of our activities, to enable existing species to survive and to provide them with the flexibility to respond to these pressures. Appropriately managed natural habitats can cost-effectively provide natural services such as flood alleviation, pollution reduction, carbon storage and adaptation to the impacts of climate change. Already, Scotland's natural landscapes and wildlife provide the resources and the backdrop for a number of our key industries including food and drink, the creative industries and tourism. Currently sources of funding for this kind of work are very limited. Investment in Scotland's natural assets through establishing green infrastructure makes both environmental and economic sense, and we believe this should be one of the measures that the GIB takes forward.

In conclusion, the Green Investment Bank must be just that – using financial investment as a means of ensuring the move to a low carbon economy, a healthy robust environment without damage to sensitive sites and wildlife, and a more sustainable society, environment and economy.

For further information please contact:

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Email: aedan.smith@rspb.org.uk or julia.harrison@rspb.org.uk RSPB is a registered charity: England and Wales no. 207076,

Scotland no. SC037654 – FEB 2012 RSPB Scotland is part of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the UK-wide charity which speaks out for birds and wildlife, tackling the problems that threaten our environment. Nature is amazing - help us keep it that way.

³ [http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(08\)61689-X/fulltext](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(08)61689-X/fulltext)

⁴ <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0169204611003665>

⁵ <http://www.rspb.org.uk/futurescapes/>