

## Coastal communities deserve share of offshore wealth

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**For the battlecry “Scotland’s oil!”, should we now read “Scotland’s water!”?**

The vogue for short snappy titles for government bodies has led the stiff-sounding Crown Estate Commissioners to restyle itself as simply The Crown Estate. The implication, repeated in Crown Estate reports and publicity, is that this commercial organisation which holds the lands and privileges previously owned by the monarch, actually owns the land it manages. In Scotland that includes urban property, including shops and offices in Edinburgh’s Princes Street and 43,000 hectares of farmland and forestry. However, the reason this could become a hot topic is its marine estate, including almost all the seabed out to 12 nautical miles. Last year renewable energy earned the Crown Estate only £1.8m but if offshore wind, wave and tidal power take off in Scotland, this could scale up rapidly.

Under current legislation both the administration and the revenues accruing from Crown Estate are reserved to Westminster. Nevertheless, a report this week from the Commons Treasury Committee implies that the income generated by sustainable energy projects around Scotland’s coasts, could eventually flow to Holyrood rather than Westminster. Crown Estate in Scotland has a different status from the rest of the UK because it is governed by Scots law. This raises questions about the accountability of the Crown Estate in the new pattern of devolved government.

One day we may see Scottish ministers pressing to abolish crown rights over the seabed. For the moment they are happy not to muddy the waters because of a successful working partnership with the commissioners and local authorities in attempting to realise the potential offered by marine renewable energy, including a major tidal energy project in the Pentland Firth. Regardless of which coffer ultimately claims the income stream from offshore renewables, Scotland’s coastal communities are entitled to share the benefits.

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