

news release

Monday 17, January 2011

Hydropower on the increase

There has been a six-fold increase in the number of hydropower schemes planned in England and Wales since 2008, the Environment Agency announced today. In 2010 the Environment Agency granted licences for 65 schemes, compared with 10 in 2008.

To assist the communities, developers and individuals looking to capitalise on Government incentives to produce renewable electricity, the Environment Agency has simplified the application process to install hydropower schemes. There will be no change to the standards of environmental protection as a result.

Hydropower schemes can have complicated impacts, including changing river flows, which in turn can affect fish migration and downstream habitats as well as introducing flood risk. To ensure the environment and river life are protected, a range of permissions covering abstraction, fish movement and flood defence, are required from the Environment Agency.

It will now be more straightforward to make an application. Simpler application forms will be published on the Environment Agency's website during February 2011. Environment Agency teams throughout England and Wales will provide early advice to developers of hydropower schemes to help them produce well-designed sustainable schemes.

The Environment Agency has been working with industry, anglers, NGOs and landowners on ways to improve the existing permitting process. These improvements will not need any changes to the complex legal framework around the various permissions and have been implemented in response to the growing interest in hydropower.

The Environment Agency had been asked by Defra in 2009 to carry out a review of the permitting procedures for hydropower.

Dr Paul Leinster, the Environment Agency's Chief Executive, said:

"Hydropower is a reliable and proven technology and it is increasingly attractive to local communities, organisations and individuals. But poorly designed schemes could have damaging impacts on the environment and increase risk of flooding.

"The Environment Agency is committed to getting the regulatory balance right – supporting the development of sustainable renewable energy by making it as easy as possible for organisations to apply for hydropower permits whilst ensuring that the environment is protected."

Energy and Climate Change Secretary Chris Huhne said:

"It's vital that getting hydro power schemes up and running is as simple as possible. There's been a big rise in applications over the past two years and, with new financial incentives, there'll be even more this year. We have already allowed former mills and water turbines to get financial support to increase the amount of clean electricity generated in this way. Hydro power helps meet our renewable energy goals."

With around 350 hydropower schemes currently licensed by the Environment Agency in England and Wales, the Environment Agency estimates that this number could rise to around 1,200 by 2020.

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Notes to Editors:

- The current UK target is to produce 15 per cent of energy from renewables by 2020 - a target that is likely to require at least 30 per cent renewable electricity production. With the Committee on Climate Change recommending that the UK almost fully decarbonises its electricity supply by 2030, and the new coalition government signalling a desire to go even further with renewables, hydropower has a small but significant role to play in achieving this goal.
- The simplifications to the application process come following an Environment Agency review, a report of which can be found on the EA website www.environment-agency.gov.uk/hydropower
- An additional and wider review of hydropower permitting in Wales is being carried out and will be considered by Ministers in the Welsh Assembly Government.
- Hydropower facilities can have an impact on the aquatic environment, fisheries and fish migration. However, a sustainable hydropower scheme builds environmental protection into its location and design. Key features include:
 - A fish friendly turbine and/or adequate screening of the turbine
 - Safe passage for fish where appropriate
 - Sufficient flow to maintain ecology and the fishery
 - Design that avoids impairing flood management or adversely affecting land drainage.