



Executive Complaints Unit

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Ref: CT/1800387

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Dear Dr Peiser

**Today, Radio 4, 28 June 2018**

Thank you for your letter of 15 August, which was also forwarded to us by email by your colleague Harry Wilkinson. We have now completed our investigation into the concerns you raised about the interview with Lord Deben on the above edition of **Today** and, with apologies for the delay, I am writing to let you know the outcome.

You raised two separate points of complaint and so I propose to address each in turn. I have summarised each point based on the wording of your letter but in reaching my finding I have considered all the previous correspondence.

- 1. Most people listening to the programme will have understood Lord Deben to say the Government is preventing communities that wish to have onshore wind developments from having them.**

As you will recall, Lord Deben was invited onto the programme to discuss the Committee on Climate Change's latest progress [report](#) on reducing UK emissions. He spoke about the progress which had been made in reducing carbon dioxide emissions from the generation of electricity but criticised the Government's progress, particularly in terms of promoting electric cars and ensuring new-build homes are energy efficient. The presenter, John Humphrys suggested listeners might be puzzled by his comments because *"they'll look around and see lots of wind farms all over the place"*.

Lord Deben replied as follows:

*But the trouble is it is much more urgent than that. We have done a great deal but that mustn't mask the fact that there is much more to do. I mean what on earth is the Government doing saying that even where a community wants to have an onshore wind farm it can't have it? This is sheer dogma. The fact of the matter is, it is the cheapest form of producing electricity today and we need to have more of it and many communities, particularly in Scotland and Wales would like to have it. The Government doesn't make it*

*possible. And that means that the next generation will pay for the cost of moving from a carbon intensive society to the kind of low-carbon, no-carbon society we need.*

As you know, the Government's position on the development of new onshore wind farms was set out in two [written statements](#) issued on 18 June 2015 by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Greg Clark, and the Energy and Climate Change Secretary, Amber Rudd. Mr Clark said:

*I am today setting out new considerations to be applied to proposed wind energy development so that local people have the final say on wind farm applications, fulfilling the commitment made in the Conservative election manifesto.*

The provisions of the subsequent Energy Bill were summarised in a departmental [factsheet](#) published in January 2016 as follows:

*The Government made a manifesto commitment to decentralise decision making on new onshore wind farms as it believes new wind farms should only get the go ahead if supported by local people... ..The Government is committed to ensuring that only wind farms that are supported by the local community come forward in the planning process.*

Lord Deben and the Committee on Climate Change are clearly opposed to this policy and he was perfectly entitled to express his view on the programme. However, his assertion that the Government is "saying that even where a community wants to have an onshore wind farm it can't have it?" and where communities, particularly in Scotland and Wales, would like to have it, "The Government doesn't make it possible" does not appear to be supported by the evidence. Lord Deben was presented as someone with a significant degree of expertise and knowledge in this area and since his comment was, at the very least, contestable, I think he should have been challenged on this point to ensure listeners were not left with a materially misleading impression.

I am therefore upholding this aspect of your complaint.

## **2. Lord Deben's claim that onshore wind is the cheapest form of electricity generation was inaccurate.**

I accept there are a range of views in the energy debate about how the cost of electricity generated from various sources should be calculated and any measure involves a range of assumptions and variables. It is not for the Executive Complaints Unit to judge which approach is correct or most reasonable; our role is to consider whether Lord Deben's claim that "The fact of the matter is, it [onshore wind] is the cheapest form of producing electricity today" met the BBC's requirement for due accuracy.

In order to reach a decision, I think it is reasonable to take account of what is generally accepted as the most appropriate way to measure the cost of generating electricity. My understanding is the costs of different sources of electricity generation are generally compared by using what is known as the "levelised cost". This is defined by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy as "the average cost over the lifetime of the plant per MWh of electricity generated. It reflects the cost of building, operating and decommissioning a generic plant for each technology". The most recent figures from the BEIS were [published](#) in 2016 and show the following levelised costs for each technology:

**Table 2: Levelised Cost Estimates for NOAK Projects Commissioning in 2020, Technology-specific Hurdle Rates, £/MWh**

	CCGT H Class	OCGT 600MW (500hrs)	Biomass Conversion	Offshore Wind Round 3	Large Scale Solar PV	Onshore Wind >5MW UK
Pre Development Costs	0	5	2	5	6	4
Construction Costs	7	63	5	73	52	44
Fixed O&M	2	17	6	24	9	10
Variable O&M	3	3	1	3	0	5
Fuel Costs	35	52	72	0	0	0
Carbon Costs	19	28	0	0	0	0
Total	66	166	87	106	67	63

This was also the table provided by Claire Perry, Minister for Energy and Clean Growth, in a written [Parliamentary Answer](#) to a question about electricity generation costs in May 2018.

I therefore do not believe the comment by Lord Deben can be considered inaccurate or materially misleading and so I do not propose to uphold this aspect of your complaint.

In conclusion, I am upholding one aspect of your complaint for the reasons set out above. In cases where we uphold part of a complaint, we publish a summary of our finding on the complaints pages of [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk), as a public acknowledgement that there was a significant lapse of editorial standards on this occasion. I will also consider what further action is required and I will let you know what I consider appropriate in due course. There is no provision for further appeal against our decision within the BBC but I would be happy to consider any comments you may wish to make about my finding. I would be grateful if you could let me have any such comments by 19 October.

Alternatively, if you do wish to pursue the matter further, it is open to you to ask the broadcasting regulator, Ofcom, to consider your complaint. You can find details of how to contact Ofcom and the procedures it will apply [here](#). You can also write to Ofcom at Riverside House, 2a Southwark Bridge Road, London SE1 9HA, or telephone either 0300 123 3333 or 020 7981 3040.

Yours sincerely



**Dominic Groves**

Deputy Head of the Executive Complaints Unit