



## Addressing Agenda 21

### *By Robert Kyriakides, Genersys plc*

Energy policy has been in the news recently, with the announcement of the Clear Skies Initiative and with the Government deciding that we should not build any more nuclear power stations at least for the time being. I welcome these policies but I think that the Clear Skies Initiative has some flaws.

First, the grants that are given to photovoltaic systems are excessively large, compared with those available for other renewable systems. At Genersys we can supply both photovoltaic and solar thermal systems but I find it hard, in good conscious, to recommend a photovoltaic system, which even after the 50% government grant can only provide a forty or fifty year pay back, especially where they may only last for twenty years.

Photovoltaic systems have their place in the market in this country where they can prove invaluable in off-grid locations, because the cost of cabling. I can see no point in installing photovoltaic systems in the middle of a city where the whole cabling infrastructure is in place. It strikes me as positively inefficient.

Secondly the price band that the Clear Skies Initiative has given for solar thermal systems is in some cases unrealistically low where you wish to deliver a high performing long lasting system. It is possible to buy very cheap solar thermal systems but they will not last as long or perform as well as quality systems. Environmentally, quality is the criteria but it comes at a price.

Thirdly, the best solar thermal systems work most efficiently with special hot water cylinders. These are larger than those normally installed in this country and where an unvented 300 litre cylinder is required, the cost is significant.

Some installations are more complex than others. Installing a solar thermal system in certain types of houses will require internal adaptations (for example the creation of loft access or a place to keep the hot water cylinder) which come at a cost. Sometimes roof repairs or existing fossil fuel system repairs are needed.

We should all be encouraged to install solar in a way that provides substantial amounts of hot water and lasts for thirty or more years with very little maintenance. Clear Skies run the risk of having the grant being taken up by only very basic poorly performing solar thermal systems. I do not think that thermal solar is a product where we should encourage a "do it yourself" approach. After all, it is necessary to haul heavy panels to a roof, use some means of connecting pipework (often soldering) and often pressurise the heat exchange system. I think that there are enough safety issues in installations by commercial installers. Will the do it yourself market be aware of these?

I am puzzled by the way in which the government seeks to subsidise very expensive poorly performing photovoltaic systems to 50% - which may amount to a grant of well over £10,000 but will only offer a modest £500 to high performing solar thermal systems. I am puzzled by the price parameters that the Clear Skies Initiative provides which are misleading to say the least. I am puzzled by the Clear Skies requirement that consumers should be given a cooling off period where they are not "cold called" or sold on a finance related basis. That would take away all incentives from businesses that want to market solar thermal systems and may lead to fewer systems actually being installed. It deters businesses from carrying out an extensive marketing campaign. The grants, I understand, will not become available until much later this year. I am puzzled why it was thought that such a long lead time was appropriate.

I hope that there will be some fine tuning because the Initiative needs it if it is to be successful. There is very little money available for grants so it is critical to get it right.

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