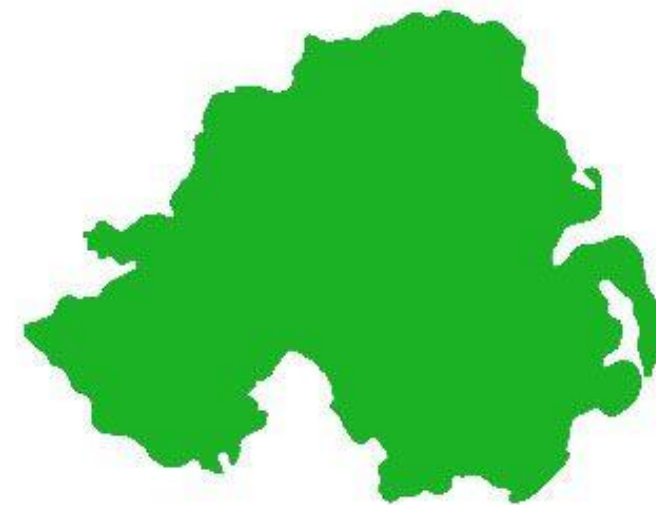




Renewable Community Empowerment in Northern Territories

Northern Ireland – Policy Brief; Existing Policy Baseline



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Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme
2014–2020



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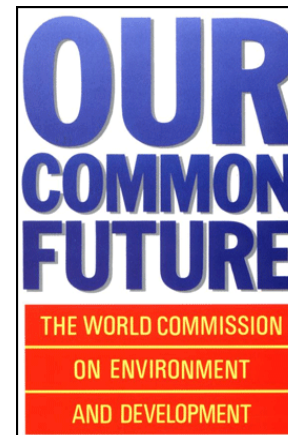
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Introduction

On an international level, sustainable development has been driven by the Bruntland Report of 1987 which defined it as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It contains within it two key concepts:

- the concept of 'needs', in particular the essential needs of the world's poor, to which overriding priority should be given; and
- the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organisation on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs.”

Subsequent to publication of the Bruntland Report there have been several global summits relating to Climate Change, each seeking to put mechanisms in place to control Climate Change and reduce emissions of harmful gases. These summits include the Kyoto Protocol in 1997, which agreed international targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to a target percentage of 1990 levels and allowed for emissions trading between nations. Several major countries opted out of this, however, including the USA and Canada. More recently a new agreement, in the form of the Paris Agreement of December 2015 saw major nations including the USA sign up to an agreement to, amongst other targets, a long-term goal of keeping the increase in global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels.



The outcome of signing up to such agreements has been seen in the creation of sustainable development strategies cascading down from global to European to national and regional levels.

In Europe, the EU put in place the Sustainable Development Strategy (SDS) 2001 (Revised in 2006 and 2009) as an overarching policy to drive work in this area. All members were required to agree and sign up to the policies and outcomes set out within this policy. The EU SDS sets out several key objectives that form the backbone of the strategy and feed down to local level. The objectives include “To promote sustainable consumption and production patterns” and this is particularly relevant to the work SEAI hopes to carry out.

Another key document at European level is the Europe 2020 document. This is a ten year strategy setting out targets in the areas of employment, innovation, education, social inclusion and climate/energy with targets to be reached by 2020. This document provides targets at a European level for various topics including green-house gas emissions, level of energy consumption from renewable sources and other topics. Individual Nations can set their own targets, for example the European target for energy consumption from renewable sources is 20% by 2020 but Ireland has set a target of 16%. Latest figures available show that in 2013 Ireland had reached 8%.

Local Policy

HM Government



As part of the UK, Northern Ireland must base its policy on a combination of EU policy and legislation which informs policy developed by the UK government, and also through its own development of policy as part of the devolved administration which sits at Stormont in Belfast.

UK Policy is based around The UK Government Sustainable Development Strategy "Securing the Future" which was originally published in 1999 and has been revised since.

Positive trends were noted between the original publication and revision but also noted was the fact that "Income is not the only component of people's wellbeing. Good health, a safe environment and strong communities are also very important." In relation to this RECENT project, this emphasis on community building is notably relevant.



In Northern Ireland, policy is led by the Dept for Regional Development's Regional Development Strategy 2035. The RDS, originally published in 2001, revised in 2008 and replaced by this new version in 2012 gives "an overarching strategic planning framework to facilitate and guide the public and private sectors." The RDS influences other areas such as the Program for Government and how departments and councils make decisions and spend or invest their money. The theme of sustainability runs throughout the document and thus is an important consideration in every area of future development.

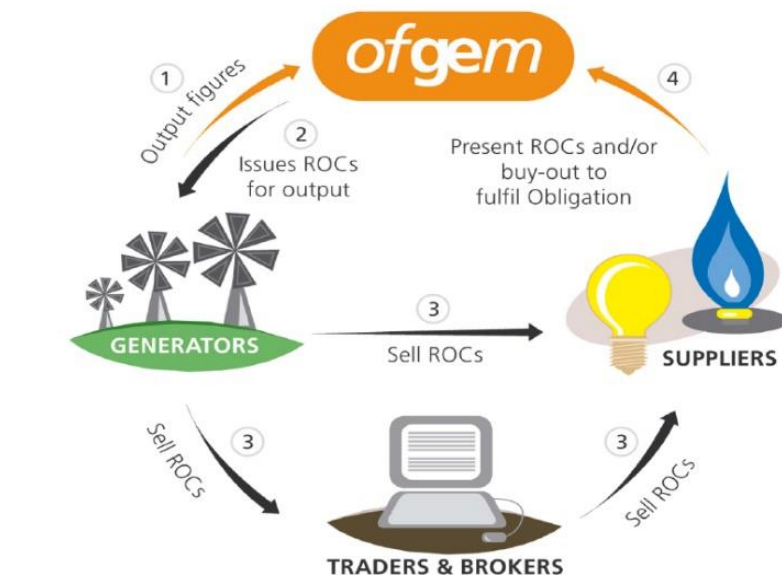
Environmental policy is further guided and enforced based upon Planning Policy Statements, led by the "Strategic Planning Policy Statement; Planning for Sustainable Development". The SPPS quotes the Bruntland Report as its starting point and sets out the aim of ensuring sustainable development is at the heart of the SPPS and the planning system.

Individual Planning Policy Statements further back this up. PPS 18 Renewable Energy quotes the international emissions reduction targets and sets out in detail the issues linked to various renewable technologies in relation to incorporating them into various developments. Throughout all planning policy there is presumption in favour of developing renewable technologies as long as there is no negative impact, such as on a listed building or in certain areas such as those of historic interest.

Financial Incentives

It was recognised that despite having these policy instruments in place that stated a desire to increase sustainability and renewable energy installations that the costs of the technology for individuals and businesses were often prohibitive. Therefore the obvious way to respond to this challenge and encourage uptake was to introduce financial incentives that would help to pay back the initial outlay on equipment and installation. These incentives have taken many forms over the years, but some of the major devices have been Renewables Obligation Certificates (ROCs), the Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) and Feed-in Tariffs (FiTs).

ROCS were introduced in Northern Ireland in 2005 but FITs have never been put in place unlike the rest of the UK. ROCS work by assigning a ROC value to a particular renewable energy installation (for example a Solar PV system may be granted 4 ROCS). Energy generators are required to produce a certain percentage of their energy from renewable sources and this level is shown by the number of ROCS they are able to show. This allowed for small scale providers to sell their ROCS to energy companies thus providing a financial incentive for individuals to install a renewable energy technology in their home or business.



How ROCs work, from Ofgem regulator website

Another instrument used within Northern Ireland was the Renewable Heat Incentive, based upon a similar scheme in place across the rest of the UK. The RHI was an incentive scheme to encourage businesses via the non-domestic scheme and householders via the domestic scheme to install renewable heating technologies such as biomass boilers and various heat pumps in place of existing fossil fuel heating systems. The scheme worked by providing a quarterly payment based upon the heat generated by the installation, with the price per unit being based on the technology used.

RHI
Renewable Heat Incentive



Renewable Community Empowerment in Northern Territories

However, errors in the implementation of the RHI scheme led to a larger than expected uptake, particularly in the area of biomass, which in turn led to the scheme being suspended in February 2016. This was accompanied by a sustained period of negative press via print media, radio and television and has led to a major tarnishing of the reputation of renewable energy, and particularly renewable heat, in Northern Ireland.

On the back of the revelations that there had been errors made in the drafting of the legislation along with the extremely large uptake and a potential overspend of funds set aside by the executive the scheme was suspended and then closed. This in turn means that there is currently no incentive to help with the transition to renewable heating installations in Northern Ireland rendering the industry almost obsolete. Without incentives the initial costs of purchasing the equipment and having it installed is prohibitive without an incentive to help with payback costs.



Conclusions

Northern Ireland currently finds itself in a policy and governance vacuum. There is no functioning assembly after elections in March 2017 and the UK parliament was dissolved in preparation for a Westminster election to be held in May 2017. While the key pillars of sustainability and clearly stated presumption in favour of developing renewable installations, the lack of financial support for a market that has not yet reached full maturity is a major impediment to continuing development.

There is an opportunity through the RECENT Project Policy Influencer Programme and other assorted lobbying activities to meet with policy makers. However with no assembly in place there are no ministers for the various government departments. This means that any policy or legislative documents that are in the process of being drafted will not be available for debate in the assembly or sign off by ministers until the impasse is resolved. Further the lack of ministers makes it difficult to make representations at this time as the identity of the party linked to the minister will likely inform the position of the department.



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