

DEPARTMENT OF ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT

9 December 2015

Bell: Interconnection critical for security of supply

Enterprise, Trade and Investment Minister Jonathan Bell today met with the System Operator for Northern Ireland (SONI) to discuss plans for the North South Interconnector.

Emphasising his continuing support for delivery of the project Jonathan Bell said: **“The requirement for this project is irrefutable as it is critical to long term security of supply for Northern Ireland. It can deliver savings on bills for consumers and it will support the Executive’s renewable targets but the importance of the project goes beyond these considerations. European energy policy is about harmonised and integrated trading across Member State markets. This is only possible with appropriate levels of interconnection.”**

The Minister added: **“On 19 November the Commission set out its work programme commitments for 2016 in its ‘State of the Energy Union 2015’ paper. On infrastructure projects the Commission stated that in 2016 all actors need to step up their work to facilitate delivery.**

“Turning specifically to those projects which it has designated as critical to European energy policy, ‘Projects of Common Interest’, it further stated that they require “urgent political push” with too many facing delay due to permitting and consenting procedures which are taking too long to be effective. Today I’m giving that push and I call on others to do so.

“I understand and accept that there are concerns about large infrastructure projects and their possible impacts on communities. The appropriate environment for consideration of these issues is through the respective planning hearings and it is therefore imperative that dates are set for the planning hearings as soon as possible.”

Welcoming the Minister’s support for the project, Robin McCormick, General Manager at SONI said: “The Minister has recognised the urgent need for the North South Interconnector, because Northern Ireland’s long term electricity supply, in the next decade, is hanging in the balance. Fossil fuel generation capacity is being reduced and older units at some of Northern Ireland’s power stations are being retired – together this means that by 2021 we may quite simply not have enough electricity.

“The North South interconnector is a vital part of the solution. Northern Ireland needs the interconnector to secure the electricity to our homes, our businesses and our economy. The Minister’s support is welcome and we would encourage everyone to get behind this project.”

Notes to editors:

1. Projects of Common Interest (PCI) are those projects which the European Commission considers critical to achievement of its energy priorities – security of supply, trading across Member States and integration of electricity from renewable energy sources.

2. The North South Interconnector was one of just 248 energy infrastructure projects across Europe to be

designated as a PCI under the Commission's first project list published in October 2013.

3. On 18 November 2015 the Commission published its updated list of 195 energy PCIs, with confirmation that the Interconnector remains a key European energy infrastructure priority.

4. The list can be accessed at the following link: <http://ec.europa.eu/energy/en/news/commission-unveils-list-195-key-energy-infrastructure-projects>

5. For press queries please contact DETI Press Office on [Tel:028](tel:02890529604) 9052 9604. Out of office hours please contact the Duty press Officer via pager number 07699 715 440 and your call will be returned.