PRESS RELEASE
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Landmark report reveals Britain's small-scale renewable energy 'deserts and forests'

- ***Rural forests and urban deserts highlight huge disparity in adoption of domestic green energy***
- ***Current rate of installations would take 250 years to reach all households***
- ***The 10 local authorities with the lowest rates are all London boroughs***
- ***One in five homes on off-grid superstar, Orkney, has some form of small-scale renewable technology***
- ***MCS issues three key recommendations for government to support small-scale renewables on a national level***

Huge disparities in Britain's uptake of small-scale renewables over the past 14 years have created so-called green technology deserts and forests, according to a landmark report.

Titled, *Renewing Britain: The Changing Landscape of Home-Grown Energy 2008 – 2021*, and delivered by MCS – the national standards organisation for renewables – the report uncovers 14 years' worth of data held by the MCS Installer Database (MID), against a backdrop of a UK target to reach net-zero by 2050.

Since 2008, MCS has registered 1.2 million installations of the five major renewable energy technologies[1], generating 34,000GWh-plus of energy, and saving nearly 10 million tonnes of CO_2e – roughly equivalent to the electricity consumed annually by 9.65 million homes.

The data shows the pace of installing small-scale renewables is achingly slow in the context of the 2050 target: 1.2 million installations over 14 years suggests a rate of just 100,000 per annum, even in a period when solar PV boomed.[2]

MCS has calculated that, with almost 26.5 million households in England, Wales, and Scotland[3], it would take around 250 years to reach the point where all homes currently without any renewable energy had some form installed.

The analysis also shows that the path of growth has been volatile, with the number of installations spiking and dropping in line with changes in government incentives, notably the Feed in Tariff (FiT) and Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI).

Deserts and forests: renewables in Britain to date

By mapping its own data against official statistics[4], MCS has identified commonalities in areas where small-scale renewables are particularly prevalent or scarce – creating forests or deserts of renewable technologies.

MCS compared the rates of installation as a percentage of households with how urban or rural a local authority area is, to what extent they are on or off the gas grid, average income, and levels of fuel poverty.

Predictably, adoption of renewable heat is strongly correlated to areas where a relatively large proportion of consumers have no access to mains gas or where fuel poverty is prevalent.

The Orkney Islands and the Western Isles are the top two areas in Britain for deployment. A staggering one in five properties on Orkney have some form of small-scale renewables, while the Western Isles has the highest level of fuel poverty in Britain (36 per cent) and highest proportion of homes with Air-Source Heat Pumps.

[1] The main focus of this report is on the five major technologies for generating electricity and heat that have been deployed at the largest scale: Ground/Water-Source Heat Pumps, Air-Source Heat Pumps, Solar PV, Solar Thermal, and Biomass.

[2] 1.2m installations over 12 years averages at 100,000 per annum (accepting current rates at around 73,000 per annum), assuming one installation per household. Does not include 2020 data.

[3] ONS data.

[4] MCS worked with data technology specialist, Quanovo, which used MID data augmented with external data from the UK Census and the Office of National Statistics (ONS).

Overall, rural or semi-rural areas have predominately led the way on small-scale installations, accounting for 18 of the top 20 local authorities.

Cornwall is a leader in terms of its high number of installations; almost 20,000 Solar PV installations to date mean the area generates 37 per cent of its electricity from renewables.

At the other end of the scale are the urban deserts of London. The 10 local authorities with the lowest rates of installations for small-scale renewables are all boroughs of the capital[5] – fewer than one in every 127 households.

The picture presented is clearly evidenced by the data; however, there are several urban and semi-urban areas that buck the trend. Stirling and Peterborough have the highest levels of Solar PV installations, while urban Enfield in London has the eleventh highest percentage of Ground/Water-Source Heat Pumps.

Sunderland – where fewer than one in every 100 homes is designated rural – has one of the lowest average disposable incomes, yet one of the highest rates of Solar PV installations (7.6 per cent).

Deserts and forests aside, the wider picture uncovers where areas of Britain are falling short when it comes to small-scale renewables. Many local authorities have an installation rate of fewer than five per cent of households, including most of Lancashire, West Yorkshire, the West Midlands, and South Wales.

How do we achieve net-zero by 2050?

MCS is at the heart of three new government incentive schemes, including the Green Homes Grant, a Smart Export Guarantee in place of the FiT, and consideration of a Clean Heat Grant to replace the RHI from 2022.

Renewing Britain intends to help government and industry to learn from thriving markets (forests) and identify barriers in areas where renewables have made little or no penetration (deserts).

In the report, MCS makes three key recommendations to the government:

1. **Learn from the successes** of the devolved administrations and other tiers of government identified in the report: in particular, Scotland's "whole-system" approach, which sets the benchmark on a national level.
2. Use those lessons to **set clear, evidence-driven, and ambitious targets** delivered through long-term incentives to close current gaps and drive an increase in installations.
3. **Devise an integrated package of support** for small-scale renewables that is targeted to people and the areas they live. Cost reduction to improve accessibility and consumer awareness founded on impartial, independent advice should be at the heart of any support package.

Ian Rippin, chief executive officer of MCS, commented: "Domestic renewables have come a long way since 2008, when just 43 installations were made. The wealth of data at our disposal that we've distilled into this report paints an invaluable picture of the past to help inform our current path to net-zero.

"The data speaks for itself: Britain is a divided country when it comes to the investment in small-scale renewables, with myriad factors affecting uptake. True change is happening at a local authority level; something which central government should learn from.

"Short, sharp injections of support in the form of consumer incentives have been shown to drive temporary demand. Our core recommendations are centred on the fact we need a carefully considered, long-term roadmap for the quick, broad adoption of renewables and the decarbonisation of our homes.

"MCS and the wider industry are here to continue supporting the government as we move into a crucial period in addressing the climate emergency."

MCS is overseen by the MCS Charitable Foundation, which works to increase public confidence, awareness and access to renewable energy and low carbon solutions across the UK.

Adrian Ramsay, chief executive officer of the MCS Charitable Foundation, commented: "This report will be a really valuable tool to policymakers, researchers and the renewables sector in understanding the trends and patterns of the last 14 years and setting agendas to deliver the transformational change the industry needs to create a resilient and greener future."

ENDS

[5] For full list see notes to editors

For further information, please contact Rumpus PR on 0161 942 9988 or mcs@rumpuspr.com

NOTES TO EDITORS

About *Renewing Britain: The Changing Landscape of Home-Grown Energy 2008 – 2021*

Delivered by MCS (Microgeneration Certification Scheme), this eye-opening report shines a light on Britain's relationship with small-scale renewable technologies over the past 14 years. Analysing data from the MCS Installations Database (MID), it offers a comprehensive analysis of what has gone before, providing an opportunity for learning and growth in line with net-zero by 2050 targets.

View and download the full report online here www.renewingbritain.com

Top 10 areas of home-grown energy

1. Orkney Islands - 20.80%
2. Western Isles - 14.95%
3. Mid Devon - 14.56%
4. Stirling - 14.10%
5. Peterborough - 13.04%
6. South Cambridgeshire - 12.61%
7. South Hams - 12.19%
8. Torridge - 12.08%
9. Mid Suffolk - 11.44%
10. South Norfolk - 11.20%

Areas with the lowest home-grown energy

1. Wandsworth - 0.79%
2. Lambeth - 0.79%
3. Hackney - 0.78%
4. Islington - 0.75%
5. Camden - 0.73%
6. Tower Hamlets - 0.69%
7. Hammersmith and Fulham - 0.61%
8. City of London - 0.58%
9. Westminster - 0.49%
10. Kensington and Chelsea - 0.30%

About MCS

www.mcscertified.com

With energy costs constantly rising and climate change affecting us all – low-carbon technology has a bigger and bigger role to play in the future of UK energy.

We're here to ensure it's a positive one.

Working with industry we define, maintain and improve quality – certifying products and installers so people can have confidence in the low-carbon technology they invest in. From solar and wind, to heat pumps, biomass and battery storage, we want to inspire a new generation of home-grown energy, fit for the needs of every UK home and community.

About MCS Charitable Foundation

MCS Charitable Foundation is an independent UK-wide charity, whose mission is to accelerate the widespread adoption of renewable energy and low carbon technologies.

With growing concern about the climate emergency and energy costs on the rise, the need to advance low carbon solutions has never been greater. MCS Charitable Foundation wants everyone to have access to affordable and reliable renewable energy, so that we can have warm, comfortable homes as part of a resilient, zero carbon future.

For more information, visit https://www.mcscharitablefoundation.org/projects.