

A chilling betrayal: Human cost

COMMENT
BY FATIMA
IFTIKHAR

‘EVERY winter, it gets harder to stretch our pensions to cover heating costs,” Ms McDonald” says, her voice trembling with frustration and fear. Her words are a stark reminder of the reality faced by many elderly Scots.

At 78, living on a fixed income, she and her partner, Mr Robertson, 82, have felt a bitter chill creep through their home in Hillhead, Glasgow—not from the weather, which remains warm, but from the news that the Scottish Government will no longer provide the Winter Fuel Payment after the Labour government announced it would be means tested.

It’s a struggle familiar to far too many elderly Scots. Yet this winter, the fear will deepen as they – and

thousands like them – face the scraping of winter fuel payment.

They have endured some freezing winters, and the fear of being unable to afford heating has always loomed. This coming winter will be even more daunting.

Our older people will feel the impact of this much more than we can imagine.

The Scottish Government’s decision to follow the UK Government’s lead in ending universal Winter Fuel Payments is more than just a policy change – it’s a direct hit on the elderly struggling to make ends meet.

The Winter Fuel Payment, which provided between £100 and £300 annually to help cover heating costs, is being replaced with a means-tested benefit, available only to those on

pension credit or other income-based benefits.

This shift is a blow to the most vulnerable in our society.

The decision has been portrayed as necessary in the face of the financial crisis. However, in a country like Scotland, which is potentially energy-rich, it is nothing short of a betrayal to force our elderly to endure the harsh winter months without adequate support. This is a stark example of the unfairness that many in our society are forced to endure.

The Scottish Government’s promise to replace the winter fuel payment with the Pension Age Winter Heating Payment (PAWHP) is a hollow gesture. Delayed until 2025, with very restrictive criteria, benefits like this leave a massive shortage of

elderly people who desperately need assistance.

Organisations like Parents for Future Scotland, which supports the Warm This Winter campaign, are fighting for those left in the cold by these damaging policies.

We are calling on the Scottish and UK Governments to reverse these cuts and restore the Winter Fuel Payments.

Scotland’s elderly population should not suffer because of decisions made by politicians that are far removed from the realities of daily life for those on fixed incomes.

For Tahira, a neighbour to an elderly woman who spent the entirety of last winter wrapped in a thick jacket inside her own home, the reality of the scrapping of

Energy experts give verdict on electricity ‘super highway’

Senior figures warn privatisation of the energy system is dangerous

BY ADAM ROBERTSON

THE problem with a new energy “super highway” flowing south out of Scotland “isn’t that it’s going to England”, but instead about who will benefit, experts have said.

On Tuesday, it was announced that the 500-kilometre Eastern Green Link 2 (EGL2) will connect Peterhead in Aberdeenshire to Drax in North Yorkshire with construction planned to start later this year for completion in 2029.

However, the announcement sparked some criticism, with Alba warning the new link would siphon Scottish renewable power “from under our noses”.

Many were left wondering why Scotland can’t seemingly take greater advantage of this, particularly when fuel poverty rates in the country increased to 31% of all households in 2022, according to the latest Scottish House Condition Survey.

The Sunday National has spoken

with two experts who gave their thoughts on the new project.

What will the project do?

DELIVERED as a joint venture by National Grid and SSEN Transmission, EGL2 will transport renewable energy between Scotland and England after being approved by the energy regulator.

Most of the 311-mile cable will be laid under the North Sea, while the rest will be underground onshore.

Professor Paul de Leeuw of Robert Gordon University, who has over 35 years’ experience in the global energy sector, explained: “I think it’s important to look at the bigger context.

“By any reasonable measure, electricity demand is likely to double over the next 25 years, that’s a huge increase, particularly when it comes to trying to get to net zero and reduce emissions.

“We need somehow to connect supply and demand and you need a number of connections to make sure we do that.”

Despite being able to carry electricity in both directions, the majority from the link is still expected to flow out of Scotland.

It marks the biggest investment in electricity transmission infrastructure in the UK, costing around £4.3 billion.

De Leeuw continued: “What has happened is international markets determine the price of a commodity. Russia invading Ukraine had a massive impact on the regional energy market.

“What we’re trying to build is one which is environmentally better but also more resilient and give us more energy security.

“We can repurpose the North Sea to be a multi-energy base. We can see wind power, energy storage, carbon capture storage.

“But it is about putting the right policy framework in place, the right incentive and if we do it right then we end up with more jobs and more investment. This is a big opportunity and it is massive if we get it right.

“The outcome is a better energy



system, it’s low-carbon, it gives you far more resilience and energy security.

“We should get a greener, cleaner and hopefully lower-cost energy system and, if we get it right, everybody wins.

“If we don’t have a super highway and can’t get the electricity to where the demand is, we don’t see jobs or connectivity.

“There’s no point building it if you can’t do anything with it so I believe there’s a huge benefit to Scotland.”

of Winter Fuel Payment cut

winter fuel payments is especially concerning.

"I could see her from my window, sitting in her coat," Tahira recalls, a deep worry etched into her voice. "She rarely turned the heating on, and the house was always dark.

"I knew she was doing it to avoid the fearsome energy bills that could plunge her into debt. But what could I do?"

It wasn't just about the cold – it was about dignity. Tahira struggled with approaching her neighbour. She didn't want to make her feel ashamed or embarrassed, but she knew the silence couldn't go on.

"I didn't feel like I could ask her outright if she needed help paying her bills, but I did what I could in other ways," she explains.



Whether dropping off extra groceries or stopping by for a chat, Tahira tried to ease the burden in small, compassionate ways. Yet, she remains haunted by the thought of so

Pensioners in Scotland face a harsh winter this year

many elderly Scots suffering quietly in their homes, unable to ask for help.

As we head into winter, remember Ms MacDonald, Tahira's neighbour, and countless others facing an uncertain and potentially dangerous season. Protecting our elderly from the cold isn't about offering help – it's about ensuring fairness and treating people with the care they deserve.

We urge everyone to join us in demanding that our leaders prioritise the well-being of Scotland's elderly. In a nation potentially rich with renewable energy resources and wealth, leaving our elderly out in the cold is not just a policy failure – it's a moral failure.

As winter approaches, we must act. The Warm This Winter campaign is fighting for those hit hardest by these cuts, but we need your help. Advocate

for the reinstatement of winter fuel payments, and join us in ensuring everyone can face winter with the warmth they need.

"Even if you've never contacted your MP or MSP before, it's straightforward, and we can help," Claire, Director of Parents For Future Scotland, says. "Contact us at parents4futurescotland@gmail.com or visit our media pages for more information.

For updates on their latest campaign and more, follow Parents for Future Scotland on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

Fatima Iftikhar is Project Lead at Parents for Future Scotland

**Pseudonyms have been used to protect the individuals' privacy*



Moving electricity to England
DR Ewan Gibbs, a historian of energy with the University of Glasgow, said he did not feel the issue with the super highway was that electricity was being transported to England.

He told the Sunday National: "You know, if Scotland's going to be an energy powerhouse and generate surplus electricity, then it's going to end up in England. That's a logical place for it to go.

"It's a densely populated country that needs it. I don't think that's a problem and surely it's beneficial

The new link will connect Peterhead in Aberdeenshire to Drax in North Yorkshire

for Scotland to enjoy that sort of infrastructure."

According to figures released this year, Scotland's green sector delivered more electricity than Scotland used for the first time in 2022. Renewable technologies generated the equivalent of 113% of Scotland's overall electricity consumption that year.

However, according to Advice Direct Scotland, Scottish households are still paying hundreds of pounds for more gas and electricity than they were before the energy crisis hit,

despite Ofgem lowering the energy price cap to £1568 from July 1.

The advice bureau said this is still £430 more than the amount households were being charged before the energy crisis hit in the autumn of 2021. Meanwhile, 791,000 households faced fuel poverty in 2022, of which 472,000 were in extreme fuel poverty.

For Gibbs, this comes back to a question of who it is that's really benefiting from Scotland's energy potential.

"Most people in Scotland who

aren't large shareholders aren't enjoying these benefits. If we're going to be critical of the system, it's about controlling ownership," he said.

"The problem isn't that it's going to England, the problem is who's benefiting from that.

"The electricity system is ran for profit, by companies that emerged out of the privatisation of the British system, including companies like Scottish Power, that are now owned from the Basque Country."

Scottish Power, for example, is part of the Iberdrola group which is based in Bilbao.

De Leeuw, who feels the same as Gibbs, believes the super highway will help to provide energy security in the long-term.

"The electricity these wind farms generate has to go somewhere, so the existing onshore grid is not capable of handling that so we need to re-enforce and strengthen and add to the onshore grid," he said.

Gibbs continued: "We need to look at private ownership and ending private ownership, look at the price levels we allow companies to charge and consider where the profits from electricity generation are going.

"There's questions about supply chains and industrial benefits and again Scotland is not receiving the benefit that it should be there.

"Most wind turbines aren't made in Scotland, and that's about international supply chains, but it's also about ownership and control of our resources and we've not organised sufficient controls to guide activity to this country."

Ofgem chief executive Jonathan Brearley said: "Ofgem is fully committed to supporting the Government to meet its aims of getting clean power by 2030.

"This announcement is a further step in putting the regulatory systems and processes in place to speed up network regulation to achieve its aim."