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Dear Stephen

### Comments on Fairburn extension case reference ECU00004542

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Fairburn extension proposals at scoping stage. The John Muir Trust has considered the scoping report and accompanying documentation. We have the following comments to make with respect to the proposals at this stage:

1. The proposed design contravenes current Scottish Planning Policy with respect to the four turbines that are sited within the Central Highlands Wild Land Area. Current Scottish Planning Policy is clear that siting turbines in a Wild Land Area is by exception only. At this stage, every effort should be being made through the planning and design process to respect planning designations and policy that exist for nature and wild land. The significant impact this proposal is likely to have on the Wild Land Area could be substantially overcome by removing the four turbines (11 to 14) from the Wild Land Area. We would like to see these turbines removed from a revised design.
2. We are seriously concerned about the proximity of the proposed development to the Glen Affric to Strathconon Special Protection Area (SPA), designated for breeding golden eagle habitats. We are also concerned about the inconsistent record of whether the proposed site overlaps with this designation or not. Figure 13 shows the SPA boundary borders the site boundary with the four turbines proposed in the Wild Land Area just *outside* the SPA. However, the Scoping Report states that the proposed site '*overlaps* with one statutory designation containing ornithological features, the Glen Affric to Strathconon Special Protection Area (SPA)'. Whether the site overlaps with, or is on the border of, the SPA, both are of concern. The former however would demonstrate wanton disregard for a recognised protection of a nationally rare and important native species. We recommend the applicant revisit the site boundary, so it is clearly outside both the SPA and the WLA.
3. The Scoping Report identifies priority peatland habitats on site 'National Vegetation Classification (NVC) surveys carried out as part of this found that peat-based habitats dominate the site, with more than 50% occupied by wet dwarf shrub heath (SSE Renewables, 2013). Patchy blanket bog, wet modified bog and dry dwarf shrub heath were also recorded across the site, among other limited extents of other habitat types.' Peatland habitats are Scotland's most valuable natural carbon store and as specialised ecosystems they have a nationally important role in biodiversity recovery. We expect the design of the proposals to avoid impact on Class 1 peatlands and to leave priority peatland habitats intact and undisturbed. The peatland habitats on the site provide an opportunity for the applicant

to demonstrate, if this proceeds to planning application stage, how they will compensate for any habitat lost in a way that means overall biodiversity improves across the site rather than declines.

4. The nature and planning designations surrounding this site are not simply a formality nor a nice to have; they exist to protect the existing native habitats and species which will enable regenerating and recovering biodiversity elsewhere. It is no coincidence that 19 protected species have been recorded within 5km of the proposal. The biodiversity crisis is as real and urgent as the climate crisis. Any new development proposals coming forward during a biodiversity and climate emergency should, at an absolute minimum, avoid protected sites. This development being no exception. Beyond this, they should be contributing to nature's recovery, demonstrating best practice biodiversity improvements through design and, at a future stage, land management on site. We would welcome the opportunity to advise and discuss this point in detail with the applicant.
5. We note that the proposal is presented as an extension of the existing Fairburn development. In actuality, 'Figure 01 – site location', 'Figure 2a – site layout' and the Scoping Report tell us that the proposed development is clearly separated at a physical distance of 2km to the south of the existing development. The reason for siting the proposed development at such a distance from the existing development is not apparent. We would welcome an explanation for why the developer has selected this higher, more remote area of land for siting the turbines when it seems that an extension could more reasonably have been proposed closer to the existing scheme. An extension closer to the existing scheme would respect planning constraints for wild land, as well as protected sites for nature, and be in keeping with the design of wind farm extensions that have been approved to date. Otherwise the application is not an extension but a new wind farm.
6. The Scoping Report states 'An assessment of effects on the Central Highlands WLA is likely to be required. The scope of the wild land assessment will be agreed with NatureScot and THC'. We respect that the applicant should agree assessments with NatureScot and The Highland Council. Given the proposals outlined site four turbines within the eastern boundary of the Central Highlands Wild Land Area we have no doubts that an assessment of impacts on the Wild Land Area will be required. If this proposal proceeds to application stage, the absence of an assessment would seriously undermine the credibility of the Environmental Impact Assessment Report as it would deny the planning authority a full account and assessment of the extent of impacts the proposal is likely to have on this Wild Land Area.
7. We support the comments submitted by Mountaineering Scotland and endorse the inclusion of the suggested additional viewpoints in the Landscape Visual Impact Assessment if this proposal proceeds to application stage.

We would be grateful if our comments could be shared with the applicant and hope that these points inform the design of this development. We would be very keen to hear how the applicant seeks to address our concerns.

Yours sincerely,

The John Muir Trust