

UFU WATCH

9 October 2010

COMMODITY WATCH

UFU in Busy Renewables Lobby Timetable

UFU Policy Officer Chris Osborne gives a comprehensive round-up on the work of the UFU Rural Enterprise Committee.

The Committee has been actively engaged on a number of fronts representing the views of Northern Ireland land-based sector in recent months;

1. **Strategic Energy Framework (SEF) Directive** – The SEF was announced by Enterprise Minister Arlene Foster on 27 September, setting a target of 40% of electricity to come from renewable energy sources by 2020 and 10% of renewable heat. The UFU has broadly welcomed the SEF and highlighted the fact that NI land-based sector as a key role to play in achieving these targets. Our response to this announcement was in last weeks Farming Life (2 October).

2. **Evidence to Enterprise, Trade and Investment (ETI) Committee** – the UFU have been invited to provide evidence (written and oral) to the NI Assembly ETI Committee on challenges and barriers faced in the development of sustainable renewable energy/heat production in Northern Ireland. We have highlighted barriers and challenges under the following headings;

- **Lack of primary legislation**

In GB, the Department for Environment and Climate Change (DECC) has successfully taken three Bills through Parliament in Westminster since 2008. Most recently, a new Energy Bill 2010 was announced in the Queen's Speech in May 2010. The Bill implements some of the key measures required to deliver DECC's low carbon agenda, namely provisions on delivering a new financial incentive for carbon capture and storage, implementing mandatory social price support, and introducing a package of measures aimed at ensuring that the energy markets are working fairly for consumers and delivering secure and sustainable energy supplies.

NI does not have this primary legislation and is needed urgently. Further time lags could stifle development and progress in the sector.

- **Existing Policies and operations**

Planning - The UFU are receiving calls from our members concerning problems relating to Planning Policy for certain Renewable installations. Whilst the UFU acknowledge PPS18 (the relevant policy) we are receiving calls concerning conflicting advice being given on the ground, both from planner and other professionals. With the relocation of planning staff to other areas, the UFU are concerned about the impact upon existing planning applications and possible further time delays in the decision making process.

NIE - UFU members are experiencing problems in relation to getting installations connected to the Electricity Grid as well as an overhanging time lag from point of application to going live on the Grid. However, the UFU have met with NIE and collectively we are working to rectify any problems and to ensure that future procedures are clarified and that our members are in full possession of all the relevant information needed when connecting to the grid.

- **Culture**

- **Traditional farming ethos** – If you consider the example of an arable farmer, when times are good, they will reap the benefits from good prices on the open market. However, when the market is subdued and a poor farmgate price is being returned, some producers may consider the growing of renewable crops as an alternative way to bolster farm incomes, sometimes at the detriment of other more traditional types of crops. However, the UFU believes that renewable crops could be introduced in unison with more traditional crops, thereby maintaining the growing of indigenous crops and farming methods.

- **Food Security** – Food security is a hotly debated area and growing area of policy development, with a growing global population and many more mouths to feed during a global economic recession. The barrier would be how to prioritise food security whilst at the same time maintaining the supply and growth of crops for renewable purposes.

- **Maintenance**

There are only a limited number of sources offering course for training in the maintenance of renewable technologies, in particular wind turbines. We are currently experiencing a major economic downturn, with many potential installers being made redundant from their current jobs, in particular electricians. Several electricians have approached me about re-training in the maintenance of wind turbines, but there is a severe shortage in courses and which courses there are, they are often being held in remote places. The UFU concerns would be a knowledge/experience gap which could stifle renewable installations.

3. Proposed Changes to the Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation – the UFU are currently preparing a response to this consultation. The key recommendations are;

- **Enhanced support for Anaerobic Digestion (AD)** – in the consultation it is proposed that AD will receive the following support as set out in the table below;

Capacity	NIROC
Up to and including 500kWh	4
500kWh to 5Mw	3

The UFU have lobbied for enhanced support for AD and earlier this year provided analytical evidence on the high level of set up costs involved in establishing such installations. The UFU welcomes the enhanced support and will be seeking assurances that it will be introduced at the earliest possible opportunity.

- **Support for large scale Refurbishment and Replacement** – this will offer support for large scale refurbishment and replacement of existing energy stations. The UFU will continue to analyse the detail and will comment in due course.
- **Microgeneration Certification Scheme** – since the closure of DETIs Re-Connect Scheme and the Low Carbon Building Programme (LCBP), there has been no requirement for MCS accreditation. DETI propose that from 1 April 2011, installations up to 50kW will have to be accredited.
- **Sustainability Criteria for Biomass** – many of projects undertaken by our membership will be exempt from Sustainability Criteria. However, the UFU will be lobbying for this to wide-ranging and applicable.

4. CAFRE - A Practical On-Farm Renewable Energy Event

This event will be held at Greenmount Campus on 2 November. DARD has joined forces with the UFU, AFBI and Action Renewables to provide practical information for farmers on various renewable energy operations which are available for their businesses. There will be a variety of seminars throughout the day covering the main renewable technologies; wind, biomass production and utilisation, Anaerobic Digestion, solar hot water and micro-hydro. A second set of seminars will be running which will address many of the challenges faced when installing and running such technologies.

The UFU would encourage any of our members who are interested in Renewable should attend the event as it will be a worthwhile series of seminars which will cover many areas of renewables.

5. Concluding Remarks

This is a snapshot of key policy areas the Rural Enterprise is working on. We will continue to formulate policy and work with key stakeholders in developing an effective renewables sector in Northern Ireland. The Committee is meeting at AFBI Hillsborough next week to finalise our response to the Proposed Changes to the Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation and there will be further press releases on progress made.