

Western Morning News

£50M TO BOOST WAVE ENERGY PROJECTS

11:00 - 03 August 2004

Projects to harness tidal power off the Westcountry coastline are to benefit from a share of a £50 million cash fund, the Government announced yesterday.

The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) has launched a Marine Research Development Fund to finance a variety of projects, aimed at making the UK a "world leader" in wave energy.

Over the next three years, the scheme will provide grants and subsidies for new and existing projects to harness energy from Westcountry waters - which boast one of the strongest tidal currents in Europe.

The coastline off Lynton and Lynmouth, in North Devon, is already the site of a pioneering £3 million underwater turbine.

Nicola Harper, a director of OreconLtd, currently developing a wave energy system in Plymouth, said: "It is about time the Government invested money into wave energy. The power is out there, and would contribute a huge amount to renewable energy targets."

Miss Harper, whose project would have large columns inserted into the ocean to act like giant pistons, added that wave energy is "far more reliable and more predictable" than wind power.

Nick Harvey, Lib-Dem MP for North Devon, said the news was "welcome and timely" as the backlash against the proliferation of wind turbines continued to grow. Mr Harvey, who is heading a campaign to block plans for a string of giant wind turbines in Fullabrook Down, said: "The South West will be particularly interested in this new research and development because of our long coastlines and strong tidal forces. I believe people will be far more receptive to tidal energy than wind power, and allow us to make a proper contribution to renewable energy."

The scheme is the latest initiative by the Government as it strives to meet its target of generating 15 per cent of the UK's energy needs from renewable sources by 2015.

One of the benefits of generating electricity from tidal currents is predictability, enabling developers to know when the turbines will be producing electricity.

Wave power has long been seen as the poor relation of renewable energy, despite the fact that it costs less than wind power. Initial investigations indicate that the technology also has a low environmental impact. The Lynton project, managed by Marine Current Turbines, has one 11-metre-long underwater rotor blade producing up to 300kw of power. After a successful start, plans for another turbine are already underway.

Announcing the new fund yesterday, Patricia Hewitt, Secretary of State for Trade and Industry said: "The UK's wave and tidal flows are the greatest in Europe and I want to ensure we harness these immense natural resources to generate power for the UK."

The Scottish Executive has already announced plans to generate as much as ten per cent of the Scotland's electricity from wave turbines by 2020, establishing a

new industry that could create as many as 7,000 jobs.

The £50 million fund will also help finance the world's first marine test centre in Orkney.