



RURAL ENTERPRISE COMMITTEE MINUTES

The Rural Enterprise Policy Committee met on Wednesday 1 February 2017 at Ulster Farmers Union Headquarters, Belfast

ATTENDANCE: I Ferguson (Deputy President), G Hawkes (Chairman) R Burgess (Vice Chairman), R Campbell, R Craig, M Harnett, P Lundy, D McElrea, R Smyth, J Watt and C Osborne (Secretary).

APOLOGIES: J Martin

WELCOME: The Chairman welcomed the Committee to the meeting.

MINUTES

The Minutes of meeting held on 4 August 2016 were agreed and signed.

MATTER ARISING

Irrelevant information redacted by the RHI Inquiry

COMMUNICATION

Irrelevant information redacted by the RHI Inquiry

Renewable Heat Incentive

Since early December 2016, the press and media has been awash with news surrounding the non-domestic Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI). So much so it has not evolved into a situation where the Northern Ireland Executive has collapsed and Assembly elections are confirmed for 2 March 2017.

From the very outset of the scheme, the UFU participated in the formal consultation process and we warned that the scheme should not be overly generous or it would be unaffordable. Furthermore, in July 2015, we met with DETI officials to warn them that there was a spike in applications pending.

In December 2016, the UFU stressed that focus of the review of the Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) scheme must remain on the failings of others to deliver a scheme with adequate safeguards and that those using the scheme legitimately to reduce energy bills should not be made scapegoats or treated unfairly for the failures of the scheme. We advised our members who availed of the scheme not to give permission for their names to be disclosed, unless audits have been carried out of their installation. In the New Year, the Renewable Heat Association (NI) was formed, involving Action Renewables, UFU, poultry and mushroom grower associations, biomass representatives and boiler installers. It was agreed that a collaborative group would be set up to represent the interests of those who had entered the scheme for legitimate reasons and who were using the boilers legitimately.

The Committee discussed at length the merits of using renewable heat, in particular the benefits to the poultry sector. The discussion also highlighted the benefit of the RHI benefits to the rural economy. One example was given that for every £5 the farmer receives, they will spend £6 in the local economy.

The latest position is that there are two Judicial Reviews (JR) ongoing. The first one is the JR to prevent the naming of RHA (NI) members names being published. RHA (NI) was granted leave to seek a review of the publishing of names. The second JR will be to challenge the ETI Minister decision to change RHI Tariff legislation.

It was pointed out that at the time the non-domestic RHI was launched, the Matrix group has presented an alternative to the ETI Committee. It was pointed out by the Secretary that had a proper Energy Bill been in place the outcome may have been different. The absence of an NI Energy Bill meant that the Department simply copied and pasted GB legislation, and in doing so omitted 96 words which could have ensured that this mess had not occurred.

The Committee were very vocal in their criticism of Moy Park. Both in their role in the application process and their lack of voice since early December.

POFRE events were run by CAFRE over a 5 year period and have been cited as events which promoted the RHI. This was not the case as the events were organised as multi-technology events with no focus on one area. The UFU were always very cautious in our involvements and senior CAFRE staff were never enthusiastic about the RHI.

There had been criticism from some quarters in relation to UFU refusal to participate in the Nolan Show. This platform is a no-win situation and that is why the UFU declined the offer. Going forward the Committee agreed that the UFU was following the correct line in relation to press strategy.

The Committee stated that the UFU focus needs to be supporting our members. As far as next steps are concerned, it was suggested that Technical Officers provide on-farm support to RHI recipients (UFU members) who are subject to OFGEM audit/inspections. To allow this, it was suggested that the UFU should contact OFGEM ask that confirm the inspection criteria/requirements which could allow our members to have a pre-inspection check list. Northern Ireland farms are well versed with “on-farm inspections” in relation to Cross Compliance/Red Tractor Assurance, and each of the inspecting bodies provide a check list which assist the farmer.

In addition Ofgem should adhere to strict biosecurity advice when visiting farms and consequently provide adequate notice before visiting farms

Action Point One - RHI Audits and Inspections – Secretary to ask OFGEM for a check list and to ask UFU for Technical Officer support.

Lobby Update

Irrelevant information redacted by the RHI Inquiry



Irrelevant information redacted by the RHI Inquiry

Storage Update

Irrelevant information redacted by the RHI Inquiry

Rating of Small Scale Renewables

Irrelevant information redacted by the RHI Inquiry

Wind Farms and Inconvenience Payments

Irrelevant information redacted by the RHI Inquiry

Date of next meeting

The next meeting will be held in 3-4 months, or sooner if the situation regarding the RHI requires an earlier meeting of the Committee. The next meeting will be an AGM.

Summary of Action Points

1. **RHI Audits and Inspections – Secretary to ask OFGEM for a check list and to ask UFU for Technical Officer support**
2. **UFU to seek meeting with DfE Permanent Secretary Andrew McCormick**
3. Irrelevant information redacted by the RHI Inquiry
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