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UK leaps to world #3 after a 1½ GW first quarter

The United Kingdom has leap-frogged India and Germany to third place in the world ranking for utility-scale solar after a surge in installations in the first quarter of 2015. Developers and contractors pulled out all the stops to finish projects ahead of the 31st March deadline, when solar power stations over 5MW became ineligible for the Renewables Obligation incentive mechanism. Almost 1.5GW of installations were completed in the quarter according to data released today by Wiki-Solar.[1]

Leading the surge was Lightsource RE, which now holds some 700MW_{AC} of utility-scale solar capacity, and climbed into the world's top 10 solar generators in 2014[2]. Its Chief Executive Nick Boyle said that "The UK has an extremely competitive ground-mount solar market and we are delighted to be amongst those at the forefront – we installed more than 300MWp in March alone. I still believe there is huge untapped potential."

The cumulative utility-scale capacity of the world's top ten countries is shown below:

Country	Plants	Capacity MW_{AC}
United States	552	9,996.2
China	315	8,880.9
United Kingdom	408	3,610.1
Germany	299	3,589.6
India	216	2,533.7
Spain	172	1,538.5
Canada	94	1,184.8
Chile	24	1,109.4
Japan	56	1,022.4
France	91	1,022.0
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The top ten countries for utility-scale solar capacity now all hold over 1GW

It will be interesting to see if the UK can hold this position, or whether it will drift back down the table, now the Renewables Obligation (RO) has been restricted and larger systems have to compete in the new Contracts for Difference (CfD) regime. Nick Boyle's view is that "the loss of secure tariff for sites larger than 5MW is challenging from a business perspective. Deployment of large-scale solar projects will undoubtedly feel the effects of the CfD regime in its current form. Some changes should be made to the support mechanisms, if solar is to continue on the path to become the cheapest form of electricity generation."

Wiki-Solar's Philip Wolfe expects growth to slow in the short term as many developers refocus their activities on smaller projects below the utility-scale threshold[4]. "Having said that, we may yet be

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understating the current figures," he said; "when the UK energy regulator catches up with the backlog of station registrations, we may find that even more projects have been connected than are currently shown in our database as having been commissioned."

T E X T E N D S

Notes for editors:

[1] This release on the growth in the UK market is available here:
http://wiki-solar.org/library/public/150430_UK_leaps_to_third_place.pdf

[2] The previous release on leading plant owners / IPPs is available here:
http://wiki-solar.org/library/public/150401_Infrastructure_funds_focus_on_utilty-scale_solar.pdf
A longer list of top plant owners is available on the Wiki-Solar website.

[3] Global figures for utility-scale deployment at the end of 2014 were published last month:
http://wiki-solar.org/library/public/150305_Utility-solar_2014_figures_set multiple_records.pdf

[4] Following an open consultation, Wiki-Solar defines 'utility-scale solar' as 4 MW_{AC} and above; see: http://wiki-solar.org/data/glossary/utility-scale.html. A capacity rating of 4 MW_{AC} equates roughly to 5 megawatts peak DC (MWp) and delivers energy approximately equivalent to the consumption of 1,400 households in the UK.

[5] "Solar Photovoltaic Projects in the mainstream power market" was published in 2012.

[6] Wiki-Solar's database covers over 4,200 utility-scale solar projects, of which about two-thirds are operational, and the remainder are under construction or development.

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The 11.5 MWp Burntstalks solar farm near Kings Lynn *(courtesy: Lightsource RE)*