

Onshore wind to make a comeback with the British Government

Wind power supporters were pleased in February 2020 when the Government announced that in 2021 the Government would issue some long term contracts for onshore wind and solar power for the first time since 2015 (called 'contracts for difference' or CfDs). This is on top of more contracts for offshore wind, included in which would be a special facility for floating offshore wind power.

This is good, although we still wait to see how much pudding will actually be served. Will enough contracts be handed out to make progress towards the net zero-by2050 target credible? Will, in fact, onshore wind and solar be offered more than crumbs in terms of the size of their contracts? If things panned according to the purely 'illustrative' impact statement then there would only be crumbs. Then the Government would, at this stage, at least, be inclined not to scare the strong ranks of anti-windfarm Tory backbenchers by 'illustrating' large amounts.

Currently onshore wind is generating around 10 per cent of UK electricity consumption measured on an annual basis. Even on the basis of just Scottish likely sites this can be increased to over 15 per cent within five years or so. But I imagine that onshore wind will be expected to be very cheap – no more than wholesale power prices, or at least expectations for them. We don't know what these will be. As I speak in the middle of the C virus lockdown these prices are rock-bottom – but who knows what will happen in the future. Oil and gas price crashes can be followed by spikes if too much oil and gas production has been 'destroyed' by low prices.

One proposed change in the rules governing the contracts for difference (CfD) issue will encourage wind and solar operators to stop sending power to the grid when wholesale power prices are negative. Of course as time goes this happens more and more often as the proportion of renewable on the grid increases because of the there is more often excess wind and solar being generated to what is demanded. This could be an incentive to install more batteries next to windfarms and solar farms. What however is certain is that this trend is exacerbated by the fact that nuclear power stations will not turn off to accommodate more renewable – it always has to be the other way around, for contractual reasons, if not technical ones. In effect nuclear power makes renewable more expensive just by generating!

See <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/contracts-for-difference-cfd-proposed-amendments-to-the-scheme-2020>

Noise

Meanwhile a Finnish based meta review of the evidence has concluded that so-called 'infrasound' produced by windfarms does not harm people. Infrasound, according to a favourite argument by some of the wackier anti-windfarm campaigners is sound which humans cannot hear but which has an insidious damaging effect on people. The study upholds the statutory guidance which refuses to acknowledge noise that you cannot hear. Question: is noise that you cannot hear noise? I don't think so! See:

https://yle.fi/uutiset/osasto/news/study_wind_turbine_noise_not_the_cause_of_health_symptoms/11313640