



The long-awaited announcement on subsidies to renewable energy generation was made on 25 July, following protracted debate, acrimony and a spat between Energy Secretary Ed Davey and the Boy George that threatened to scupper the entire process and even the coalition. That brawl ended in victory for Davey, according to *The Guardian*, but only insofar as it affected onshore wind – several Megawatts were generated by the argument alone – leaving energy from waste and geothermal energy in the dark, so to speak.

Announcing the 'Renewables Obligation Banding Review' (more onshore wind), the Under Secretary at the department, Lord Marland, said: "We have some of the best renewable resources anywhere in the world, and the Government is absolutely determined that the UK will retain its reputation as one of the best places to invest in renewables. We have also legally committed to ensure that 15% of our energy will come from renewable sources by 2020."

According to the statement, consumers will benefit, too: by £6 this year and £5 next.

I'm also sure I'm not alone in having a bit of me sorry the dispute was resolved, if only grudgingly and temporarily. The prospect of the Lib Dems finally evolving a backbone and the Chancellor's attacks on the climate change targets becoming ever shriller – so that he shoves his foot in his mouth so many times he nearly chokes – was just a wee bit attractive to those of us who find the coalition a kind of hideous Frankenstein's monster (it wants to be loved, but can't help itself destroying those its more sensitive side wants to protect).

One sector to gain is the biomass industry, itself a controversial source because of the temptation to replace food crops with fuel crops. One advocate is the Drax power station (downwind of which this writer lived for some time in the 1980s).

Its chief executive Dorothy Thompson is quoted as saying that the new rules on subsidies could mean that the power station would be burning more biomass than coal within five years.

"This is all about jobs in the UK. The UK is critical to us as part of the supply chain for biomass, but also for imports of biomass: through the port facilities, in storage facilities and transport."

Apparently, the idea is to take nut husks, olive pits, bits of waste wood and such and cart it across the globe in order to burn it. OK, as reported in last week's blog, the EU might stump up a billion euros or so to transport the resultant CO₂ out into the North Sea to force out some 'hard-to-reach' oil before storing it underground, but there is still the carbon footprint created by the 'non-food miles' to consider.

Is it me, or is it a bit bonkers to subsidise a process that takes bits of waste organic material, transports them around the globe, presumably using diesel-powered ships, and burns them; then subsidise further a means of getting rid of the CO₂? Particularly when the material for producing energy from our own waste is already available.

One community that will be disappointed there is no subsidy for geothermal schemes will be Bath Abbey. The venerable organisation is planning a major extension of its facilities, which it hopes to heat by tapping into the famous hot springs of *Aqua Soulis* underneath its medieval buildings. Have they never seen

Bonekickers

? You just don't know what's down there.

Anyway, need to go now to have a think about how I'm going to spend my £6.

Chris Stokes