

MARKS & SPENCER'S ETHICAL SOURCING CALLED INTO QUESTION

Isle of Man Friends of the Earth has today questioned the authenticity of the Manx Electricity Authority's (MEA) new Green Tariff. The MEA has said its tariff will deliver customers with '100% renewable energy', but IoM FoE says this claim is 'demonstrably bogus'.

IoM FoE has also suggested that Marks & Spencer's decision to become the new tariff's first customer calls the supermarket chain's Plan A ethical sourcing strategy into question. (1)

Cat Turner, energy spokesperson for IoM FoE, said, 'We've been pushing for a Green Tariff from the MEA for some time, and I've glad they've listened to our arguments. It's also great news that they've followed our suggestion of ring-fencing the profit generated to help fund development of Manx renewable energy projects.

'However, I am very concerned that only a small amount of the energy being sourced for the Green Tariff is actually renewable. M&S has a strong record of ethically responsible retailing, but by opting into a misleadingly green-branded MEA tariff, that actually supplies dirty electricity, I fear M&S may tarnish their reputation.'

Electricity for the MEA's Green Tariff will come from two on-Island sources, but only the first, the small hydro electric power station in Sulby in the north of the Isle of Man which produces less than 1% of the Island's electricity, is genuinely renewable.

INCINERATION

The second source, which IoM FoE believes will supply the majority of electricity for the Green Tariff as more customers join the scheme, is the island's incinerator.

Ms Turner said, 'The MEA appear to be re-defining the term 'renewable electricity'. A waste incinerator cannot be considered renewable because the fuel, rubbish, is only burned once. In the UK, 'combined heat and power' (CHP) plants which use incineration are classed as

producing renewable energy and are eligible for Renewables Obligations Certificates (ROCS). The IoM's incinerator is however not a CHP plant. It only produces power and actually wastes a huge amount of the heat it generates - as such it would not be eligible for ROCS.' (1)

There is however a third 'top-up' source of electricity for the MEA's new tariff - genuine renewable energy supplied from the UK. Ms Turner said, 'In our view the incinerator should not be part of the Green Tariff package. It isn't green and it isn't renewable. If Sulby hydro is unable to supply enough electricity then the MEA should be providing genuine renewable electricity to its customers via the interconnector. Also, having now set this precedent, I hope the MEA will allow Island residents to buy renewable electricity from the UK too, until the MEA is able to generate green power itself.'

PLAN A

M&S's Plan A scheme (2) is a positive ethical sourcing strategy that's helping the supermarket reduce its environmental impact and is strongly supported by IoM FoE. Plan A has also helped M&S gain a public reputation for ethical retailing.

Ms Turner said, 'While I strongly welcome M&S's continuing commitment to the environment, I hope they're aware that the MEA's claim to provide 100% renewable energy in their Green Tariff package is currently misleading.'

According to the MEA their 'Green Tariff is an important landmark for M&S as it was the one remaining Green Tariff needed in order for M&S to achieve its 100% target by 2012.' Mervyn Bowden, M&S's Head of Energy Management, has also welcomed the MEA's Green Tariff as 'a significant milestone for our Plan A energy commitments.'

Ms Turner said, 'As an ethically responsible retail chain I'm certain M&S would be surprised to hear that they're going to be purchasing dirty energy from the incinerator. I hope they will address this question with the MEA and seek to assure their customers that their Plan A commitment has not been undermined.'