

Wasteful spending on renewable energy should be no surprise

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The NIAO report on the massive overspend on the Renewable Heat Incentive should come as a surprise to no one. The obsession which Assembly members had with driving our economy towards greater use of energy from expensive renewable sources instead of using increasing cheaper fossil fuels such as coal, oil and gas was a recipe for wasteful spending.

In their manic attempts to show how keen they were to save the planet from global warming many assembly members competed with each other to display their green credentials. It was inevitable that the enthusiasm to make sure that N.I. did not fall behind the rest of the UK in promoting RHIs that mistakes would be made. Whether it was planning policy, environmental policy, energy policy or even rating policy there was an insistence that priority be given to renewables. The impacts and the details of policies were never properly scrutinised for fear of being labelled a global warming denier.

We see the results. Incentive schemes which distort the energy market making it cheaper to waste energy than conserve it. Giant wind turbines like some mechanical trifids destroying the most beautiful parts of our countryside. Acres of fields covered in ugly carpets of black panels and the real scandal businesses and householders saddled with hundreds of millions of pounds added onto their energy bills in decades to come.

Whilst I recognise that most of the policy direction has come from the EU and Westminster the fact is that green obsessed Assembly members did little to question the policies or use what little powers they had to slow them down. In years to come I have no doubt people looking at the huge subsidies we are now asking consumers to pay for renewable energy across the UK will ask what kind of madness overtook decision makers.

In the meantime as the Assembly contemplates how the present mistakes are paid for a starting point may be to insist that any incentives are only paid when it can be shown that the heating of a building is essential for its productive use not as a means of extracting money from the public purse.

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