

The environmental damaged caused by the Glen Etive hydro construction continues

Description



The Allt Charnan from the road bridge 26th January 2022. Photo Credit John Sinclair.

John Sinclair sent parkswatch more photos of the Allt Charnan two days ago. The water is not as cloudy as it was last month, when it featured in my post on the environmental damage that is being caused by the construction of the seven hydro schemes in Glen Etive ([see here](#)):



But two days ago the burn was significantly higher – the boulder centre bottom of both photos provides a reference point – and the flow of water far faster, as you can clearly see from the turbulence:



While to the casual

observer of these photos the Allt Charnan might not look that full of silt, due to the volume of water it is likely that in fact more was being washed down the Allt Charnan on Wednesday than back in December. The destructive impact on aquatic life in the Allt Charnan and the River Etive below is likely

to have been considerable.

My December post was followed up by the Lochaber Times in January who reported that SEPA bosses had no current concerns regarding “significant environmental damage” and that Highland Council had received weekly reports from the Ecological Clerk of Works – whose job it is to prevent environmental damage – but *“there has been a delay in uploading these to the electronic case file”*.

Lochaber Times
Thursday 13 January 2022

NEWS 5

Watchdog has ‘no current concerns’ after claim of silt in river at Glen Etive

by Mark Entwistle
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Environmental watchdog bosses say they have no current concerns regarding any ‘significant’ environmental damage being caused following reports of silt in the river from a new hydro scheme at Allt Charnan in Glen Etive.

The Allt Charnan is one of seven ‘run of river’ hydro schemes in Glen Etive for which developer Dickinson Hydro Resources Ltd received approval from Highland Council planners almost three years ago, and is one of the four schemes located in plantation forestry on the west side of the glen.

The scheme is what is known as a ‘run of river’ scheme, whereby a small dam creates a weir pond higher up the burn, feeding piped water



A photograph showing the Allt Charnan river discoloured by what is claimed to be silt. Photograph: John Sinclair.

into a lower turbine house. Two days before Christmas, the parkswatchscotland website and blog carried a report – accompanied by photographs supplied by local resident, John Sinclair – appearing to show the river at Allt Charnan coloured brown.

Parkswatchscotland, authored by conservation campaigner Nick Kempe, states: ‘A

standard condition now for all developments is that mud and silt should not be allowed to enter our river systems.’

And referring to the hydro scheme, the blog continues: ‘The map of the development suggests the silt could not have come from anywhere except the intake area.’

Mr Sinclair reported his concerns about the possible

silt problem to both Highland Council and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA).

Parkswatchscotland adds: ‘So far, apparently, only SEPA has taken any interest but as yet there has been no sign of remedial or enforcement action. Unfortunately, even where individual staff in our public authorities are concerned about planning conditions being breached, they have their hands tied because of the prevailing ethos which precludes enforcement action.’

‘Our public authorities’ ostensible policy commitment to protect Scotland’s rivers becomes greenwash when they go brown and nothing happens.’

Parkswatchscotland goes on to flag up what it says is the lack of information on the local authority’s planning portal,

saying: ‘There were supposed to be weekly reports on the Allt Charnan scheme from an Ecological Clerk of Works, paid for by the developer,’ states parkswatchscotland.

‘The last one was over eight months ago, although whether this is because they have not been produced or because Highland Council has failed to publish them is not clear.’

‘The purpose of appointing Ecological Clerks of Works is to prevent environmental damage – such as rivers being filled with silt.’

‘Where such developments do go ahead, they should abide by the highest standards and our public authorities should ensure that happens.’

‘I hope that by helping to publicise what is going on, our public authorities may be prompted to act.’

However, asked to comment,

a SEPA spokesperson told the Lochaber Times: ‘We received a report from a member of the public on December 23 regarding silt in the Allt Charnan.’

‘Staff are investigating and we have no current concerns regarding any significant environmental damage.’

A council spokesman added: ‘The council is aware that there has been an issue with regard to silt affecting the watercourse at the Allt Charnan scheme.’

‘The site is being continually monitored by the Ecological Clerk of Works (ECOW) who is working with SEPA to address this.’

‘The ECOW continues to submit the weekly progress reports as required by the Construction Environmental Management Plan.’

‘There has been a delay in uploading these to the electronic case file.’

It is an interesting question what would cause SEPA bosses concern?

SEPA has produced a range of guidance which appears aimed at preventing silt from entering river systems, such as [Engineering in the Water Good Practice Guidance](#), and its latest [Guide to Hydropower Good Practice](#) (2019), produced with NatureScot and Scottish Renewables is very clear:

“Keep clean water flows clean by not allowing them to mix with construction drainage (Page 16 of Good Practice Guide: Temporary Construction Methods describes this in more detail)”


The water in the Allt Charnan in December was opaque. What does this say about the commitment of SEPA bosses to uphold their own policies?

As for, Highland Council’s comments to the Lochaber Times, just how long does it take to upload the ECOW reports to the planning portal? I have checked today and the last ECOW report that has been uploaded to the planning application ([see here](#)) is still dated 5th April 2021:

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so it is

Even covered in the local press has still not been enough to force Highland Council to publish information which should be public. That makes it far more difficult for any member of the public to challenge whether the construction works at the Allt Charnan are being properly monitored or to raise questions about whether the environmental protections that are supposed to be in place are effective or not.

The Lochaber Times followed up their first article last week with an excellent piece of reporting:

Lochaber Times
Thursday 20 January 2022

Hydro boss says 'every care taken' over Glen Etive scheme

by Mark Entwistle
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The boss of the company constructing a hydro scheme on the Allt Charnan burn in Glen Etive claims every care has been taken to try to ensure problems with silt do not occur.

The comments from William Dickins, of Dickins Hydro Resources, were in response to recent complaints about silt being washed into the Allt Charnan burn.

The development is one of seven 'run of river' hydro schemes in Glen Etive for which Dickins Hydro Resources received approval from Highland Council planners almost three years ago.

Two days before Christmas, the parkswatchscotland website and blog carried a report - accompanied by photographs supplied by a local resident - appearing to show the Allt Charnan burn water coloured



The Allt Charnan river discoloured by what is claimed to be silt. Photograph: John Sinclair.

brown.

The silt concerns were reported to both Highland Council and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA).

Asked to comment last week, a SEPA spokesperson told the Lochaber Times: 'We received a report from a member of the public on December 23 regarding silt in the Allt Charnan.

Staff are investigating and we have no current concerns regarding any significant environmental damage.'

And a council spokesman added that the local authority was aware there had been an issue with regard to silt affecting the watercourse.

Contacted by the Lochaber Times for an explanation, Mr Dickins told us that his understanding of the situation was that there had been an issue with a culvert that failed, causing dirty water to mix with clean water runoff, which in turn caused silt to be washed into the Allt Charnan.

'This was reported to SEPA for which the mitigation was to replace the culvert and improve the silt fence. Replacing this was a controlled action which would have caused a pulse of siltation during the remedial works,' Mr Dickins told us.

'Construction on this scheme started in spring 2020 and

should be finished on this site in the next six weeks, thereafter reinstatement and restoration works will commence.

'We have taken every care during the construction period to ensure, as far as possible, that these incidents do not occur.

'We have had an Ecological Clerk of Works on site one or two times a week depending on the time of year. More frequent visits during periods of bad weather.

'In general during construction, this site has performed well with minimal incidents. Where any such incidents did occur they were reported and mitigated in a timely fashion.

'We would obviously prefer to have no such siltation issues on site. We feel that in conjunction with our site contractor, we have worked hard to minimise the potential for any such siltation incidents to occur.'

Mr Dickins not only claimed every care has been taken at Glen Etive to prevent silt entering the river system but that the problem was caused by a failed culvert and had been fixed. What John Sinclair's latest photos show is either those claims are not true or a new problem has developed. (It hardly inspires confidence that Mr Dickins refers to "his understanding of the situation" rather than being able to state what is actually going on).

I hope to come back to the reasons why silt is being washed into the Allt Charnan in a further post but meantime there is evidence to show that the construction of these hydro schemes are causing other sorts of damage to the natural environment:



Burning off of hydro construction waste. Photo credit John Sinclair 18th January.

EU, Scottish Government and SEPA policy has been to reduce the amount of waste that is burned in the open environment to reduce air pollution and carbon emissions. Normally a license from SEPA would be required before construction waste, such as in the photo, can be burned. Unfortunately, it's not possible for a member of the public to find out easily whether a license is in place as the information is not available online (SEPA's systems were massively affected by a cyber attack two in 2020). Instead of being open and providing information that would help the public report breaches of environmental legislation, this is another example of how our public authorities are effectively sheltering developers from the law.

The Glen Etive hydro schemes were given the go-ahead because they were supposed to be good for the environment but in practice there is clear evidence they are causing various types of damage to the natural environment. All sorts of construction related materials will have been brought into Glen Etive to construct the hydro schemes, but instead of recycling or re-using those that have not been used it is easier (and cheaper) just to burn them.

The Scottish Government has recognised the need to recycle and re-use materials in “Scotland 2045 Our fourth National Planning Framework for Scotland” which is currently out for consultation ([see here](#)). There is a section in it that highlights the requirement for more “Circular Economy Materials Management Facilities”:

“The range and scale of facilities required to manage secondary materials and their reprocessing back out into the economy is not yet clear. However, it is clear that sites and facilities will be needed to retain the resource value of materials so that we can maximise the use of materials in the economy and minimise the use of virgin materials in order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This is particularly significant for the construction and demolition industries and decommissioning industry.”

If we are to have any chance of addressing the climate and nature emergencies, we cannot afford to wait until things like more recycling facilities are constructed, we need to stop damaging construction practices now. That means public authorities like SEPA and Highland Council taking a far more proactive approach towards developments such as those taking place in Glen Etive.

Category

1. National Parks

Tags

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2. natural environment
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