



## Energy For a Changing World: A Credible European Energy Strategy for the 21st Century

Posted by [Euan Mearns](#) on February 24, 2008 - 10:44pm in [The Oil Drum: Europe](#)  
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Tags: [alex salmond](#), [biofuel](#), [brian wilson](#), [carbon sequestration](#), [energy efficiency](#), [european commission](#), [hydrogen fuel cells](#), [peter vis](#), [tritium](#) [[list all tags](#)]

On Friday 22nd February, I attended the above conference in Aberdeen. With presentations from the EU Commission, The European Parliament, Scottish politicians and leading academics, this was a high profile event. There follows an account of the key issues raised by the various speakers together with my own observations and opinions on these matters.

### Peter Vis

Peter is a member of the cabinet of [Andris Piebalgs](#) who is European Commissioner for Energy. He has particular responsibility for climate change targets, renewable energy and bio-fuels.....

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Peter provided an overview of the EU framework for staged targets in CO<sub>2</sub> reductions and reported on the progress being made by various countries in meeting these targets. I gather the UK is not doing so well. The core of EU energy policy centres on reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions combined with attention to energy security. On paper they are admirable goals.

However, do actions match the rhetoric? Peter conceded that bio-fuels had recently received some bad press and I believe he said that the EU was intent on rehabilitating this tarnished image and would proceed with existing targets for bio-fuel production.

I believe he also said that bio-fuels have the capacity to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 80%. Somewhat misleading I believe? It may be the case that Brazilian sugar cane ethanol with eroei (energy return on energy invested) about 7, may deliver around 86% CO<sub>2</sub> reduction. However, with temperate latitude bio-fuels where eroei may range from 1.2 to 2.5 the CO<sub>2</sub> reductions are much lower – roughly 17% and 60% respectively (assuming that fossil fuels provide the energy of production). And so the key question is this. Are these reductions in CO<sub>2</sub> worth the cost of changing land use, soil depletion and the threat of famine caused by converting our food supply into liquid fuels?

No doubt new enzymes and cellulosic ethanol may address some of these issues. However, why not promote the simplest and most energy efficient route of putting renewable electricity in a battery in an electric car instead?

### Professor Jim McDonald Chairman of the Energy Technology Partnership

Professor McDonald gave an overview of energy research groups in Scotland focussing on Glasgow, Edinburgh and Aberdeen.

Hydrogen fuel cell research and CO<sub>2</sub> sequestration were mentioned and since neither is to my mind an energy efficient way of dealing with energy decline these priorities leave me with a sense

I hasten to add that using CO<sub>2</sub> in miscible gas flooding of hydrocarbon reservoirs is a completely different matter and should be prioritised since the incremental increase in oil recovery adds to our national and energy security. There is a trade off between burying some CO<sub>2</sub> at the expense of producing more fossil fuel energy that when combusted will produce more CO<sub>2</sub>. I sincerely hope therefore that a way is found to revive the currently dormant [BP Miller – Boddam scheme](#).

In the discussion session I made the point that energy efficiency needs to be applied to energy production as well as energy use and Professor McDonald endorsed that point of view. Personally I would like to see energy efficiency as the guiding beacon of all Scottish and EU based energy initiatives.

### **Alyn Smith MEP**

Whilst Alyn represents the [Scottish National Party](#) (SNP) at the European Parliament he dedicated part of his speech to criticising the administrative mess that the SNP government recently inherited at the Scottish parliament in Edinburgh citing the ability of small interest groups to block progress in new energy development projects.

Alyn is a full member of The Agriculture and Rural Development Committee of the European Parliament and is a substitute member of the Industry, Research and Energy Committee.

Alyn provided details of truly vast sums of money available for energy research and development projects within the EU and invited anyone or organisation looking for advice or assistance on such matters to contact him or his office.

I sensed a genuine desire to help so if you are looking for EU funding contact Alyn [here](#).

### **Malcolm Webb CEO [UK Oil & Gas](#)**

Malcolm observed that the European Oil and Gas industry accounts for most of the primary energy production within the EU, is the main provider of energy security and yet receives little attention within the EU energy strategy.

A curious paradox indeed which I suspect is related in part to declining oil production that will shortly be followed by gas and the need to replace these historic energy resources with something new.

However, I happen to agree with Malcolm that sustaining indigenous oil and gas production within the UK and EU should be a high priority and I personally would like to see the burden of taxation shifted away from the producers and on to the consumers. In this way the incentive to consume is minimised and the incentive to explore and produce is maximised. That is the path to energy security.

Very difficult to sell this to the electorate I know.

### **Jason Ormiston CEO [Scottish Renewables](#)**

Jason provided an overview of the progress made in renewable energy developments within Scotland that was laced with a sense of frustration at the slow pace of development.

Those who have pursued and promoted renewable energy developments in Scotland are to be applauded. The reasons for the slow pace of development need to be identified and cleared away. I sense the new SNP administration is on the job.

## **Rt Honourable Brian Wilson, former UK Energy Minister**

Now retired from politics, Brian Wilson is one of the UK's most experienced and knowledgeable politicians on energy matters.

Good will and good intentions were on prominent display at this conference and Brian rather laconically observed that this had been the case for decades and voiced a sense of frustration at the slow pace of progress in developing Scotland's non fossil fuel based energy economy. He observed a gap between the rhetoric and the reality. "We are in the hands of destiny".

In the discussion session I pointed out that the actual response of the UK to declining gas production had been to build pipeline links to Norway and 100 bcm per annum infrastructure for importing LNG. When the LNG cargoes do not arrive we will wish we'd done something different.

I share Brian's sense of scepticism.

## **First Minister Alex Salmond**

Alex Salmond is an economist, leader of The Scottish National Party and First Minister of the Scottish Parliament where he leads a minority administration with great skill. Throughout his political career Alex has worked tirelessly towards the goal of gaining full independence for Scotland.

Unfortunately I had to leave to pick up kids from school and missed the day's keynote speaker. I gather he announced a new Green Energy institute would be built in Aberdeen – maybe I need to prepare a CV – I guess there is a first time for everything.

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### **End note**

The first question of the day came from a rather nervous student, who had just submitted his PhD, who asked why a space program was not part of the EU energy policy. He went on to explain that Planet Earth is short of  $^3\text{He}$  which is more abundant on The Moon. Sustainability of the human race lay at the core of this question which I imagine was lost on the majority of speakers and delegates. He went on to explain how  $^3\text{He}$  may be used as fuel in nuclear fusion reactors.

Brian Wilson mentioned the vision of those who built Scotland's Hydro dams in the post-war years from which so much benefit has flowed. We once again require vision of this sort that stretches beyond where the next contract or research grant is coming from. I'd offer this student a job.



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