Summary

The Welsh Government wanted to be able to monitor all land-use planning applications for wind-power developments in order to assess whether policy ambitions were being met and identify barriers to development. Local Planning Authorities are requested to complete quarterly returns and this information was available to the ENNEREG project. It was clear, even from a quick inspection, that these returns were not complete or accurate. Some local authority officers completing the returns were obviously unclear about definitions such as “installed capacity” and the survey returns had obvious errors to the experienced eye. Even if it were accurate the survey ceased at the point at which consent was granted or finally refused – it did not provide information on implantation.

Success / Barriers

The main barrier encountered has been the lack of conscientiousness in the data collection.

Aims and Objectives of this Sustainable Energy Action

The aim was to develop a database for Wales which would provide information on on-shore wind turbine planning applications – i.e. turbines submitted for planning permission, details on approvals, refusals and appeals, and in particular those approved but not generating after 1 year.

The main focus of the monitoring was to identify those applications that fall out of the system and to determine the main causes for this. This was to be followed by sessions where local authority officers would be trained to fill in the returns forms accurately (for the main central government database), this being one of the main barriers to success of the system currently in place.

This work would have been undertaken on behalf of the Welsh Government and would require to be endorsed by them in order that the participation of the local authorities is ensured.
Results and Impacts

It might become possible to implement a monitoring system if the data bases from Ofgem are clarified and the data is easily cross-referenced to that from the local planning authorities. Information on reasons for the non-implementation of consented schemes is always, however, likely to be partial at best.

Process

Having contacted the Department for Energy and Climate Change (DECC) who were keen for us to progress with the project acknowledging its usefulness, we were directed to on-line databases which went some way to providing us with the information we required. One was compiled by the DECC and one by Ofgem (the UK Energy Regulator) - see:

https://restats.decc.gov.uk/cms/welcome-to-the-restats-web-site

There were however gaps in the information and its accuracy was questionable. We (SWEA and Welsh Government Planning Division) had considered contacting all relevant local authorities to check the accuracy of the information held for their regions on these databases but we knew that this would be a laborious process and were reluctant to commence upon it unless we were clear of the process into the future.

In addition, it was proposed that letters could be issued to applicants and/or developers of sites approved but not yet generating 1 year after approval, requesting reasons why the site is not yet active. This approach would clearly depend on being able to identify such cases. It was initially assumed that the planning authorities would provide information on consented turbines and that the statistics relating to generation would come from Ofgem that is monitoring the payments of the generation support payments (Renewable Obligation certificates and Feed in Tariffs). The latter information proved frustratingly difficult to access and the way that the information was classified did not tie up with the information available from the local authorities. Even if we had managed to find a definitive list of approved but inoperative turbines, getting to the reasons why approved turbines are not yet generating is difficult, if not impossible, when the information is commercially sensitive. It may be, for instance, that funders/financers backed out or there may be aviation/defense issues.

Actions undertaken

The ENNEREG project staff at SWEA liaised with officers of the Welsh Government on the potential for survey and data collection and its quality over a period of around six months. Possibly as a result of the difficulties encountered the Welsh Government commissioned a consultancy company to examine the timeline for all renewable projects consented since 2005 in order to identify bottle-necks in the consenting process. This study will examine all forms of renewable technologies and will look at only those projects which have been consented, i.e. not those which are currently still in the system. The study will only provide for part of the initial ambitions for the monitoring project and only a “snapshot” as opposed to a continuous monitoring.

Find out more about this and other Sustainable Energy Actions, online at: www.regions202020.eu/gp

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