

Tourist Attitudes towards Wind Farms

Introduction

The issue of how wind farms affect tourism has long been an issue that has divided opinion and promoted much debate. However, there has been little other than anecdotal evidence to use to help resolve this matter. With this in mind, Scottish Renewables Forum and the British Wind Energy Association jointly commissioned MORI Scotland, as an independent research agency, to undertake a programme of research among tourists visiting Argyll & Bute. The purpose of the survey was to assess tourists' awareness and perception of wind farms in the area, to help answer the question about how wind farm development might affect tourism in Scotland.

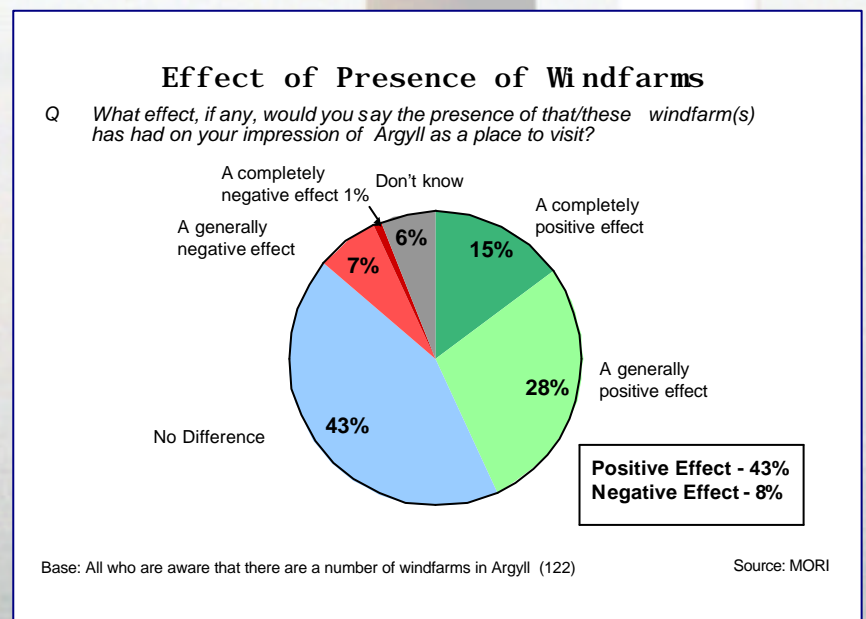
MORI interviewed tourists visiting Argyll and Bute in Scotland during September 2002. Argyll and Bute was chosen as a study area as it currently has the greatest concentration of wind farms in Scotland, with three large commercial wind farms now in operation. Furthermore, the area has high landscape value, and the local tourist industry relies on the scenery and natural environment to help attract visitors to the area.

The results clearly show that areas do not have to choose between promoting tourism or wind energy, but that both activities can co-exist happily together. Indeed, the research shows that wind farms can have a positive impact on tourism, by helping promote a positive image of an area and by encouraging repeat visits.

Summary of Findings

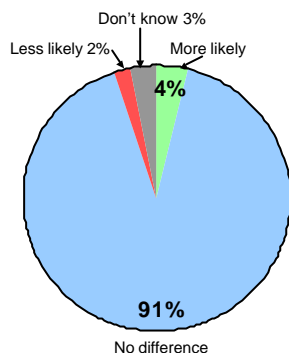
The research clearly shows that tourists came to Argyll because of its high landscape value. When asked what attracted them to the area, the main reason for visiting the area was given as *'beautiful scenery and views'*, and was mentioned by almost half (48%) of the tourists interviewed.

40% of tourists interviewed were aware of the existence of wind farms in the area and when asked whether this presence had a positive or negative effect, two in five (43%) maintained that it had a positive effect, while a similar proportion felt it made no difference. Less than one in ten (8%) felt that it had a negative effect. This means that the majority of tourists who knew about the wind farms, came away with a more positive image of the area because of their presence (see right).



Likelihood of Visiting Argyll in the Future

Q Has the presence of windfarms in Argyll made you any more likely to visit the area in future, made it less likely, or has it made no difference?



Base: All respondents (307)

Source: MORI

When asked whether the presence of wind farms in Argyll made any difference to the likelihood of them visiting the area, the majority, (91%) maintained that it made no difference. Importantly, twice as many people said they would be "more likely" to visit again than the amount who would be "less likely" to visit.

Finally, tourists were asked to what extent they would be interested in visiting a wind farm if it were opened to the public with a visitor centre.

The majority, (80%) would be interested with over half (54%) 'very interested'. Around one in five are 'not interested'.

Research Implications

This independent research demonstrates that the wind and tourism industries can coexist peacefully together, because tourists are able to both appreciate an area's natural beauty and also react positively to the presence of wind farms. The fact that the presence of wind farms makes the majority of tourists think more positively about Argyll suggests that tourists will judge an area positively if it is using its natural resources to generate energy from renewable sources.

Most tourists visit Argyll & Bute because of the landscape and its beautiful views and scenery. The research reveals that the wind farms are not seen as having a detrimental effect on their visit and would not deter tourists from visiting the area in the future. Interestingly, the presence of wind farms would encourage more people to revisit than to stay away.

Finally, the majority viewed the prospect of having a visitor centre at the site of wind farms favourably and would, in fact, be interested in visiting and subsequently finding out more information on wind farms and their operation. This means that there are opportunities for developers to develop visitor centres on wind sites, to help attract visitors to an area.

For more information please contact:

Maf Smith ~ Development Manager ~ Scottish Renewables Forum

The e-Centre ~ Cooperage Way ~ Alloa ~ FK10 3LP

Tel: 01259 272 117 Fax: 01259 272 118

Email: info@scottishrenewables.com Web: www.scottishrenewables.com