

ELECTRICITY ACT 1989

TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING (SCOTLAND) ACT 1997

DPEA CODE OF PRACTICE FOR ELECTRICITY ACT INQUIRIES

TEALING TO KINTORE UPGRADE PROJECT (TKUP) TRI-120-1

Community Hearing Statement on CONSULTATION by EILEEN WEST

INTRODUCTION

My name is Eileen West and before I speak today on behalf of communities who feel NOT consulted, not respected, not heard but managed, sidelined and systematically disenfranchised. I wish to refer to my 17 page submission on Consultation which the Reporters have declined to admit to the Inquiry as supporting documentation or exhibit on the DPEA website. This curtailment of scrutiny feels uncomfortably similar to the Applicant's failures in transparent community engagement.

This Community Hearing Statement is not a complaint about poor communication. It is a challenge to the integrity of the entire process.

THE QUALITY OF COMMUNICATION

In March 2024, Gillian Martin MSP said that for projects like TKUP to succeed, developers must "*engage early, thoroughly and sympathetically*". That standard has not been met here. Not remotely. What communities have experienced has been an exercise in late notice, inadequate information, control, containment, defensive behaviour, outright disdain and merely a paper trail of engagement while pressing ahead behind the scenes.

Many people first learnt of this huge proposal not from SSEN, but from their MP. That alone says a great deal. The original consultation window was so short it had to be extended repeatedly under public and political pressure. Don't think that for a moment it was a sign of responsiveness! It was evidence that meaningful engagement had never been properly built into the process in the first place.

PUBLIC MEETINGS

Then came the public meetings.

At Peterculter, residents attended in good faith expecting serious discussion about a proposal of immense consequence. What they encountered was a box-ticking exercise. SSEN arrived looking less like an organisation seeking dialogue and more like one complying reluctantly with an obligation it resented. Poorly prepared, unreadable material and made claims of "forensic" route assessment that quickly collapsed under basic questioning. They appeared unfamiliar with major infrastructure, environmental

constraints and obvious features on the route such as a helipad. That is not thorough consultation. That is not competent consultation. And it is certainly not respectful consultation.

Worse still, when those in the audience with industry experience asked SSEN to consider a different strategy to examine modern alternatives more fitting for a 21st century grid, that invitation was not meaningfully taken up. It was clear the technology choice had effectively been closed off before the public was ever allowed near the table.

GUNNING PRINCIPLES AND THE ÅARHUS CONVENTION

That strikes at the heart of the Gunning Principles, underpinned by the authority of the Åarhus Convention, a UN Treaty in place since 1971.

Lawful, meaningful consultation must happen when proposals are still at a formative stage. It must provide honest information for people to respond intelligently. It must allow adequate time. And the responses must be conscientiously taken into account.

On every one of those tests, this process falls short.

Communities were not consulted when options were open. They were presented with a preferred technology and then invited to comment on the least damaging way to impose it upon them. That is not consultation. That is notification.

Honest information? No transparent, properly costed and independently scrutinised appraisals comparing overhead AC with underground or subsea HVDC alternatives. Instead, communities have been expected to accept vague assertions that alternatives are too difficult or too expensive, while being denied the evidence. The outcome was ring-fenced from challenge.

Opportunity to engage? Meetings were tightly controlled. Questions filtered. Live challenge prevented. At a busy Drumoak meeting civilised, compliant residents were required to submit questions weeks in advance which were cherry-picked by SSEN, answers scripted, the community banned from speaking from the floor and warned security was present. This captures the process perfectly ... a company willing to present but unwilling to engage.

That is not an open democratic process. It is stage managed.

Written correspondence was met with generic replies, delayed replies or no replies at all. Many describe it as formulaic, evasive, and dismissive.

North-east communities, rich in experience and shaped by decades in the industry had much to offer in cutting-edge technology. That knowledge was treated not as an asset but as an inconvenience.

The impact on people has been severe. My 13 page submission on the mental health impacts goes into great detail. Much to my personal chagrin, It has been disallowed by the Reporters. Residents describe anger, stress, anxiety, demoralisation and despair often leaving meetings in tears. People are experiencing the effects of this proposal on their wellbeing, homes, sense of security and faith in public decision-making. To tell such communities that they have been properly consulted is not merely unconvincing. It is insulting. Could that be why residents call SSEN consultations “insultations”?

SSEN’s own stakeholder engagement survey appears to corroborate this, reporting widespread perceptions that consultation was procedural, late and essentially box-ticking.

That phrase ... box-ticking ... comes up again and again. If communities are right in believing this process was never intended to shape the outcome, then the Inquiry must ask itself a serious question - what was it for?

This runs contrary to the Treasury Green Book. A project of this scale, with such profound consequences for homes, health, livelihoods and landscapes cannot properly proceed on the basis of “process theatre”.

What we have received instead is a derisory exercise in managed tokenism designed to satisfy procedure rather than democracy.

This Inquiry now has an opportunity, in fact, a duty, to recognise that failure.

A consultation process is not lawful simply because meetings were held, leaflets were printed (but never received) and webinars held. If alternatives are excluded, if information is partial, if timescales inadequate, and the public “managed” rather than heard, then the process fails ... morally, politically and legally.

Eileen West

12 May 2026