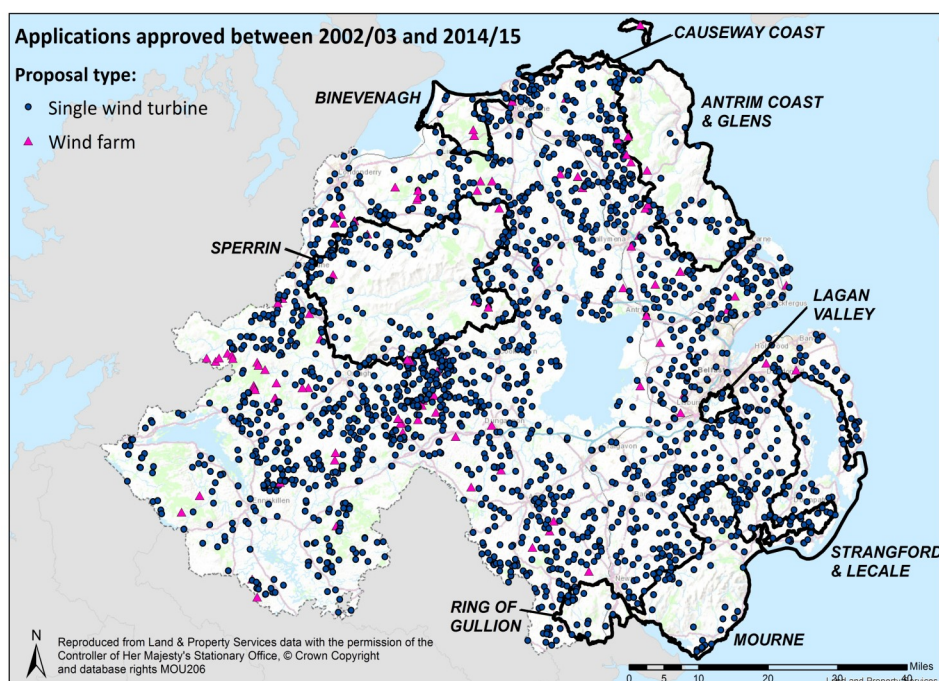


The wind power debate

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Concerns are growing surrounding the erection of wind turbines in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

In Northern Ireland, the eight Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) are some of the region's most spectacular landscapes, ranging from the internationally renowned Causeway Coast to the picturesque Mourne Mountains. These are areas of high scenic quality with distinctive character and natural beauty that are well known and highly valued in Northern Ireland. The increasing presence of wind turbines in recent years has produced opposition among various groups and individuals, in particular regarding the erection of turbines in these areas of natural beauty.



Applications approved in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

16

in 10/11

55

in 14/15

There has been a large increase in approved planning applications for renewable energy proposals, and particularly wind applications, from 2002/03 to 2014/15. Just 8 applications for single wind turbines and wind farms were approved in 2002/03 compared to 379 applications approved in 2014/15. The number of applications peaked in 2012/13 with 510 being approved, and it is likely that this was driven by the Northern Ireland Executive's targets for electricity consumption from renewable sources, with a target of 20% to be achieved by 2015, and 40% by 2020. Since this peak, the recent decrease may

be partly due to a reduction in government funding available, as well as a lack of capacity on the power grid to allow for new connections. Of the total number of 2,445 approved wind energy applications between 2002/03 and 2014/15, the vast majority (96%) were for single wind turbines. Considering the applicants' proposal descriptions for each of the 108 wind farm applications, it can be estimated that the average number of turbines is 6 per wind farm application.

But what about wind turbines in AONBs? Concerns have been raised by residents and other groups that

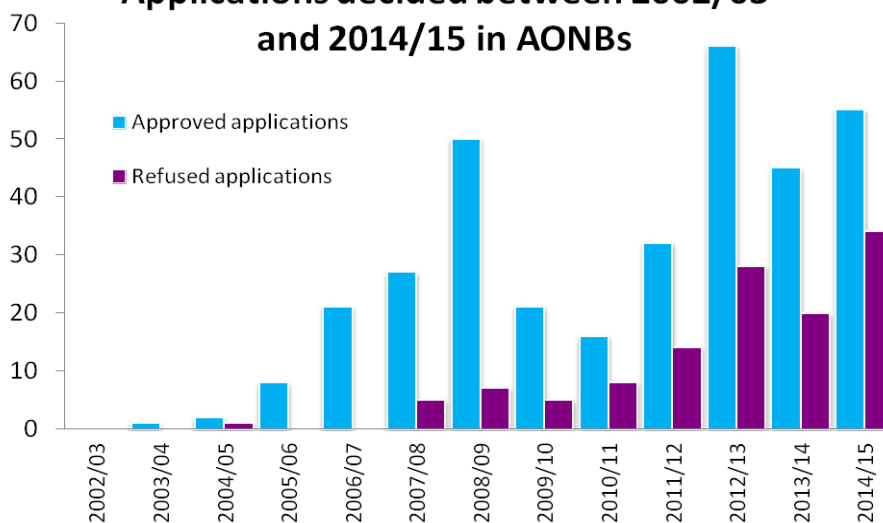
the erection of turbines in these areas spoils the visual amenity of the tourist attractions and the surrounding countryside. The most recent figures from the Department of the Environment reveal that from 2010/11 to 2014/15, the number of approved applications for single wind turbines and wind farms in AONBs has increased by around three and a half times, from 16 in 2010/11 to 55 in 2014/15. There was also a spike of 66 approved

applications in 2012/13, which, as mentioned before when referring to all wind applications, was likely due to the electricity consumption targets.

However, it must also be noted that the number of refused applications for single wind turbines and wind farms in AONBs has more than quadrupled, from 8 in 2010/11 to 34 in 2014/15. The numbers are of course smaller than the figures for approvals, but this pattern suggests that even though the numbers of received applications may be increasing, the proportion of those being refused is also increasing.

In fact, back in 2008/09, just over 1 out of 10 (12%) wind energy applications in AONBs was refused, and the refusal rate has generally been on an upward trend up to the latest figures for 2014/15, which show that around 4 out of 10 (38%) applications were refused.

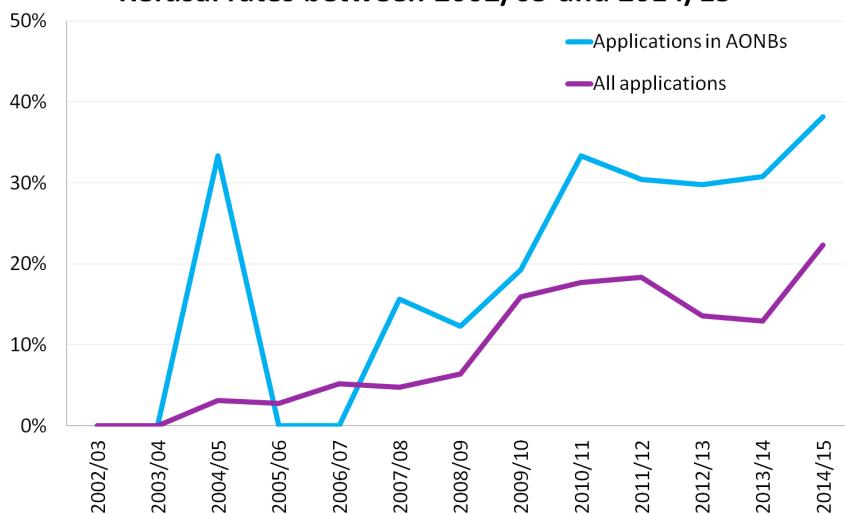
Applications decided between 2002/03 and 2014/15 in AONBs



“The Department has taken extra consideration with applications in these special areas of natural beauty.”

The refusal rates for wind energy applications in AONBs have generally been higher than refusal rates for all wind energy applications, indicating that the Department has taken extra consideration with applications in these special areas of natural beauty and are prepared to refuse applications for these areas if appropriate. This is also backed up by comparing the average processing times of wind energy applications in AONBs with those of all wind energy applications. Looking at 2010/11 to 2014/15, the average processing times for wind energy applications in AONBs have been longer than those of all wind energy applications in 4 out of 5 of the financial years. Over this period the average processing time for wind energy applications in AONBs was 52 weeks, compared with 44 weeks for all wind energy applications.

Refusal rates between 2002/03 and 2014/15



For further information on Renewable Energy Planning applications please visit: <https://www.doeni.gov.uk/topics/doe-statistics-and-research/planning-statistics>