

Unlocking Ireland's Biomass Potential – AnneMarie O'Brien

15 March 2016

“Good morning everyone and thank you sincerely for taking the time and the trouble to come here today. Thank you also to Malcolm Brown and Dr Tony White for inviting me here this morning and for asking me to say a couple of words at the launch of their report on ‘Unlocking Ireland’s Biomass potential’.

.....A question I get asked a lot is how did I become interested in this whole area of renewable energy in the first place - I suppose it really started a few years ago when we became aware that Eirgrid was proposing to build a line of massive pylons stretching from Dublin to Cork and part of that line was scheduled to go straight through our stud farm where Aidan and I breed and raise bloodstock.

Should such a project have been given the go-ahead it would have rendered that land totally unfit for the purposes for which it was being used. One then invariably starts to ask the questions - Why was such a large infrastructure project being considered?Was it something that was necessary? and ... Were there any alternatives that should be given due consideration?

After much research and discussion the answers soon became apparent - The pylons were being proposed to facilitate our existing energy Policy which advocates the doubling of onshore wind energy and to accommodate that energy coming onto the electricity system as our existing infrastructure would not be able to cope with that increase in variable wind power. Were they necessary - no - building a new pylon line from Dublin to Cork is absolutely not necessary unless we continue to add more and more wind farms onto the network and - are there any other alternatives to wind energy - yes there are - and one of those is the document that is being launched here this morning.

So - what exactly are Malcolm, Tony and Professor Burke suggesting that we do?

Firstly - as Moneypoint is Irelands largest source of CO2 emissions and as it becomes closer to the end of its natural lifespan - is there anything that we can do with it to minimise its carbon footprint, to continue its usefulness, to protect the jobs of the people that work there and to continue to use its existing infrastructure and grid connectivity -

therefore mitigating the need to spend billions of taxpayers money building new facilities and new infrastructure.

We simply cannot continue to burn coal at Moneypoint - the suggestion that is being put forward this morning is to convert our largest power plant from burning coal to burning biomass - something that can be achieved within the next 4 years in order to meet our 2020 EU renewable energy commitments, something that can be achieved much more economically than pursuing our existing all wind renewable energy policy and something that - with the right demand structure from Moneypoint and the right subsidy structure in place could provide our farmers with an alternative crop to farm therefore creating a secure, sustainable and indigenous supply chain.

However small Irelands contribution to global warming may be - we still must play our part in reducing emissions and we must take our responsibilities seriously in addressing the problem of climate change - however - we must do so by also taking seriously our responsibilities to the Irish people to do this as efficiently and as economically as possible and to minimise the serious effects for thousands of people whose quality of life is seriously compromised by living close to wind turbines.

Thank you again Malcolm and Tony for inviting me here this morning - I know that your report will be considered, will provide food for thought for our decision makers in agriculture, in finance and in energy and the environment - it will encourage us all to participate in the renewable energy debate and remind us all that the greatest threat to solving global warming is the believe that it is someone else's problem."