

UFU WATCH

8 OCTOBER 2009

COMMODITY WATCH

By Chris Osborne, Policy Officer**UFU replying to three major Renewable Energy Consultations**

The Ulster Farmers' Union has completed and submitted their response to DETI's consultation on the draft Strategic Energy Framework Directive. In addition, we are currently compiling our response to two other consultations which will impact upon the Renewables sector

1. Renewable Electricity Financial Incentives (DECC – closing date - 14 October 2009)
2. Bioenergy Action Plan (DETI – closing date - 30 October 2009)

The UFU intend to consider each of these consultations in unison as they impact upon each other to varying degrees.

DETI's Strategic Energy Framework was published with the intention of outlining key energy goals in terms of competitiveness, security of supply, sustainability and infrastructure. In our reply, the UFU expressed the view that the draft document was not far-reaching enough and that the document is long on rhetoric but short of decisive action going forward. For a number of years the UFU have believed that there is a need to review the current Northern Ireland electricity grid infrastructure. We had met previously with DETI and asked that alternative electricity grid proposals should also be considered in particular a Distributed Grid. The inefficiency of the current grid means that any move towards replacing fossil fuels with renewable resources in the current circumstances could be a pointless exercise.

The UFU also highlighted several disparities between Northern Ireland and mainland GB in terms of Financial Incentives on offer. For example, in GB producers are able to avail themselves of what is known as Feed-In Tariffs (FIT's), which are not available here in Northern Ireland. FIT's are available to small low-carbon generators.

The UFU are aware that there are no legislative powers in NI to introduce FIT's, hence we are calling on the Government to consider introducing legislation which will allow them to do this.

In the second consultation "Renewable Electricity Financial Incentives", the UFU will be calling for these instruments (in particular FIT's) to be applied across the United Kingdom, not just the mainland. This will ensure that no company (in any sector) will be at a competitive advantage. The DECC consultation says that FIT's are being extended in GB, to open-up low-carbon electricity generation beyond traditional energy companies and make it more cost effective for smaller parties/groups to take part. The UFU believes that there are significant opportunities for farmers and we will be stressing that the same should apply to Northern Ireland. The UFU will also be using this opportunity to call for a review of the electricity grid infrastructure in Northern Ireland.

UFU members have a clearly defined role to play in Bioenergy with the natural resources as well as input and outputs associated with farming and this could in the future form an integral part of farming practices. However, it will be difficult for any Bioenergy Action Plan to work if the Strategic Energy Framework is not far-reaching enough.

Aside from the 3 consultations, the Agricultural Stakeholder Forum on Renewable Energy (ASFRE) Report is almost ready for publication, with a final review currently underway. The UFU have been involved as the major stakeholder and the report's recommendations will be working side-by-side with the three Consultations.

On 30 August in the last Commodity Watch, the UFU invited members to submit details which could be used to build a database of members involved in energy production. Information gathered will be for UFU use only. Where applicable please specify your source of Energy Production, namely is it Wind Turbine, CHP, Solar Panel Systems.

So, as a reminder, if you fall into this category, please ring or email you contact details to;

Angela Scott
02890 370222
ascott@ufuhq.com