

ULSTER FARMERS' UNION NEWS RELEASE



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UFU comment on DETI Strategic Energy Framework release

The Ulster Farmers' Union has broadly welcomed DETI's Strategic Energy Framework Directive (SEF), with Energy Minister Arlene Foster confirming a target of 40% of electricity to come from renewable energy sources by 2020. Currently less than 10% of NI's electricity is generated from renewable energy.

Rural Enterprise Chairman David McElrea said "the Northern Ireland land-based sector is the principal provider of renewable energy sources and will play a key role in achieving this target and the Energy Framework sets out how this will be achieved".

"Overall the publication of this Strategy is a positive step, in particular the recognition by DETI for the need for a diverse mix of renewable sources with no emphasis upon one single technology. The Strategy has identified 4 key goals needed to meet the respective targets; Building Competitive Markets, Ensuring Security of Supply, Enhancing Sustainability and Developing the Energy Infrastructure".

Commenting on DETI's commitment to developing the Energy infrastructure, David McElrea said "DETI have committed to completing a Strategic Environmental Assessment (and associated Strategic Action Plan) before June 2011, in relation to land-based electricity generation and the associated grid infrastructure and this will be a significant development for the renewables sector. The UFU are encouraged by the Departments pledge to ensure co-operation between NIAUR (Utility Regulator), NIE and SONI (Systems Operator Northern Ireland who are responsible for transmission) in delivering a new electricity grid infrastructure. This will be crucial to the success of any infrastructure works".

In relation to the development of the Grid David McElrea stated "back in September 2009, in our response to the Consultation, we urged that the Government should investigate intelligent grid alternatives and make this a major theme within the SEF and we will continue to press for progress, in particular relating to Distributed Generation. Any works relating to a proposed North-South Interconnector may raise concerns for the UFU, in particular the siting of high voltage lines across agricultural land. This is an issue which we will have to consider fully".

"The UFU welcomes DETI's confirmation that they will be working with NIAUR, NIE and SONI to encourage provision of up to 300mW of biomass generation and we will continue to champion the needs and role of our membership in this area".

"In terms of Planning Policy and Environment consent, the UFU are encouraged by the Strategy detailing the need for clear, consistent and appropriate procedures to be in place. The UFU welcomes this recognition by DETI as this is common complaint from our members and we have been calling for this to be addressed. However we are aware there are problems being experienced by our members and we urge that these are addressed with priority".

"In addition to a commitment to generating electricity from renewable energy, the Directive has pledged a commitment to heat from alternative sources. UFU recognises that there is much work to be done and that primary legislation may be required in developing this further, but the UFU are keen to highlight the potential for the agricultural sector to contribute to this target".

Mr McElrea concluded "the UFU will be continuing to champion the role of indigenous renewable resources and look to playing a central role in meeting the targets set out in the Strategic Energy Framework Directive, whilst returning money not just to the rural economy but to wider Northern Ireland".