

From: John Mills**Tel No: 29215****Date: 15 April 2016****cc: Copy distribution list below****To: 1. Timothy Cairns
2. Jonathan Bell MLA****DETI RESPONSE TO DOE'S 'CALL FOR EVIDENCE' FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING POLICY ON RENEWABLE ENERGY**

Issue:	DOE Planning Policy Division has issued a 'Call for Evidence' for its Strategic Planning Policy on Renewable Energy. The responses received will assist in informing the scope of DOE's forthcoming review of this policy area.
Timing:	Routine
Executive Committee Referral:	Not applicable
PFG Implications:	None
Presentational Issues:	None
FOI Implications:	Discloseable
Financial Implications:	None
Legislation Implications:	None
Statutory Equality Obligations:	None
Recommendation:	That you note and agree the attached draft response from DETI Energy Division to DOE Planning Policy Division (Annex A)

Background

1. The Department of the Environment (DOE) will be undertaking a review of its Strategic Planning Policy for onshore renewable energy development as set out within the Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland (SPPS).
2. DOE published the SPPS 'Planning for Sustainable Development' in September 2015. The SPPS consolidates around twenty separate policy publications into a single document.

3. The aim of SPPS in relation to renewable energy is to facilitate the siting of renewable energy generating facilities in appropriate locations within the built and natural environment in order to achieve Northern Ireland's renewable energy targets and to realise the benefits of renewable energy without compromising other environmental assets of acknowledged importance.
4. The regional strategic objectives for renewable energy are to:
 - a. ensure that the environmental, landscape, visual and amenity - impacts associated with or arising from renewable energy development are adequately addressed;
 - b. ensure adequate protection of the Region's built and natural, and cultural heritage features;
 - c. facilitate the integration of renewable energy technology into the design, siting and layout of new development and promote greater application of the principles of Passive Solar Design.

Issue

5. During the consultation on the SPPS, DOE received a significant number of representations on renewable energy planning policy. The Minister for the Environment, Mark H Durkan, committed to undertake a review of the regional strategic planning policy for renewable energy following publication of the SPPS in final form.
6. The evidence received will improve DOE's understanding of the operation and impact of the existing strategic policy and provide up-to-date evidence on the social, environmental and economic impacts of renewable energy development.

Recommendation

7. That you note and agree the draft response to DOE Planning Policy Division (Annex A).



JOHN MILLS
Head of Energy Division

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Call for Evidence for Strategic Planning Policy 'Renewable Energy'

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the 'Call for Evidence' on the Strategic Planning Policy on Renewable Energy. This letter provides some commentary to assist in informing the scope of DOE's forthcoming reviews of this policy area and on DETI Energy Division's actions to support renewable energy.

Progress in Renewable Energy Generation to Date

Supported by the Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation (NIRO), renewable electricity has grown rapidly in recent years and currently stands at almost 26% of total electricity consumption (February 2016) or approximately 800MW of installed renewable electricity generation capacity.

The majority of renewable generation is from large-scale onshore wind. However, small-scale generation has also contributed and there are now over 10,000 solar PV generating stations, the vast majority of which are micro-generation stations installed on domestic properties.

Future Support for Renewable Energy Generation

The wider policy environment for renewable energy support is undergoing a significant period of change at present.

On 4 March 2016, the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Jonathan Bell MLA, announced his decision to close the NIRO to new large-scale onshore wind from 1 April 2016. That legislation is now in place and, in line with the Minister's commitment at that time, re-consultation on closure arrangements for small scale onshore wind commenced on Thursday 24th March 2016.

The consultation document is available at <https://www.detini.gov.uk/consultations>. Support for existing generation under the NIRO will continue until 2037.

Siting of Renewable Energy Generating Facilities

The capacity of the existing electricity grid to accommodate new generation (either renewable or conventional) is currently subject to severe constraint. This is likely to impact on the SPPS aims relating to the siting of renewable energy generating facilities in appropriate locations; and the integration of renewable energy technology into the design, siting and layout of new development.

In August 2015, the Utility Regulator determined that planning permission could no longer be a pre-requisite of application for a generation connection to the Distribution System. Since the Determination, there have been around 50 new large-scale and around 300 new small-scale applications totalling 870 MW of additional generation capacity. The new applications are province-wide and the provision of access to the grid affects all areas of the Transmission and Distribution Systems.

The level of connected (876 MW) and committed (720 MW) renewable generation already exceeds the capacity of the Transmission System and some areas of the Distribution System while the Generation Capacity Statement 2016-2054 states demand growth in Northern Ireland is not expected to increase significantly in the upcoming years.

In November 2015, the Utility Regulator approved an NIE Networks / SONI moratorium on making grid connection offers until May 2016. NIE Networks and SONI are undertaking a consultation on the connection and offer process in Northern Ireland. The public consultation exercise closed on 30 March with a decision paper is anticipated by May 2016. Initial feedback from NIE Networks and SONI is that while some grid connection offers may be made in October 2016 the vast majority are unlikely to be made until the period June-December 2017.

John Mills
Head of Energy Division