

## GOVERNMENT ADVISERS SLAM PEMBROKE POWER STATION GO-AHEAD

The Environment Agency's decision to grant an environmental permit for Pembroke power station has been strongly criticised by the Welsh Government's environmental advisers, the Countryside Council for Wales (CCW).

In its response to the Agency's decision [1], obtained by Pembrokeshire Friends of the Earth under Freedom of Information Regulations, CCW repeats its warning that the cooling system will harm the important marine environment of the Milford Haven waterway. These damaging impacts could last for the 40-year lifetime of the power station.

It states that, each year, hundreds of thousands of fish caught on the intake screens will die while hundreds of millions of juvenile fish that pass through the screens are also likely to be killed **[para 3.3.3]**. This decline in fish and eel numbers could be sufficient to reduce the numbers of otters **[para 8.4.2]**.

CCW also point to other damaging impacts. The discharge of cooling water at 7C higher temperature will, it predicts, harm shell growth, fish reproduction and resistance to disease, while the use of biocide in the cooling water will pose an additional threat **[paras 2.1.1, 2.1.5, and 5]**

The CCW paper complains strongly that its case has been "misrepresented" by the Agency and that, despite a minuted agreement to remove these views, they still appear in the Agency's final environmental assessment document **[para 9.1.1]**. Another serious allegation made is that the Agency failed to both follow an agreed process of working and to work closely with CCW **[para 9.4.1]**.

The paper also accuses the Agency of significantly understating the power station's impact on the Pembrokeshire Marine Special Area of Conservation **[para 1.1.5]**, and of failing to provide sufficient expert evidence to back its case **[para 1.2.3]**.

Pembrokeshire Friends of the Earth spokesperson, Gordon James, said:

“The letter from CCW contains remarkably strong criticism of the Environment Agency’s decision to give Pembroke power station an environmental permit to operate and clearly shows that this should not have been allowed as it will damage this extremely important marine environment.”

Following objections from CCW, the Welsh Government did intervene, on 21<sup>st</sup> July last year, to prevent the Agency issuing an environmental permit to operate the power station. It requested more detailed information from CCW about its objections and a response to these from the Agency.

Although this process resulted in some mitigation of the power station’s harmful environmental impacts, CCW maintained its opposition to the environmental assessment undertaken by the Agency [2]. The Welsh Government chose to ignore these important objections of its expert environmental advisers and, in a letter to the Agency on 8<sup>th</sup> November, informed it that it could now issue the environmental permit.

Gordon James of Pembrokeshire Friends of the Earth continued:

“It’s shameful that the Welsh Government has ignored the remaining strong objections of its environmental experts to this damaging and wasteful power station. We believe this should have resulted in Wales’ Environment Minister, John Griffiths, calling in the application and holding a public inquiry. By failing to do this he has ducked a difficult decision and Pembrokeshire’s greatest asset, its natural environment, will be worse off as a consequence.

“We feared last July that the Government’s intervention was little more than a gesture of flexing its muscles. It seems that when it comes to making tough decisions, the Welsh Government’s commitment to sustainable development is only skin deep.

”This dispute also raises strong concerns about the effectiveness of the body that will emerge from the amalgamation of the Countryside

Council for Wales, the Environment Agency in Wales and the Forestry Commission. It appears that in a unified body strong objections from the government's environmental scientists will have to quietly acquiesce behind closed doors to the regulatory priorities of the Agency.”

The European Commission is continuing to investigate a complaint about Pembroke power station from Friends of the Earth Cymru.

ENDS

For further information phone Gordon James on 01437 563670 or 07579964256

NOTES

1. The Countryside Council for Wales' final response (December 2011) to the Environment Agency on the granting of an environmental permit to allow Pembroke power station to operate is attached. The specific references to it in the press releases are numbered in BOLD.
2. Para 54 of the attached letter to Chris Mills, Director of the Environment Agency Wales, from Matthew Quinn, Director of Environment, Sustainability and Housing at the Welsh Assembly Government and signed under the authority of Welsh Ministers, on 11<sup>th</sup> November 2011. This states, “It is clear that differences of view remain between you (the Environment Agency) and CCW as to the impacts of the project and that CCW maintains its disagreement with the conclusion of the AA (Appropriate Assessment)”