

Western Morning News

## WIND BUSINESS LEADERS HEAD 'GREEN' BOARD

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Eleven of the 18 "appointed" members of the agency that advises the Government on the "green" energy needed to combat global warming, work for private companies with heavy financial interests in wind technology, the WMN has learned.

Their prominent role on the Renewables Advisory Board is revealed amid mounting controversy over the Government's policy on wind power as the primary source of renewable energy.

Ten of those eleven members have prominent positions in companies that are listed as members of the British Wind Energy Association, the trade organisation for the onshore and offshore wind power industry.

The advisory board, which describes itself as "independent", has a pivotal role in guiding Government policies on tackling climate change and promoting renewables. Yet the companies for which the board members work are investing millions of pounds in wind development.

One of the smallest, Ecotricity, this year put £7 million into wind power, while one of the largest, Scottish and Southern, plans a total investment of about £850 million on projects in the Highlands.

Three of the board members are leading figures in companies - NEG Micon, Cambrian and Ecotricity - which make wind turbines.

Another three are also board members of the British Wind Energy Association, Alan Moore (chairman), Rob Hastings, and Chris Morris.

The BWEA describes itself as "the trade and professional body for the UK wind industry". Its promotional material says: "We act as a central point for information for our membership and as a lobbying group to promote wind energy to government. We research and find solutions to current issues and generally act as the forum for the UK wind industry."

At the same time the Renewables Advisory Board says it is "an independent non-departmental public body sponsored by DTI, which provides advice to Government on a wide range of renewable energy issues on request and may also offer other such advice to the Government, as it considers appropriate."

Mr Moore is also the managing director of npower, which is behind the plan for three turbines at Goveton in the South Hams in Devon.

The WMN's findings were last night described as evidence of a bias that could jeopardise the UK's strategy on global warming.

Noel Edmonds, chairman of the Renewable Energy Foundation (REF), described the situation as "scandalous" and "potentially catastrophic for all of us". The Devon-based businessman and broadcaster condemned the composition of the board as "morally, commercially and ethically unacceptable."

He said: "There appears to be a complete lack of independence and impartiality. I believe the wind industry is being favoured to the exclusion of other forms of renewable technology. Onshore wind power is about the commercial development

of the countryside for commercial gain."

His comments were echoed by the South West MEP Dr Caroline Jackson, who is a member of the European Parliament's Environment Committee.

She said: "It's a scandalous situation. If this was happening in a European context people would be screaming blue murder and there would be a case to take to the European ombudsman. These companies are being subsidised by the Government at one end, and supposedly giving independent advice at the other. They can't lose."

The companies with representatives on the advisory board have openly declared their commitment to wind power.

In its promotional material, npower says: "National Wind Power is now called npower renewables and remains committed to developing and promoting wind energy as a major renewable energy source for a sustainable future."

Another company NEG MICON states: "With almost 20 years of experience in the business, we have been involved in the development of wind power technology from the very start, and have, therefore, been instrumental in elevating the business to the advanced level it occupies today. More than 7,400 of the company's wind turbines are today in operation around the globe, responsible for approximately 23.4 per cent of the total wind power production capacity."

Shell Wind Energy says: "As wind energy becomes increasingly competitive with conventional power sources, we aim to be one of the industry's leading players and a force for progress in this rapidly developing sector."

Wind Prospect's commercial director, Chris Morris, states his role in the company as "to help steer the company to continued growth underpinned by a secure financial base". The company claims to have managed the construction of 60 per cent of the windfarms commissioned in the UK in 2002.

Local communities repeatedly complain that their views are over-ruled by a planning process that the Government has skewed in favour of wind development.

But at least one member of the advisory board is on record as complaining that the planning process is too restrictive.

Dale Vince, the founder of Ecotricity, recently complained: "You can't be in wind without having problems with planning. Onshore schemes are in the hands of local councillors, who don't read the details of applications, don't understand Government policies and cave in to local pressure groups."

The advisory board, which was set up in November 2002 is chaired by Mike O'Brien, the Minister for Energy and Construction at the DTI. It is split into two between 11 "ex officio" members, including the chairman, drawn from Government departments and other sectors. The "appointed" members are selected from what the DTI insists are "all sectors" of the renewables industry.