



THE MOUNTAINEERING COUNCIL OF SCOTLAND

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20/10/10

Dear Mr Drummond

Dunalastair Estate Hydro Development Screening Study – MCoFS Response

The MCoFS main interests in planning applications, such as this hydro scheme, are the potential impacts on recreation access, ecology, visual amenity and landscape. In the immediate vicinity of the proposal is the popular Corbett Beinn a' Chuallaich and the rock climbing crag Craig Varr. The whole development is in the nationally significant area for visual amenity, a National Scenic Area (NSA) and the Drumchastle Burn is in the Beinn a' Chuallaich SSSI designated for vascular plant assemblages, particularly in the flushes and around an on the limestone outcrops. The MCoFS considers it necessary for a full Environmental Statement due to the potential significant impacts on the features for which the SSSI is designated.

Both proposals are within the NSA. This is also a popular area for tourism and visitor walkers. For this reason the visual amenity impact of both schemes must be assessed and the effects minimised, including consideration of undergrounding pipelines/penstocks and avoiding addition of new tracks beyond those that already exist. According to 2010 OS map, at Allt Mor there exists a track to the northern boundary of the woodland at NN661594 and around the Drumchastle Burn development there is a track west from the Farm to about NN678588, then north then north-east to approximately NN679590. The distinction between a path and a track must be recognised and that a track has a far greater impact on visual amenity and the landscape than a path, either made or formed through use. New tracks or changing use from footpath use to vehicular-capable could be avoided through temporary tracking and low impact vehicles.

Drumchastle Burn

This element of the proposal is wholly within the SSSI, designated for Upland Assemblage and Vascular Plant Assemblage. Nationally rare plants are present especially in the eastern section, in the vicinity of the proposal. The SNH documentation for the SSSI states that the long term goal for the SSSI is to maintain the extent, quality and typical species of the various habitats. Also works involved in the development are likely to include some Operations Requiring Consent. The Screening Study states that, "special care will have to be taken to ensure any of the associated infrastructure including pipe and access routes do not impact on the drainage pathways in order to preserve the status of the SSSI." The MCoFS considers that without a full ES, it will be unclear that a satisfactory assessment of the mitigation of impacts can be achieved. Additionally, care must be taken to manage the effects on the visual amenity due to NSA status.

Allt Mor

The east bank of the Allt Mor south, crossing the burn to join the track at its northern limit at NN661594 is a popular hill walking route. The Screen Study statement that this route is for access to Craig Varr is incorrect. This is the access route for Beinn a' Chuallaich, rather than the rock climbing at Craig Varr which would be north east from Kinloch Rannoch. The MCoFS welcomes the commitment to, "an assessment of the impact on users of this path will be undertaken and alternate access routes provided should it be necessary." Any proposed alternative should be no less accessible or attractive an approach than the current route.

Please do not hesitate to contact me to discuss these issues further.

Yours sincerely

Hebe Carus (Ms)
Access & Conservation Officer