

ULSTER FARMERS' UNION NEWS RELEASE

Date: 30th September 2015

Cyclo No: 172/2015

Renewables Decision Bad, says UFU

The Ulster Farmers Union has criticised a decision by the Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment (DETI) to launch a two week consultation on the early closure of the Northern Ireland Renewable Obligation (NIRO) for onshore wind generation.

In June the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) said it was closing its Renewables Obligation support for onshore wind generation. In response the local DETI minister, Jonathan Bell, said he did not intend to follow the Westminster government's policy with an early closure of the scheme here. "This was welcomed by the UFU, but now the plan is to close the NIRO scheme in March 2016. This is a year earlier than planned, and to give only two weeks of consultation is inadequate in light of the implications for the small scale renewables sector in Northern Ireland," said UFU rural enterprise chairman Gary Hawkes.

The early closure decision was made because to continue the NIRO until March 2017, would have meant an additional cost to consumers. "However if you separate small scale (less than 250 kW) from large scale, an already small cost to consumers becomes miniscule. This is why the UFU wants small scale wind generation to be separated," said Mr Hawkes.

Ever since the NIRO was launched, the small scale wind sector has been reset by grid connection problems. "NIE Project 40 will not be available until spring 2016 at the earliest. Our members who have already committed funds to a wind turbine may only be connected to the grid then. This early closure will make that too late, leaving many out of pocket," stressed Mr Hawkes.

The UFU will lobby DECC in London to extend the consultation period and allow small scale wind to continue to avail of the NIRO until March 2017. "The early closure will put at risk the use of small scale turbines located on day to day farming business. These are farms that would use wind energy to not only reduce energy costs, but to boost energy efficiency and reduce carbon emissions," he said.

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ULSTER FARMERS' UNION NEWS RELEASE

Date: 13th October 2015

Cyclo No: 175/2015

UFU angry at DETI Renewables Decision

The Ulster Farmers Union has said the proposal by the Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment (DETI) to close Northern Ireland Renewable Obligation (NIRO) for onshore wind generation in March 2016, a year earlier than planned, could cost the local farming industry at least £20 million.

UFU Rural Enterprise Chairman, Gary Hawkes, has warned that the early closure will put at risk the use of small scale farm turbines, leaving farmers out of pocket if projects already started are not finished by the new deadline. Since the NIRO was launched, the small scale wind sector has been beset by grid connection problems, which NIE's Project 40 is supposed to tackle – but this will not be available until spring 2016 at the earliest. “Our members who have already committed funds to a wind turbine may only be connected to the grid then. This early closure will make that too late,” said Mr Hawkes.

In its response the UFU stressed the need for a separate consultation for small scale wind and specifically urged DETI to defer the eligibility date for small scale onshore wind 'non-cluster connections' to the end of March 2016, and to then allow a two year grace period for connections. “Given the many public policy statements made by DETI on renewables we believe a lack of clarity on any future support mechanisms and the early closure of the NIRO is putting an opportunity at risk,” he said.

The UFU is lobbying DETI over this as part of the consultation process and is urging individual farmers who fear they will lose out to do the same. It has been claimed that the early closure decision was made because to continue the NIRO, as planned, until March 2017, would have meant an additional cost for consumers. This has been rejected by the UFU, since any additional costs attributed to keeping the NIRO open until March 2017 for small scale wind would be minuscule. The UFU have submitted a formal response to the Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment and will continue to lobby the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) in London, which is driving the early closure of the NIRO here.

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ULSTER FARMERS' UNION NEWS RELEASE**Date: 6th November 2015****Cyclo No: 191/2015****UFU lobbies DETI Minister over wind turbines**

The UFU has urged the DETI minister, Jonathan Bell, to postpone plans to end aid for small scale wind turbines – and has warned that his decision could face a legal challenge.

At issue are plans to close the Northern Ireland ROCs (Renewable Obligation Certificates) support mechanism for small scale wind turbines.

The delegation was led by UFU president, Ian Marshall, and included representatives from Simple Power, which leases land from farmers. Speaking after the meeting Mr Marshall said the UFU remains 'hugely disappointed' and 'dismayed' about how this has been handled by DETI here and the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) in London.

Despite promising in June and July this year to maintain support for new farm-based small scale wind projects (less than 250kW) until 2017, in late September the minister announced the immediate closure of the scheme to new projects, unless they meet strict eligibility criteria. "This has left many farmers and small businesses in a terrible situation where they have invested thousands of pounds with the legitimate expectation of delivering projects before March 2017," said Mr Marshall.

The UFU says DETI publicly promised over recent years and right up to this summer that the scheme would be maintained until 31 March 2017. All investment by farmers and others was made in good faith on this basis. But Mr Marshall said the small scale wind sector has faced 'huge challenges' which have delayed projects, most notably around grid connection. "Many of these problems are finally close to resolution, so the minister's decision has come as a hammer blow to farmers and the rural economy," he said.

As energy is a devolved matter at Stormont, DETI has the power to stick by its commitments and maintain the support mechanism until 2017. "If it fails to provide a solution, the only option then available would be legal action against DETI. This is something no-one undertakes lightly, but the way the department has gone back on commitments it gave is unfair and completely unacceptable," said Mr Marshall.

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