

Date: 15 April 2009

JIM NICHOLSON MEP MEETS CAMPAIGNERS FOR SAFE ELECTRICITY IN SOUTH TYRONE

Ulster Unionist MEP Jim Nicholson & Assembly member for Fermanagh & South Tyrone, Tom Elliott MLA yesterday met with campaigners from (SEAT) Safe Electricity for Armagh and Tyrone on Wednesday 15 April 2009 in Moy to hear their concerns over the north – south interconnector. They have given their support to representations being made by residents in the Moy and Armagh area that the cross border electricity connector should be buried underground rather than overhead power lines.

Mr Nicholson said: “We have already met with NIE on a number of occasions with party colleagues. I do not accept that all the health and environmental issues have been properly addressed and cannot accept that the figures that the costs to go underground would be seven times higher than traditional methods. We understand that EirGrid have announced that two routes have now been selected and it is essential that landowners views are considered and await a judicial review from the High Court in Dublin before the scheme is advanced.”

Mr Elliott said: “It is estimated that approx 150 farms, 1500 households and 5000 people will be affected by this proposal.

“The main concern for residents is the exposure to potentially dangerous fields from new and existing power lines and the increased risk of children developing leukaemia (Draper report 2005). The study found that children living within 200m of high voltage power lines had a significant higher risk than those living 600 m or more away. These issues were raised with Cross Party Inquiry into Childhood Leukaemia April 2008. One notable UK building firm is operating a policy that they will restrict building within 200 metres of existing power lines.

“No matter what the initial costs, it is our strong view that ultimately it would be a lot more cost effective in that the damage caused by weather would be eliminated and therefore long term maintenance costs vastly reduced. There is concern that the number of interruptions in supply are already increasing each year in Northern Ireland.”

Mr Nicholson concluded: "Many European countries, like Germany, Austria and Switzerland have all got underground power transmissions and the benefit of these is obvious and do not pose the associated electromagnetic radiation problems as overhead lines and do not blight the countryside or the devaluing of property. It is time that NIE stopped dismissing the campaign to have underground cables because in the long term it would be a lot more cost effective, storm damage to overhead cables could be eliminated and maintenance costs reduced in the future but more importantly safeguard the health of future generations.

"I have also agreed to investigate the matter further through the European Union authorities."

Ends