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1. The objectors' website for the Hinkley Point – Avonmouth 400kV proposal at <http://www.pylonthepressure.co.uk/> (news288.7) is an umbrella for local objector groups, including a group “Pylon More Pressure” representing people from the village of Mark in Somerset. They are particularly concerned that National Grid's consultation has not adequately met statutory requirements in the new infrastructure planning system.
2. In the last two weeks of January the group SEAT is running workshops for objectors to the proposed 400kV interconnector in Northern Ireland, in anticipation of the formal application very soon.
<http://www.seatactiongroup.com/>
3. Approval for the Beaully-Denny 400kV line was announced by the Scottish Government on 6 January 2010. It is grim reading with little given to objectors. At least the announcement was not buried just before Christmas, but then that trick tends to be for suppressing response potential in the proposal stages. Details can be obtained, with difficulty as they are fragmented into many small files not directly accessible, at <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Business-Industry/Energy/Infrastructure/Energy-Consents/Beaully-Denny-Index>
4. It is no surprise that the “pressing need” for the line was upheld, or that strategic alternatives were dismissed, given the limited scope of the purely Scottish decision. It is notable that the line is also wanted for “harvesting renewable generation between Beaully and Denny”. Expect more windfarms in the central Highlands!
5. However, it is disappointing that the “substantial impacts” did not result in more sections being rejected, with a view to undergrounding. In North Yorkshire the visual impacts were recognised as “severe”; perhaps the Scottish authorities think less of the Highlands. There appears to be a serious inconsistency in these assessments.
6. The Scottish Government seems to place importance on land, even in a national park, not being specifically designated as a “national scenic area” or “an area of great landscape value”. Does this mean that national park designation does not afford the same protection, and that it might be necessary to seek extra specific designations for special places in a national park? At the edge of the Cairngorms National Park the line would impact on the area of Loch Laggan, which would surely be of the highest possible landscape value.

7. The Beaulieu-Denny announcement is somewhat misleading in stating that Scottish Ministers have “no powers to direct that sections of electricity infrastructure be undergrounded”. The way it works is that rejecting overhead routes leaves the grid companies no alternative but to underground. In Yorkshire in the 1990s this worked in stages. After the first inquiries, substantial lengths were rejected, with a view to seeking alternative overhead routes where possible. Then, after a second application (for the alternative routes), rejection meant that no better alternative route was available, and so undergrounding was the only solution. The cost of such “required” undergrounding is approved by the regulator Ofgem for passing on in prices, so it does not burden the company (which is a regulated monopoly).

8. No substantial lengths of the Beaulieu-Denny proposal have been rejected. There are two small sections rejected, where “the route should be adjusted”. The Technical Report discusses undergrounding at length and concludes (5.2.7 and elsewhere) that “Partial undergrounding of the line in short lengths is practical and feasible” and “the Proposal can accommodate at least two typical sections of underground cable (5km at around £35m extra capital cost each, based on about £7.1m/km construction costs for underground cables) and still be the best scheme from an economic perspective”.

9. The Beaulieu-Denny line route passes through or close to a number of Natura 2000 sites, but the Reporters concluded that there would be no adverse effect on the integrity of the sites concerned. Objectors elsewhere might note the ineffectiveness of this line of objection in this case.

10. The EMF issue and precaution were discussed at some length in the Beaulieu Denny Technical Report, which is dated 11-2-09, well before the government response 16-10-09 to the SAGE report, but after the negative HPA response 15-10-07 to the UK government. In section 4.2.122 the Technical Report states “HPA advice to Ministers on SAGE is helpful in that it represents an authoritative perspective on the contentious issue of precaution”. The Reporter goes on to conclude “the case is not strong enough for me to propose precautionary measures in the absence of such measures ... established by government”. However, in concluding, he seems not to mention the point (which I pressed at the inquiry) that EMF should be taken, alongside visual and other impacts, as a contributory element in considering combined impact in particular locations.