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1. The EU Parliament passed the Ries report (news271.11 etc.) by 559 votes to 22 with 8 abstentions. A Parliamentary resolution is not itself law. The principal part of the resolution “*Urges the Commission to review the scientific basis and adequacy of the EMF limits as laid down in Recommendation 1999/519/EC*”. The resolution has 29 parts in all.

http://www.next-up.org/parlement_europeen.php#1

2. The EU Parliament Ries report also contains proposals on issues of probity:

“20. Proposes that the European Group on Ethics in Science and New Technologies be given the additional task of assessing scientific integrity in order to help the Commission forestall possible cases of risk, conflict of interests, or even fraud that might arise now that competition for researchers has become keener;”

“22. Calls on the International Commission on Non-Ionising Radiation Protection and the World Health Organisation (WHO) to be more transparent and open to dialogue with all stakeholders in standard setting;”

3. Although the EU Parliament Ries report is largely about telecommunications, some sections are specifically about powerlines:

“26. Calls on the Council and Commission, in coordination with the Member States and the Committee of the Regions, to encourage the introduction of a single standard designed to ensure that local residents are subjected to as low a degree of exposure as possible when high-voltage grids are extended;”

4. It is acknowledged in the inspectors’ report on the 1992 public inquiries into the Yorkshire line, and elsewhere, that high voltage overhead powerlines do have a strong negative impact on visual amenity. Indeed it was sufficient to refuse consent for a substantial section of the proposed line. But steel pylons can have some sort of beauty in an appropriate setting, or even in an inappropriate setting, in the eyes of some beholders.

5. A Guardian article “The gaunt, skeletal beauty of pylons” 26-3-09

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2009/mar/26/pylons-beauty-spender>

refers to the “disarming”, if comic, Pylon Appreciation Society website,

www.pylons.org. That society looks like a commercial success with its shop and badges and recruitment of children, reminiscent perhaps of Reginald Perrin’s Grot.

There are real emotional undertones to the appreciation, with reference to those animated pylons marching destructively and conquering the countryside in the TV adverts for the newly privatized UK energy companies. Perhaps they appeal to dominance devotees or sado-masochists. Comments on the Guardian web site refer to

“giants striding across the country” and “our lust for power” and “thrillingly scary, the way they march through a landscape”. Something in common with rape and snuff movies perhaps?

6. I can understand the nerdish appeal of the various types and functions of pylons. A single tower, like Eifel or Blackpool, can appear elegant. A powerline has a much greater impact: a linear structure of many kilometres, like an army of angry soldiers. That may enhance the awe of a surreal industrial landscape. Some may like the more vicious incongruence of powerlines in an otherwise tranquil rural setting, for its very dominance of the landscape. But therein lies the negative impact for the majority.

7. Last week I was at the public hearings into the Donegal Project (some 100km of 110kV line proposed). One witness spoke as an artist to say that a powerline through a beautiful valley does not just occupy the small land-take of its footings; it occupies the whole valley. To the artist, the whole valley becomes a pylons valley. The proposers seem not to understand this. In contrast, inspectors confirm there is a large negative impact (point 4 above); that much at least is official.

8. Continuing the theme of pylons, alternative designs abound on the internet. They include laminated wood structures and tubular steel versions, with lots of pictures - a nerd's paradise. See also news243.7 and its picture link. Some designs have a more benign anthropomorphic posture than the usual aggressive steel lattice pylons. Thanks to Charles Swingler in Donegal for the following links:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Electricity_pylon and see also “wood pylon”,
<http://www.lwsinc.com/> for laminated wood alternatives, and
<http://www.sabretubularstructures.com/> for tubular steel, and
<http://www.hughesbros.com/Utility/StructureDesigns.html> for mixed designs

9. Windfarm proposals continue in Hambleton District, North Yorkshire, albeit in low wind areas and flying protection zones, aided by the arbitrary and irrational allocation of targets down to District levels. A renewed application has been made for a Seamer wind farm (news263.11 etc.), claiming to address the reasons for rejection by both affected councils. The proposal at Ingram Grange (near Appleton Wiske and Welbury, see news267.10) has evoked a protest group North Hambleton Windfarm Action Group with a new excellent web site www.nhwag.org which illustrates turbines dwarfing the Angel of the North for comparison.

10. The new site www.nhwag.org hits the spot with Yorkshire bluntness in identifying the motive for local farmers approached by windfarm companies: money! They claim the Ingram Grange farmer would earn over £80,000 per year for having the turbines on his land, a total of over 2 million pounds over a 25 year lifetime.

11. Likewise on money, the Scientific Alliance newsletter 9 April 2009 contains a correction: windfarms do not have a “government subsidy” as such, since it is paid by consumers. The newsletter explains: “Wind power is uneconomic at current market prices for electricity, but the shortfall is actually covered by a government-mandated price increase paid by consumers. Governments may subsidise, but they use taxpayers' money to do so.” The newsletter of 3 April suggests the political decline of wind power, signalled by April fool jokes, may be under way.

www.scientific-alliance.org

12. All defenders of the countryside might want to sign an official 10 Downing Street petition. It calls for a 2 km separation (small enough!) of giant wind turbines from homes and villages, unless by consent of those affected. Time is of the essence. The petition will close on 29 April and is linked from www.nhwag.org or accessed direct at

<http://petitions.number10.gov.uk/2000metres/>