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Renewable Energy: the Scottish Story - The political landscape

**Graphic:**

Scotland has some of the best renewable resources but they'd be redundant without the political will to harness them. So what impact does Scotland's political landscape have on its energy policy?

**Dr Alistair Martin, Flexitricity:**

Renewable energy policy is different in Scotland to the rest of the United Kingdom. That has allowed the Scottish government to set a rather different course and actually a more ambitious one. Over the years that that's been happening the Westminster policy tends to try to catch up. I think that that dichotomy, that conflict in a sense, has actually been healthy for the whole of the UK.

**Dr Nicola McEwen, Academy of Government, University of Edinburgh:**

The Scottish government, the Scottish parliament actually doesn't have very much power in the area of energy policy, most of the powers, the levers of power, are based in the Westminster institutions. So they've been able to do quite a lot with very little law making power. Scotland has always had a significant hydro-capacity since the post-war period, so there was a base on which to build there and since devolution when climate change came further and further up the agenda of all governments, all the Scottish governments have tried to be, seem to be progressive, they try to be active in renewable energy and it's just increased over the years.

**Marco Biagi, SNP MSP for Edinburgh Central:**

Renewable energy has been a very popular political priority for both administrations we've had in the Scottish parliament since devolution took place. The first labour, liberal democrat executive set the first ever renewable energy target and the SNP in particular in our re-election in 2011 came in with a goal of generating 100% of our electricity demand from renewable sources by 2020. The experience of Scotland has been, any target that has been set, whoever it's been set by has been met or exceeded; because there is such a great consensus. Maybe it has something to do with the society that we live in in Scotland, just being more tuned to green values. More willing to support environmental causes, we do after all have the world's most ambitious climate change targets now in Scotland, and that sets a backdrop for a country that is more willing to, to really support and embrace renewable energy.

**Niall Stuart, Scottish Renewables:**

I think the countries that have succeeded in really rapidly changing their energy systems are the ones who have been very strong political leadership and have clear strong statement of intent by government. And Scotland has very much done that, and unequivocally stated it wants to expand its renewable sector. And once you have that, then you come on to the next difficult bit, which is setting up the legal, the regulatory financial frameworks that will bring investment and create development. And so we've seen a very strong commitment from the Scottish government to renewables, we've then seen a lot of work done to create the right planning framework to balance the need for renewable energy development with the need to protect our iconic landscapes. Because just as Scotland's becoming known for renewable energy, Scotland has long been known as beautiful country with spectacular landscapes.

**Dr Nicola McEwen, Academy of Government, University of Edinburgh:**

One of the other things in terms of policy, that the Scottish government has done is they have a favourable planning environment. So it's not that it's predisposed towards renewables, but it's very efficient. So you won't necessarily get an application bogged down in the planning system in a way that you might have south of the border. One of the things that I think they've done quite successfully is reached out to the industry and brought the industry on board. So for example, there is an energy advisory board, which is convened by the first minister and also by a senior representative within the industry, and brings together lots of industry partners, academic community, lots of different players coming together. So there's been a sense in which there's been a consensus among the different partners, the different players behind this drive towards a low carbon Scotland. And independence for me would offer us a chance to set our own system.