

‘Connecting Energy, Protecting Nature’. A joint EEB and BirdLife briefing by Ivan Scrase, Martina Mlinaric and Suzie Lukacova.

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The poster features a central image of a person's silhouette filled with green foliage, standing on a stone wall. In the background, there are power lines and a transmission tower. The text is centered in a white box with a grey border.

EU Launch of the Report
“Connecting Energy, Protecting Nature”
with subsequent debate

7 October 2014, 09 – 11.30 am followed by reception
University Foundation, Brussels

Logos in the top right corner include the European Environmental Bureau (EEB) logo, the BirdLife International logo, and the text 'Renewable Grid Initiative'.

Launch supported by the Renewables Grid Initiative

BirdLife Europe

- Partner NGOs in 48 countries, including every EU Member State.
- Owns or manages more than 5,800 sites totalling 320,000 hectares.
- We support a green energy transition.
- “BirdLife Europe’s unique local to global approach enables it to deliver high impact and long-term conservation for the benefit of nature and people.”
- <http://www.birdlife.org/europe-and-central-asia>



European Environmental Bureau

- 140 member organisations in 31 countries.
- Over 15 million members represented.
- Part of the “Green 10” Brussels NGOs, along with BirdLife, Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth, WWF and others.
- “We stand for environmental justice, sustainable development and participatory democracy. Our aim is to ensure the EU secures a healthy environment and rich biodiversity for all.”
- <http://www.eeb.org>



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RGI

Renewables
Grid Initiative 

- Coalition of grid operators and NGOs supporting grids for renewables.
- Develops and applies improved practices in environmental protection and public engagement.
- BirdLife, WWF and Climate Action Network Europe are part of RGI.
- “The Renewables-Grid-Initiative promotes 100% integration of electricity produced from renewable energy sources.”
- www.renewables-grid.eu



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Why are green NGOs interested in energy infrastructure?



- Need to tackle climate change, for people and nature.
- Need for renewables = need for grids.
- Massive investment = need to work with nature.
- Grid risks to birds: collision, electrocution.
- Habitat fragmentation e.g. in grid corridors.
- Loss of habitats e.g. ecologically rich valleys to pumped storage.
- Chemical pollution risks with LNG terminals.



Why PCIs?



- European common objectives: security of supply, competitiveness and sustainability.
- PCI Regulation adopted in 2013.
- PCIs are the highest priority infrastructures for EU's 503m citizens.
- High status and time limits in national permitting.
- Access to EU funds.
- Additional requirements to consult the public: legitimacy and acceptability are crucial.

The PCI process (in 30 seconds!)



- Two year rolling process: 2nd started Sep 2014.
- ENTSOs develops TYNDPs and CBA methodologies.
- Promoters propose projects to the Regional Groups (RGs).
- RGs assess and rank proposals according to criteria in the PCI Regulation, and consult with stakeholders.
- The RG 'Decision Making Body' adopts a draft list, and ACER checks.
- EC adopts the list by Delegated Act.

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What went wrong in 2012-13



- Too little information provided for stakeholders to understand what projects were being considered and why.
- Stakeholders given too little time to comment or notice to attend stakeholder meeting.
- Lack of scope to make a difference – no meaningful engagement or consultation.
- Lack of consideration of climate and biodiversity objectives.
- Some controversial and damaging projects.



Improvements from 2014



- Some RG meetings open to stakeholders, web streaming.
- Make up of RGs now more transparent.
- Commitment to consult on a 'long list' of candidate PCIs.
- All projects must now be in the ENTSO-E plan.
- Electricity CBA methodology now reports on kms of electricity lines in protected areas.
- DG Energy transparency platform and PCI map.





Climate change



- Risks to species, habitats and ecosystem services = risks to people.
- Carbon cycle depends on functioning ecosystems.
- Renewable electricity is key, and power lines essential.
- Gas PCIs: inflated demand assumptions risks missing climate targets, creating lock in and stranded assets.
- Smart Grids? CCS? Oil PCIs?



Nature protection



- EU biodiversity target to halt decline by 2020.
- Planning, routing, technology choice and mitigation measures can largely eliminate risks.
- Massive investment in infrastructure is a risk for nature, but also presents opportunities.
- Public funding for projects that serve Europe's citizens: 90% say biodiversity is important to their quality of life.
- Grid operators do not want weaker nature legislation: European Grid Declaration.
- No EU 'back door' for damaging projects.



Public acceptability



- Public opposition locally is almost inevitable, but opposition by environmental NGOs is not.
- Forcing bad projects through against public opinion and excluding dissenting voices will not serve the aims of the PCI Regulation.
- Economy vs. nature thinking is outmoded.
- Environmental assessment procedures help minimise impacts using expert and local knowledge: damaging trade offs and conflicts can be avoided.
- Better outcomes through working together.

A virtuous circle?

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. ADDRESS CLIMATE AND BIODIVERSITY TOGETHER

Getting power lines built, and stopping biodiversity decline, are two immense challenges Europe is facing today. Yet, protecting nature and building the energy infrastructure that Europe needs are related and compatible. More needs to be done by all parties involved to understand both challenges, and how they can be tackled simultaneously and coherently.

2. ENERGY SAVINGS AND RENEWABLES FIRST

We need an energy system and a society that can be sustained indefinitely because it does not deplete resources, nor pollute and damage the environment upon which we all depend. Delivery of energy infrastructure PCIs should support this switch to an energy efficient society and clean, sustainable renewable energy.

3. PROTECT HABITATS AND VULNERABLE SPECIES

The PCI label is an endorsement by the EU, which has targets and objectives for both energy and biodiversity. Therefore the PCI label should not reward projects that are likely to damage Europe's most precious wildlife sites and endangered species. Promoting highly damaging projects would undermine EU objectives, and is likely to provoke conflict, rather than help to speed up delivery as intended.

4. PLAN AHEAD

National and European energy infrastructure plans should be "environment-proofed" and "climate change-proofed". Energy system development as a whole, and the details of each project, should contribute to building a coherent, resource-efficient, and ecologically rich low-carbon future. No project should receive PCI status if it has not been scrutinised by environmental authorities and stakeholders in its host countries. This can most effectively be achieved through strategic environmental assessment of national infrastructure plans.

8. LEARN AND IMPROVE

PCI lists are renewed every two years, with the Commission's Regional Groups and the EU Agency for Co-operation of Energy Regulators (ACER) charged with reviewing progress of the implementation of the projects. This provides an excellent framework for improving the environmental profile of PCI projects, which should increase public support. It is also a good opportunity to publicise the benefits of the PCI label, and to highlight the challenges faced in developing energy infrastructure sustainably (see Recommendation 1 above). Learning and improvement of this kind can best be achieved in consultation and dialogue with environmental stakeholders.

7. FACTOR CLIMATE AND NATURE IN

It is important that the methodologies used to prioritise and select projects for PCI status are robust and help ensure environmentally acceptable projects, which are also in line with EU climate objectives, come forward. Cost-benefit methodologies for all PCIs should include information on potential environmental impacts, including whether all or part of a project is likely to fall within a site protected for its nature value. They must also be based on scenarios and demand assumptions that are in line with Europe's commitments to cutting carbon emissions.

6. LISTEN

Current consultation on which projects become PCIs needs to be improved, to ensure stakeholders and the public have a real chance to engage meaningfully. European and national institutions and developers must provide the necessary information, opportunities and forums for the public and interested parties to be able to have their say. It is important to help stakeholders to get involved, to work together and to engage early in the decision-making processes – rather than interested parties finding out about plans late in the process and fighting to stop them. There should at least be the potential for the public participation processes to lead to projects being modified or rejected as a result. There is much to be gained by going beyond formal public participation requirements. Grid operators and national and European institutions are increasingly discovering the benefits of working with environmental stakeholders to develop strategies, agree standards and improve practices. The non-governmental organisations (NGOs) can then seize these opportunities, and help to shape the plans and projects, to make sure they are as environmentally acceptable as possible.

5. OPEN UP

The Aarhus Convention and Regulation set out minimum requirements for openness and public participation in environmental decision-making, and the TEN-E Regulation introduces additional transparency measures. If fully implemented across Europe, these provisions provide a strong basis for ensuring that the PCI selection process is opened up for input from interested parties, and consequently better involves and reflects the priorities of European citizens.

1. Address climate and biodiversity together

- NGOs: communicate the challenge and engage constructively for solutions.
- Political leaders: joined up thinking, not nature vs. economy.
- Governments and industry: communicate common objectives and benefits to the public, not 'the lights will go out'.
- Promoters and authorities: adopt, embed and promote common objectives.

2. Energy savings and renewables first

- NGOs: push for the right infrastructure and safeguards for nature.
- Leaders: commit to ambitious and effective climate and energy targets to 2030.
- Regulators, innovation policy makers and funders: support green technology and innovation.
- ENTSOs and Regional Groups: build the energy transition into the PCI process.

3. Protect habitats and vulnerable species

- EC: insist PCI selection responds to evidence and public pressure where nature impacts are unacceptable.
- RGs: do not promote projects that cannot comply with EU legislation on PCIs and nature.
- EC and governments: provide guidance on ensuring compatibility of energy and nature priorities.

4. Plan ahead

- EC and leaders: demand EU-level strategic planning, for greater efficiency and public support.
- EC: insist on national plans with consultation, and no 'back door' for third party projects.
- Governments: comply with requirements to plan infrastructure, applying strategic environmental assessment.
- TYNDPs and PCI lists need to be environment-proofed.
- Gas TYNDP and PCIs must be climate-proofed.

5. Open up

- EC, promoters and authorities: take a proactive approach to transparency under international conventions and in the PCI Regulation.
- Regional Groups: make all meetings and procedures transparent.
- EC and ENTSOs: Further improve PCI maps and other information available to stakeholders.

6. Listen

- EC and governments: engage the public and stakeholders in developing policies and plans.
- RGs: seek stakeholder input on candidate PCIs – consult thoroughly in writing and in open meetings with affected groups.
- RGs: organise dedicated meetings on the most controversial candidate PCIs.
- NGOs: enable members and partners to be heard, to engage and to make a constructive contribution.

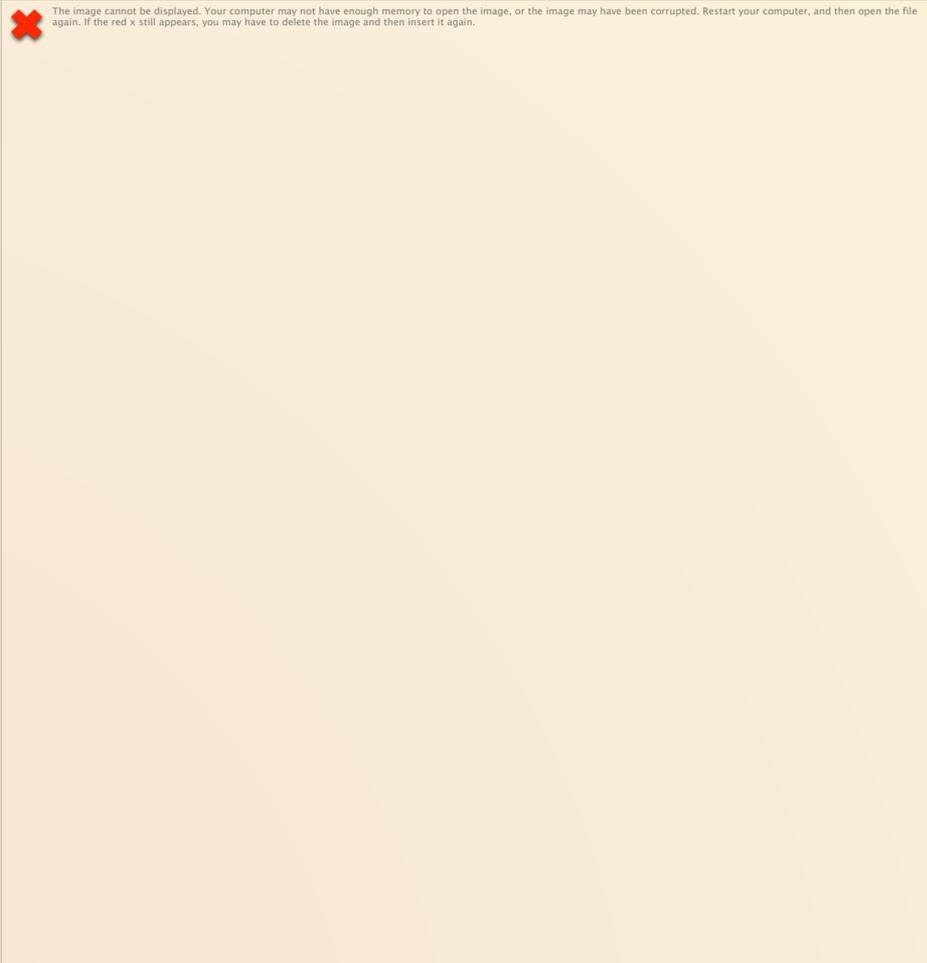
7. Factor climate and nature in

- EC and ENTSOs: clearly communicate and take into account nature and climate risks or benefits.
- EC, governments and RGs: ensure environmental assessment and consultation outcomes from national level planning are available to inform consideration of all candidate PCIs.
- RGs: reject projects with unacceptable climate or nature impacts.

8. Learn and improve

- RGs: involve stakeholders in reviewing implementation of the PCI Regulation and projects.
- Stakeholders: share ideas for improvement and help implement them.
- EC, RGs and ENTSOs: progressively improve methodologies and procedures, and communicate about progress and opportunities.

Thank you. Enjoy the “fishbowl”!



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