

ASA
Adjudication
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Save Our Unspoilt Landscape
Western House
Main Street
Lowick
Northumberland
TD15 2UD

Date: 22nd November
2006
Media: Circular, Leaflet
Sector: Utilities

Industry Complaint
From: Manchester

Complaint:

A circular, for Save Our Unspoilt Landscape (SOUL), was headlined "Please help us to keep these monsters out of your back yard" and featured images of wind turbines on the front page and across the bottom of pages 2 and 3. Text on the first page of the circular claimed "There is clear evidence that these turbines will do enormous damage to the local environment, to the local economy and to the lives of local people. And there is also clear evidence from countries which have tried the wind power experiment proving that wind power generation is a hugely expensive and massively inefficient failure". On page 2 of the circular, text stated "No wind = no power. Wind speeds over 45 mph = danger = reduced power. Wind speeds over 56 mph = shut down = no power. This means that wind turbines are incredibly inefficient". Headline text in the next column stated "Will wind turbines reduce CO2 emissions? NO". Text on page 3 of the circular stated "This sprawling carpet of vast steel structures will need to be connected to the national grid, which will mean new powerlines, pylons and substations across our countryside. BUT the national grid can't cope with any more input from wind turbines at the moment. 'Wind Farm' builders are now being told it could be 10 years before their turbines are connected to the grid. Yet still the rush to build goes on ... Surveys carried out in areas of Scotland, Cumbria and Wales where wind turbines have been built or are planned indicate that over 25% of visitors would not return to these areas".

Pendragon Consultants Ltd, on behalf of Force 9 Energy, challenged whether the following claims were misleading and could be substantiated:

1. "There is clear evidence that these turbines will do enormous damage to the local environment, to the local economy and to the lives of local people";
2. "there is also clear evidence from countries which have tried the wind power experiment proving that wind power generation is a hugely expensive and massively inefficient failure";
3. "This means that wind turbines are incredibly inefficient";
4. "Will wind turbines reduce CO2 emissions? NO";
5. "This sprawling carpet of vast steel structures will need to be connected to the national grid, which will mean new powerlines, pylons and substations across our countryside";

6. "the national grid can't cope with any more input from wind turbines at the moment" and
7. "Surveys carried out in areas of Scotland, Cumbria and Wales where wind turbines have been built or are planned indicate that over 25% of visitors would not return to these areas".
8. The complainants also challenged whether the image of the wind turbines along the bottom of pages 2 and 3 was misleading because it was an inaccurate representation.

Codes Section: [3.1](#), [7.1](#) (Ed 11)

Adjudication:

1. Complaint upheld

SOUL sent Force 9 Energy's planning application for the Barmoor wind power station and argued this confirmed that the station would have an adverse visual impact on the environment. They argued that, because the turbines were likely to be built overseas and specialised construction workers would need to be brought in to erect them, the local economy would not benefit from the construction of the station. They sent surveys by VisitScotland, the Wales Tourist Board and the Cumbria Tourist Board, which they believed demonstrated the adverse effect of wind power stations on tourism and asserted that tourism was the major area of economic growth in Berwick Borough. They argued that there was inevitably a lack of data about the long-term effects of wind power on tourism. They sent academic research on the noise made by wind power stations which they believed showed the Barmoor station would have an adverse effect on the quality of life of local residents. They sent a statement by residents involved in an anti-wind farm campaign in South Cumbria which asserted that a local wind farm was noisy, had an adverse visual effect and had very little benefit to the local economy.

The ASA noted that Force 9 Energy's planning application referred to the visual effect of the station but did not describe that effect as adverse. We did not consider SOUL had demonstrated that labour would have to be imported to construct the station, nor that any importation of labour would do "enormous damage ... to the local economy". We noted the surveys by VisitScotland and the Wales and Cumbria Tourist Boards assessed the potential impact of wind farms on tourism but did not assess the impact of existing developments. We noted that the survey by VisitScotland found there was a consensus among visitors that, "wherever possible, wind turbines should not be located in or near popular 'tourist areas'", but noted the survey also found that "the majority of visitors were at least conditionally positive towards wind farm development from a tourism perspective". We noted the survey by Wales Tourist Board found that 22% of respondents would be likely to avoid any parts of the countryside with wind farms, but that 66% would not. We noted the survey by Cumbria Tourist Board found that, while most visitors were not concerned about seeing wind farm developments in the area, between 7% and 10% of visitors would be deterred from visiting the area and that figure would equate to over a million visitors and at least £75 million of spending in the local economy. We considered that, taken together, the surveys did not conclusively prove that all wind farm developments damaged local economies. We noted SOUL's argument that there was a lack of data about the long-term effects of wind power on tourism, but reminded them that the leaflet claimed there was "clear evidence" of

that long-term effect. We did not consider that the statement from the anti-wind farm campaign in South Cumbria was adequate substantiation of the effect of wind farm developments and noted that while it asserted the local wind farm was noisy, it also said three other wind farms previously built in the local area had not created the same problems. We considered that, because SOUL had not provided a comprehensive economic assessment of the potential impact of the wind farm or evidence of reduced tourist numbers or reduced quality of life from other wind farm developments, they had not provided appropriate substantiation for the claim "There is clear evidence that these turbines will do enormous damage to the local environment, to the local economy and to the lives of local people". We concluded that the circular was misleading on that point.

2. Complaint upheld

SOUL sent reports produced by companies that operated the National Grid in Germany and Ireland and an annual press conference document produced by the German company, E.ON Netz, which operated Germany's national grid for 40% of its wind capacity. They also sent the Renewable Energy Foundation (REF)'s submission to the 2006 Energy Review and an article by an independent consultant that assessed the costs of wind energy generation in Europe. E.ON Netz's annual report of 2005 referred to two major German studies that concluded wind energy currently provided 8% of its installed capacity. It also stated that traditional power stations with capacities equal to 90% of the installed wind power capacity must be permanently online in order to guarantee power supply at all times. It projected that by 2020, with a forecast wind power capacity of over 48,000MW, 2,000MW of traditional power production could be replaced by wind farms. E.ON Netz's annual press conference document stated that power lines measuring 2700 km needed to be laid by 2020 and predicted that, if legislators were to compel system operators to lay those lines as cables, the cost might be as high as €20 billion.

The report produced by Ireland's ESB National Grid documented studies that simulated Ireland's generation system and found that, in the situations looked at, total generation costs increased significantly. SOUL pointed out that, while the report did not examine potential additional costs of investment into transmission infrastructure, it did comment that the cost of reductions in CO₂ emissions achieved by wind energy appeared high relative to other alternatives.

The REF submission discussed the E.ON Netz reports and two articles on wind power in Denmark, published in a peer reviewed journal on civil engineering. The REF argued that the E.ON Netz reports demonstrated wind was not an alternative to nuclear power and could not reduce the need for gas and coal stations but might supplement conventional generation. They pointed out that nearly 80% of the energy generated from wind power in Denmark had to be sold at a loss to Norway, Sweden and Germany because it could not be accommodated to the Danish grid and argued that, while the articles did not dismiss wind energy altogether, they supported the REF's argument that wind could only supplement conventional generation. The REF also argued that the articles demonstrated the best provision of energy from wind power would be from offshore developments. They argued that, while some analysts thought evidence from Germany and Denmark irrelevant to the UK because of the UK's greater potential capacity for wind power, others had identified flaws in assessments of the UK's capacity that suggested evidence from those countries should be considered when projections were made about future provision of wind energy in the UK.

We noted that the report and annual press conference document produced by E.ON Netz

referred to the difficulties they faced in integrating wind power to the national grid, but did not state that wind power had failed. We noted that the ESB National Grid report used modeling and simulation to predict the potential costs of wind power and did not focus on Ireland's experience of existing wind power provision. We considered that, while the reports sent suggested Germany and Denmark had experienced great difficulties in integrating wind power to the national grid, they were not clear evidence of the failure of wind power in those countries. We noted that there was a lack of consensus among analysts about whether capacity for wind energy in the UK, Germany and Denmark could be compared and considered that the claim could potentially exaggerate the relevance of evidence from other countries by suggesting its relevance was generally agreed. We concluded that the claim was misleading and asked SOUL to amend it.

3. Complaint upheld

SOUL argued that the amount of electricity generated by wind power stations was variable because wind speed fluctuated and because turbines had to be shut down when wind speed was too high. They argued that the reports they sent from E.ON Netz in Germany confirmed that wind power was variable and generated a small percentage of its installed capacity. They pointed out that the leaflet gave examples of wind power output in Germany and Denmark, measured against installed capacity to give a "capacity factor". They asserted that in recent years, wind power in Denmark had an average capacity factor of 20%, while Germany's average capacity factor was between 15% and 17%. They sent an article by the DTI that estimated the UK's capacity factor for wind farms between 1998 and 2004 at 29% and pointed out that capacity factor varied from region to region: from 21% in North-East England to 36% in Northern Ireland. They argued that, compared with a modern gas fired conventional power station with a capacity factor of between 75% and 90%, wind energy was inefficient.

We noted that another DTI document on wind energy stated that capacity factor should not be confused with efficiency. The document explained that efficiency normally referred to the amount of energy extracted as a fraction of the total energy available. We noted that capacity factor referred to the amount of energy extracted as a fraction of the theoretical maximum amount of energy and not the amount of energy actually available to a turbine in the course of a year. We did not consider SOUL's evidence suitable to substantiate the claim that wind energy was inefficient and told them to ensure they held full substantiation for all claims in future.

4. Complaint upheld

SOUL sent a report commissioned by the REF and a conference paper given by the representative of a power generating company to substantiate their claim. The report argued that CO₂ emissions savings were not guaranteed by the introduction of wind power and that forecasts for CO₂ emissions savings produced by the DTI and Defra were inconsistent and overstated. The conference paper said it had been estimated that the entire benefit of reduced emissions from renewable energy had been negated by increased emissions from part-loaded conventional power plants used as back-up. SOUL also sent their own calculations based on data from reports by the Environmental Change Institute and the DTI. They pointed out that their leaflet claimed "wind power generation ... WILL NOT: Reduce our CO₂ emissions by more than 1 or 2%" and said their calculations supported that claim.

We noted that the report argued CO₂ emissions savings were not guaranteed but did not state that no reductions in emissions would be achieved. We noted that the conference paper

referred to an estimate, but did not state conclusively that the reduction in emissions had been negated by increased emissions from conventional power plants used as back-up. We considered that text in the SOUL leaflet that stated "wind power generation ... WILL NOT: Reduce our CO2 emissions by more than 1 or 2%" contradicted the headline claim "Will wind turbines reduce CO2 emissions? NO". We concluded that the claim was misleading.

5. Complaint upheld

SOUL sent Force 9 Energy's planning application for the wind power station at Barmoor, which they believed showed that new overhead transmission lines would be required. They asserted that the size of the overhead transmission line would be determined by the amount of power it would have to carry and argued it was inevitable that, if more wind power stations were built in England and Wales, existing lines would have to be upgraded and bigger transmission lines would be needed to link those stations to the National Grid.

We noted that, if more wind power stations were built in England and Wales, the National Grid would require reinforcement and expansion. However, we considered that readers were likely to see the claim as a reference to the local development at Barmoor. We understood from Force 9 Energy that one new substation would be built onsite and that electricity would be exported from the site to an existing substation at Berwick using overhead transmission lines on wooden poles. Because we understood that pylons would not be used to export electricity from the wind power station and only one new substation was planned, we considered the text "pylons and substations across our countryside" exaggerated the impact that the proposed wind power station would have on Barmoor. We concluded that the claim was misleading and asked SOUL to amend it.

6. Complaint upheld

SOUL sent a national press article that claimed the National Grid was unable to cope with the number of wind farms applying for connection. They argued that the reports they held from one of Germany's National Grid operators demonstrated that, if more wind farms were built in England and Wales, existing transmission lines would need to be upgraded and new grid capacity would need to be built in both countries.

We understood from the National Grid that there was some need for reinforcement of the network in Scotland because of an unprecedented amount of offers, mainly from wind farm developers, to connect to the network, but that there were no insurmountable technical difficulties in accommodating wind power generation to the grid nationally. We considered that, without further qualification, readers would understand the claim "the national grid can't cope with any more input from wind turbines at the moment" to mean that wind power generation could not currently be connected to the National Grid in any part of the UK. Because we understood that was not the case, we concluded that the claim was misleading.

7. Complaint upheld

SOUL sent surveys carried out by VisitScotland, the Wales and Cumbria Tourist Boards in support of their claim. They said one of the surveys carried out by the Cumbria Tourist Board found that 19% of visitors would avoid areas with wind turbines and 10% said that the presence of wind turbines would mean they visited less often. They thought that meant 29% of visitors would be affected by the presence of wind turbines. They argued that, when data from the three surveys was combined, the average number of visitors affected would be 26% and that that substantiated the claim.

We noted that more than 25% of visitors polled by VisitScotland were less likely to visit parts of the countryside if a wind farm was built there, but that SOUL had claimed those visitors would not return. We noted that the Wales Tourist Board found that 22% of visitors were likely to avoid any parts of the countryside where wind farms were built, while the Cumbria Tourist Board found that 19% of visitors would avoid parts of the countryside where wind farms were built. We noted that 10% of visitors said they would visit less often if wind farms were built but that that figure was taken from the findings on a separate question in the survey and that, in response to that question, only 1% of visitors indicated they would not visit at all. We considered that it was misleading to combine the results of separate questions, because some respondents might have been counted twice. We considered that readers would understand from the claim that, in all three areas, more than 25% of visitors polled would not return to the area and that it was misleading to take an average from all three areas. We concluded that the surveys provided by SOUL did not substantiate the claim that over 25% of visitors polled would not return to parts of the countryside where wind farms were built and that the claim was misleading.

8. Complaint upheld

SOUL said the image used a photograph that had been taken overlooking the southern half of the proposed site of the Barmoor wind power station. They said they had overlaid the photograph with images of wind turbines, but that they were not intended to represent the exact sites of the proposed wind turbines at Barmoor. They said they had produced the circular before detailed site maps with exact locations for the turbines were available. They argued that they had not claimed the image was an exact representation in the circular. They said they had taken care to ensure that the images were as close to the correct scale as possible.

We considered that, in the absence of any qualifying text in the circular, readers were likely to assume that the image was intended as an exact representation of the proposed site. Because we understood that the image had not been prepared using a ground model or other imaging software and had been prepared before detailed site maps were available, we considered SOUL had not taken appropriate steps to ensure that the image was accurate. We concluded that the image was a misleading representation of the proposed site and asked SOUL to take greater care when preparing similar images in future.

On points 1 to 8, the ad breached CAP Code clauses 3.1 (Substantiation) and 7.1 (Truthfulness).