

Climate Emergency: HIE's irresponsible actions on Cairn Gorm

Description



Hydro intake below Ben Vorlich, Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park. Not perfectly finished but an illustration of how it should be possible to construct a small run of river hydro scheme within the Cairn Gorm area without lasting adverse landscape impacts.

The Scottish Parliament has been a target for Climate Change protesters, including 'Extinction Rebellion', while school children have been taking days off school to protest. It's big news and rightfully so with the future of our planet and even our very existence at stake. The Scottish Government have declared a 'Climate Emergency' and vowed to do all they can to reduce carbon emissions as speedily as possible. This post takes a look at how all this sits with what

Highlands and Islands Enterprise, the Scottish Governments Development Agency, have done on CairnGorm Mountain.

In 2012, CairnGorm Mountain Ltd commissioned a study by John Duncanson Engineering Ltd into the feasibility of Hydro power generation on Cairn Gorm. Duncanson's study concluded that run of river Hydro schemes were quite possible within both Coire Cas and Coire na Ciste. He calculated that the burn flows would comfortably enable the powering of 80Kw turbines in each Coire. At that time, the feed-in generation tariff (FIT) was around 18p per kilowatt generated. If these Hydro developments had been constructed then the hill business would have been able to sustainably produce electricity that, at just 50% operating capacity, would have provided the business with 698,880 Kilowatts of power.

The FIT scheme would have generated an annual tariff payment of Â£125,798. The hill business would then have been able to use as much of that power as it could and feed the remainder back into the grid [and gain a further tariff payment from that]. A conservative estimate is that the total annual benefit would have been cÂ£250k.. Crucially, these schemes would have considerably reduced CairnGorm Mountain Ltd's reliance on buying electricity from the grid and reduced purchases of heating oil. However HIE, who were in control of the hill business at that time, would not permit CML to go ahead with any capital investment projects and the Duncanson Engineering report was shelved and forgotten.

In 2015, the Save the Ciste Campaign enlisted the voluntary services of a qualified Hydrologist to examine the possibilities for Hydro power generation within Coire na Ciste. The Campaign provided accommodation and meals and site visits were made to study the possibilities on the ground. A number of options were then generated for consideration. The proposals were provided to HIE's recently appointed new operator, Natural Retreats, who proceeded to do nothing. HIE said that their tenant did not have Hydro as a priority at that time. Once again, the opportunity to considerably reduce the carbon footprint of the business was lost. Considerable FIT scheme revenues that would have accrued from the Tariffs were also lost, as were the large power bill reductions.

It is very obvious that HIE's strategic incompetence has lost the hill business a very significant amount of revenue over the last few years and that they have done nothing to reduce the business reliance on energy that isn't produced sustainably.

In an article in the Strathspey and Badenoch Herald a few weeks ago the Aviemore and Glenmore Community Trust erroneously credited HIE with undertaking consultancy work in respect of Hydro Power Generation on Cairn Gorm. The only Hydro consultancy work that's ever been done on Cairn Gorm has been by CairnGorm Mountain Ltd and by The Save the Ciste Campaign. All HIE have ever done on Cairn Gorm in respect of Hydro Power Generation is to stymie any possible development. No credit whatsoever is due to them and the A&GCT have now accepted that to be the case.

Fast forward to 2018 and the failure of the CairnGorm Funicular. HIE's knee jerk reaction was to ignore the snowmaking consultancy report that they'd commissioned and spend almost a million pounds of public money on a large TechnoAlpin snow factory



The Snowfactory used 34,375 litres of diesel during the 2018/19 season



The 8 TR8 snowcannons used 19,725 litres of Diesel in 2018/19

The failure of the snow factory has been well documented and will be covered in a future parkswatch post. To enable the powering of the snow factory and cannons, HIE had to hire generators and diesel fuel cubes for each cannon. Over the course of the season, the snow factory operated for approximately 1100 hours during which time it consumed 34,375 litres of Diesel. The 8 TR8 snowcannons operated for 2121 hours cumulatively and they consumed 19,725 litres of Diesel. That's a total of 54,100 litres.

Cairngorm Mountain recorded its lowest ever skier day total over the 2018/19 season with only 4,515 skier days. For every skier who visited Cairngorm last winter, the operator used almost 12 litres of diesel to make snow. The use of diesel to power the Piste machines would have added to the total. The whole project was a spectacular commercial and environmental failure which did next to nothing for the local economy.

I'd encourage the Scottish Government to grant fund the purchase of the latest Piste Machine which is all electric. That would be a visible and effective commitment towards becoming carbon neutral.



HIE appear to have no understanding that everything they do should be informed by the need to combat Climate Change. Instead they’ve ignored their responsibilities, stymied Hydro Generation and used tens of thousands of litres of highly polluting diesel fuel in a failed attempt to make snow and attract customers.

This operating strategy must cease now. There can be no justification for the level of pollution caused and the government must be true to their word and step in to stop this madness. It’s completely unsustainable both from a commercial and an environmental perspective. Strathspey struggled through last winter without much in the way of tangible help from HIE. It’ll be down to the business community to find a way to reinvent itself and survive the winter months until HIE are kicked off the mountain and the local Community can then get on with establishing a sustainable year round business.

What should happen now

1. The Scottish Government should step in and HIE should be removed from all strategic and operational involvement at Cairn Gorm.

2. A task force should be put in place that can drive forward the changes that must be made as well as facilitating the transfer of the Cairn Gorm Estate into the ownership of the local community.
3. No further snowmaking should be done until an upgraded main electricity supply is installed.
4. Hydro Developments should be pursued forthwith.
5. A full enquiry into HIE's gross mismanagement of the CairnGorm Mountain business must be convened at the earliest possible time. The Cabinet Secretary with responsibility for HIE, Fergus Ewing MSP, should realise that the calls for an enquiry will not fade away.

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

1. climate change
2. HIE
3. renewables
4. Scottish Government

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