

## Renewable energy targets unachievable in an independent Scotland experts warn

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The Scottish government's ambitious targets for renewable energy would become "politically unachievable" in an independent Scotland, experts have warned.

A study by five energy academics, led by Dr David Toke of the University of Birmingham, casts doubt on notions that Westminster would continue to pay for Scotland's renewable energy targets if it becomes independent from the UK.

The report, published this week in *Political Quarterly*, states: "The Scottish government has led the way in the pursuit of ambitious renewable energy objectives, but it is still the case that without the subsidies paid by electricity consumers in the rest of the UK, the Scottish government's ambitious targets for renewable energy would be politically unachievable."

Dr Toke said: "Scottish independence will only be good for renewable energy if the Westminster government agrees, in advance, to pay the same rates for Scottish renewables as is available south of the border. However, no such agreement exists, or is likely to exist."

Political support for renewable energy development, especially offshore renewables, is particularly conspicuous in Scotland and is a centre piece of Scottish National Party policy. Indeed, the report notes that the Scottish government has led the way in the pursuit of ambitious renewable energy objectives.

But it adds: "However, the Scottish government's support for renewable energy development is built on something of a paradox because, put simply, without the subsidies paid by electricity consumers in the rest of the UK, the Scottish government's ambitious targets for renewable energy would be politically unachievable. It is argued that if Scotland does move towards independence, then there could be little reason for the UK to continue paying (much) of the subsidies since the resulting renewable generation would no longer contribute towards UK renewable energy targets."

In their conclusions, the experts warn that in practise, funding a significant expansion of Scottish-based off-shore renewable under independence would "lead to considerable increases in Scottish electricity prices".

The report considers a number of potential scenarios and suggests that one option for those favouring Scottish independence may be to accept that Scottish targets for renewable energy need to be reduced.

"As with other aspects of the independence debate, Scottish emotions may push them one way, but hard-headed financial calculations may push them towards seeing continued union as providing a basis for the achievement of good progress towards Scottish renewable targets," the report concludes.

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For more information or to see a copy of the paper, please contact Deborah Walker, Media Relations Manager for Social Affairs at the University of Birmingham. [d.s.walker.1@bham.ac.uk](mailto:d.s.walker.1@bham.ac.uk) (mailto:d.s.walker.1@bham.ac.uk) Tel 0121 414 9041 or (m) 07776 465138.

### Note to Editors

- The report "Scotland, renewable energy and the independence debate: will head or heart rule the roost?" by David Toke, Fionnguala Sherry-Brennan, Richard Cowell, Geraint Ellis and Peter Strachan, is due to be published in the academic journal, *Political Quarterly*, in the week beginning February 11th.
- Dr David Toke is a Senior lecturer at the University of Birmingham, Fionnguala Sherry-Brennan is a Research Fellow at Cardiff University, Geraint Ellis is a Senior lecturer at Queens University Belfast, and Peter Strachan is a Professor at Robert Gordon University.
- The paper being published in *The Political Quarterly* is based on research done for the project 'Delivering Renewable Energy Under Devolution'. This is a recently concluded two-year research project, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (RES-062-023-2526), to assess the effects of devolution within the UK on the delivery of renewable energy: wind, solar, biomass, hydro, wave and tidal power. The project was delivered by a team of researchers led by Dr Richard Cowell of the School of Planning and Geography, Cardiff University. The team is Dr Geraint Ellis (Queens University Belfast), Professor Peter Strachan (Robert Gordon University), Dr David Toke (Birmingham University) and Dr Fionnguala Sherry-Brennan (also of Cardiff University). This study ran from January 2011 to January 2013, and has drawn on more than 80 interviews with senior figures in government (at all levels), politicians and officers, energy companies and trade associations, and non-governmental organisations, supported by the analysis of policy and planning documents.

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