



THE MOUNTAINEERING COUNCIL OF SCOTLAND

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14/8/08

Faber Maunsell
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Dear Ms McGuinness

GLENFINNAN ESTATE HYDROELECTRIC SCHEME

Mountaineering Council of Scotland Comments on the Scope of the ER

The Mountaineering Council of Scotland (MCoS) is the representative body for hill walkers, climbers and ski-tourers and we aim to represent the interests of all mountaineers. As the only national representative body of the sport of mountaineering in Scotland, we have 10,000 members, with 127 Scottish hill walking and climbing clubs affiliated.

We welcome the opportunity to comment on the requirements for the content of the Environmental Report in connection with a proposed Glenfinnan Hydroelectric Scheme. The following is an explanation of issues mountaineers consider to be of high significance in this important area for quiet recreation and high quality landscape.

Recreation and Access

The Glenfinnan area is highly important for upland recreation, and this significantly contributes to the economy of the area. This is recognised by central location in Lochaber near the centre of the Outdoor Capital UK. The MCoS is disappointed to note that there is no relevant proposed topic title in the list provided in the covering letter. We therefore propose that 'Recreation and Access' be added to the list of topics to be addressed in the Environmental Report (ER).

The very minimum for consideration are the routes to Munros and Corbetts. The map of the proposed scheme labels the Munros in the immediate vicinity of the scheme. Sgurr Thuilm and Sgurr nan Coireachan are often climbed together and often with use of a bicycle along the main Glen Finnan track to 300m short of the location of the most northerly proposed intake, then on foot traversing the horseshoe ridge. Corbetts are also very popular location for hill walking. Sgurr an Utha NM885839 is often accessed from Glenfinnan railway station up the ridge of Fraoch-bheinn. Streap NM946863 is often accessed either along the ridge via Beinn an Tuim starting up the path adjacent to the Allt an Tuim or west-south-west directly from Corryhully up the track parallel and immediately to the north of the Allt a Chait or by joining the ridge south west of the summit by a rising traverse from the most northerly proposed intake. These are popular routes, but not exhaustive of the access use in the area. It must be borne in mind that the rights to responsible access encompass the area, not just along linear routes.

The implications for access during construction, operational and decommissioning phases should be considered in detail. Specific assurance is needed from the developers that at the very minimum, that access can continue up the line of these routes throughout the construction, operational and decommissioning phases. A lack of such assurance has caused long term access problems for walkers on another Highland hydroelectric development site, and avoidance of this needs planned for at the first opportunity in this development. Should temporary alternative routes be necessary, MCofS are happy to be consulted on the details of what is a viable alternative. A requirement for walkers to take a completely different route is not an acceptable “alternative.”

Potential disruption to the car parking is also an issue that needs satisfactorily addressed. The customary car parking location for hill access is a small parking area off the A830 a short distance up Glen Finnan (approximately NM905808 as marked in the 1:25000 OS map). Car parking space must be preserved as there are few alternative options in Glenfinnan village.

There is a popular bothy near Corryhully (NM912844). The MCofS would greatly support continued access to this for use on an open bothy basis.

Landscape and Visual Impact

As noted above, the area is a very popular upland recreation location and this has local economic benefits. The ER should consider the landscape impact from all the most popular hill locations above the development. At the very least consideration of the landscape impact should include an assessment of the views from Munros and Corbetts and popular routes to and from these locations. The potential cumulative impacts with other proposed developments must be included in the analysis.

Although currently the proposed track along the east side of the River Finnan is screened by the plantation, this may not always be the case depending on the long term plans for the forestry block. Plans for this plantation need stated within the ER for a realistic assessment to be made of the visual impact on the landscape. There has recently been an increase in tracks constructed in the immediate vicinity and the cumulative impact of further construction is likely to be detrimental to the landscape quality of the area. The related signs that are unwelcoming to access users must not be repeated in connection to this development. Further reduction in visual amenity through more track construction is very unlikely to be acceptable. With the exception of Access Track Option 1, track construction would seem to be avoidable; hence an irrefutable reason for option 2 and 3 would need to be made for MCofS not to make an objection based on lack of need for further track construction.

Ecology and Aquatic Ecology

Avoidable track construction would also needlessly have potential impacts on salmonids and downstream SSSI and SPA through siltation and construction vehicle originated pollution.

These above issues need included in the Environmental Report as potentially significant impacts. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you wish to discuss any of these points.

Yours sincerely

Hebe Carus
Access & Conservation Officer