



Newsletter

February 2024

‘Odd’ Hinkley Point C salt marsh plan has Somerset locals up in arms

Guardian, 2 Feb 2024

Anger at EDF proposals to flood wildlife-rich farmland as ‘compensation’ for killing millions of fish at nuclear site

Standing in a field close to the Somerset coast surrounded by her flock of sheep, Juliet Pankhurst shook her head. “It doesn’t make any sense,” she said. “They want to flood this land that has been farmed for generations. We’ve got great crested newts in the pond over there, water voles in the ditches, hares all over the place. They’ll be lost.”

Her partner, Mark Halliwell, shrugged. “But they’ll get their way – they always do. No matter what scheme they come up with.”

The “they” in question is EDF, the French company building the Hinkley Point C nuclear power station a few miles down the coast from the farm. The scheme is to create a salt marsh on the land as – its word – “compensation” for dropping an innovative plan to stop millions of fish from swimming into the plant’s cooling system and being killed.

“The whole thing sounds a bit odd,” said Pankhurst.

Usually, creating salt marshes – excellent wildlife habitats and carbon stores – is a positive story. This one has been greeted with anger and scepticism in the local area and farther afield.

It takes a bit of unravelling. As part of the Hinkley Point C project, EDF had said it would save millions of fish by installing an “acoustic fish deterrent” (AFD) system. The Bristol Channel and Severn estuary are hugely important habitats for species including salmon and eel.

Under the system, almost 300 underwater “sound projectors” would have boomed noise louder than a jumbo jet into the sea to deter fish from entering the plant’s water intakes, nearly two miles offshore.

But EDF has changed its mind, arguing that installing and maintaining the system would risk the lives of divers working in the fast-flowing, murky water and expressing concerns about the impact of the noise on porpoises, seals, whales.

According to the UK government’s Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science,

between 18 and 46 tonnes of fish will be lost a year if the AFD plan is abandoned.

So as “compensation”, EDF has proposed to create or enhance native oyster beds, kelp forest and seagrass habitat, and, contentiously, create about 313 hectares (773 acres) of new salt marsh along the River Parrett at Pawlett Hams, an area of wildlife-rich grassland managed by about 30 landowners, who face having to sell up and move on.

Scores of people, under the watchful eye of a police community support officer, turned up for a meeting at Pawlett village hall this week as part of EDF’s consultation on the proposal.

Robin Edwards, whose family have farmed in the area for 80 years, said he would have to move his 150 cattle from the fields. “I’m a tenant there so I won’t get any compensation,” he said. “It will mean keeping my cows inside more, which I don’t like to do. It’s not good.”

Jo Smoldon of the campaign group Stop Hinkley said she was shocked the fish were being sacrificed. “It’s probably all about cost,” she said.

When the Guardian asked EDF representatives at the event how the cost of the “compensation” proposals compared with the price of an AFD system, the response was that the salt marsh scheme was at the “concept” stage, so there were no figures.

The proposal includes diverting a stretch of the King Charles III England coast path inland. One villager, Rachel Fitton, who walks at Pawlett Hams, was in tears at the prospect of the land being flooded. “It’s so sad for people who love that area,” she said. Her husband, Jason Fitton, said: “It’s insanity, disgraceful. Think of all the hedgerows and wildlife that will be lost.”

The Hampshire company Fish Guidance Systems, which had expected to provide the AFD system, is also unimpressed at EDF’s change of direction, saying it was like building wind turbines that would kill millions of birds and offering to build a nature reserve next door.

FGS says elver migration from the Atlantic is expected to be particularly hard, hit with eels “likely to be sucked into the Hinkley intakes” and only a few making it to the Somerset Levels and other habitats.

The company's managing director, David Lambert, said: "The proposed measures will not replace the lost fish. Given the January announcement that Hinkley Point C won't be up and running until at least 2031, they have plenty of time to explore options which would prevent unnecessary fish deaths and to look at developments in technology."

In the consultation overview document, NNB Generation Company (HPC), the EDF subsidiary set up to build and operate Hinkley Point C, says there are no examples of AFD systems being installed permanently in the "harsh conditions" found in this part of the Bristol Channel. It said at the time of the original application, AFD systems were regarded as "emerging best practice" but it had now decided that having to use divers made it an "intolerable and unjustifiable" risk.

The document says the new salt marsh would provide an excellent habitat for flora such as sea lavender, glasswort and marsh mallow and for birds like redshank and curlew. It would also provide foraging ground for some, but not all, of the fish species affected.

The consultation runs until the end of February and EDF said views would be considered before it submitted its proposals to the energy secretary, Claire Coutinho. Chris Fayers, head of environment at Hinkley Point C, said: "The new wetland would be a fantastic place for wildlife and a beautiful place to visit."

Old Sparky in Private Eye

Feb 2024

That EDF has completely lost control of the costs and timetable of its new nuke at Hinkley Point on the Somerset coast, is now clear to all. So the French firm is looking to cut every corner it can find – and billions of fish may be in the firing line.

In 2021, EDF was formally told it must fit an acoustic fish deterrent [ADF] system to the massive seawater intakes of the cooling system. It was considered necessary to "protect the marine life of the Severn Estuary catchment area and its nine great rivers: Parrett, Avon, Severn, Wye, Usk, Ebbw, Rhymney, Taff, Ely and their tributaries, where many fish species go to breed". Without the AFD it is estimated that 22 *billion* fish would be ingested over the planned 60-year life of the plant, of which half would be killed in the process.

EDF appealed against this but in 2022 the then environment secretary, George Eustice, refused the appeal in definitive terms: "The decision of this appeal is final [and] can only be challenged in the courts by judicial review."

Final? EDF, which has been running rings around the government and bullying ministers since it bought the British nuclear fleet in 2008, simply went regulator-shopping on the basis that energy ministers are more likely to be sympathetic. And so it proves: the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) has been reduced to role of consultee on the "final final" decision which will now be taken elsewhere – with no judicial review required.

When the *Eye* asked it to explain this humiliating climbdown, Defra offered a feeble reply: "We're now applying the principles of better regulation and consider that the most appropriate place to regulate controls on the intakes is in the Development Consent Order regime." That sounds a lot like "we've been told to get out of the way". This climbdown strongly suggests EDF will continue round the houses until it gets the answer it wants.

Perhaps Labour leader Keir Starmer could boldly tell EDF he'll reverse any backsliding on AFD's if and when he comes into power? Don't hold your breath: Labour's energy policy critically depends on Hinkley and its would-be twin at Sizewell (another AFD candidate) coming into service before 2030. However implausible that is, he won't be doing anything to stand in the way.

Events

2024 AGM

Please note the Annual General Meeting will be via Zoom on Monday 18th March. All members and non-members are very welcome to attend, though only members have voting rights. Please get in touch if you would like to be involved.

Stop Hinkley meetings

Our monthly campaign meetings are being held via Zoom for the time being. Please get in touch if you would like to be involved.

Meetings are usually held on the second Monday of the month. All members and non-members are very welcome to attend, though only members have voting rights.

Contact: admin@stophinkley.org

Contacts

Press & Spokespersons: Pete Roche:

pete@stophinkley.org

01749 860767 or 07821 378 210

Local Press & Spokesperson: Roy Pumfrey

roy@stophinkley.org

01278 652089 or 07886 258918

Local Information: Allan Jeffery

ajjeffery@talktalk.net 01278 425451

Membership/Treasurer/Website: Val Davey:

val@stophinkley.org



Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/StopHinkley/>

www.stophinkley.org