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The Government must not be allowed to outlaw historic waterwheels

UK (SIR) – At a time when the clean production of electricity is a hot political topic, the Government plans to outlaw historic waterwheels, even if they work efficiently, unless they have the right paperwork.

As a builder of waterwheels, I am puzzled by the Government's unhealthy obsession with the minutiae of regulating fewer than 10 such small businesses.There might be a case for it with solar power, a cornerstone of the Government's proposed "feed-in tariff" system, which is dominated by a few multinational companies that build a small number of standardised components.

Small-scale water-power projects, on the other hand, require bespoke designs if historic mills, sometimes in beautiful rural locations, are to be preserved.

So why does the Government insist a traditional waterwheel, often an imposing feature of an old mill, is replaced by a modern bit of industrial machinery to qualify for the new tariffs?

The Treasury is not giving these projects grants, but is simply paying for the electricity produced. So if the project doesn't work, the taxpayer does not have to pay.

My family has put their name to what they make for 200 years, so why should faceless gnomes who have never had anything to do with water power tell us we need accreditation?

By labelling innovation "non-compliant" they cut off the very route to solving pressing environmental problems.

Rupert Armstrong Evans
Trebullett, Cornwall

SIR – We have an over-optimistic faith in the extent to which renewables can meet our energy requirements in the next few decades (Letters, February 27). But the construction of more coal-fired power stations is taking Britain further down the road of energy imports.

We have mind-bending quantities of unmineable coal in Britain, and there is a potential means of extracting energy from it without digging it out of the ground – by underground coal gasification (UCG).

The gas produced can be readily scrubbed to remove its carbon-dioxide content at a fraction of the cost of scrubbing the flue gas from a boiler. The carbon-free gas, mostly hydrogen, can then be burnt in gas-turbine power stations. The exhaust from the power stations would then be mainly water.

The cost of generating power from UCG is likely to be less than a quarter of the cost of power from the offshore wind farms now being planned, and is not dependent on the weather.

UCG gas can also be a cheap source of hydrogen for fuel cells.

It is high time for much wider recognition of the huge potential for UCG in Britain as a clean, affordable domestic energy source. Other countries, especially Australia, South Africa and China, are already well embarked on developing the process commercially.

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