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## **UFU critical of decision to increase network connection charges**

The decision to increase charges for connecting to the electricity grid (or increasing capacity) for small scale businesses has been criticised by the Ulster Farmers' Union. The Unions comments follow the decision made by the Utility Regulator that all subsidies would be removed from connection charges from 1 October 2012. .

UFU Rural Enterprise Chairman Gary Hawkes said "The UFU are very disappointed at the Utility Regulators decision to increase network charges, especially after their recent decision to turn down NIE capital spending proposals on upgrading the 11kV network which our members rely upon. The UFU has formally raised two objections to this proposal over the last 18 months".

"The Regulator argues that this subsidy is now irrelevant as it was introduced back in the 1970's to encourage rural electrification and the expansion of the electricity network. The UFU's point is that it is needed now more than ever, with the continuing roll out of small-scale on-farm renewables in rural areas the demand for new grid connections are once again on the rise. Therefore, the added cost of connecting to the grid could not have come at a worse time and once again it is apparent the developer pays whilst others on the line will benefit from improved access to the grid".

Gary Hawkes concluded "The UFU believes that the subsidy should remain to allow the continued roll out of renewable generation as well as on-farm expansions of more traditional farming practices which could be held back by this decision".

**ENDS//...****Media Contact:        Deborah Quinn 028 9037 0222**