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# RHI cash swelling coffers of 'puppy farm'



MONEY TO BURN: A massive dog breeding outfit is one of the companies benefitting from the disastrous RHI

## Controversial dog breeding firm one of 2,000 users in botched scheme

By Christopher Woodhouse

**AN ALLEGED puppy farm is heating its dog kennels with a boiler funded by the disastrous Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) scheme introduced by Arlene Foster.**

The dog breeding firm, which this newspaper cannot name for legal reasons, is understood to have hundreds of dogs kept in sheds at its remote rural site.

The licensed dog breeding company was given planning approval to build a biomass boiler house and fuel store in 2014.

But the firm is a member of the Renewable Heat Association of Northern Ireland which was

granted an injunction barring the names of its members from being published by Economy Minister Simon Hamilton (*below*).

The wood pellet burning boiler, for which the company receives generous subsidies, was installed to heat existing buildings on site but it's known that the establishment has since expanded.

Claims of puppy farming were previously levelled at the company's owners but they denied the allegations and stressed that their facility had been approved by council inspectors.

There is no suggestion that the dog breeders are abusing the scheme or that there was anything improper about their application being approved.

The botched RHI scheme paid £1.60 for every £1 worth of wood pellets the user burnt before it was closed in No-

vember 2015. As cost controls were not put in place it's estimated the total overspend to be paid for by the Northern Ireland Executive will be £190million over the next 20 years. While Mr Hamilton has announced plans to cut costs associated with the scheme, it is generally accepted that any attempt to cut tariffs to legitimate users of the scheme could face a

legal challenge. The failed green energy initiative was launched by then Enterprise Minister and Fermanagh MLA Arlene Foster in 2012 but the subsequent scandal has brought down the Assembly and forced a snap election.

In July 2013, just months after the scheme launched, Green Party leader

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Steven Agnew raised concerns with Mrs Foster in a written Assembly question.

The North Down MLA described the subsidies paid to those using the scheme as "pervers" but Mrs Foster said that biomass would be the last energy efficiency measure taken by businesses due to costs.

But the DUP has faced relentless criticism for its role in promoting the scheme to farmers and other industries after it emerged that relatives of DUP MLAs and party officers benefit from the initiative.

One of them is Fernunagh poultry farmer Hugh Rutledge, the father-in-law of DUP special adviser — or spud — John Robinson.

Mr Rutledge uses two RHI-funded boilers to heat his chicken sheds near Newtown-butler but when approached by Sunday Life, said his son-in-law did not have any knowledge of his RHI application. James Crawford, the brother of former DUP

spud Dr Andrew Crawford, uses an RHI boiler to heat sheds at his poultry firm DJC Poultry in Beragh, Co Tyrone.

Dr Crawford, who advised Arlene Foster at the time the RHI was introduced, resigned last month after it was claimed at a Stormont committee that he had used his influence to delay the reduction of the scheme's excessively high tariffs.

His name was given to the Public Accounts Committee by senior civil servant Dr Andrew McCormick.

Dr Crawford has denied the claim, saying he "acted with complete integrity". And his former boss, Mrs Foster, has said she believes her former adviser will be cleared by the judicial inquiry into the Renewable Heat Incentive scheme.

Stephen Brimstone, a former spud in the Office of First and Deputy First Minister (now the Executive Office), operates an RHI boiler at his home outside Broughshane, Co Antrim.

Last month, South Down DUP MLA Jim Wells revealed that four members of his family who are poultry farmers operate RHI boilers, but said he had no personal or financial interests in the businesses.

There is no suggestion that any of the above people abuse the scheme or have acted improperly in relation to their or their relatives' involvement in the RHI scheme.

Last month, Mr Hamilton brought emergency legislation before the Assembly to introduce a cap and tiering system to the scheme in a bid to limit the cost to the Executive.

Mr Hamilton has also been due to publish a list of those people and businesses using the scheme who consented to having their names made public. However, the Renewable Heat Association for Northern Ireland representing 450 of the 1,946 RHI users won a temporary injunction at the High Court barring Mr Hamilton from publishing their names.



FIASCO: Dr Andrew Crawford (left) advised Arlene Foster on the RHI scheme. Green Party leader Steven Agnew raised concerns as long ago as July 2013