

**Fw: Ms O'Neill was agriculture minister for the running of the RHI, from its inception in 2011 to its abrupt cancellation in February last year.**

jimwells

Sent: 30 January 2017 17:39

To: Sammy Wilson Personal Information redacted by the RHI Inquiry; Clive McFarland; Arlene Foster Personal Information redacted by the RHI Inquiry; William Irwin [william.irwin@mha.niassembly.gov.uk]; Chris Stalford Personal Information redacted by the RHI Inquiry; Edwin Poots Personal Information redacted by the RHI Inquiry

Categories: Yellow Category

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From: Horace Reid <Personal Information redacted by the RHI Inquiry>

Date: Mon, 30 Jan 2017 00:47:56 +0000

To: jim Wells <Personal Information redacted by the RHI Inquiry>; Horace Reid Personal Information redacted by the RHI Inquiry>

Subject: Ms O'Neill was agriculture minister for the running of the RHI, from its inception in 2011 to its abrupt cancellation in February last year.

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/edition/ireland/agriculture-officials-gave-cash-for-ash-demo-k6zfbw3ln>

## Agriculture officials gave cash-for-ash demo

January 30 2017, 12:01am,



The Cafre leaflet advertising the RHI information session in October 2015

Agriculture officials gave farmers a demonstration of the controversial renewable heat incentive scheme at the height of the rush to sign up for the programme, documents released to *The Times* have shown.

An advertisement for the event, which appeared on the official website of the Northern Ireland Department of Agriculture in October 2015, shows one of its officials pressing the controls on the RHI-funded wood pellet boiler. The boiler was installed by Original Heating, a company co-owned by John Gilliland, the former president of the Ulster Farmers Union.

Michelle O'Neill, the leader of Sinn Fein in Northern Ireland, said last week that it was "irrelevant" that farmers signed up for the RHI scheme while she was agriculture minister and that the DUP was solely responsible for the programme.

However, documents obtained by *The Times* show that her department was heavily involved in promoting the RHI's financial benefits.

The department admitted last week that it had organised 58 workshops in which the benefits of the RHI were explained to farmers.

Ms O'Neill was agriculture minister for the running of the RHI, from its inception in 2011 to its abrupt cancellation in February last year.

The 2015 boiler demonstration, in which a department official showed the Austrian-made 99kw wood pellet boiler to farmers and explained the financial benefits of the RHI, came just three weeks before the November 19 cut-off point for the most lucrative grants under the scheme.

The so called "cash for ash" scheme based payments on the volume of pellets burned, which incentivised users to keep their boilers going for as long as possible. More than 40 per cent of all businesses signed up for the RHI in the final six weeks before the cut-off date and the agriculture department's demonstration came in the middle of that sudden spike in applications.

The demonstration took place at the department's College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (Cafre) campus at Greenmount, Antrim on October 29, 2015, after a day-long department workshop on renewable energy for farmers.

Although department officials also spoke about geothermal and solar heating, those made up less than two per cent of applications under the RHI scheme and most participants wanted to know about wood pellet boilers, according to two people familiar with the event.

Agriculture officials at Cafre had already registered six boilers under the RHI for its three campuses. All three campuses had been used for workshops on the RHI in the three previous years.

Earlier that day, Tom Forgrave, a poultry industry representative, gave talks to two groups about the RHI benefits after he installed six boilers at his farm in Ballymoney, Co. Antrim.

Workshop participants also heard talks from a Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Deti) official, who spoke about the financial benefits of the RHI for farmers.

At previous workshops, department of agriculture officials had used Deti presentation documents to show farmers the grants available at each level of the RHI.

Mr Forgrave is the founding member of new lobby group, the Renewable Heat Association for Northern Ireland (RHANI), and told an assembly committee last week that his group would strongly oppose any attempt to renegotiate RHI contracts.

Farmers make up more than half of all RHI claimants and the vast majority of its cost base. Poultry farmers alone make up over 800 claimants out of the 2,100 businesses that applied.

John Gilliland is co-owner of Original Heating, which installed all of the department's six demonstration boilers at Cafre. Original Heating has its own RHI-funded boiler for drying wood pellets.

Mr Gilliland, a pioneer of biomass technology long before the RHI scheme, has said that he will make £1.6 million in RHI payments from the three boilers on his own farm, where he grows biomass crops, over the next 20 years. He added, however, that he had spent more than that on developing biomass technology.

There is no suggestion of any wrongdoing on the part of Mr Gilliland and Mr Forgrave, who signed up for the RHI when the government was encouraging enrolment from the farming community.

An agriculture department spokesman said that its renewable energy workshops "included talks on wind power, biomass production, heat from biomass, solar photovoltaic, micro-hydro and energy storage".

Grid connection, renewable heat incentives, planning permissions and renewable obligation certificates also featured, he said, as did payback times and investments and financing of projects for land owners. "Officials from a number of departments and organisations presented and/or provided input for these events," he added.

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