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Renewable Energy: the Scottish Story - The impact of independence

Graphic:

What are the energy challenges and opportunities faced by Scotland if it opts for independence in the 2014 referendum?

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

If Scotland were to become independent, possibly quite high on the list of priorities would be ownership of North Sea Oil and of the waters surrounding Scotland, there's no question in my mind of that. And it's one of the intriguing things about the Scottish government in a sense is that although they do promote a low carbon discourse that goes hand in hand with an, a commitment to exploiting the fossil fuels that remain in the north seas. So it's driven I think, more by the desire for economic prosperity than necessarily a desire to be green. What would Scotland look like if it was independent? Who knows? It very much depends, but the Scottish government's view seems to be that at least in the field of renewable energy things may carry on before. The Scottish government wants an independent Scotland to be part of a GB market, part of a single electricity market, in mainland Britain and that would be supported and facilitated to a larger extent by European Union regulations, where they would expect an independent regulator in Scotland, but they would expect close cooperation with the other regulators in the British Isles.

Charles Hendry MP, former UK Minister of State for Energy:

We are seeing quite different approaches being taken within Scotland and England on different aspects. The key aspect of that is nuclear. The United Kingdom Government for England and Wales, we've decided that nuclear should be part of the mix going forward, the Scottish government has decided that it shouldn't. So if Scotland wishes to decarbonise, then it has to do much more through renewables, but then much of the renewable resource for the whole of the United Kingdom is based in Scotland. And so they're in a strong position to do that. The challenge, of course, is that should Scotland be separate from England, is that they would then need to be selling into an English market; and English consumers may decide they would rather buy French nuclear through an interconnector rather than Scottish renewables. So it then has to be cost efficient. And one can only get to that position of Scotland being entirely self-sufficient if it can be done in a way that they have more than they need for some of the time, and recognising at other times they'd need to be importing from other areas.

Niall Stuart, Scottish Renewables:

I find it hard to see a situation where even if Scotland were to become independent where we wouldn't continue to export electricity to the rest of the UK. Because over these next four or five years we're gonna triple the level of connection between Scotland and the rest of the UK. And of course, the UK is already in negotiations with Ireland, for example, about setting up a contract import, very significant levels of renewable electricity later this decade and beyond. So I think irrespective of the constitutional setup of Scotland, there's a market for the commodity that we can generate from renewable power. We have to compete. There's a market for power, and power can come from many different sources. So our medium, long-term aspiration is to continue to drive down the costs of renewable electricity. So if renewable electricity from Scotland is cheaper, more competitive than alternate sources of import power from France, from Belgium, from the Netherlands, or generating it from fossil fuels or nuclear in England, why wouldn't the rest of the UK continue to import power from Scotland?

Marco Biagi, SNP MSP for Edinburgh Central:

After independence, we would expect that offshore wind development would still be largely private led, but the key issue for us would be the revenues from that and the taxes from that would come to the Scottish government, the Scottish exchequer. The experience of the constitution has been, sometimes we've been held back a little bit where there's been one size fits all policies towards energy across the whole of the UK, because our emphasis has been different, our scope for developing renewable energy has been much greater, and so, on issues like charging the spending of the fossil fuel levy, other regulatory issues like that, we've had to continually go to Westminster and make our case for a more green energy friendly system. And independence for me would offer us a chance to set our own system.