

## **NIRIG response to Local Government Bill**

**12<sup>th</sup> November 2013**

The Northern Ireland Renewables Industry Group (NIRIG) is a joint collaboration between the Irish Wind Energy Association and RenewableUK. NIRIG represents the views of the large and small scale renewable electricity industry in Northern Ireland, providing a conduit for knowledge exchange, policy development support and consensus on best practice between all stakeholders in renewable energy. NIRIG welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Local Government Bill as this provides the legislative framework for reorganised local government from April 2015. Specific comments on those elements of the Bill of particular interest to the renewables sector can be found below.

### *Part 9 Conduct of Councillors*

NIRIG welcomes the proposal to establish a mandatory ethical standards framework for Councillors and local government as represented by the Code of Practice.

### *Part 10 Community Planning*

NIRIG believes that community planning will enable sustainable development to take place within the new Council areas. Northern Ireland has considerable renewable energy resources available, ambitious targets to develop these, and the potential to deliver an increasingly more sustainable, diverse and secure energy mix. Given this NIRIG strongly recommends that wind farm applications greater than 5MW continue to be assessed centrally as Major Applications with Strategic importance. Energy is fully devolved in Northern Ireland and, as such, 'national' targets exist as outlined in the Strategic Energy Framework 2010. NIRIG therefore believes that wind farms, offshore renewable energy developments and associated grid infrastructure should be considered nationally significant and decisions on them retained centrally.

By their very nature, wind energy developments are large scale infrastructure projects and are predominantly located in upland areas. As such, many wind farms applications will have effects at a larger than local scale, tending to fall along or close to district council boundaries, and be visible across council areas. The significance of wind energy development goes beyond a single district council area, both in terms of potential impacts and benefits.

Furthermore, NIRIG believes that a 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 in Northern Ireland.

NIRIG also notes that the Bill provides for community planning partners. We would propose that the renewable electricity sector, as key partners to the long-term objective of contributing to the achievement of sustainable development in Northern Ireland, should be represented on community partnership panels.

NIRIG looks forward to continued engagement with DOE and other stakeholders in developing an appropriate policy framework for the implementation for Local Government Reform.

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Meabh Cormacain

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