

Severn tidal energy must not become a political football

A Joint statement by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF-UK), Wildfowl and Wetland Trust, Save Our Severn, The Bristol Port Company, Gloucester Harbour Trustees, The Salmon and Trout Association, the Wye and Usk Foundation, Atlantic Salmon Trust and Professor Martin Bell.

We agree that the climate challenge means it is right to investigate new ways of generating power, including ways to harness the tidal power of the Severn Estuary as fully as possible while minimising wider negative impacts.

Political pressure to commit the Labour party to a tidal power-generating barrage across the Severn from Cardiff to Weston is highly inappropriate. For any political party to make such a specific commitment before the Feasibility Study on Tidal Power in the Severn Estuary has completed and before all the various options have been fully examined pre-empts the current studies.

The Government's Feasibility Study, which is investigating a range of options, their impacts and cost-benefit, is currently in Phase 2. It is not expected that the results will be available and subject to public consultation until after the election. The Government is also committed to supporting the development of three innovative proposals through the Severn Embryonic Technologies Scheme (SETS).

The SETS proposals may generate as much power as the Cardiff-Weston barrage, at less cost and with less environmental damage. These findings are yet to be released, and there have been assurances from the Government that they will be fed back into the Feasibility Study before any final decision is made.

Over £9 million has already been spent on the Feasibility Study and SETS, and a barrage from Cardiff to Weston would cost in the region of £23 billion. In addition to the costs involved, significant impacts can be expected, including:

- massive losses of internationally important bird habitats;
- loss of several fish species, and an end to the commercial and cultural activities of eel and salmon fishing that date back thousands of years;
- coastal erosion, increased flood risk, together with uncertain and potentially damaging changes in tides as far away as Ireland;
- job losses and damage to commercial interests at ports on the Severn;
- loss of important sites of archaeological interest;
- an end to the famous 'Severn Bore' phenomenon and associated tourism.

Until the studies are completed, we cannot know if a barrage is a cost-effective and acceptable way of delivering the urgent replacement required to our energy generation system, or even if the project is feasible at all. Politicians simply cannot reach an informed decision at this stage. This is too big an issue to be made into a political football for electoral gain when the facts are still not known.

The undersigned call on political parties to make their judgment on whether to support or otherwise a scheme for Severn tidal power based solely on the economic and scientific data to be published after the election.

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