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Highlands must gain from net zero opportunities

The final run up to the Christmas break was somewhat frenetic in terms of announcements and comment around the renewable energy sector and the opportunities that exist in the critically important area of decarbonising our energy and transport requirements.

My colleague Joanne Allday, from Port of Cromarty Firth, was extensively quoted in the media as she outlined the range and potential of the ambitious Opportunity Cromarty Firth proposals to develop our region's potential in all forms of renewable energy production and establish leading edge green hydrogen production, quite literally,

on an industrial scale.

In the same few days there was also the announcement of plans to resurrect the Port of Ardersier, which has been closed for over two decades, to establish the capability to decommission oil rigs and create the infrastructure needed to manufacture offshore wind farm foundations.

This was closely followed by SGN's proposal to develop the former gas holder facility on Harbour Road as a site for producing, storing and distributing green hydrogen. It's great to see Inverness leading the way by being identified as the first of some 21 SGN sites across Scotland and England to be developed as a hydrogen hub.

Allied to all these plans was the announcement by the First Minister, at the Port of Nigg, of the investment of £110 million to help create the UK's largest factory for making steel offshore wind turbine towers.

Although initial contracts would be focused on UK domestic supply, most of which would be sited off the Highlands and Islands shoreline, it is anticipated the factory would have the capability to export towers and associated products across Europe.

In the final run up to the festive break, colleagues across the British and Scottish Chambers of Commerce network have been arguing for a just transition from our reliance on oil



A £110 million investment at Nigg will create an offshore wind turbine tower factory.

and gas to a net zero destination.

I agree with them completely. We have to focus on continuing to meet our energy needs, protect jobs and diversify our economy while achieving sustainable growth and ultimately achieving net zero destination. I agree too, that we need a balanced debate between all stakeholders and clear, supportive government policy.

But I go further. I aspire for this energy transition to shift where the technology, production and expertise is located. Our region is already Scotland's powerhouse, producing more renewable energy for our country than any other region. We need to capture our share of this national value and ensure that Highland businesses

and communities benefit from this pipeline of opportunity.

2021, like the proceeding year, has been unbelievably tough for many businesses across the Highlands. However, what we saw developing over its final few weeks should give all of us in business here significant hope and optimism for the coming year, and many future decades.

Happy New Year to you all and those most important to you. Everyone at Inverness Chamber of Commerce wishes each of you the very best for 2022 and gives you the commitment that we remain dedicated to actively connecting and representing businesses across the Highlands, such as yours, to support your growth.

Our region is Scotland's powerhouse. We need to ensure our businesses and communities benefit from these opportunities.

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