

Who surveys the surveyors?

**Surveys and polls
in the formation of
Scotland's energy policy**

**The
Scottish Wind Assessment Project**

Produced by *The Scottish Wind Assessment Project*

April 2005

The Scottish Wind Assessment Project is an ongoing programme of research which seeks to collate existing studies and commission new research to promote a thorough investigation of the claims made for and against the use of wind-generated energy. It is supported by private donations.

Contact *SWAP* via research@swap.org.uk. Its reports are posted on www.swap.org.uk.

DISCLAIMER

Whilst *SWAP* has made every effort to ensure the accuracy of this report, it offers no guarantee or representation of any kind with respect to the quality, accuracy or completeness of the contents of this document or to any document referred to herein. Researchers are advised to check source documentation where available before relying on conclusions published herein.

COPYRIGHT AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Text & graphics © *The Scottish Wind Assessment Project*,
No reproduction permitted without explicit permission.

Our thanks to those provided and/or checked the data on which this report rests.
Errors are the responsibility of *SWAP* and will be corrected if notified.

Front cover: view over the North Lewis moor towards the Pentland Hills taken at midnight on the summer solstice, 2004. This view will be obscured by the seven-turbine Pentland Road site, now approved by the Western Isles Council. The moor is also proposed for development by an AMEC/ British Energy consortium. Photograph © Anne Campbell.

Who surveys the surveyors?

(Surveys and polls in the formation of Scotland's energy policy)

SURVEYS AND OPINION POLLS are regularly quoted as proof of public support for wind power. They are referred to in proceedings at Westminster and Holyrood, in the statements and writings of ministers, civil servants and planners, in wind-industry publications and, frequently, in planning documentation.

It is, therefore, quite proper to examine whether they are sufficiently robust for the uses to which they are being put. Although the press tends to take claims made by executive and industry sponsored energy-related surveys at face value, opponents of wind-power have alleged that they serve to mould rather than measure public opinion. This is a serious charge.

To see if these concerns have merit, Scottish Wind Assessment Project (SWAP) researchers studied eleven surveys that either feature in the renewable energy debate or have been used to justify or implement government energy policy. This report presents their findings.

The market research industry certainly acknowledges that there is scope for problems with the uses to which its data are put, that surveys or opinion polls record at best a snapshot in time of the views and perceptions they seek to measure and that they should not be regarded as long-term indicators.

Its professional membership body, the Market Research Society (MRS), stresses key points particularly on the surveying of opinion (as opposed to investigating, say, product preference):

- The researcher must ensure that there are measures in place to check and agree any reporting of the research results;
- Questions must not lead a respondent towards a particular answer;
- When opinion research results are put in the public domain, MRS members must supply data to support the results if it is requested.

Its Code of Conduct says that:

Researchers must not knowingly allow the dissemination of conclusions from a marketing research project which are not adequately supported by the data. They must always be prepared to make available the technical information necessary to assess the validity of any published findings.¹

Its (draft) Public Opinion Research Guidelines are also emphatic:

However, public opinion research tends to be an especially 'sensitive' area. It deals with issues which arouse greater public interest and emotion than do most commercial market research projects. In addition, its findings are much more widely published and debated, and may sometimes be presented in a provocative or even tendentious way.

In short, MRS codes and guidelines seek to ensure that research is conducted and presented to a high standard and provide for public access to key information about surveys whose findings on public opinion are in the public domain.

As a minimum, this should include the name of the research organisation, the fieldwork dates, the 'universe' represented, the number of people questioned and the sample's geographical spread. They advise inclusion of the data collection method, the number of interviews and a general indication of the sampling approach. Studies with unusually low response rates should be identified.

Public access to the questionnaire is particularly important if the form or wording of questions might affect the answers or is critical to interpreting findings, especially if the issues are politically, socially or commercially 'sensitive'.

The British Market Research Association (BMRA) is a membership organisation for companies whose primary business is market research. Its members – and by extension their employees – agree to comply with the Market Research Society (MRS) code of conduct.

The MRS is the world's largest membership organisation for professional researchers. All its members agree to comply with its Code of Conduct and its guidelines on best practice.

The MRS also advises members that, whatever information is given in a published survey report, the client and/or the researcher must be prepared on request to supply other information about survey methods.

Where the questions reported on were part of a more extensive 'omnibus' survey, this must be made clear to any enquirer.

Methodology

The surveys examined matched the following criteria:

- They were distributed with a press release to the media and/or feature on publicity web sites: most were widely reported at the time of publication;
- The respondents lived in Scotland, except for a DTI survey (which separately analysed Scottish respondents); one each from the BWEA and Scottish Renewables where no details were provided;
- Where the sampled population was local, the survey had, or was deemed by its sponsors to have, national relevance.

Examination of press archives and the internet suggests that no significant study has been omitted though we have excluded local surveys, of which there have been many in the press, on the internet and elsewhere.

Due to their methodological variety, it was impossible to determine assessment criteria in advance. Each assessment started by obtaining the supporting data followed by a thorough reading of the survey's report and questionnaire and an examination of sampling integrity. (Are, for example, respondents competent to answer the questions? One survey asked if tourism had increased or decreased since certain sites were built. Who is to know? Another, asking respondents to rank benefits from a wind-power site, included the provision of cheap electricity, a patent absurdity.) Survey results were examined to check that they correctly reflected the data and conclusions checked to ensure they followed from the results (and had not been exaggerated by enthusiastic clients). Had researchers – with survey expertise but perhaps no energy sector or environmental knowledge – made unsafe assumptions?

Surveys were checked for basic compliance with MRS guidelines on the proper disclosure of information.

Given the scope for disagreement, a systematic critique of the questionnaires was not deemed useful although some comments have been included.

Not all the current MRS guidelines had been adopted when the older surveys were conducted. Some might therefore feel it unreasonable to assess in the light of *post hoc* regulation. But it can also be argued that surveys

'Respondents were fairly positive about wind farms. Those who live nearest a wind farm are more likely to provide positive responses when asked about the wind farm than those in the other zones. For example, while 67% overall reported that there was something they liked about the wind farm, this proportion increases to 73% of those living in the high proximity zone (up to 5km from a wind farm).'

Public Attitudes towards wind farms in Scotland, Scottish Executive, May 2000

'People living closest to the windfarms tend to be most positive about them (44% of those living within 5km say the windfarm has had a positive impact, compared with 16 per cent of those living 10-20km away). They are also most supportive of expansion of the sites (65% of those in the 5km zone support 50% expansion, compared with 53% of those in the 10-20km zone).'

Public Attitudes to Windfarms: a survey of local residents, Scottish Executive, August 2003

'The fact that respondents who have experience of living near an onshore wind farm were more positive than the General Public about a similar development in their area is very encouraging.'

Attitudes and Knowledge of Renewable Energy amongst the General Public, DTI, August 2003

that do not meet current standards are obsolete and potentially unreliable. Since conclusions from surveys are regularly relied on by decision makers many years after their publication, we tend to the latter position.

Where opinions were surveyed as part of, or appearing to be part of, an omnibus poll, the conclusions should be treated with caution not least because the full survey and questionnaire in particular are, for proper but unrelated reasons, excluded from scrutiny under MRS rules. It might also be argued that omnibus surveys are an inappropriate tool for research in this field, particularly when used in the way they are.

The MRS nominally places obligations on both researchers and their clients but it is clearly unrealistic except in exceptional circumstances to look to market research companies to police their clients.

Suggestions in this report that survey findings or conclusions have been mis-used should not be read as an indictment of the original research. We found research companies generally, though not invariably, as co-operative as might reasonably be expected. Less so with clients.

SWAP recently received reports that a seven-year old survey has been submitted as evidence to two or more Public Inquiries by major wind-power developers. It is hard to envisage opinion polls of similar vintage being used to inform critical decisions in, for example, health or foreign policy.

Tourism

Three surveys on tourism and wind power are included with two from 2002 offering contrasting results. VisitScotland's survey, which arose out of an initiative by the Scottish Parliament's Public Petitions Committee, was launched with little publicity and all but ignored by the media. It tended to be overshadowed by a less substantive but better publicised local poll which, commissioned in the wake of the former by wind-industry bodies, gave a more sanguine picture.

That two reports should draw such different conclusions about the risks to one of Scotland's major industries was seen by the body politic not as a stimulus to further research but as an excuse to ignore possibly unpopular warnings. Instead, the VisitScotland report was shelved and its sponsors were allegedly instructed to 'de-emphasise' it. It was certainly marooned on a web site for industry insiders. This seems unwise. (It has recently been given a more prominent position.)

The third tourism survey, sponsored by the Western Isles Tourism Board before its incorporation into VisitScotland, is included partly because its results suggest that many in the tourism industry still seem unconvinced by Executive reassurances and partly because it is one of the few surveys competently to examine how businesses from an unrelated but affected sector view the wind-power boom.

Conclusions

It is not possible in the space available to make detailed comments on eleven surveys, some of which are long and complex. (Two have been subjected to detailed analysis elsewhere.²)

Starting in late 2004, there has been a turn to issuing declamations of popular support for its products by the wind industry and its policies by the environmental lobby. Resting as they do on what are almost certainly omnibus polls publicised by clients in ways that breach MRS disclosure guidelines, this gives grounds for concern. The freedom of information culture has, it seems, yet to permeate the renewables sector. We hope that the market research bodies will use their influence to restrain what many may come to see as the abuse of its product.

That said, while there is much to criticise in the surveys examined, we found no evidence that disclosure guidelines have been significantly breached by the market research companies.

Compared to the curious uniformity of conclusions drawn from government-sponsored surveys and the panglossian optimism of vested interests, one is struck by the paucity of detailed studies of near neighbours of wind power sites. With close to 30,000 MW installed in Europe, there is no lack of opportunity to discover if those who live closest to turbines are indeed their biggest fans or if the persistent reports of noise and other health-related issues have substance. To our knowledge, no study is mooted for any modern (i.e. =>2MW turbine) Scottish site.

Finally, we suggest that if developers wish to retain public credibility they should not make use of surveys that are either out of time or do not comply with current MRS standards.

Notes

¹ The MRS Guidelines, its Code of Conduct and other material are available on www.mrs.org

² See viewsofscotland.org

A glossary of market research terms used in this report

Data collection

The collection of information using techniques such as face-to-face interviews in the home, on the street or at a central venue, telephone interviews from a call centre or the interviewer's home, respondents returning self-completion postal questionnaires.

Hall test

A hall test comprises fairly in-depth interviews of respondents selected off the street. For example, if questioning tourists, quotas might be set to ensure a balance of day-trippers versus residential visitors, overseas versus UK visitors or 'active' countryside visitors as opposed to more 'passive' ones. Typically, there are between 25 and 50 interviews of between 15 and 20 minutes at each location (hence 'hall').

Interview period

The period of time during which interviews are conducted.

Market research

The collection and analysis of data from a sample of individuals representative of a wider population on their characteristics, behaviour, attitudes, preferences etc. It includes all forms of market, opinion and social research such as consumer surveys, psychological investigations and qualitative and group discussions.

Number questioned

The number of people whose responses form the basis of the survey.

Omnibus survey

A multi-client survey into which individual clients buy access with a few questions that meet their individual needs. They provide quick answers without the cost of a full research survey. MRS omnibus survey guidelines are slightly different.

Opinion poll

A survey of opinions about political, social and other issues of public interest.

Population

The entire set of persons that have at least one common characteristic of interest to the researcher. A sample is selected from the population.

Qualitative surveys

Although they lack the statistical reliability of quantitative research, qualitative surveys can give an understanding of why people hold particular views or how they make judgments in a way that quantitative surveys do not.

Quantitative surveys

Responses to a set of questions inform researchers how many people do or think something and are designed so that their findings are statistically reliable.

Questionnaire

A set of questions designed to enable respondents to answer in a way that reflects the view they want to express and ensures the answers can be interpreted in a meaningful and unambiguous way.

Typically they begin with several questions which establish the respondent's age, gender, socio-economic class and eligibility to participate in the survey (e.g. in a poll of local residents those renting holiday accommodation would be excluded.)

Research agency

An organisation which conducts polls and surveys. The British Market Research Association (BMRA) is a membership organisation for companies whose primary business is market research. Its members – and by extension their employees – agree to comply with the Market Research Society (MRS) code of conduct. The MRS is the world's largest membership organisation for professional researchers. All members agree to comply with its code of conduct and guidelines on best practice.

Respondent

A person whose replies to the questions form part of the data which comprise the survey.

Response rate

The proportion of the sample which responded to the questionnaire and whose data is included in the survey.

Sample

A subset of cases or elements selected from a population.

Sampling frame

The list from which the sample is selected.

Source

Where the survey information was found.

Street interview

An interview conducted in the street or other public place.

Universe

That part of the whole population that constitutes the object of the study.

Weighted sample

A sample to which post-weighting has been applied.

Weighted to

The population the survey is set to represent, such as all adults in Scotland or all homeowners living

within 20 km of a proposed or existing wind-power development.

Weighting

Weighting is the process by which data are adjusted to reflect the known population profile to counter any effects such as differential refusal rates, interviewers falling short on particular quotas or the over-sampling of minority populations.

A ‘weight’ is the percent assigned to a particular criterion. A sample is weighted if the responses show that particular groups (for example those living in a particular area) are under-represented in the sample. If this is not carried out, then the results will not properly reflect the views of the population being considered.

Where data has not been weighted, this is referred to as ‘unweighted’ data.

The surveys examined in this report

July 1998	National Wind Power	<i>Novar Residents Survey</i>
May 2000	Scottish Executive	<i>Public Attitudes towards wind farms in Scotland</i>
August 2002	VisitScotland	<i>Potential Impact of Wind Farms on Tourism in Scotland</i>
Sept 2002	British Wind Energy Association & Scottish Renewables	<i>Tourist Attitudes Towards Wind Farms</i>
August 2003	Scottish Executive	<i>Public Attitudes to Windfarms: A survey of local residents in Scotland</i>
August 2003	Dept of Trade and Industry	<i>Attitudes and Knowledge of Renewable Energy amongst the General Public</i>
Sept 2004	Greenpeace	<i>Untitled - no report</i>
Sept 2004	British Wind Energy Association	<i>Embrace the Revolution</i>
March 2005	Scottish Renewables	<i>Untitled - no report</i>
March 2005	BBC	<i>Hebridean Wind Farms</i>
March 2005	Western Isles Tourist Board	<i>Wind Farm Research</i>

Novar Residents Survey

(National Wind Power, 1998)

Source: British Wind Energy Association web site
Researched by: Robertson Bell Associates
Interview period: June-July 1998
Number questioned: 203
Weighted to: information not provided
Response rate: assumed to be within limits
Survey method: quantitative, face-to-face
Questionnaire available: no

Methodology

Not known.

Goal

Not known.

Summary conclusions

The conclusions on the BWEA's web site are neither the client's nor the researcher's and are not contemporaneous with the survey.

'The visual impact of a wind farm is often cited by the small but vocal anti-windfarm lobby as a main source of public concern and objection but the survey shows quite the opposite with a 68 per cent majority feeling that the wind farm is acceptable in the landscape and 11 per cent saying that the wind farm makes the scenery more interesting! Equally, more people thought the turbines graceful than ugly.'

Comments

This was one of a series of surveys conducted by Robertson Bell Associates shortly after some early sites became operational. We were unable to contact RBA. Industry guidelines typically require researchers to keep the data for two years only and it is unreasonable to expect them to be still available. Whatever, the different physical, planning and political conditions now prevailing render this survey's data obsolete.

The BWEA web site reports that interviews took place with people living near Novar Estate including residents from Alness, Ardross, Evanton, Invergordon and settlements on the north coast of the Black Isle. Some of these are nearly 30 km away: there are few dwellings within five km of the turbines. This might have been appropriate at the time but, under the current conditions, many of those interviewed would no longer properly be considered as living 'near' the site.

Age would have excluded this survey from this report were it not that it remains on the BWEA's web site and that its conclusions were cited as evidence of the likelihood of future support for proposals in at least two recent Public Inquiries. The proposals at issue bear little or no resemblance to Novar in terms of site visibility, turbine number and size or settlement proximity. In visibility terms, Novar is unusually well-sited.

However favourably one assesses the BWEA's conclusions, this is an improper extrapolation of data which, by any standards, is out of date.

Public attitudes towards wind farms in Scotland

(Scottish Executive Central Research Unit, May 2000)

Source: survey withdrawn – see below
Researched by: System Three Social Research
Interview period: information not provided
Number questioned: 430
Weighted to: no weighting
Response rate: 400 target met
Survey method: quantitative, by telephone
Questionnaire available: yes

Methodology

There were at the time four small wind-power sites in Scotland – Beinn Ghlass, Hagshaw Hill, Novar and Windy Standard. The survey covered all four, interviewing 215 respondents living within 5 km of a site, 108 living between 5 and 10 km and 107 between 10 and 20 km.

Goal

‘The research results were intended to inform the Scottish Executive’s renewable energy policy, in particular the current review of National Planning Policy Guideline (NPPG6) ... ’

‘As much of the previous research has been funded by the wind power industry, there is scope for accusations of partiality. In order to inform both developers and the relevant authorities, it was necessary for independent and methodologically-robust research to be conducted to ascertain the opinions and perceptions of local residents to wind farms.’

Summary conclusions

‘The majority of respondents currently living near wind farms have not experienced any problems due to their presence. The problems they had anticipated did not materialise in the vast majority of cases ... ’

Comments

The survey results were quoted as supporting argument in the following papers, all published in 2002:

Scottish Executive consultation paper, *Scotland’s Renewable Energy Potential – Beyond 2010*

Scottish Executive National Planning Policy Guideline NPPG6, *Renewable Energy Developments*

Scottish Executive Planning Advice Note PAN45, *Renewable Energy Technologies*

Cabinet Office Performance and Innovation Unit report, *The Energy Review*

National Assembly for Wales, Economic Development Committee, EDC 02-02

Amec Wind, *Edinbane Wind Farm Environmental Statement*

It was also quoted widely by Westminster and Holyrood politicians and used in support of wind power in the USA, Canada, Australia and Denmark.

The Scottish Executive withdrew the survey in December 2002 after a private researcher showed that hardly anyone lived within 5 km of a site where many of the respondents had allegedly been questioned. It is included here because the Executive explicitly stood by its published conclusions despite this error.

In the light of the above list, this is perhaps unsurprising. There is, undoubtedly, irony in the fact that a major Scottish planning review (and one that led to a planning crisis), was prefaced by interviewing several hundred people who, although they endorsed Executive policy, weren’t actually there.

Attitudes and Knowledge of Renewable Energy amongst the General Public

(Department of Trade & Industry et al, August 2003)

Commissioned by:	The Central Office of Information on behalf of the Department of Trade and Industry, the Scottish Executive, the National Assembly for Wales and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment
Source:	Department of Trade and Industry web site
Researched by:	Taylor Nelson Sofres
Interview period:	10-30 March 2003 (June in Northern Ireland)
Number questioned:	variable but a maximum of 1279 – see below
Weighted to:	see below
Response rate:	assumed to be within limits
Survey method:	quantitative, face-to-face
Questionnaire provided:	yes

Methodology

The survey compared different samples:

1. A *General Public Sample* of 1279, made up of 428 in England, 254 in Scotland, 112 in Wales and 485 in Northern Ireland, weighted to the profile of the general public.
2. A *Boost Sample* of 528 who lived within five km of a proposed or operational renewable energy site, made up of 417 from Great Britain and 111 from Northern Ireland. Results were weighted to correct for regional bias and the proportion in each type of renewable energy source. Sites were selected randomly ... by region and technology.
3. An *Informed Boost Sample* of 318 (60% of the Boost Sample) comprised people aware that they lived near a renewable energy site. The report contrasted their perceptions with those of the General Public Sample.

Goal

‘To measure awareness, knowledge and general attitudes towards renewable energy; determine levels of knowledge about the Renewables Obligation; advise future publicity and PR activity.’

Summary conclusions

In line with its stated aim, the report draws no overall conclusions. Its more specific conclusions are too numerous to be summarised.

Comments

This survey appears to have been mainly for internal use – it received little or no media attention on publication and was not ‘launched’ in any formal sense.

Overall, it is a thoughtful and comprehensive survey whose data are robustly analysed. Curiously, its surveying dates, publication date and conclusions are almost identical to the Scottish Executive’s re-run of its ‘Public Attitudes’ survey.

Potentially significant sections of the population, likely to be informed either about wind power or climate change, were excluded – see below. The DTI has recently sponsored a public relations campaign in favour of wind power and it is possible that the survey was aimed at assessing the views of population sectors most likely to respond to such a campaign.

- Some samples were small

A breakdown by country is given for the General Public sample but not for the others. As the 'Informed Boost' sample questioned only 156 respondents near wind-power sites across the whole UK, it is likely that the number in Scotland, for example, was very small.

- Sampling was not random

Potential respondents were excluded if they or close family members belonged to Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth or Local Agenda 21, organisations that campaign for renewable energy in general and wind power in particular.

They were also excluded if they or close family members belonged to the Campaign for the Protection of Rural Wales, the Countryside Council for Wales, the Wales Tourist Board or the Council for the Protection of Rural England (conservation or amenity organisations with a broad agenda that, though supportive of renewable energy in general, have expressed concerns about wind power) or Country Guardian and Views of Scotland (organisations that support renewable energy in general but campaign against wind power). It included similar (e.g. Scottish) organisations that had not taken a stance on wind power.

This tended to exclude not only those with 'set' views but also those who might have objected to or campaigned against a local wind-power application or those who suffer or perceived themselves as suffering problems caused by a proximate site. It follows that the more influential organisations questioning wind power are, the more likely their supporters were to be excluded from the survey. The numbers affected by this provision are not given.

Without knowing at which sites they were polled it is impossible even to guess what effect the elimination of objectors had on this statistic.

The survey did claim that 63 per cent of those who knew they lived within 5 km of a proposed or operational wind-power site would apparently strongly support 'an onshore wind farm being developed in their area'. This might have been because they felt there was little likelihood of this happening: answering another question, only a third thought it would be acceptable to build as many as five or ten turbines within 8 km of a community.

Many hundreds of such sites are currently proposed, nearly all with many more turbines, some within a few hundred metres of dwellings.

Public Attitudes to Windfarms: A Survey of Local Residents in Scotland (Scottish Executive Energy Policy Unit, August 2003)

Source: Scottish Executive web site
Researched by: MORI Scotland
Interview period: 27 February-18 March 2003
Number questioned: 1810
Weighted to: the profile of all adults within 20 km of selected sites
Response rate: 28 per cent
Survey method: quantitative, by telephone
Questionnaire provided: yes

Methodology

Researchers surveyed residents living by Scotland's (then) ten operational wind-power sites with nine or more turbines. A total of 1810 interviews was broken down after weighting to 35 interviews with respondents living within 5 km of a site, 164 with those living 5-10 km away and 1,611 with those living between 10-20 km away.

Goal

'To investigate the views of people living in close proximity to existing windfarm sites in Scotland.'

Summary conclusions

9.1 People who live within 20 kilometres of Scotland's windfarms often live in remote and widely dispersed communities. ... Concerns, where they existed, that the construction of a windfarm would have a damaging impact have largely not materialised, according to local people. The most prominent long-term impact that people would consider a problem is the visual effect on the landscape. Overall, however, twice as many people think the local windfarm has had a positive impact as think it has had a negative impact on the area.

9.2 People living in zones closest to the windfarms tend to have more positive views, even though they are more likely to see the turbines as they go about their every day lives. They are also more likely than others to support the idea of an expansion by 50% of the number of turbines on the site.'

Comments

After the collapse of the earlier survey (see p. 10), publication of a new study was promised for the spring of 2003, shortly after surveying finished in March. In the event, it took nearly six months to write the report but it remains difficult to accept its conclusions. (For example, neighbours of the ten sites did not '... often live in remote and widely-dispersed communities'. Around eight per cent of Scotland's population lives within 20 km of the sites – interviewees included people living on the outskirts of Edinburgh.)

More seriously, the report claimed to have surveyed people living in 'close proximity' to sites when a large majority of respondents actually lived between 10 and 20 km away. As a result, responses reporting problems experienced by genuinely local residents were overwhelmed by those of more distant neighbours. Only 35 out of nearly 2,000 post-weighting interviews were conducted with residents living within five km of the 10 sites and none at all at three of them.

Other results further undermined sampling credibility. For example, 53 respondents reported noise problems 10 km or more from a site, only two reported them from 5 to 10 km away and none at all under five km. The probable explanation for this absurd finding is that, while most respondents lived in a cluster of adjacent sites, they were not assigned to the site they lived closest to, rendering distance-related data meaningless.

A researcher who spotted these serious sampling discrepancies in what was a keynote report remains convinced that they had caused the publication delays and sought to discuss them with Scottish Executive officials. Pressed on the issue, however, the Executive terminated the dialogue and the report stood.

Untitled Survey

(Greenpeace UK, 13 September 2004)

Source: ICM web site
Researched by: ICM
Interview period: 25-26 August 2004
Number questioned: 1005
Weighted to: the profile of all adults
Response rate: assumed within limits
Survey method: quantitative, by telephone
Questionnaire available: yes

Methodology

Not known.

Goal

Not known.

Summary conclusions

Conclusions appear on a number of web sites, including that for Greenpeace (which commissioned the survey) and in a BWEA press release.

Comments

Although there is no survey report, ICM does provides over 40 pages of data analysing the responses but no indication of how the respondents were selected. Given that there were only three questions, they were probably part of an omnibus survey.

Greenpeace claims that, 'The new poll by ICM shows that 80 percent of people support government plans to significantly increase the number of wind turbines in Britain, with just eight percent opposed.'

This is not true. What they supported was 'the development of renewable energy *such as* wind power', not 'the number of wind turbines' (emphasis added). Of that eighty per cent, half only 'somewhat' supported it.

Another conclusion claimed that, 'the poll revealed that seven out of ten people support the construction of wind farms in their local area'.

This claim is meaningless unless we know where they lived. If it was in urban areas (and, in the absence of information about respondent selection, it is correct to assume that many if not most of them did) the response was, at best, romantic aspiration.

The three questions that respondents were asked were suggestive. The first, to ascertain how concerned the respondent was about the 'threat to the environment posed by global warming', sets the tone. Given the current media attention what is surprising is that 21 per cent were neutral or unconcerned.

The other two questions are cannily worded. The second, for example, reads, 'Some governments and environmental groups believe that one solution to global warming is large-scale investment in renewable sources of energy production like wind power as opposed to more traditional forms of energy production. From what you have seen or heard, would you support or oppose: *the development of wind farms in the UK generally; *the development of a wind farm in your area, *the development of a wind farm out at sea off the coast of Britain.

There is, it seems, no difference between wind power and renewable energy in general. The BWEA used these results in its *Embrace the Revolution* PR campaign.

'Embrace the Revolution'

(British Wind Energy Association, 20 September 2004)

Source: Press release, British Wind Energy Association web site
Researched by: NOP World
Interview period: 27-29 August 2004
Number questioned: 1000
Weighted to: not known
Response rate: assumed within limits
Survey method: not known
Questionnaire available: no

Methodology

Not known.

Goal

Not known.

Summary conclusions

'Results' from this poll underpinned a nationwide public relations campaign called *Embrace the Revolution*, launched by the BWEA in September 2004.

Comments

The survey has no title and there is neither a report nor are there published conclusions. Several requests for the BWEA to provide further information went unanswered. Except for a footnote in a BWEA press release, there is no information on the survey in the public domain.

The absence of supporting data puts this survey in substantive default of MRS Guidelines. Without, as a minimum, correction of this breach of rule, the conclusions have no merit in market research terms. Given that it was almost certainly part of an omnibus poll, the onus is on the BWEA to comply.

Untitled Survey

(Scottish Renewables, March 2005)

Source: Press releases, Scottish Renewables and BWEA web sites
Researched by: NOP World
Interview period: not known
Number questioned: not known
Weighted to: not known
Response rate: not known
Survey method: not known
Questionnaire available: no

Methodology

Not known.

Goal

Not known.

Summary conclusions

N/A

Comment

There is no record of this poll in the public domain bar the reporting of one of its results in press releases from the BWEA (22 March 2005) and Scottish Renewables (23 March 2005).

When contacted, NOP suggested the results perhaps came from an omnibus poll and undertook to provide details after obtaining their client's permission. After weeks of to and fro, Scottish Renewables said it would provide no information beyond its earlier press release until early in May.

Scottish Renewables claims that: 'almost three-quarters of Scots agree wind farms are necessary to help meet the country's current and future energy needs'.

What they agree with, of course, is the statement, not necessarily the policy.

Comparing press releases from the BWEA and Scottish Renewables (where much of the text is identical), it is possible that the questions were the same as those in NOP's August 2004 poll for the BWEA – see page 14.

As with that poll, the absence of supporting data puts Scottish Renewable's survey in substantive default of MRS Guidelines. Without, at the very least, correction of this breach of rule, the conclusions have no merit in market research terms. Given that it was almost certainly part of an omnibus poll, the onus is on Scottish Renewables to comply.

Hebridean Windfarm Plans **(BBC Scotland, March 2005)**

Source: MORI web site
Researched by: MORI Scotland
Interview period: 02-15 February 2005
Number questioned: 802
Weighted to: Age, gender, working status, area
Response rate: information not provided
Survey method: quantitative, by telephone
Questionnaire available: yes

Methodology

Not known. The geographical area included Lewis and North Harris.

Goal

Information not formally provided but see below.

Summary conclusions

The report was broadcast as well as published: results were presented at a televised debate on Lewis hosted by BBC 2's (sub-titled) Gaelic-language *Cunntas*, 3 March 2005. The BBC web site reported that 'A majority of people on Lewis and North Harris are opposed to wind farm developments in the area, according to a poll commissioned by BBC Scotland'.

Comment

The questionnaire objectively reflected both sides of the argument, the questions kept to the subject of the proposed wind developments and their effect on the area. Perceptions were not coloured by questions about topics such as global warming.

The survey is of interest because its results contradict most previous surveys in that three-quarters of those who thought they would see turbines were opposed to the developments as well as a fifth of those who would not. Overall, just over half of all respondents were opposed.

Previous surveys questioning people in zones around established or proposed sites generally found a majority in favour and, as Environment Minister Sarah Boyack said in 2000, 'the most illuminating finding was that the closer people live to a wind farm, the most positive their attitude is towards them'.

Times have, it seems, changed.

Investigation into the potential impact of wind farms on tourism in Scotland (VisitScotland, August 2002)

Source: The ScotExchange (Scottish tourism industry) web site
Researched by: NFO System Three
Interview period: July 2002
Number questioned: 180
Weighted to: no weighting
Response rate: assumed to be within limits
Survey method: hall tests at six locations
Questionnaire available: yes

Methodology

Hall tests were conducted at six locations across Scotland near to existing or planned developments. At an average 30 minutes each, interviews were unusually long, reflecting the range of issues covered by the study.

Goal

To establish the impact (both positive and negative) that the existing/proposed/anticipated development of wind farms in Scotland is likely to have on Scottish tourism.

Conclusions

‘... the research has highlighted a mix of different messages and conditions related to wind farm development which makes a general, all-encompassing tourism policy fairly impractical. Most respondents, both on the trade and consumer sides, felt that each case should be judged on its own merits rather than attempting to define an overall policy which suggested that VisitScotland was either ‘for’ or ‘against’ wind farm development.’

Comments

Notably, the questions were not prefaced with phrases like ‘many people believe that ...’ or ‘a way to stop global warming ...’ One of them, for example, begins ‘there is a wide range of opinions both positive and negative ...’

Respondents were shown mock-ups (presumably supplied by the wind industry) of scenery with and without turbines taken from different distances and perspectives in different locations and on different scales reflecting applications in 2002.

VisitScotland commissioned the survey after the Scottish Parliament’s Public Petitions Committee expressed concern that the Scottish Executive had overlooked the risk to tourism in its drive to develop wind power.

The report, dismissed by a British Wind Energy Association spokesperson as ‘statistically irrelevant’, was more-or-less shelved with its sponsors allegedly instructed to ‘de-emphasise’ it. It disappeared onto an obscure trade-only web site. It has recently been restored to a more prominent position.

These data are by now obsolete. There are, for example, over 250 applications nationally, not the 100 that respondents were told of. This might well affect visitor attitudes.

Tourist Attitudes Towards Wind Farms **(Scottish Renewables & BWEA, September 2002)**

Source: Scottish Renewables web site
Researched by: MORI Scotland
Commissioned by: Scottish Renewables & the British Wind Energy Association
Interview period: 21-23 and 27-29 September 2002
Number questioned: 307
Weighted to: not stated
Response rate: not stated
Survey method: face-to-face street interviews
Questionnaire available: yes

Methodology

Interviews were conducted over two weekends in Campbeltown (30), Inverary (40), Lochgilpead (55), Oban (117) and Tarbet (64).

Goal

‘To assess tourists’ awareness and perception of wind farms in the area, to help answer the question about how wind farm development might affect tourism in Scotland.’

Conclusions

‘The research reveals that the wind farms are not seen as having a detrimental effect on their visit and would not deter tourists from visiting the area in the future. Indeed, the research has shown that the majority viewed the prospect of having a visitor centre at the site of wind farms favourably and would, in fact, be interested in visiting and subsequently finding out more information on wind farms and their operation.’

Comments

Respondents were asked whether they were aware of any wind farms in Argyll. The interviewer explained, where necessary, that they are ‘areas of land with windmill-like turbines for generating electricity’.

The reactions of some or all of the 40 per cent who were ‘aware’ of the wind sites were examined. Many of these results were therefore based on 122 responses or less (the minimum was ten).

On the other hand, all respondents were asked whether the wind developments affected the likelihood of their visiting Argyll again. Although a large majority (91%) said they made no difference, this might be partly because 60 per cent of them were ‘unaware’ the developments were even there.

This survey is still frequently quoted by the wind industry, environmental groups, ministers and civil servants to support claims that wind turbines attract tourists. This unsubstantiated claim is compounded by a suggestion on the Scottish Renewables web site that the results are valid outside the sampling frame:

‘The fact that the presence of wind farms makes the majority of tourists think more positively about Argyll suggests that tourists will judge an area positively if it is using its natural resources to generate energy from renewable sources.’

As with the VisitScotland survey, the conclusions from this study are obsolete. There were three small sites when the survey was carried out – there are now 24 proposed or working in Argyll & Bute, including extensions to two of the three original sites with turbines up to twice the height.

Western Isles Tourist Board: Wind Farm Research **(Western Isles Tourist Board, March 2005)**

Source: Visit Hebrides web site
Researched by: The Market Specialists
Interview period: information not provided
Number questioned: 402 questionnaires issued
Weighted to: no weighting
Response rate: (35%) 139 responses
Method: postal survey of all members
Questionnaire available: yes

Methodology

A background paper with facts about the developments and the claimed pros and cons was sent to all 402 WITB members along with a questionnaire and a reply-paid envelope.

Goal

‘Major wind farm development is proposed for sites in the Western Isles, subject to the granting of planning consent. The Western Isles Tourist Board, at its last Annual General Meeting before being merged into the VisitScotland structure, decided to seek the views of its members on the proposals through a postal survey.’

Conclusion

‘In presenting [the results] we have avoided any comments or interpretation, our aim throughout the survey being to remain entirely objective at all stages ... We hope that we have achieved our aim of complete objectivity and that the information presented is of use to our client and the wider Western Isles tourism industry.’

Comment

This is the only survey examined in which the research agency offered neither comments nor interpretations. It also differed in that respondents received a background briefing outlining arguments for and against the proposals. (VisitScotland’s survey did use ‘before and after’ mock-ups.)

Its results reveal significant levels of concern amongst people who depend for their livelihood on tourism in the Western Isles.

In line with most other surveys, three-quarters of respondents supported in principle the development of renewable energy in the region. However, 73 per cent were ‘not supportive’ of the 234-turbine North Lewis proposal and 70 per cent were ‘not supportive’ of the 133-turbine South Lochs scheme.

About half the respondents perceived a potential benefit due to increases in jobs and wealth during construction but around 70 per cent added that disbenefits included the displacement of leisure tourists by contractors during construction, destruction of the natural and visual landscape and a negative impact on the respondent’s business. Many felt that the promised level of jobs and wealth would not be created and two-thirds thought the economic disbenefits outweighed the benefits.

There is clearly a need for more research.