# EnergyLaw@Lansdown Chambers

## When Can Projects Connect?

If a solar, onshore wind or a project with another technology seeks to generate over a network (almost all must do so) the answer to the question *when* it can connect is either the mid-to-late 2030s (so no use to current contenders) or much earlier if, but only if, batteries connect sooner and relieve the crush on the relevant network.

After two plus years of the networks faffing around, batteries should be connecting now: we keep being told it will be one month or two months more. So, it is *almost* happening, although it has been *almost* happening since last October.

## Where We Were

Long ago (the May before last) the regulator and the Energy Networks Association reached a public agreement of a really simple kind:

a. The situation with battery connections was urgent and something needed doing ***now*;**

b. Batteries used barely any capacity on the system so a way could be found to accommodate them that did not depend on prior network reinforcements;

c. The batteries should be switched off (curtailed) without compensation when the network needed (when it needed less output or input).

## Where We Are

Progress is tantalizingly slow – tantalizing because we keep being given dates, but slow because those dates never seem to arrive. Almost all those wanting to connect, who have been told they can connect soon, are still waiting for a firm date.

Before knowing they can connect, battery projects expect to be given key information by each network. They know they can be curtailed, so they expect to be given data to allow them to determine how often and in what circumstances that will happen. They

need to know for their funders to release funds. Obviously, if a project were curtailed for 90% of the time, it wouldn't be funded. It would be an ex-project.

## Data Options and Problems

Wouldn't it be *relatively* simple to be given data for potential curtailment? The answer to that question is determinedly 'no'.

What the networks offer is three different data options:

- 'raw' information
- a semi-modelled product produced by the relevant network or
- a bespoke model for a project at a cost of ~£10,000.00 (bear in mind that local networks concede they don't know much about batteries)

The range of the offers, particularly the last one, makes clear that curtailment data isn't simple and unravelling it needs the input of a specialist modeller.

Why is it so complicated? Couldn't networks provide a table of half-hour capacity over the previous year matched by a table of half-hour use of that capacity over the same period? Such a table wouldn't provide a complete answer – after all, last year might, e.g., have been sunnier (more capacity used by solar) or windier (more capacity used by wind). But what the matching tables would do is provide enough information for fairly simple modelling to provide reasonably clear answers.

The networks aren't providing that information.

In place of matching tables there is one table (a half-hour load for the year), together with totalled data: the total capacity the different generators on that part of the network have 'used' in the same period and the total amount of capacity available.

The networks are not producing a matching usage table with a matching load table. They aren't required to. What they are required to do is produce a set of figures for the new agreement all battery projects are going to have to sign, the 'Curtailment Agreement'. The figures in that Agreement will list, for any given project, the total network capacity that can and cannot be curtailed and the level of curtailment that

counts as an error by the network. If there is an error, the network pays the project for its curtailment.

The data provided by the networks is all network data and not project data – aimed at dealing with and minimising curtailment errors, hence minimising payments.

The data is unhelpful in other ways. In (very) brief, assumptions are made about the percentage utilisation by different technologies that are either wildly over-generous or simply not plausible.

The battery projects receiving the curtailment data are going to need to employ expert modellers to work out their likely periods of curtailment – or they will have to find a completely different way to determine what they will be.

## The Role of the Regulator

How did the regulator agree to these arrangements? How did it not see that the networks are simply adding complexity and costs to all those projects that have been queuing to connect?

The added complexities don't aid the project but only the networks; the data is all about networks having to pay out if they curtail generation outside 'agreed' limits.

Did the regulator notice that the 'agreed' limits, imposed by monopolies, can in no proper sense be agreed, that they are a given for any project?

The role of the regulator is (*inter alia*) to regulate the networks with a view to the five-year carbon budgets, the 2050 net zero target and "effective competition".

Networks over the last few years make for a sorry tale: National Grid with an obligation to plan didn't 'notice' the increase in embedded generation; none of the networks has an adequate IT system; local networks don't know what's on their network; each network is a monopoly dictating to its users. Regulation – where is it?



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