

Consultation on the Proposed Changes to the Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation: Statutory Consultation for the Renewables Obligation (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011

Comments by

Northern Ireland Environment Link

21 October 2010

Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL) is the networking and forum body for non-statutory organisations concerned with the environment of Northern Ireland. Its 58 Full Members represent over 90,000 individuals, 262 subsidiary groups, have an annual turnover of £70 million and manage over 314,000 acres of land. Members are involved in environmental issues of all types and at all levels from the local community to the global environment. NIEL brings together a wide range of knowledge, experience and expertise which can be used to help develop policy, practice and implementation across a wide range of environmental fields.

These comments are agreed by Members, but some members may be providing independent comments as well. If you would like to discuss these comments further we would be delighted to do so.

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1. INTRODUCTION

We welcome the opportunity to participate in the consultation process on the Proposed Changes to the Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation. It is essential to ensure that Northern Ireland plays its full part in the development of small scale renewable electricity generation and appropriate incentives are required together with adequate provision for protection of the environment.

2. SUPPORT FOR ANAEROBIC DIGESTION

We are pleased that on 1 April 2010 enhanced levels of NIROCs were introduced. We did not consider the old NIROCs to be adequate incentive for people to set up renewable energy generation, especially microgeneration. We are also pleased to see the proposed new NIROC levels for anaerobic digestion.

Q1. We agree that the proposed support is likely to be at an appropriate level to incentivise AD development in Northern Ireland and represents an acceptable attempt to support AD at this stage.

Q.2 . We agree with the proposed implementation date.

3. REFURBISHMENT AND REPLACEMENT OF GENERATING EQUIPMENT

Q3. We agree that additional support should be introduced for refurbishment and replacement in existing stations.

Q4. We agree that this should be limited to cases of major refurbishment or replacement only, otherwise the taxpayer would be over-subsidising generators.

Q5a. We believe that major refurbishment of parts and major replacement should be covered by the terms but not minor refurbishment or replacement.

Q5b. These terms should be technology specific if they are defined in terms of specific or significant parts of a technology.

Q5c. 'Major refurbishment' and 'major replacement' could be related to the cost of the refurbishment or replacement, but if this option was selected it might not be necessary to make the terms technology specific.

Q6. The repowering of wind turbines is covered by the description of 'replacement' used in this chapter. This would not necessarily differ from other technologies. For

example, older photovoltaic panels might be replaced before the end of their design life with newer, more efficient ones.

Q7. We agree that any additional support for stations undergoing such major refurbishment or replacement should be less than for newly accredited stations (or additional capacity).

Q8. We do not have a preference between a lower level of support, shorter duration of support or a combination of the two.

Q9. We agree that existing generators who add additional capacity should receive the same level of support for this additional capacity only at the same level available to new stations.

Q10. We agree that support should be provided to existing co-firing generation converting to dedicated biomass.

Q11. The level of support given to converted stations should be the same as for new stations as an incentive for conversion.

Q12. We assume that all commercial wind turbine installations are subject to health and safety legislation. Private microgenerators should be responsible for their safety. Quality issues are likely to lead to reductions in power generated and exported (and therefore income) so it is in the interests of generators to ensure the quality of their installations whether they are refurbished or not. Regulation would be an unnecessary public expense.

Q13. We agree that qualifying hydro, wind and PV generating station capacity thresholds should be based around total installed capacity rather than declared net capacity to avoid gaming opportunity and because TIC is easy to determine.

4. MICRO GENERATION CERTIFICATION SCHEME

Q14. Yes, we agree with the proposal to require new microgenerators seeking accreditation on or after 1 April 2011 to use the Microgeneration Certification Scheme (MCS).

Q15. We agree that the MCS requirement should be limited to microgenerators i.e. up to and including 50kW because larger commercial generators should be solely responsible for the quality of their installations.

Q16. We do not know if this provision can be brought in on an administrative basis rather than in legislation. An appropriate legal expert should be able to advise.

5. SUSTAINABILITY CRITERIA FOR BIOMASS

Q17. We agree that at this stage 60% is an appropriate minimum GHG emission saving threshold.

Q18. We agree that the sustainability criteria restricting the types of land used should be consistent with the criteria imposed on bioliquids by the renewable energy directive.

Q19. We agree that generators over 50kW should be required to report against the sustainability criteria from April 2011 and we agree with the information to be included in the report.

Q20. We agree that for biomass generators of 1MWe and above there should be a transition period of mandatory reporting against the sustainability criteria from April 2011 before compliance is linked to receipt of ROCs from April 2012. We consider this to be an adequate transition period. We consider the longer transition period (until April 2013) proposed to be unnecessarily long. In our view, the industry should be able to comply by April 2012.

Q21. We agree that for biomass generators below 1MWe compliance with the sustainability criteria should not be linked to the receipt of ROCs. However, this should be kept under review to determine the environmental impacts of microgenerators in the medium term.

Q22. We agree with the exclusion of waste and sewage gas and landfill gas. Nothing else should be excluded.

Q23. We consider that sustainable forestry management practices should be a mandatory part of the criteria. We consider this to be much more important than the compliance burdens on small businesses. We expect small businesses to operate as efficiently as large businesses. All of the woodlands in Northern Ireland are small. Sustainable forestry management is essential.

Q24. No further comments on the proposals in this chapter.

6. SUSTAINABILITY CRITERIA FOR BIOLIQUIDS

Q25. We agree with, where applicable, using the RFA technical guidance to calculate greenhouse gas emissions savings.

Q26. We agree that the ISAE 3000 standard should be regarded as an adequate standard for the independent audit report.

Q27. We most certainly agree that Ofgem should have the power to revoke ROCs/withhold a commensurate number of ROCs in the next Obligation Period where the audit is late, qualified or not carried out.

Q28. Sustainability grounds are the only reasons why any particular bioliquids ought to remain excluded from the NIRO.

Q29. We agree that voluntary sustainability criteria should be introduced in line with those being proposed for solid biomass in chapter 5.

Q30. We accept that some of the details relating to sustainability criteria must await future decisions of the Commission as stated in chapter 6. However, we would like to draw attention to the importance of high biodiversity grassland in Northern Ireland. It is essential to ensure that the final sustainability criteria are sufficiently robust to prevent the degradation of this important habitat in Northern Ireland.

OFFSHORE WIND PHASING

Q31. We agree with the proposal to phase support for offshore wind to account for the longer construction period.

Q32. We agree that phasing of capacity should be limited to once a year for a maximum of 5 years.

Q33. We have no opinion on how the capacity included in each phase should be determined. This could be at Ofgem's discretion.

Q34. We think that each phase should be metered separately to avoid gaming.

Q35. We agree that the support level for the total capacity of the station should be set at the initial accreditation.

Q36. We think a minimum proportion of the overall capacity must be accredited in phase 1 to secure the band for the whole generating station.

Q37. We would expect very small offshore stations to be commercially unattractive and unlikely to be proposed. It may therefore not be necessary to apply a minimum capacity to this policy.

Q38. We certainly agree that phased support should only apply to offshore wind generators.