

# Involving communities in deliberation: A study of three citizens' juries on onshore wind farms in Scotland

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## Executive summary

This is one of the most comprehensive studies of citizens' juries conducted to date. The unique project entailed, for the first time, three citizens' juries addressing the same task in different locations, and the research combined five sources of data to provide an in-depth account of the deliberative process and its outcomes.

The deliberative approach used in citizens' juries gives voice to the diversity of views that often exists around controversial policy areas. Deliberative processes are particularly valuable because rather than simply expressing their views, participants are encouraged to develop, scrutinise, justify and re-examine those views in light of evidence and arguments presented by others. As such, deliberative engagement is particularly suitable for topics characterised by complexity, conflicting views and values, competing interests, and contested evidence.

Scottish Planning Policy emphasises the importance of public engagement, requiring that it should be early, meaningful and proportionate. However, to date, deliberative engagement has not been actively used to inform planning policy or decisions in Scotland. This project focussed on onshore wind farm development, and was designed to offer insight into key dynamics in citizen participation and public deliberation – rather than to inform decision-making.

This report provides the policy and practice community with practical advice about organising and facilitating deliberative public engagement in support of decision-making. It explores how citizens' knowledge and perspectives evolve during the process. It presents a picture of what the jurors decided matters most to them about wind farm development. It analyses whether three juries, addressing the same topic under similar conditions, generate different outcomes. And it explores the potential role of citizens' juries in and decision-making.

Our **overarching findings** include:

- Citizens of all backgrounds can enjoy addressing complex policy issues when they are adequately supported to do so as part of a fair and engaging process.
- Jurors learnt about the topic and related debates, engaged with others' perspectives, and revised their opinions during the process.
- Common themes emerged across the juries, which reflect common values and tensions on the topic.
- Diversity of initial views on the topic was the most influential factor on the quality of the jury's deliberation and decision-making.
- The experience (learning and deliberation) was both enjoyable and rewarding for the jurors, and fostered civic skills.

Our overarching lessons for deliberative engagement practice include:

- **Recruitment:** Ensuring diversity in the jury's composition is one of the most challenging tasks due to the small group size. We recommend investing in recruiting substitute jurors.
- **Time:** Time constraints were at the heart of most shortcomings in this project, and at least a third jury day would have made a considerable difference to the process and the outcomes.
- **Design and facilitation:** Experienced facilitators are central to the success of the juries, and in particular their ability to create space for various styles of learning, dialogue and deliberation. The design should combine a range of formats and techniques that enable all jurors to participate and influence the outcomes.
- **Improvisation:** No matter how much preparation is done, improvisation will be needed and the organising team must be responsive, creating a positive environment for the jurors.
- **Social space:** Creating a collaborative environment, where disagreement can be productively explored, requires building 'relational capital'. The social space (refreshment breaks) can be as important to the success of the jury as the working space (sessions).

### Project Aims:

1. **To understand how deliberative processes can be used to engage citizens on complex public issues** and inform decision makers about how such processes may be used in policy making – including the value that deliberative processes can add and the practical challenges of this approach.
2. **To learn about citizens' views on wind farms before and after the deliberative process**, and explore what the citizens involved think about wind farm development in Scotland when given the opportunity to learn and deliberate on the topic.

### The juries

The **three** jury locations were chosen to be of similar size and rural characteristics but with different exposure to wind farm developments: one location **close to an existing wind farm** (Aberfeldy, 18 jurors); one location with **a wind farm proposed nearby** (Helensburgh, 14 jurors); one location with **no existing or proposed wind farms** (Coldstream, 15 jurors).

The jurors were given their task (Box A) at the start of the process; the topic of the jury was not disclosed during recruitment.

#### Box A - The Jury's Task

*"There are strong views on wind farms in Scotland, with some people being strongly opposed, others being strongly in favour and a range of opinions in between. **What should be the key principles for deciding about wind farm development, and why?"***

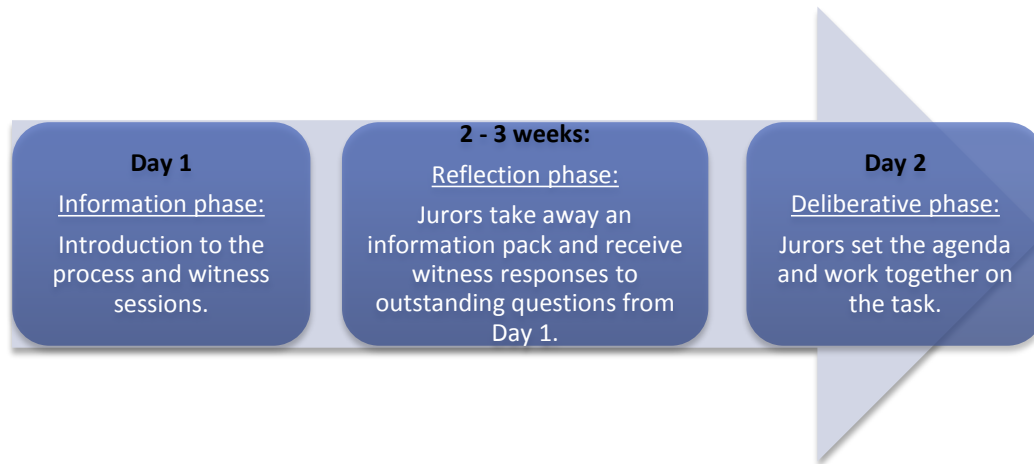
The juries were held over two days, and had three distinct phases as shown in Figure A. During Day 1 the jurors listened to and cross-examined witnesses representing different perspectives on the topic. There were three thematic sessions:

1. **Energy and Climate Change:** One impartial witness gave an overview.
2. **Wind Energy:** Two witnesses, presenting arguments 'for' and 'against' wind power.

### 3. Wind Farms: Two witnesses, presenting arguments 'for' and 'against' wind farms.

Jurors could reflect on the information and perspectives in Day 1, or follow-up on any issues in the couple of weeks before the second day. On Day 2 the juries discussed the information they had been given, articulated their own priorities, and agreed on a set of principles for decision-making about wind farm development.

Figure A – Phases of the jury design in this project



## Research Findings

## Jurors' perspectives and experience

### What principles did the jurors prioritise for guiding decision making about wind farm development in Scotland?

**Each jury completed their task;** they formulated, discussed and agreed a set of 'principles for wind farm development', though they did not have time to write up their reasoning for each principle (the 'why' of their task).

The majority of principles across the three juries correspond to six themes:

- the desirable energy mix for Scotland,
- the characteristics of the evidence needed for decision-making,
- the range of negative and positive impacts that should be taken into account for decision-making,
- the role of public responsibility i.e. reducing energy consumption,
- the limits to wind farm development, and
- the question of who should benefit from this energy source.

The fact all juries agreed principles is a remarkable achievement - jurors only had a total of 8 hours across the two days to actually discuss the evidence and generate and agree the principles (taking out time for breaks, introductory and wrap-up sessions and questionnaires). This shows how a group of strangers can work together very effectively despite their diversity and the complexity of the task.

### Did the jurors learn during the process?

**Jurors gained knowledge** about several aspects related to the topic, whether or not these aspects were directly covered by the witnesses. This is in line with previous studies. The level of learning was similar for all juries, although this varied on different questions.

Jurors picked up the nuances and complexities of the debate, thus learning about

**When did jurors learn?**

key concepts and trade-offs. This was particularly so in juries that featured high deliberative quality. There is also evidence that jurors developed deliberative skills.

Jurors developed knowledge on climate change and energy in the Information and the Reflection Phases. There were no knowledge gains on these topics in the Deliberation Phase, and actually there were some instances when jurors shared incorrect information in this final phase. Jurors also learned about broad concepts related to the topic in the Information Phase, but explored trade-offs and nuances more in the Deliberation Phase. Self-led learning in the Reflection Phase also played a central role.

**Did the jurors' views change during the process?**

**Most jurors revised their views** regarding various aspects of wind farm development. Some jurors became more supportive, while others became more opposed following each phase, although the Information Phase had the strongest impact. The findings show that participants were often engaging with both sides of the argument throughout the jury, rather than simply assimilating information to back up previously held views.

Our data support core findings from previous studies, namely: the prospect of having to publicly deliberate on issues, justify views and make collective decisions provided a strong incentive for the jurors to get more informed and engage in considered judgement.

**What critical factors shaped how each jury evolved and the set of principles they agreed?**

The principles generated by Coldstream and Aberfeldy had many similarities, both in terms of the themes covered and the statements within them, while Helensburgh was very similar on the former and distinctive on latter. The differences between the principles reflect the idiosyncrasies of each jury's composition (e.g. diversity of views) and evolution during the deliberative process (e.g. impact of witnesses, scrutiny of evidence), as well as the context of their location.

**One of the most important factors was the diversity of initial views within each jury.** The two juries that were more diverse (in terms of demographics and attitudes) tended to moderate their views about the impact of wind farm energy (from largely positive to moderately positive). In contrast, the jury that was less diverse (composed of few jurors with a positive initial perspective on wind farms, due to recruitment issues) developed stronger views against wind farms. This is in line with research that shows that when people deliberate with like-minded others they tend to develop stronger views in the direction of their pre-deliberation preferences. In this jury, this resulted in the unbalanced scrutiny of the witnesses, which in turn influenced the lack of counter-arguments to the jury's emerging anti-wind farms consensus.

The purpose of a citizens' jury, particularly when used in decision-making, is not to measure individual preferences, but to generate collective recommendations agreed by the jurors. In this project, even the jury that had consolidated round anti-wind farm arguments by the end of the process spent time and effort agreeing principles for decision making on wind farm development.

**Did the process foster civic skills and attitudes?**

**Experiencing the deliberative process fostered jurors' civic skills, confidence and sense of self-efficacy.** The process also enhanced jurors' interest and understanding of decision making on these complex issues, and the jurors were willing to participate in similar forums in the future.

**How do citizens relate to information, evidence and opposing testimonies and perspectives?**

**For jurors, the experience of learning is one of the highlights of the experience, and a fundamental reward for their participation.** The Information Phase helped to empower and equip jurors to engage in self-led learning during the Reflection Phase, and become more informed about the topic. This was incentivised by having to participate in the subsequent Deliberation Phase. The knowledge obtained by self-led learning was more likely to be correctly recalled. Encouraging and facilitating self-led learning is therefore important for jurors' understanding of the subject.

**The jurors found making sense of competing evidence a challenge.** This is reflected by the fact that a large set of the principles generated as a response to the task had to do with the nature and interpretation of evidence. A key finding from this project is that jurors must be supported to learn not only about evidence, but also about critically interpreting its credibility and robustness.

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**Research Findings**

**Designing and Organising Citizens' Juries**

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**Was the process deliberative?**

Our analysis shows that the three juries achieved a high standard on five dimensions that define deliberative quality:

- **Un-coerced deliberation.** The jurors felt able to express their views and did not feel pressured into adopting a particular position.
- **Other-regarding deliberation.** The large majority of jurors respected and listened to each other, and based their arguments on appeals to the 'common good', rather than self-interest.
- **Reasoned deliberation.** Jurors engaged largely in reasoned exchanges of arguments.
- **Inclusive and equal participation.** The juries provided a supportive environment where jurors helped each other to participate and everyone felt some level of influence over the outcomes.
- **Unbiased facilitation.** Our analysis has showed that facilitation contributed to ensure the effectiveness, fairness and impartiality of the process.

The quality of these dimensions improved from jury to jury. Experience, developed by replicating and refining a particular process design, is crucial to this type of process. If public authorities want to foster high quality deliberative processes, they should build capacity through sustained practice over time.

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**What are the key lessons for designing, organizing and facilitating citizens' juries?**

As well as the overarching lessons above, we recommend that future processes consider:

- **Jurors' induction day.** There was little time to ease the jurors into their role and offer opportunities to reflect about how they may go about it, and how they may be best supported by facilitators and fellow jurors. In this project, this had to be learned on the go. Our recommendation is to dedicate a day to induction.
- **Securing the contribution of suitable witnesses.** This was a difficult task, principally because this was a research project, rather than a real decision making process, and because of the significant time demand (i.e. 3 separate juries with 3 evidence sessions each)

- **Vetting the quality of evidence.** The quality of the evidence presented was not vetted in advance to ensure that sources were transparent and credible. Our recommendation is that the Stewarding Board could fulfil that function.
- **Supporting the witnesses.** Although the organisers prepared briefs for the witnesses, this proved insufficient. Witnesses must engage in 'live debate' on whatever issues the jury deems relevant, which is a challenging task.
- Giving enough **time to develop, review and refine the principles**, unpack assumptions, deal with contradictions and flesh out details.
- **Clarity on voting procedures** when consensus is not possible. This is an area where the Stewarding Board could have been brought in; or something the jurors could decide.
- **Using Information Officers**, and/or introducing a '**devil's advocate**' function, is useful to the jurors (as there were no witnesses on Day 2). Information Officers answered questions on demand, and occasionally challenged 'uncritical consensus' thus helping the jurors to articulate and justify arguments.

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### What are the prospects for the citizens' jury as a format for public engagement in decision-making?

Based on lessons from the project, the potential role of citizens' juries in decision-making is explored in the report. We propose that they may play a triple function as:

- a **direct advisory body** to decision makers – offering recommendations based on deliberation that draws on diverse views, knowledge and experiences;
- a **catalyst** for broader public engagement – jurors could be supported to act as facilitators of public forums in their communities, thus bringing into the jury a broader range of local perspectives;
- an **honest broker** of evidence – distilling the pros, cons and tradeoffs of policy options into balanced information that can be shared with local communities as a resource and stimulus for public deliberation.

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### Conclusions

Our analysis suggests that most jurors felt included in influencing the process and its outcomes. No juror declared feeling completely unrepresented by the principles generated, and a large majority across the juries (84%) said that their views were to a 'large extent' reflected.

To create a process with this level of deliberative quality, facilitators must be impartial, but not neutral. They must be impartial about the topics discussed, but not neutral about the process of discussion. Citizens' juries offer a high quality deliberative space where desirable rules of communication and interaction can be, to a large extent, effectively implemented. Often, 'natural' spaces for public discussion can be hindered by the problems that deliberative design and facilitation seek to avoid (e.g. coercion, disrespect, lack of listening, lack of inclusion, dominant voices, etc).

All juries managed to agree most principles on the basis of consensus or large majorities. This illustrates how diversity and difference of opinion can form a basis for finding common ground and agree principles which is as strong as homogeneity and like-mindedness.

There were striking similarities between many of the principles agreed by each jury, particularly for the juries that featured diverse viewpoints. However, we also find indication that different juries dealing with the same topic may produce different outcomes. This makes each jury somewhat unique, and the results may depend on the jurors' diversity and how this influences the deliberative process, as well as other crucial factors such as the quality of the evidence presented. However, the same could be said of elected bodies.

If using citizens' juries in decision-making it is essential to identify the appropriate level of engagement for a particular policy topic (i.e. local, regional, national, international). Citizens' juries must be populated by participants from across the appropriate level.

All in all, our study supports the overarching message from decades of studies on deliberative public engagement, namely: When citizens are given the time, resources and support to learn and deliberate together about public issues, they can grasp complex debates and collectively make considered decisions. Our conclusion is that deliberative processes can add value to decision-making, but their role needs to be carefully defined and clearly connected to decision-making processes and representative institutions.

### Data gathering and analysis

For each jury, there were several qualitative and quantitative sources of data. Qualitative data include:

- *Transcriptions* of the materials produced by the juries, such as the principles statements generated to complete the juries' task.
- *Audio recordings* of all the sessions, including plenary and group deliberation.
- *Field notes* written by the ethnographers and evaluators observing the jury.
- *Interviews* with witnesses and members of the Stewarding Board following the juries.
- *Reflective notes* of the organisers and facilitators

Extensive quantitative data and some additional qualitative data were collected through four questionnaires, which jurors completed at the start and end of each day to solicit their individual views and knowledge, and track their evolution.

### Project Organisation

Following best practice in deliberative processes, the project set-up was overseen by a Stewarding Board comprising representatives from organisations with a range of opinions about wind farm development in Scotland. This Board discussed the jury task, project design, choice of jury locations and choice of witnesses. However, the responsibility for the project lies with the research team.

The project and the juries were organised by a core team from ClimateXChange and the University of Edinburgh. The research team comprised academics from six Scottish Universities; the University of Edinburgh, University of Strathclyde, University of the West of Scotland, University of Glasgow, Robert Gordon University, and Queen Margaret University.