

Renewables plans violate convention, claim protesters

Mike Wade

Anti-turbine protesters from Scotland last night joined a European-wide action challenging the development of wind farms across 24 countries.

In a case brought at the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg, EPAW (the European Platform Against Windfarms) argues that the extension of the EC's renewable energy programme violates the Aarhus Convention. The international association, representing 596 groups across the continent, insist that the convention, adopted by the European Union in 2005, has been ignored.

Whenever a wind farm is proposed, public participation must take place at the preparatory stage at a local and national level, and this had not happened, said Mark Duchamp, EPAW's executive director. "By and large, planning authorities across the EU do not perform rigorous assessments of the impacts of wind farms," he said.

"They do little more than rubber-stamp the promoters' environmental impact statements. In legal terms, they are failing to conduct planning in a transparent and fair framework. This disrespect for the law will have dire, irreversible consequences for the EU's environment, people's health and the economy."

The case is expected to extend for at least 12 months. Last night, Susan Crosthwaite, EPAW's representative in Scotland, said that it was hugely relevant in Scotland where renewables policy was being "pursued by stealth".

Mrs Crosthwaite said that in March the Aikengall II wind farm, near Innerwick, East Lothian, became the 79th energy project that the Scottish govern-

ment had considered since May 2007. Of those, 56 had been for renewable energy projects including 32 onshore wind farms, of which ministers had refused planning permission for six. Another 46 applications were being considered, 44 of which involved renewable energy projects.

It was a "desperate situation" for rural communities, Mrs Crosthwaite said.

She added that more should be done to protect the Galloway and South Ayrshire Biosphere, inscribed by Unesco last year. Defined as "a site of excellence where new and optimal practices to manage nature and human activities are tested and demonstrated", it stretches between Ayr, Cumnock and Thornhill and covers the area south to the Solway coast from Whithorn to Kirkcudbright.

Within this area of thousands of square miles only three small zones — Merrick, Talla and Black Law — have been included in a map of wild land published last week, a designation that is almost certain to offer extra protection from wind farm development.

"The wild land identified in the south of Scotland represents a tiny area compared with the size of the Unesco biosphere," Mrs Crosthwaite said. "These scenic areas should be protected. The biosphere is about the preservation of the natural environment."

No official spokesman for the biosphere was available. Renewable energy companies sit on the Biosphere Partnership board.

"I don't think that the biosphere would have a view on wind farms," a source said. "It is a process that seeks to engage with people right across the community."