# Conservation groups urge Scottish Government to reject Berwick Bank wind farm over seabird risk



Nature conservation groups are urging the Scottish Government to reject the proposed Berwick Bank offshore wind farm, warning that it poses a significant threat to Scotland’s seabird populations. The wind farm, planned for the outer Firth of Forth approximately 40 kilometres off the Scottish coast, near ecologically important sites such as Bass Rock, St Abb’s Head, and the Isle of May, would be among the largest offshore wind developments in the world.

The project, put forward by SSE Renewables, includes plans for up to 307 turbines and aims to generate up to 4.1 gigawatts of electricity—enough to power more than six million homes. Despite these promising figures for renewable energy and climate targets, conservationists highlight the potential ecological cost as deeply concerning.

A coalition composed of RSPB Scotland, the Marine Conservation Society, National Trust for Scotland (NTS), Scottish Wildlife Trust, and Scottish Seabird Centre has collectively called for the proposal to be refused. In a letter to Scotland’s First Minister John Swinney, they emphasised the risk to seabirds, describing the project as potentially “catastrophic” for species that nest and breed in the vicinity. The area is known for its large seabird colonies, including puffins on the Isle of May and thousands of protected kittiwake, guillemot, razorbill, and shag species at St Abb’s Head National Nature Reserve.

Anne McCall, director of RSPB Scotland, stated to The Irish News (Belfast) that while offshore wind energy is crucial in addressing the climate and nature emergencies, it must be balanced with wildlife conservation. “Berwick Bank would be catastrophic for Scotland’s globally important seabirds. Its impacts are so damaging it is blocking plans for new, less-harmful wind farms. As the First Minister said earlier this year, nature should be at the heart of climate action. Our message to the Scottish Government is clear: Refuse Berwick Bank to unlock the full potential of offshore wind while protecting our outstanding wildlife.”

The groups argue that the delay in approving new offshore wind projects stems largely from concerns over cumulative impacts on seabird populations caused by developments like Berwick Bank. They suggest that rejecting the proposal could pave the way for other offshore wind projects in locations with lower ecological risks.

Diarmid Hearns, interim director of conservation and policy at the National Trust for Scotland, explained the difficult balance required in meeting climate goals while protecting natural habitats. “Climate change is one of the biggest threats to seabirds and offshore wind development is important to meet Scotland’s climate ambitions, therefore we are fully supportive of it. However, installations must be located with sensitivity to the very habitats we’re trying to protect from climate impacts – the proposed site for Berwick Bank is likely to cause high levels of ecological damage and severely impact the seabird colonies at St Abb’s Head. We urge ministers to reject the proposal for Berwick Bank and instead focus on advancing proposals in more appropriate locations.”

The Scottish Seabird Centre’s chief executive, Harry Huyton, added that Berwick Bank is “simply the wrong place for an offshore wind farm,” warning that most of Scotland’s seabird species, many already in decline, would face further threats from displacement and collision fatalities linked to the turbines. He said the project could kill and displace tens of thousands of seabirds over the years.

An environmental impact analysis commissioned by the developer estimates that hundreds of bird collisions could occur annually due to turbine operations. SSE Renewables highlights that it undertook one of the world’s largest aerial bird surveys over a decade in order to design the project with reduced environmental damage.

The planning application for Berwick Bank was submitted to the Scottish Government in late 2022 and has been pending a decision for nearly two years. A spokesperson for the Scottish Government commented that it would not be appropriate to comment on a live consenting application.

This planning decision represents a significant moment in balancing Scotland’s renewable energy ambitions with the protection of vital wildlife habitats and seabird colonies. The outcome will influence the direction of offshore wind development and conservation strategies in the region.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

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* <https://community.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/b/scotland/posts/ministers-must-say-no-to-berwick-bank> - The RSPB Scotland's position on the Berwick Bank offshore wind farm, emphasizing the potential catastrophic impact on seabird populations and urging Scottish Ministers to reject the proposal.
* <https://www.seabird.org/press-releases/conservation-charities-unite-to-call-on-scottish-ministers-to-reject-proposed-berwick-bank-wind-farm-site> - A joint statement from conservation charities, including the Scottish Seabird Centre, calling on Scottish Ministers to reject the Berwick Bank wind farm proposal due to its potential impact on seabird colonies.
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* <https://www.thenational.scot/news/24163379.charities-call-scottish-government-reject-berwick-bank-windfarm/> - An article detailing the call from conservation charities for the Scottish Government to reject the Berwick Bank wind farm due to concerns over its impact on nearby seabird populations.
* <https://www.seabird.org/conservation-strategies/marine-renewables> - The Scottish Seabird Centre's formal objection to the Berwick Bank Offshore Renewables Development proposal, citing significant annual adult mortality losses of various seabird species.
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