

The issue of water abstraction and impoundment licensing for hydro electricity generation is missing from this list although it is a permitting process applied by the environment agencies throughout the UK. I am submitting this comment here and will do so under the consultation on red-tape on Energy in November.

I administer the Micro Hydro Association (www.microhydroassociation.co.uk) whose members currently number 76 existing and potential generators and supporters of micro hydro-electric schemes and 49 individuals and organisations who offer services and products in the field. I have been representing this community in the consultations by the EA and SEPA on their guidelines for hydropower schemes.

The environmental legislation involved includes the EU Water Directive but there is other related legislation and subsidiary regulation, together with links to planning regulation and heritage preservation. The complete set of regulations governing the development of micro hydro-electric schemes (currently defined as sub 50kW capacity) is burdensome and involves overlap and duplication of effort. It can currently take years before even a tiny off-grid scheme is permitted. Micro hydro schemes offer rural landowners and communities who have access to suitable water resources the best renewable energy technology available in terms of performance and resilience. The Feed-in Tariff has offered a viable incentive for people to make the investment involved but uptake has been very limited as a result of the over-precautionary approach applied by the agencies, apparently mainly based on concerns which apply to much larger schemes.

What is needed is a single and simple regulatory process which will permit the majority of micro hydro-electric schemes given satisfactory registration of scheme designs and evidence of consultation with, and agreement from, any affected landowners. Registration would need to be supported by selective monitoring of implementation (as would full mitigated licensing).

Registration would need to be replaced, following appropriate surveys, by specific abstraction and impoundment licences with defined mitigation measures, only where the extent of a depleted reach or the addition of an impoundment could have a significant impact in the total river basin in terms of flood risk, water scarcity, biodiversity, protected species, or critical business and recreational fishing interests. Significance would be determined principally on spatial/volumetric parameters within overall river basin plans.

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