



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

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**COMMITTEE FOR  
ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND  
INVESTMENT**

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**OFFICIAL REPORT  
(Hansard)**

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**Energy Bill**

16 September 2010

**NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY**

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INVESTMENT**

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**Members present for all or part of the proceedings:**

Mr Alban Maginness (Chairperson)  
Mr Paul Butler (Deputy Chairperson)  
Mr Leslie Cree  
Mr Paul Frew  
Mr Paul Givan  
Mr William Irwin  
Ms Jennifer McCann  
Dr Alasdair McDonnell  
Mrs Claire McGill  
Mr Gerry McHugh

**The Chairperson (Mr A Maginness):**

We will now discuss the written briefing on the Energy Bill. Members have received copies of a letter from the Department and the Energy Bill issues table. I remind you that the Bill was considered at last week's meeting, when it was agreed to discuss any issues arising. Are there any comments? Would you like to take oral evidence from stakeholders on some of the issues? For example, the Consumer Council and the Utility Regulator have indicated some concerns in relation to the legislation. We may want to invite representatives from those organisations.

**Mr Cree:**

We need the gas people to come along — Phoenix and Firmus. We have had no comments from

them, have we?

**The Chairperson:**

We can, if you want. I wanted organisations that were raising issues of concern.

**Dr McDonnell:**

It is important that we dig down into this a bit, from two perspectives. First, the overall cost of energy is one of the biggest millstones around our economic recovery. Secondly, from a renewables perspective there is a big issue in relation to job creation. The point I wanted to make, which I made privately to them outside, is that energy is barely mentioned in the Budget discussions, even though they are only in outline. It is mentioned in relation to one or two high-profile things, but I see renewable energy as creating all sorts of work in rural communities, and perhaps in Harland and Wolff as well, with the building of the turbines and all the rest. It is perhaps not appropriate to make the point here, but nevertheless I think that the energy division in the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment is far too small and ineffective.

**The Chairperson:**

This is a fairly limited Bill, dealing purely with domestic users, rights of entry, etc. They are fairly limited issues. The issues that you are talking about are important, and they go well beyond the scope of this particular Bill. It may be more appropriate to direct your remarks to the renewable energy inquiry aspect of our agenda.

**Dr McDonnell:**

I accept that.

**The Chairperson:**

The Consumer Council and the Utility Regulator have expressed concerns, and I feel that we ought to invite them to give oral evidence. The informal indications are that they are happy to provide such evidence. Can we agree that?

*Members indicated assent.*

**Ms J McCann:**

I wanted to ask about the Consumer Council coming in, because there was a query about the

standards and about where the money for compensation would come from. It is a big issue for people.

**The Chairperson:**

There are issues there, and you are quite right to highlight them. We have agreed to that, and the Committee office will schedule the oral briefings in the next few weeks.

**Mr Cree:**

Can we just come back to the gas companies? I do not see any comments from Firmus. Is there any reason for that?

**The Chairperson:**

I do not know whether there is a specific reason for that.

**The Committee Clerk:**

Perhaps Firmus did not respond.

**Mr Cree:**

Unbelievable.

**The Chairperson:**

In relation to the two Bills, are members content to start next week's meeting in closed session to consider internal memos on delegated powers from the Examiner of Statutory Rules?

*Members indicated assent.*

**The Chairperson:**

I do not think that there are any other issues.