

SUBMISSION FROM VANCE ALLEN AND BILL RODGER

Scottish Government Aims & General Assumptions

NPF2 invites feedback in respect of 6 topics. We believe it is appropriate to comment on two of those, namely –

- Whether the policies set out in NPF2 support the government's key aims for the development of Scotland to 2030
 - Where we believe that insufficient consideration is given to developing and mobilising human capital (ref. Aim 3 and Aim 4 of para 43)
- Whether the correct balance has been struck between economic development and environmental protection
 - Where we suggest that a more creative stance could and should be adopted which would improve the possibility of advancing both aims rather than trading one off against the other. In particular, we argue for targeted R&D investment.

Over and above these specific points we hold the view that the Framework presupposes a world which, while changing, will remain fundamentally “business as usual”. We question whether, to use Shell's phrase, we are “heading for the rapids”, thereby making it appropriate to consider the use of methods which accommodate a wider range of outcomes.

The remainder of this note expands on these observations.

Mechanistic Approach

The contents of the Framework list a strong list of projects which, if completed, should make a substantial contribution to the people of Scotland. It follows a traditional style for such documents of setting out broad policy objectives and then a series of concrete measures which seek to move Scotland's welfare forward towards achieving those objectives.

The inevitable weakness of this style of document is that it is necessarily light on implementation. It concentrates on the development of physical assets on the assumption that we Scots will use these more effectively and profitably to further our own welfare. While this may be true in itself it does not directly address the motivation and confidence of Scots to anticipate taking advantage of these developments and engage in the very entrepreneurial activities which will bring about the desired increase in prosperity.

Communication & Engagement

In the current Scottish context moreover, this may be an opportunity missed and potentially leaves open an issue which will compromise achieving the very aims which it is targeting. This is because Scottish society has become accustomed to relatively low ambitions and is somewhat cynical of what it is possible to make happen. Fuller engagement after publication of NPF2 ought to make it possible to increase the sense of ownership and pride in its aspirations. In turn that is likely to increase the motivation behind the plans

and thereby better support implementation.

If the Framework is to have maximum impact there should be a communications strategy which makes it become real for the people of Scotland. It will be important for that communications strategy to properly engage people while retaining a sense of direction. If it feels like a PR exercise, it will have failed.

We note the intention (para 241) to publish Action Plans and hope that the thoughts might be useful to the agencies charged with developing that Action Plan.

Scenarios

One means of tackling this while simultaneously addressing a separate vulnerability is to adopt a scenario-based approach. The world of early 21st century is brimming over with potential change. The credit crunch will eventually settle and, in the way of creative destruction, produce its new winners and losers. Which will be which?

But there are also longer term considerations. The shelflife of the Framework will likely see a number of issues coming to a head which potentially will dwarf the turbulence already experienced since the start of the Millennium. Many of these are difficult to forecast, but outcomes may yet be imagined. Not the least of these is the coming to maturity within the workforce of the Net Generation for whom interconnectedness is second nature and whose perspective on world affairs is accordingly rooted quite differently.

The Framework should seek to engage Scotland with these very real possibilities in a proactive way. (The challenge involved in that should not be underestimated given the threadbare condition of the Scottish media and might even lay the conditions for its rebirth.)

Thus, for example, there can be no doubting the potential that Scotland possesses in renewable energy. Exploiting that to maximum advantage will take place in the dynamic context of

- fluctuating energy prices susceptible to international relationships,
- an international market (mostly EU) which doesn't yet subscribe to a common energy policy (so might yet be influenced) and
- a technologically dynamic context as different energy solutions compete to fill the role being steadily vacated by hydrocarbons.

Alternatively we might settle for a domestic UK market or overland route through England. But what would be the relative advantages/disadvantages of each approach and what influence might Scotland bring to bear? Some consideration of different outcomes would help explain and communicate the policy rationale while at the same time visibly demonstrating good practice as per the 2006 Planning Act.

Another purpose of such a scenario-based communication exercise could be

to communicate less obvious implications of policy decisions. For example, if a breakthrough produces cheap sustainable biofuels from cellulose, Scotland would be well placed to take advantage. However cheaper fuel would likely mean a much greater congestion problem exacerbating an already problematic aspect (which NPF2 currently treats too lightly.)

Proactivity & Collaboration

Related to this, the Framework acknowledges the longer time horizon for biomass renewables. Indeed international research on the conversion of cellulose to energy has the potential to deliver further breakthroughs beyond 2030. Appropriate R&D investment by SG would seem judicious to bring forward benefits, to monitor how competing technologies emerge so as to position investment appropriately and to seed new Scottish businesses.

Under the current circumstances, it might also be productive to consider an even longer timescale for some headings such as that adopted by the UK Government's ForeSight Project on Land Use Futures.

The Framework doesn't seem to recognise the need for such collaborative proactivity. While other countries have already established a lead in onshore wind production, a similar case might be made for R&D into offshore energy production and for waste recycling.

R&D (coupled with innovation-to-market funding) represents infrastructure investment just as much as does a new train line. Moreover the impact on human capital should be embraced in line with Scottish Government's declared Objectives for its people.

Making it Happen

R&D represents a form of government intervention which should enable subsequent exploitation by empowered local authorities and private enterprise but without which, they will be abandoned to struggle on in a suboptimal reactive fashion. Truly devolving power to the local level necessitates provision of the appropriate tools and of effective but unobtrusive coordination. Not least among these tools are healthy two-way communication, aspiration and confidence. If handled well, the Framework's own publication could make a substantial contribution to these.

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