

Frequently Asked Questions – closure of the Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation (NIRO) to onshore wind >5MW

This document is for operators of onshore wind generating stations in Northern Ireland affected by the closure of the NIRO scheme to onshore wind >5MW on 1 April 2016. It should be read alongside our [final guidance on the closure of the NIRO to onshore wind >5MW](#) and the [RO: Guidance for generators](#).

1. Why are you closing the scheme to onshore wind?

The Department for the Economy in Northern Ireland took the decision to align with the approach being taken in Great Britain by the (then) Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC). This maximised the contribution of the onshore wind sector whilst minimising subsidy costs for energy consumers.

2. What is changing?

The [Renewables Obligation Closure Order \(Northern Ireland\) 2016](#) closed the NIRO to large scale onshore wind operators in Northern Ireland from 1 April 2016. However, operators of stations that meet certain criteria may be eligible for a grace period, meaning that they may be eligible to apply for accreditation up to 31 December 2018, depending on the grace period conditions they can meet.

For details of the grace periods available read our [guidance](#) on the closure.

3. Can Ofgem E-Serve make a decision on my grace period evidence before my station has been commissioned?

No. The legislation is clear about when we must assess a grace period application and the associated evidence. This evidence is assessed at the time a full application for accreditation for the generating station is submitted. We cannot assess any grace period evidence before a full application for accreditation has been submitted. Similarly, we cannot make a decision on the grace period until it has been evidenced to us that the station has been commissioned.

4. Will I receive assurance on my grace period evidence if I apply for preliminary accreditation?

No. Applications for preliminary accreditation will only be assessed against the relevant RO eligibility criteria and will not include any assessment of grace period evidence.

5. Can pre-commissioning work be taken into account if full commissioning does not take place before the end of a grace period?

No. The legislation is clear that a station must be commissioned on or before the final date of the relevant grace period in order for accreditation to be granted after 1 April 2016. Ofgem E-Serve cannot act outside the requirements of the legislation.

6. Does Ofgem E-Serve need to have finished assessing my application by the end of the relevant grace period for my station to gain accreditation?

No, as long as your station is commissioned and you have submitted an application by the end of the relevant grace period. Your accreditation date will be the later of:

- the date you submitted your application for RO accreditation, or
- your commissioning date.

The time it takes for us to review your application does not affect this. Chapter 4 of the [closure guidance](#) explains how to submit a complete application to us within the required timeframe.

7. Can you grant a grace period if the relevant network operator or radar works party won't provide the required evidence?

No. The legislation is clear about the information you need to gain from a network operator or radar works party. We strongly encourage you to speak to them about the required evidence in advance of making an application to us. We cannot grant a grace period using the grid or radar delay condition without this information. It may be helpful to show the network operator or radar works party [our guidance](#).

8. There have been variations to my grid connection offer since I accepted it. Is my station still eligible for a grace period?

Yes, variations to an accepted grid connection offer are permitted as long as the new offer clearly relates to the station for which the original accepted offer was made. When assessing

eligibility for the approved development grace period we are primarily concerned with the documentary evidence that was in place on or before the relevant eligibility date (30 September 2015 for non-cluster stations or 30 October 2015 for stations connecting to a cluster).

9. There have been variations to my planning permission since I submitted it. Is my station still eligible for a grace period?

Yes, we are aware that variations may be made to planning permission as a project progresses. When assessing eligibility for the approved development grace period, we are primarily concerned with the documentary evidence that was in place on or before the relevant eligibility date (30 September 2015 for non-cluster stations or 30 October 2016 for stations connecting to a cluster). The legislation requires that the generating station commissioned is the one that relates to the planning permission granted on or before the relevant eligibility date. Chapter 3 of our [guidance](#) has further detail on what constitutes an acceptable variation.

10. The planning permission or grid connection offer for my site was issued to a different entity, and then novated. Will this affect my eligibility?

No. The NIRO Closure Order 2016 does not specify that the planning permission or grid connection offer must have been issued to the person applying for the grace period. Therefore, the party the planning permission or grid connection offer was issued to will not form part of our grace period assessment.

11. My planning permission was granted under the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 but the legislation doesn't refer to this by name. Does this still meet the grace period planning requirement under the closure Order?

Yes. Planning permission granted under the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 is acceptable even though the Closure Order doesn't specifically name that legislation.

12. How can I ensure my application is assessed as quickly as possible?

So that you can submit an application for a grace period and accreditation correctly first time, you should read the legislation and guidance before submitting an application to us. This will help us to make decisions promptly.

In particular, you should consider the evidence tables in chapter 3 of the [guidance](#), alongside the evidence checklist in Appendix 2. For instructions on submitting an application, consult chapter 4 and Appendix 1.

If your application for accreditation and a grace period is right first time, we can assess them more quickly. If the evidence provided is not clear, or is missing, and if applications appear to be speculative, it will take us longer to assess them, and delay our final decision. You also need to respond to our queries as soon as possible.

13. Can I submit my metering details after I've submitted my application for accreditation?

Yes. We recognise that operators may not yet have metering details available when submitting their application for full accreditation. You may still submit an application before you know these details, and up to two months before the anticipated date of commissioning the station. We ask that you update your application with this information as soon as it becomes available as without a full set of information we will not be in a position to make our final accreditation decision.

14. What if my commissioning date/evidence cannot be provided until after the final date for the relevant grace period?

The grace period and commissioning evidence can be provided after the final date of the relevant grace period. Chapter 4 of our closure [guidance](#) provides details of what you must submit on or before the final date of the relevant grace period and what can be provided after that final date.

15. What will happen if I try to apply on the final date of the relevant grace period, but the register isn't working?

If you are looking to commission your station by this deadline we strongly suggest that you submit your accreditation and grace application well before the final date of the relevant grace period. You are able to submit an application for full accreditation up to two months before the expected commissioning date. This should fully address the risk of you encountering problems accessing our system.

If you do attempt to make an application to us on the final date of the relevant grace period and encounter problems, please email renewable@ofgem.gov.uk and we will assist you with making your application.