



RME – Automatic for the People?

Many of us are already familiar with the part that wind energy is playing in contributing to Scotland's renewable energy targets.

Less well known perhaps are the Renewable Marine Energy (RME) technologies utilising wave and tidal power that have been developed in recent years. The best known of these are Pelamis, a wave energy converter developed by Edinburgh-based Ocean Power Delivery and the Sea Snail developed at the Robert Gordon Institute. Other prototypes are fast emerging, but there are many hurdles to overcome before the sector can meet the increasing demand for diverse renewable energy sources.

Scotland not only has some of the best natural resources for producing renewable energy (wet and windy!) but it also has some of the most nationally and internationally important environmental habitats and species. Wildlife along the coastlines and offshore areas may well suffer from even the most seemingly benign technologies and there is therefore a need to balance the conflicting uses of our marine resources (tourism, dredging, trawling, shipping and renewables to name but a few) with the environment. One way to help resolve the conflict between business and the environment is by "Marine Spatial Planning" – a planning system for the sea. There are also calls from renewables developers and environmentalists alike for the introduction of a Marine Act for Scotland.

Apart from these environmental concerns, developers of new RME technologies must also face the usual problems that seem to plague all developers of new technologies. These include: a lack of financial support; a lack of the right people to make the project work; risk and risk management; market competition; obtaining consents and permissions; and last but not least, objectors.

The renewables industry, the Crown Estate (as managers of the sea bed) and environmental groups have all shown a strong commitment to meeting and overcoming these hurdles. Developers have identified the need to attract investors by demonstrating the long-term prospects of the emerging RMEs. There is a huge opportunity to create many jobs in Scotland, and a commitment to attracting and retaining our homegrown engineers. RMEs could also take the pressure off onshore wind. In the short term, the continued development and testing of devices will continue, with many more projects being able to demonstrate to funders a good risk vs. return ratio and eventually, more of these RMEs will start to add to the megawatt hours produced by renewable energy.

WJM is at the forefront of these new challenges and opportunities, providing expert advice and assistance to a broad range of landowners, developers and funders.

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