

2,200 renewable energy jobs at risk says expert

BY JOE BULMER

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CUTS to funding for households with solar panels could mean the loss of 2,200 jobs in the South West, claims the chief executive of Regen SW.

The changes will mean around an 87% reduction in the money an average household with solar panels receives if the system is bought from January 2016.

Those people who've bought the system prior to the rule changes will continue to receive the same deal.

A typical household system producing around 4kWh currently receives around £449 a year through the government's feed-in tariff.

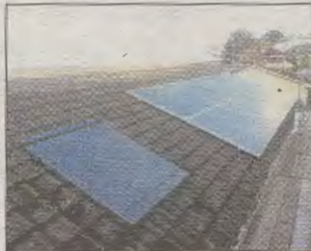
People buying the same system from January should only expect around £57 from the tariff.

Regen SW is an independent non-profit organisation which works with communities and businesses to introduce more renewable energy to the south west.

Its chief executive, Merlin Hyman, believes the renewable energy industry should be moving away from government subsidies.

He believes the speed and scale of these cuts is too much. He said: "Nobody argues against subsidies coming down, it's a sign of a successful industry. The problem is the speed and scale of these cuts.

"In a few years time the industry will bounce back but in the intervening years we'll lose



the capacity and skills we've built up over the last few years. Businesses can only adapt so fast."

Mr Hyman believes the cuts will mean around 2,200 job losses in the south west's renewable energy industry.

Braunton-based community

energy group 361 Energy has met North Devon MP Peter Heaton-Jones to discuss the effect of the cuts.

A national day of action is taking place on Friday where energy groups and the public will lobby their MPs on the issue. Paul Rogers, a scientist from 361 Energy, will be taking part. He said: "There's been an artificial boom which could soon be followed by a devastating bust if this policy is implemented.

"I hope the renewable energy industry is listened to because this is bad for households using solar power but even worse for community owned solar PV."

NORTH Devon MP Peter Heaton-Jones has written to the secretary of state for energy and climate change, Amber Rudd, for clarification on the rule change.

He has cautioned local renewable energy businesses though, pointing out the amount of money spent by the tax-payer on subsidies.

He said: "Several companies from the renewable energy sector in North Devon contacted me with their concerns, so I invited them to a round-table meeting in my office to hear their views.

"It's quite clear that there are a number of aspects of the government's proposals that will have a significant impact on businesses, householders and community groups.

"I have raised these already with the secretary of state, Amber Rudd, who advised me that the policy was still under review.

"I understand she will be making some significant announcements in the next few weeks.

"However, because of the specific concerns raised by the groups I've met, I will be writing to the secretary of state to raise the issues in more detail.

"It's worth remembering that Britain is set to reach or exceed its renewable energy targets, and also that the subsidies are a considerable cost to the taxpayer.

"But I do agree that a balance needs to be struck, which is why I will be writing to the secretary of state to let her know of the concerns in North Devon."