

**David Stewart**  
**Scottish Labour Regional MSP for the Highlands and Islands**  
**Speech in the Scottish Parliament 17<sup>th</sup>. January 2008**

*Debate on Energy*

There can be few more important debates than that on the future of energy in this nation, particularly as the United Kingdom is now a net importer of oil and gas for the first time in a generation. The debate draws out strong emotions, with technology versus technology and process versus process.

Advocates have argued their often conflicting cases with an intensity that would bring a blush to the face of a tattooed gangland leader in Los Angeles.

It can also be a complicated debate, with the technospeak of product life cycle, proven technology, carbon capture and storage, security of supply and—my personal favourite—avoiding Russian-end supply chain, which I am sure the minister will be able to explain on a flip chart later.

Where, however, is consideration of the energy needs of the ordinary Scottish citizen in Leith, Lerwick or Lossiemouth?

The lights might not go out all over Edinburgh, but if we get the energy balance wrong in the next decade, we will be paying over a barrel—or, indeed, over a therm of gas—to countries with the political stability of Burma and the civil liberties record of Zimbabwe.

One of the most fluent and well-argued documents on the subject is the Royal Society of Edinburgh's inquiry into energy.

It concluded that the challenge is to meet the growing aspirations of the developing world, not least China and India, while mitigating the impact of global climate change.

The UK is now more reliant on imported energy, at a time when the international market is much more competitive.

The developed world has a particular responsibility to carry the torch and show leadership in reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

I mention in passing that I am very pleased that the first act of the incoming Labor Government in Australia was to sign the Kyoto protocol.

That should have been done many years ago.

I will cover three points: first, the importance of developing further what I call the father of renewable energy—hydropower; secondly, developing the role of biomass energy; and finally, examining the increased role that microrenewables and decentralised energy systems can play in the future.

As we have already heard this morning, the context of the debate is the Westminster Government's white paper on energy and the Energy Bill.

As the introduction to the white paper says, articulately in my view,

"More than two thirds of the world's carbon dioxide emissions come from the way we produce and use energy".

We should focus on three things—some members have already mentioned them.

First, we must focus on saving energy, which we sometimes forget about.

Secondly, we need to develop cleaner energy.

Finally, we should ensure that we can secure reliable energy supplies at competitive prices that are set in the market.

Renewables play an important role, particularly hydropower.

As members are well aware, Scotland has a proud record in that regard.

Members will need no history lesson from me, but I will mention the important role that hydropower has played in our history.

Back in 1896, the first hydropower station was built at Foyers by the British Aluminium Company.

Around 1900, a large hydropower station basically was responsible for the development of the village of Kinlochleven.

As members will also be aware, Tom Johnston, Labour's Secretary of State for Scotland under Winston Churchill, nationalised hydropower in the 1940s and created a network of dams and transmission towers that provided electricity to poor Highlanders for the first time. Cynics might say that that would never have happened under the current planning regime.

However, it is perhaps for others to make that point.

Hydropower is not some bygone relic of a forgotten age.

The Glendoe project, near the banks of Loch Ness, will provide the largest hydropower station for half a century.

It will provide clean renewable energy that could provide enough light for every household in Glasgow.

Hydro is cheap when oil costs around \$100 a barrel, and its operating costs are one tenth of those of gas-fired or coal-fired stations. Is it not time for a hydro revolution? Can the minister tell us what work is being undertaken to develop the potential for new sites and developments?

If the minister wants a campaign slogan, I suggest "It's Scotland's water".

Scottish Renewables tells me that the potential to increase the capacity of hydropower lies in small-scale projects and run-of-the-river developments.

As members will probably know, the Garrad Hassan report for the Scottish Executive in 2001 estimated that there is potential for small-scale developments up to around 30MW.

A renewable energy inquiry in 2004 estimated that small-scale projects could provide about 11MW by 2020.

I ask the minister to consider three further points when he sums up.

First, could he comment on the development of pump storage technology?

Secondly, are there any plans to streamline planning for hydropower, so that local authorities can determine applications under 5MW?

Finally, what plans are there to develop more small-scale hydro developments and upgrade them on a strategic basis?

Hydropower must, of course, be developed with environmental considerations very much to the fore.

Biomass has an important role to play in energy generation.

For example, a new factory has been opened in Ross-shire that will allow wood pelletisation to be developed for domestic combined heat and power.

That will stop the importing of wood pellets from abroad, which will mark a step change in that technology.

On microrenewables, WWF has said that our reliance on centralised energy generation is wasteful, given that two thirds of the energy that is generated is lost in the form of heat and through long-distance transmission.

Microrenewables have an increasing role to play.

In Wick, for example, hot water from the Old Pulteney distillery is piped to homes, businesses and Caithness general hospital. Microrenewables also play an important role in innovation, particularly in rural areas, where they provide partial energy self-sufficiency.

I congratulate Sarah Boyack on her energy efficiency and microgeneration bill proposal.

Microrenewables provide local power schemes that are under community control, which can contribute to marginal economies.

We need to work smarter, not necessarily harder.

Strathclyde University has programmed a computer that can switch off household fridges during the peak period of the "Coronation Street" tea break, which can ensure that we have intelligent and responsive homes.

We all know that the task is great, but Scotland has the opportunities and skills to achieve it, not in a self-serving way but as a partner in the UK.

With appropriate development and the right technologies at a sustainable scale, and using the proven skills of our Scottish workforce, we can take a lead in Europe and beyond, and we can contribute to meeting our global climate change responsibilities.