

Feed-in Tariffs

Feed in tariffs were originally conceived to allow producers of excess electrical power to feed it back into the National Grid. Although this is still the case for larger projects up to 5MW, the smaller schemes are paid to 'generate' green electricity and can use some or all of the energy themselves. Although it is possible to generate the power and simply waste it, this would be very stupid and is not likely to happen. The main point is that IT IS NOT NECESSARY TO HAVE A GRID CONNECTION TO THE PLANT in order to claim the feed-in tariff. An accredited electricity meter is wired into the output from the generator to measure the actual output.

If you can produce more energy than you need, you can connect to the 'Grid' at significant cost and be paid an additional 3 pence for every kWh that you export. However the cost of the connection equipment and that actual amount of surplus electricity produced, seldom makes this option worthwhile, particularly if you are using other sources of energy for heating or cooking that cost more than 3 pence/kWh. Add to this the fact that most grid connected systems shutdown if there is a power cut, and independent generation (at least as the first step until you know if you have any surplus) looks much more attractive.

At the present time there is a major difference in opinion about accessing the feed in tariff for small-scale waterpower (below 50 kW). My own opinion is that it is a total shambles inherited from the previous administration that seeks to control every aspect of the industry, even to precluding a watermill owner from building or rebuilding his mill to generate his own power. Mill-owners with years of experience in engineering are being told that they have to be 'accredited installers' and only use 'accredited products' from an 'accredited manufacturer' even if these products are produced in a basic 'sweat-shop' in the Third World and are far inferior to tried and tested UK products.

The coalition is reported as wanting to slim down 'big government. Here we have an example of civil servants wanting to 'protect customers' from problems that don't exist (plenty of existing consumer protection already exists) and even if the builder of the project is also the customer. The consequences of some projects going wrong are miniscule when compared to the 'dead hand of bureaucracy' weighing down of the very small number of engineering firms and individuals actually prepared to put on their 'welly-boots' and do something about Climate Change and renewable energy.

So if you are the owner of a waterpower site or old mill, I can but suggest you try and retain the right to choose how and what you can install by making your views known to the Minister or your local MP in the near future. If you don't, I for one will not be supplying the UK market any more, not least because I object to paying vast fees to 'accreditation bodies' who admit that they don't have expertise in the field and cannot offer any European or International guarantees of compliance or quality. Indeed the situation is so farcical that the MCS (Microgeneration Certification Scheme) web site has recently been altered to reflect the fact that MCS accreditation is based on 'certification bodies referring back to MCS/DECC itself' (I.E. a totally circular process that says that you must adhere to a standard that is not recognised by anyone except MCS/DECC)

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