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Speech

Gregory Barker speech to the Large Scale Solar Conference

From: Department of Energy & Climate Change
(<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-of-energy-climate-change>) and
The Rt Hon **Gregory Barker MP** (<https://www.gov.uk/government/people/gregory-barker>)

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(<https://www.gov.uk/government/topics/climate-change>)

The Minister for Energy and Climate Change gave a speech to the solar PV industry on 25 April 2013.



It's a great pleasure to be here today to speak to you at the Large Scale Solar Conference. And how appropriate to be here in Cornwall! A county that has long been at the forefront of the UK's drive towards a greener economy.

And with levels of solar PV deployment now at a terrific 2.5GW, it seems like the perfect occasion to reflect on the progress the sector has made in recent years, and to map out our hopes and ambitions for the future.

There are three big points I want to get over today:

1. The Coalition Government is committed to placing solar PV at the heart of the UK's energy mix

- 2.

We have an ambitious and hands-on strategy to drive it forward

3.

Solar is rightly popular. But if we aren't careful, or if the sector expands inappropriately, that invaluable popular public support will slip through our fingers. We don't want solar to become a bone of public contention like onshore wind.

And that is my key message today. Solar is a genuinely exciting energy of the future, it is coming of age and we want to see a lot, lot more.

But not at any cost... not in any place... not if it rides roughshod over the views of local communities.

As we take solar to the next level, we must be thoughtful, sensitive to public opinion, and mindful of the wider environmental and visual impacts.

But if we are smart, and there are plenty of smart people in this sector, there is no reason we can't do that successfully. Indeed, we have to!

Solar's progress so far

Now earlier this year, the Prime Minister re-iterated this government's commitment to green growth.

He said "When I became Prime Minister I said I wanted Britain to have the greenest government ever and I am as committed to that today as I was then. But I want to go further."

To me it is absolutely clear. If we want to go further, solar PV must be at the centre of that ambition.

This is why solar is now, for the first time, a priority industry in the Government's Renewables Roadmap.

And solar, alongside other industries, will benefit from the Coalition Government's new Energy Bill.

The new energy framework will revolutionise our energy system through introducing measures to attract the £110 billion investment needed to replace current generating capacity and upgrade the transmission and distribution grid by 2020.

But we should be very proud of the progress that's been made in the solar sector. Particularly over the last two years.

At times the journey has been difficult. Reforming the ill-thought through and clumsy FiTs scheme was tough for the market. But the UK is now firmly established as one of the top 10 markets for solar PV worldwide. Since January, almost 400MW of solar was deployed under the Renewables Obligation. Despite one of the worst winters on record!

We have now seen over 420,000 small-scale installations, totalling almost 1.5 GW under the Feed in Tariff alone. Up and down the country, solar is powering thousands of homes and businesses and supports some 15,000 jobs.

This progress includes fantastic new projects like the 5 MW array at the Bentley Motors Factory in Crewe, the UK's largest rooftop solar array...

...Over 1 MW in the country's largest "solar bridge" at Blackfriars in London...

...and the 30 MW Wymeswold Solar Farm in Leicestershire, the UK's largest, built on a disused World War 2 airfield.

Making solar work for local communities

This is a technology that is clean, reliable, accessible and is becoming increasingly affordable....

....and solar power consistently rates as the renewable technology with the highest level of public support. DECC's own public opinion tracker gives it an 82% approval rating.

We want to keep it that way.

This means it must work for local communities, with sensible, sustainable design of new projects. And for larger deployments, brownfield land should always be preferred.

The solar farm at the former Wheal Jane tin mine, just down the road, is a good example of how this can be done.

In other parts of the country, solar has been installed on disused airfields, degraded soil and former industrial sites. This is the model for future solar projects.

But this is not a new position. I have been clear on this point from when I first entered government.

Back in 2010 I told the House of Commons that "large field-based developments should not be allowed to distort the available funding for roof-based PV, other PV and other types of renewable." I still stand by this.

Indeed, in January I reiterated this in the House of Commons. I said, and I quote:

"We need to be careful that we do not over-incentivise large-scale ground-mounted projects in inappropriate places – I am thinking of greenfield agricultural land – that could generate strong opposition to our community energy agenda... It needs careful design and thoughtful consideration. It certainly could not be a scheme about renewable energy at any cost. Impacts on the local community, on landscape and on consumer bills have to be a real consideration..."

So our message is very clear. And it is consistent.

We have revised our subsidy structure, offering higher levels of support to building-mounted solar PV. And we will do our best to spread examples of best practice, focusing deployment on buildings and brown-field land – not green-field.

Where solar farms are not on brownfield land, you must be looking at low grade agricultural land which works with farmers to allow grazing in parallel with generation...

... incorporating well thought out visual screening....

...involving communities in developing projects and bringing them with you...

...all of these will be vital in creating a sustainable future for large-scale solar PV.

Taking solar further

But no one organisation can carry the solar PV revolution on which we are all embarking.

To do this the sector needs real champions...

...champions with the vision, the ambition and the resources to lead the charge on the next stage of solar PV's journey into the mainstream.

This is where the National Solar Centre comes in.

I was delighted to be asked to cut the ribbon at the NSC this afternoon. I believe it will be an essential component in underpinning the industry.

It will help establish an effective infrastructure for sustained growth through a wide range of activities:

...developing formal Technical Standards... ...due diligence... ...
developing a range of best practise guidance and training... ...
driving innovation through R&D.

It will also act as a nucleus to influence new markets, and to benefit from the global solar community.

The commitment the Building Research Establishment has shown in driving this forward will help lay the groundwork for more concrete links between the solar PV, building and construction sectors.

I also pay tribute to Ray Noble, who has worked unstintingly to promote and develop the solar sector in the UK. His vision and hard work has made the NSC possible.

So, what next?

In the early summer the Coalition will be publishing the first-ever government Solar PV Strategy.

This will set out, in more detail, the work which needs to be done – both by government and the private sector – to capitalise on the sector's growth and take it to the next level.

An important part of this is the creation of a new Solar PV Strategy Group, jointly chaired by DECC and the National Solar Centre.

As the sector grows, we need to balance the huge opportunities with responsible growth. As a key part of our work on a Solar Strategy, we will work, in association with the sector, on how we can ensure that large-scale solar deployment is truly sustainable.

What criteria the sector should follow, how they can be most effectively implemented – and enforced. That way, we can achieve our twin aims of growth of solar PV and protection of our rural environment.

The Solar PV Strategy Group brings together industry and government to ensure that we work effectively to address the challenges facing the sector over the coming years.

We will be consulting this group as we finalise the Solar PV Strategy over the coming weeks.

And there are other DECC initiatives which will underpin that progress....

... including our flagship Green Deal which policy is turning out to be a real motor for driving demand...

... the new Government and Industry Solar PV Strategy Group...

... reform of the electricity markets and the other measures set out in our Energy Bill....

...and, of course, the recent changes to the FITs scheme and the RO have put in place a stable foundation on which to build further deployment. And provide good projects with the type of return needed to secure investment.

Before I conclude I would like to mention something many of you will consider to be the "elephant in the room"....

...the European Commission's anti-dumping investigation into PV imports from China.

I completely understand the difficulties and uncertainty this is already causing many of you.

I want to reassure you that the government is working hard to ensure the Commission's response and any measures imposed are proportionate and take account of wider effects on the industry.

We will have greater clarity on the Commission's intentions early in the summer and I would strongly urge you to continue to work through your trade associations. As I know you already do.

Conclusion

The UK already is one of the best places for green energy, for green investment and for green jobs across the world.

And it is right that we should be putting solar PV at the heart of our green energy policy.

And I want us to continue to work together – government and industry – because this is a shared endeavour.

You are the businesses who can continue to develop our expertise in solar technology. To use this technology to cut costs, compete internationally and boost jobs.

You are the experts who can help us build the future of this industry...

...through the new Solar PV Strategy Group which will help to inform our new Solar Strategy.

There is no doubt that there are challenges. But those challenges will be met by us all together and this is just the beginning of our journey.

I would like to end with another quote from the Prime Minister, this time from February this year. He said that green energy makes "our energy sources more sustainable, our energy consumption more efficient and our economy more resilient to energy price shocks – those things are a vital part of the growth and wealth that we need".

Thank you.

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Planning Practice Guidance

where a proposal involves greenfield land, whether (i) the proposed use of any agricultural land has been shown to be necessary and poorer quality land has been used in preference to higher quality land; and (ii) the proposal allows for continued agricultural use where applicable and/or encourages biodiversity improvements around arrays

