

TUESDAY APRIL 17 2001

Wind power is no simple solution

FROM PROFESSOR IAN FELLS, FRENG

Sir, One could be forgiven for believing that somehow wind power will provide most of the UK commitment to 10 per cent renewable electricity by 2010 (report and picture, April 6; see also letter, April 14 and reports, April 16). Coverage of the two offshore wind generators off Blyth dominated the press recently, but to generate just 5 per cent renewable electricity from wind will require one 80-metre high turbine to be installed off the coast each day from now until 2010. That is assuming planning permission can be obtained and someone will invest the large sums necessary to construct the huge rigs to install them.

The Government would be wise to put much more investment into medium and small-scale hydro, tidal power, tidal stream and wave power, which have been largely neglected up to now. These systems are less obtrusive and a good deal more predictable than wind power.

“The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth” (John, iii, 8). The wind is fickle and has to be completely backed up by reliable power sources for those cold, windless mornings when we still require coffee and toast for breakfast.

UK carbon dioxide emissions rose by 2 per cent last year, making our 20 per cent reduction target look fragile. This is because cheaper and less controversial coal-fired generation replaced nuclear and gas-fired generation.

UK environment ministers claimed the moral high ground in Kyoto, boasting of UK success in reducing greenhouse gas emissions compared with other nations. Pride goes before a fall. It is going to require a much bigger, real engineering effort and not just overconfident political assertions, to meet our international obligations.

Of course, fighting the battle with one arm tied behind our back, by refusing to contemplate nuclear power as part of the solution, is an absurdity.

Yours faithfully,
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April 13.