

22 December 2005

Fiona Browne  
DARD Policy Development Branch  
Room 360b Dundonald House  
Upper Newtownards Road  
Belfast  
BT4 3SB

Dear Ms Browne,

### **Recommendations to DARD for a Renewable Energy Policy**

NICVA (the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action) is the umbrella body for the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland. It provides its 1,130 members with information, advice, training and support services on a wide range of issues, together with representation for the sector as a whole. NICVA works to achieve progressive social change, based on equality and equity, working through a community development approach, to empower local communities to pursue their own needs and agendas.

NICVA is pleased to be offered the opportunity to respond to this consultation paper. This is particularly timely with recent developments at the climate change conference in Montreal. Due to the specialist nature of many of these issues, it is more appropriate that these are left to the expertise of environmental groups, many of whom are our members. However we do wish to make a few brief comments.

Our Policy Manifesto (2003), drawn up in liaison with and with the agreement of our members, states that government should 'Establish a statutory basis for sustainable development which requires government and its various departments and agencies to ensure sustainable development is at the core of all policy and decision making.' We therefore welcome DARD's involvement with renewable energy and would strongly encourage full Departmental support for sustainable development policies. In our response to the Draft Priorities and Budgets Consultation, we have raised concerns that DARD's PSAs make no mention of sustainable development.

Huge improvements in the amount of renewable energy generated and used here will need to be made if we are to meet the relevant targets in the coming years, including those set under the Kyoto protocol. The rise in emissions here (section 1.2) is particularly worrying. In our Priorities and Budgets response we 'welcome the priority on energy infrastructure, particularly that Northern Ireland should seek to take a lead in developing renewable energy technology'. An economy such as ours, which relied for so long on heavy manufacturing, is ideally placed to take forward and gain from investment in these technologies.

We agree that ‘the objective of the DARD renewables policy should be to promote the sustainable development of renewable energy from the agri-food and forestry sectors’. We would like to see a wider degree of cooperation between DARD and other relevant Departments such as DoE and DETI, and we look forward to seeing how DARD will take forward the NI Sustainable Development Strategy when it is published in 2006.

Section 3 lists the main objectives that should be contained in DARD’s renewables policy. We would welcome further detail on how these are to be achieved, with targets, timescales and budget analysis. These objectives should also link to the Department’s PSAs in this year’s and future Priorities and Budgets.

Overall we support the recommendations made in this document, although as stated above we will not be commenting on each one individually. We welcome the specific references to working with other Departments such as DETI, and organisations including Action Renewables. We would like to see a wider relationship with environmental organisations in the voluntary and community sector, and proactive work to encourage the wider sector to take up green energy options. These recommendations should also feed in to the review of DARD’s rural development policy.

If you have any queries about the content of this response, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Zoë Anderson, Public Affairs Officer.