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Public Consultation - 10 Year Review of the Regional Development Strategy (*Shaping Our Future*)

The Northern Ireland Renewables Industry Group (NIRIG) is a joint collaboration between the Irish Wind Energy Association (IWEA) and Renewable UK. NIRIG welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Public Consultation – 10 year review of the Regional Development Strategy (*Shaping Our Future*). NIRIG has noted the following points with regards to the ‘10 year review of the Regional Development Strategy (*Shaping Our Future*)’ consultation document:

- NIRIG considers that the RDS will have an even more significant role in providing a strategic framework as a development strategy for the Region going forward, given the proposals under the Planning Reform Process.
- Chapter 2 – NIRIG believes that the Executive Target/Goal which is outlined in the Strategic Energy Framework 2010 - ‘To secure 40% of electricity consumption from renewable sources by 2020’ is a key aim and a significant factor impacting the Region.

- Chapter 3 – reference 3.9 states ‘Potential exists for further collaboration on cross border energy inter-connections to ensure a sustainable and secure energy supply across the island and on economic co-operation and enterprise’. NIRIG believes that collaboration on cross border energy supply is essential to maximise the economic benefits of the indigenous renewable energy as well as ensuring security of supply. The development of the North-South interconnector will be a necessary first step for the future development of the electricity network in Northern Ireland.
- Chapter 5 – SG16: Mitigation – reference 5.38 – ‘Increase the use of renewable energies’ refers to the Strategic Energy Framework (SEF) for NI as a draft document published in July 2009, this is however not the case, the SEF was published in 2010. This paragraph also states that renewable electricity installations and grid infrastructure must be appropriately sited to minimise their environmental impact. NIRIG agrees with this statement while also recognising that the publication of the Onshore SEA will help ensure that this objective is met, particularly in relation to grid upgrades.
- Chapter 6 – reference 6.5 – NIRIG supports the view that Projects which contribute to the achievement of renewable energy target should be considered as being strategic in nature and of regional significance. It is NIRIG’s belief that it is not appropriate for wind energy development planning applications to be determined by the various district councils. At present these applications are assessed by the Strategic Project Team within Planning Service Headquarters. NIRIG would strongly support the view that all wind energy developments

should remain the remit of the Strategic Projects Team and should be classed as Major Applications with Strategic importance.

Wind farm applications are highly specialised and the Strategic Projects Team have built up considerable expertise in this area over the past number of years. NIRIG believes that this centralised approach to wind energy development and associated infrastructure, including grid connections, will continue to ensure that a strategic and consistent approach to the development of energy infrastructure is achieved across the Region, in line with planning policy for Northern Ireland and the delivery of the objectives of the Strategic Energy Framework 2010.

- Chapter 6 – reference 6.19 – NIRIG supports the point made in the RDS that it is necessary to strengthen the electricity grid. We believe that the delay in processing the planning application for the North-South Interconnector could have a significant impact on the future of the grid network on Northern Ireland. We also believe that significant investment is not only required in the north and west (as highlighted in the consultation) but throughout the Region.

Queries in relation to anything contained within this response should be addressed to Ms Kerry Curran, Policy and Communications Manager, NIRIG, Forsyth House, Cromac Square, Belfast BT2 8LA, E: kerry@ni-rig.org
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