



NORTHERN IRELAND INDEPENDENT RETAIL TRADE ASSOCIATION

Postponement of Competition in the 10 Towns-NIIRTA Submission

15th September 2010

The Northern Ireland Independent Retail Trade Association (NIIRTA) is the representative body for the independent retail sector in Northern Ireland.

Although NIIRTA was only formed in Spring 2000 it already represents the interests of over 1,200 independent retail members throughout the Province. Our collective membership employs more than 30,000 staff and has an annual turnover of over £3 billion to the Northern Ireland economy.

Our members are absolutely vital in providing local employment as well as a strong focal point within the local community.

We welcome the opportunity to respond to the "Consultation on the options for co-ordinating the relinquishing of firmus energy's supply exclusivity in the ten towns area".

Our members compete with large UK multiples and have been at the forefront of innovation in terms of marketing, promoting local produce, customer service and many other areas which make them stand out from the crowd. Fundamentally, we believe in fair competition.

NIIRTA believes that our members should be able to avail of competitive energy costs which can be market tested and should be provided with a choice of energy supplier. This is currently being denied to our members in the ten towns of Derry, Newry, Antrim, Ballymoney, Ballymena, Limavady, Coleraine, Craigavon (including Lurgan and Portadown), Armagh and Banbridge.

We are therefore concerned that Options 2 and 3 highlighted in the Consultation document propose to delay the introduction of competition for natural gas customers in the ten towns in Northern Ireland. It is our view that competition should be implemented immediately and we can think of no compelling reason why the introduction of competition should be delayed for customers in the ten towns. We disagree with the view put forward in the consultation document that competition will be confusing for customers.

Natural gas customers, many of whom are our members, can choose their gas supplier in Belfast and we strongly support the introduction of competition now in the ten towns.

Therefore, we believe none of the options proposed by NIAUR meet this criterion and we would strongly urge NIAUR to introduce competition at the earliest opportunity for all customers in the ten towns and at the latest by April 2011.

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