

Media News

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For Immediate Release

ENVIRONMENTAL ORGANISATIONS UNITE IN CONDEMNATION OF PLANNING BETRAYAL

Scotland's leading environmental groups have reacted with anger and disbelief to proposals which will effectively mean major developments getting the go ahead without substantive public consultation, or any independent assessment of need.

The Planning Task Force of Scottish Environment LINK, has warned that the proposals represent a betrayal of the policy agreed by the Lib/Lab Scottish Executive Partnership Agreement to improve the planning system by "strengthening the involvement of communities" and also undermines the government's commitment to sustainable development.

Commenting on the proposal Anne McCall, Convenor of the LINK Planning Task Force said:

"These proposals have come with little- warning. Environmental groups, local councillors and communities risk having their views ignored as the biggest and most controversial planning decisions will be taken without due consultation, behind closed doors, by Scottish Executive Ministers."

"There are obvious problems with the current framework for approving proposals of national significance and the delays and costs of inquiries; however the solution is not an assault on the democratic rights of stakeholders in the process. These proposals replace the transparent and inclusive inquiry process, setting aside any proper checks and balances, and therefore risk bringing the whole system into disrepute."

"Similar proposals were brought forward in England and during the passage of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act and were rejected by both the Government and the public. Scotland's environmental organisations will be campaigning to ensure they are not resurrected here."

"Environmental groups have a proud record of supporting communities and defending environmental interests via the planning system; successfully challenging unsustainable

Scottish Environment LINK is a Scottish charity under Scottish Charity No SC000296 and a Scottish company limited by guarantee and without share capital under Company No SC250899.

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developments including; the Lingerbay superquarry on Harris, the Shieldaig hydro scheme and the M80 Kelvin Valley Route.”

“It is shocking that this policy change has even been considered; an immediate statement from the Executive providing assurances that this option will not be in the White Paper would be welcomed. Otherwise we must draw our own conclusions about the Executive’s commitment to the democratic process and environmental justice.”

For more information please contact **Anne McCall**, Convenor of the LINK Planning Task Force or **Julia Harrison**, Advocacy Officer on 0131-311-6500.

Notes

1. A leaked confidential paper from the Communities Minister appears to suggest that Scottish Ministers are seeking to use the National Planning Framework to prevent these projects being challenged on the basis of ‘need’. Determining national need at a national level is, of course, logical. However, the National Planning Framework, unlike similar strategies in Wales and Northern Ireland is not a statutory document, nor is it subject to public consultation, so it cannot be challenged other than through judicial review. It is not subject to any form of inquiry, examination in public or formal adoption procedure. In short, it is an Executive policy paper which can be changed at the whim of Ministers and over which even the Parliament has no control
2. A similar proposal in the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (for England and Wales) was soundly rejected by both Government and the public.
3. Scottish Environment LINK launched its planning manifesto on the 29th of April. See http://www.scotlink.org/About_LINK/Work-areas/planning.php
4. Scottish Environment LINK is the forum for Scotland's voluntary environment organisations - 36 member bodies representing a broad spectrum of environmental interests with the common goal of contributing to a more environmentally sustainable society.
5. The Executive has indicated a planning white paper is due by summer 2005.

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