

**Northern Ireland Assembly Committee for Enterprise, Trade & Investment
Inquiry into Barriers to the Development of Renewable Energy Production and its
Associated contribution to the Northern Ireland Economy**

Section 1 Company Details

Company Name		Telephone Number			
Northern Ireland Environment Link		028 90455770			
Company Address		Company Type (Include one or more X)			
89 Loopland Dr Belfast BT6 9DW		Supply	<input type="checkbox"/>	Install	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Design	<input type="checkbox"/>	Manufacture	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Maintenance	<input type="checkbox"/>	R&D	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Other (Please Specify)			
		Environmental charity			

Please provide some background information on the company

NIEL is the networking and forum body for environmental non-governmental organisations in Northern Ireland. We promote environmental matters through policy, leadership, information and services to the member organisations. Our 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.

Section 2 Government Strategy for Renewable Energy

2.1 Please provide information on your level of awareness of current Government Strategy for Renewable Energy and how that strategy assists the renewable energy sector

Reasonable awareness of the role and targets of the Strategy and its fundamental purpose of helping Northern Ireland to meet climate change targets and transition to a lower carbon economy. Developing the private sector capacity to deliver renewable energy to a high level is fundamental to meeting the targets, and could form an important opportunity for local businesses to develop products and processes which can be sold locally or further afield.

The potential resources in Northern Ireland available for harvesting as renewable energy are large, and as the technology develops ever more of these potential resources are available if the support and appropriate promotion and encouragement are involved; sewage and slurries to produce biogas and biochar is just one area not yet being exploited nearly to the extent it could be with appropriate investment and encouragement which would also help address waste management issues.

Mechanisms to support renewable energy development need to drive investment in technologies and locations where maximum environmental net benefit can be assured. This means taking account of landscape and seascape impacts as well as the environmental impacts of infrastructure required for renewable energy development – in particular grid connections for offshore projects. We would urge the renewables industry and policymakers not to see these vital considerations as a barrier, but as an opportunity to come up with ways to deploy their innovative technology which are sympathetic to our special landscapes in Northern Ireland. Lessons learned here can then be sold abroad. It is important to avoid short term decisions on devices and infrastructure (based on initial costs or ease of deployment) that end up damaging the very places we are trying to protect from climate change.

2.2 Please provide information on any Government support that your company has received in the past that is specifically related to renewable energy

None – we receive core support from the NIEA of the DOE to deliver our role as above.

2.3 Please provide information on any Government support that your company has applied for or is planning to apply for in the future that is specifically related to renewable energy

None

2.4 Please provide information on the barriers within Government to developing the renewable energy sector in Northern Ireland

Lack of sufficient priority accorded to renewables, lack of financial support for research and development, lack of action relating to climate change and sustainable development, lack of coordination across the various departments and agencies with an interest, issues regarding planning (policy and delivery) for specific renewable installations, lack of public priority to renewables resulting in lower priority by MLAs. If Northern Ireland does not replicate (where necessary modified to local physical and fiscal conditions) UK wide policy there are severe dangers to both uptake of renewables and development of the renewables industry locally.

2.5 Please provide suggestions on how Government can better support the renewable energy sector in the future in order to grow and develop the sector (suggestions should be specific to the renewable energy sector)

- Support for renewables installations at home, farm, community, business (small and large) levels for a variety of technologies and energy sources, through appropriate measures including Feed in Tariffs, renewable heat tariffs, net metering and ROCS.
- Implementation of a major programme of renewables (aimed at achieving a carbon neutral government estate by 2020) for the government estate (central and local government, all agencies, schools, hospitals; full public sector)
- Provide support (financial and policy) for research and development of technologies and products.
- Clear planning policy with guidance to facilitate deployment in appropriate sites.
- Clear strategy for the promotion of micro-generation as part of the mix with appropriate financial incentives to encourage uptake
- Look at major waste streams and innovative technologies (anaerobic digestion, landfill gas and other means) to convert waste into energy to solve problems of waste disposal and pollution and help meet carbon reduction targets
- Ensure that all GB programmes are replicated here as soon as possible to avoid disadvantaging NI companies and people.
- Creation of a 'centre of excellence' for renewables at all levels from research to installation
- Clear and integrated communications about renewables in the context of sustainable development, climate change, energy saving, low carbon economy and addressing fuel poverty.

Section 3 Government Strategy for Economic Development and its Application to the Renewable Energy Sector

3.1 Please provide information on your level of awareness of current Government Strategy for Economic Development and how that strategy assists businesses

The transition to a lower carbon economy is vital and should be a strong driver for innovation and efficiency in NI business sectors. This should be particularly apparent in the renewables industry which in turn can assist the rest of NI business to meet local carbon targets, minimise ETS and CRC costs and increase energy efficiency. Multiple strategies from nearly as many different Departments or agencies need to be integrated 'horizontally' to deliver coherent messages and outcomes from the public and business.

3.2 Please provide details of any Government support for economic development (at any level) that your company has had in the past

none

3.3 Please provide information on any Government support for economic development that your company has applied for or is planning to apply for in the future

none

3.4 Please provide information on the barriers within Government to developing the indigenous businesses in Northern Ireland

Reliance on the public sector; this needs to be addressed for Northern Ireland to have a sustainable economic future. Lack of policies and financial support for low carbon technology, renewable energy and a sustainable approach to all resource use. Lack of political priority and awareness of the significant changes necessary to transition to a lower carbon economy and hence support for business to make that transition and crucially to take advantage of the opportunities it affords, particularly for businesses in the energy efficiency and renewables sectors. The lack of a stable and long term funding support mechanism to defer the strong 'front loading' of investment in renewables (FITS, ROCS, loans, etc) mitigates against uptake of renewables which in turn disadvantages local businesses; those who can expand into other markets, but many (especially smaller organisations, installers) which do not have that facility can fail or go out of the market. Finance is still the main barrier to uptake, and mechanisms which creatively and sensitively overcome the 'up front cost long term benefit' problem are necessary. Leading by Government throughout its estate could have huge benefits here in supporting the local market as the private market develops more slowly. The conditions applied to the new Green Investment Bank which is taking over the roles of some existing organisations (Carbon Trust, EST) could mitigate against NI Companies which tend to be smaller and may be 'below the threshold' for their programmes; action must be taken at government level to ensure that the conditions for the bank do not disadvantage NI companies.

3.5 Please provide suggestions on how Government can better support indigenous SME businesses in the future in order to assist them to grow and development

There is need for specialised support (advice and financial) to help NI SMEs to exploit the full potential market at home and abroad. Development of a RE Centre of Excellence would assist in this.

Section 4 Communication, Sharing Information, Raising Awareness

4.1 How well do you think Government departments communicate and share information with each other in relation to renewable energy and how can this be improved?

Not as good as it should be; 'joined up' government is an often quoted ideal but the practice often falls far short. The Sustainable Development Strategy and Implementation Plan should provide the basis for this communication but leaves much to be desired. Integrating the SD Strategy and Implementation Plan with climate change targets and stressing the role of renewables offers great opportunities. Developing a strong commitment to a 'carbon neutral government estate by 2020 could provide a huge driver for renewables, and be a major plank in the current drives for efficiency and cost reduction as wastage of energy could be severely reduced while raising awareness of the issues and solutions throughout the public service. The Cross Departmental Working Group on renewables should take a lead in devising a more integrated approach and in delivering this improved communication.

4.2 How well do you think the Government departments and local Government communicate and share information with each other in relation to renewable energy and how can this be improved?

Very poorly; some local authorities are highly active in renewable energy but this needs to be promoted and replicated across all councils through assistance in spreading best practice. The RPA needs to be implemented in some form as a matter of urgency as one way to encourage more sustainable operations in all areas, including energy conservation and a shift to renewable energy. The uncertainty around the future structures is causing reluctance to act among councils who do not know their future structures, funding, etc.

A wider Renewable Energy Working group involving central and local government, the voluntary sector and business could be very useful in taking this entire communication issue forward.

4.3 How well do you think the Government departments and the EU communicate and share information with each other in relation to renewable energy and how can this be improved?

EU legislation and targets should be a major driver to ensure carbon, recycling and renewables targets are taken seriously and the required priority and support granted to drive them. Northern Ireland needs to acknowledge and embrace the role of the EU in setting targets and driving investment.

4.4 How well do you think the Government departments and businesses communicate and share information with each other in relation to renewable energy and how can this be improved?

Groups such as Action Renewables, Carbon Trust and Energy Savings Trust have a major role in promoting renewables and driving their adoption, but these structures are changing and business knowledge and enthusiasm may suffer if this support is not available.

4.5 How well do you think the Government departments and other regions and EU Member States communicate and share information with each other in relation to renewable energy and how can this be improved?

A major information sharing exercise involving best practice could help Northern Ireland identify areas for future development in many technologies across the EU and beyond, plus potential funding mechanisms to drive renewables uptake, would be most advantageous. We do not need to invent the wheel, just look at the huge variety of 'wheels' already functioning in both the technology and funding arenas.

4.6 How well do you think businesses in the renewable energy sector communicate and share information with each other in relation to renewable energy and how can this be improved?

Encouragement of such information sharing is always useful; Action Renewables operates a scheme and Invest NI has some company support networks which can be used to encourage businesses to share information. Current economic slowdown is having a negative impact on renewables companies; cooperation amongst companies, facilitated by government (INI?) could be useful.

4.7 How well do you think Government departments communicate and share information with the public in relation to renewable energy and how can this be improved?

Much more needs to be done locally, demonstrating why and how renewables are vital to meeting carbon commitments and demonstrating why these commitments are essential. The importance of renewables is still not totally understood by many members of the public and a coordinated communications campaign, mixing sustainable development, climate change and renewable messages in an appropriate and creative manner would be useful. Financial support for the public to deliver microgeneration (FIT, loan schemes, etc.) is one part of this message.

Involvement of NGOs is highly useful in government communication; their methodology, experience and reputation can often improve the acceptability of the messages.

4.8 How well do you think renewable energy businesses communicate and share information with the public in relation to renewable energy and how can this be improved?

Moderate – needs to be improved as there is still widespread misunderstanding. Be clear and consistent in all messages and coordinate across all sectors and all technologies.

4.9 What other support organisations are you aware of that exist to support the renewable energy sector?

Action Renewables, Carbon Trust, British Wind Energy Association (which has a new name I cannot recall), Sustainable Energy Association

4.10 How well do you think Government departments and renewable energy support organisations communicate and share information with each other in relation to renewable energy and how can this be improved?

Talk to each other, develop coordinated programmes. Partnerships among NGOs and government can be extremely efficient and effective in delivering messages a general 'renewables are the way ahead' message could help all tech and companies and start to overcome public antipathy to particular technologies. Public awareness of many technologies and the full extent to which we must change our energy supply is not high and should be a top priority of a coordinated programme.

4.11 How well do you think renewable energy businesses and support organisations communicate and share information with each other in relation to renewable energy and how can this be improved?

Talk to each other, develop coordinated programmes. See 4.10

4.12 How well do you think renewable energy support organisations communicate and share information with the public in relation to renewable energy and how can this be improved?

Talk to each other, develop coordinated programmes. See 4.10

Section 5 Additional Information

5.1 Please provide any additional information which you believe will be of assistance to the Committee during the course of the Inquiry

Renewables require promotion and support, and it must be made clear that the first avenue for business, government and the public is to reduce energy consumption and wastage. Coordination across sectors, departments and technologies is vital to ensure that people 'get the message' of renewables as a vital aspect of the imperative to move to a lower carbon economy. It is essential for Northern Ireland's business and financial future that this message is delivered and accepted now; it is a vital part of dealing with the financial strictures of the recession and government cuts, not something which is seen as optional.

Section 6 Contact Details

All written responses should be sent to:

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