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24 September 2020

Fears Dublin dragging feet on offshore wind

Concerns are growing the government is acting too slowly to develop policies needed to underpin the emergence of offshore wind in Ireland, IWEA 2020 has heard. **p2**

Two-track consenting hobbles offshore wind

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Government 'all in' for green energy transition

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Rising to the growing renewables challenge

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Onshore sector has more to do on costs

The Irish onshore wind industry must reduce costs to ensure the technology hits its 2030 deployment targets, IWEA 2020 has heard.

Energy Minister Eamon Ryan (*pictured*) told delegates the outcome of the RESS-1 auction, which delivered 479MW of onshore wind at an average weighted strike price of €74.08 per megawatt-hour, was "highly significant" but the sector needs to "bring prices down further".

The current reduction in wholesale energy prices can compensate for the subsidies but "we need to go further", Ryan added.

The Green Party leader said a "non-subsidised" market is coming in the "long-run" and he believes the auction system over the next five



years will help the industry on this path.

Ryan welcomed the recent signing of a number of corporate power purchase agreements with wind developers as an example of projects that can be built outside the support scheme.

He meanwhile highlighted "problems" in the planning system and said there is an "immediate" issue with ensuring enough projects come through consenting to be eligible for next year's

RESS-2 auction. Greater certainty will bring down costs, he said.

The government for its part will publish the final wind energy planning guidelines by the end of the year. "It is time for us to settle them and give certainty to communities and industry."

Ryan added the government will support overcoming the "huge issues" with grid development, including delivery of the north-south interconnector seen as key to reducing constraints and curtailments for renewables.

The minister said a revised energy and climate action plan will be outlined by the year-end, which will give confidence and market certainty.

Photo: Green Party

Consenting leeway on cards for offshore auction

Energy Department officials are considering watering down permitting eligibility requirements for the first RESS offshore wind auction due to open next year.

Assistant principal officer Robert McGuinness told delegates offshore projects may be able to bid once they have started the planning

process but before achieving full consent, which was required in this year's RESS-1 round for onshore and solar.

McGuinness noted there is as yet no clear consenting system in place for maritime areas and a new regime will be in its early days even when the auction launches in the fourth quarter of 2021. Such

a change would also support the faster roll-out of offshore wind, he added.

McGuinness said he wants the industry's views but the work is at an early stage.

Draft terms and conditions for the RESS round are set to be published early next year before being finalised in the third quarter.

TRENDING ON reNEWS.BIZ

Bord na Mona eyes €1.6bn war chest for wind, solar

Bord na Mona has launched a major fundraising campaign to build large-scale projects, including wind and solar, across its 200,000-acre landholding. Goodbody Corporate Finance is managing the €1.6bn cash drive.

[Click here](#)

Wind curtailment spikes in Ireland

The level of 'dispatch down' of wind on the island of Ireland hit 7.7% in 2019, up from 6% a year earlier. A total of 11,994 gigawatt-hours was generated from wind in the 12 months with 1008GWh curtailed or constrained.

[Click here](#)

Enrgia tenders for Antrim green hydrogen contractor

Enrgia is seeking a balance of plant contractor to provide civil and electrical infrastructure that will allow a hydrogen electrolyser to be added at the 27.6MW Long Mountain wind farm in Antrim, Northern Ireland.

[Click here](#)

Simply Blue opens new Cork office

Floating wind developer Simply Blue has relocated its headquarters from Ardmore to new offices in Blackrock, Cork. Managing director Sam Roch-Perks said Cork Harbour is the "gateway" to the developer's proposed Emerald floating wind project.

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Fears Dublin dragging feet on offshore wind

Concerns are growing the government is acting too slowly to develop policies needed to underpin the emergence of offshore wind in Ireland, IWEA 2020 has heard.

The association's offshore wind committee chair Peter Lefroy told delegates there are fears that work on the core pillars of consenting legislation, grid access and an offshore auction, is not progressing at speed.

The RWE Renewables man said this may mean projects are not delivered under existing timelines to support the government's 5GW by

2030 target. Lefroy warned the country is "rapidly running out of time" to introduce the right policy.

He said Covid-19 has presented challenges but should not mean a failure to deliver on commitments. "There can be no excuse for lost time at this critical juncture," he said.

Developers may look to other markets and the cost of delivery of projects will go up without the right policy, he added.

Formal adoption in upcoming legislation of the 5GW capacity target, introduced earlier this

year in the programme for government, is "critical".

That "irreversible" decision will give stakeholders and the industry the stability to deliver the target. "Given the time constraints, this is now urgent," Lefroy said.

However, he is confident the targets and policy are achievable and Ireland has the talent base to deliver.

"Offshore wind is not an option. It is not a nice-to-have. We will not reach our targets without significant levels of offshore wind being built out," he said.

■ The Irish government is at an advanced stage of work on key marine legislation, according to Planning Minister Peter Burke (*pictured*).

The Fine Gael TD said the National Marine Planning Framework, which will set out how the state wants to guide development including

Policy solution to project delay risks in short term

Ireland should adopt a developer-led regime for planning and building grid connections.

Energia offshore manager Eoin McPartland told delegates such a model would help limit the risk of project delays in the short term.

"We are at a critical juncture in terms of establishing an industry in Ireland and need to keep pace with other jurisdictions in Europe that have set out ambitious time frames for development," he said.

Centrally managed, "plan-led" grid regimes like those

used in the Netherlands or Germany should be viewed as a post-2030 opportunity for Ireland, McPartland added.

"Implementing a plan-led system where wind farms connect into offshore hubs now would leave developers waiting for these nodes to be consented, which we believe would create a four-year delay for project timelines."

The Irish government will select a method for connecting future wind farms shortly following a consultation period on a new framework, which ended in July.

EU all clear for sector auction

The Irish government has European approval to run an RESS offshore wind auction.

Matt Collins, Assistant Secretary-General for Energy at the Energy Department, said the plan is to run the

round by the end of next year.

Collins meanwhile told delegates the country is focused on playing a big role in the North Sea Energy Co-operation forum to support offshore wind development.

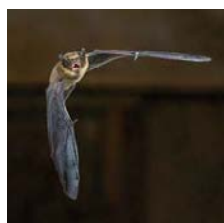
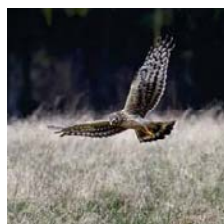


placement of offshore wind, will be published later this year.

The blueprint is on track for EU approval by end-March

2021. Offshore permitting legislation, known as MPDM, is also set to be delivered within the nine-month deadline agreed in June by the coalition.

Dublin will shortly publish offshore wind energy planning guidelines for consultation, Burke added.



Planning for your Irish wind farm development pipeline

With the Irish Climate Action Plan's call for another 4GW+ of new onshore wind energy by 2030, and annual ECP grid connection offer rounds for which planning permission is a pre-requisite, now is the time to be considering your planning and environmental requirements for your project pipeline.

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Help for planning authorities

Additional resources are needed for planning authorities to help streamline permit decisions. Statkraft Ireland head of development Donal O'Sullivan said An Bord Pleanala is currently far short of its 18-week guidance for making adjudications.

Cases on projects as well

as separate applications on grid connections are currently taking an average of around 60 weeks to decide, he added.

The delay can sometimes cause issues for wind farms in judicial reviews as there can be problems with the robustness of the initial assessments carried out.

Two-track consenting hobbles offshore wind

Ireland will deliver less than half of its 5GW by 2030 offshore wind target unless the country alters the existing 'two-track' approach to

consenting, IWEA 2020 has heard.

Energia Renewables managing director Peter Baillie (pictured) said only around 2GW is currently being advanced for this decade after the government designated five wind farms in a fast-track process known as 'relevant projects' earlier this year.

The designation means the developers can engage with Eirgrid on grid connections and prepare planning applications while 8GW-plus of other sites in development must await a new consenting regime.

Baillie said the low capacity being fast-tracked can be "readily resolved" if some of the other sites are included as 'relevant'.

The Energia man proposed that only wind farms on the south and east coasts based on proven fixed foundation technology should be considered.

Baillie added the sites to be included could also be those that have applied for foreshore licences, completed consultations and carried out the required two years of environmental studies.

Hitting the 5GW by 2030 offshore target is a "massive challenge" as it stands and development timelines are already constrained given how long it takes to plan and deliver offshore wind farms.



"Action is needed now," he said.

Energia is pursuing two projects off the

south-east coast under its £3bn investment programme dubbed 'Positive Energy'.

Baillie meanwhile said a clear timeline for the RESS offshore-only auctions, due to start next year, should be mapped.

He added transmission system operator Eirgrid must be given the resources by regulator CRU as part of the latter's ongoing budget discussions.

In onshore wind, Baillie said consenting guidelines are required along with statutory deadlines for deciding on appeals by An Bord Pleanala.

He also suggested a revamp of the RESS design, which currently does not protect operators from negative pricing.

Baillie repeated his previous calls for a solution to the ongoing issue of delays by the system operators taking over developer-built grid infrastructure.

"Energia is investing €3bn in Ireland. Let's get the decisions and action from government and the agencies now and investors and developers will deliver the targets," he said.

Photo: Energia



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Need for speed on policy to hit nation's 2030 target

Key policy decisions are required in the next 12 months to ensure the country can hit its energy targets.

Coillte portfolio director Paul Blount said there is a "need for speed" to get the key areas of planning, grid and route to market in sync.

In particular, Blount said the development of the grid is critical as the right steps in the next five years will set the tone for development of the power sector for 15 to 20 years. He added planning

must also have a better pre-application strategic infrastructure process and a system that allows for site and grid consents to be sought simultaneously.

Currently, development timelines for onshore wind farms can last between 12 and 15 years due to various delays, including in permitting.

The 'business as usual' scenario will deliver around 5.5GW of capacity, well short of the 8GW-plus required by 2030, he said.

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Public acceptance critical for growth of renewables

The Irish renewables sector's biggest challenge is winning the "hearts and minds" of the public, according to Eirgrid chief executive Mark Foley (pictured).



The company will soon launch a new engagement process for the Irish public, he added.

Foley meanwhile said Eirgrid is progressing with its strategic transformation, which the company unveiled last year.

More staff have been hired and the system operator is focused on doing things more quickly and efficiently without losing any "robustness or rigour".

Work has also progressed on partnerships and collaborations with players such as fellow system operator ESB Networks to "radically improve" the performance on infrastructure delivery.

Photo: Eirgrid

It is the responsibility of the whole industry to sell the green vision to the "ordinary people of Ireland", the system operator's boss told IWEA 2020 delegates.

"We all have to step up to the challenge," he said. "It is up to us to convince the nation that this vision we collectively have is the right one."

Foley said he does not doubt the capability of the industry to deliver the change required but said public acceptance is critical.

"We have got to get people around Ireland to say 'yes, we understand why you want to run a wire 1km from my house or a turbine in my locality because we get the story board that this is about the biggest challenge in the near and long term,'" he said.

Government 'all in' for green energy transition

The Irish government will do all it can to support the renewables sector to deliver the country's 70% green electricity target by 2030, IWEA 2020 has heard.

Green Party TD Brian Leddin, who chairs the influential Oireachtas Committee on Climate Action, said the administration is ready to do what is needed to ensure the right legal framework and conditions for planning and investment.

"As a government we will do what we can to enable you," he told delegates.

"All parties are serious about the green energy transition."

Leddin said the programme for government between coalition partners Fianna Fail, Fine Gael and the Greens, which he helped to negotiate, is "unprecedented" and contains energy targets of

"dizzying scale". The deal was drawn up in full knowledge of the "incredible effort" that will be required to hit the 70% goal, he added.

The state is also relying on the "ingenuity" of the industry to "forge ahead and break new ground".

"I have utter faith in the engineering community to achieve the impossible and get us over 70%."

Leddin said the onshore sector is an Irish engineering

success story but pointed out there have been some "missteps" along the way.

He singled out how at times developers have underestimated the value of bringing communities on board.

However, he said this attitude has now changed. Leddin believes community-owned projects, the first of which secured capacity in this year's RESS-1 auction, will start to grow significantly.

Grid budget 'will cover expansion'

Electricity regulator CRU will put in place a budget that covers the required grid expansion and also protects consumers.

Aoife MacEvilly, CRU chairperson, told delegates the ongoing discussions on five-year budgetary policy for the transmission companies include incentives for the

system operators to deliver on their objectives. The budget is due to be finalised by the year-end.

MacEvilly also confirmed the regulator is working on an ECP grid connection regime for offshore wind. She said design frameworks need to balance agility with regulatory certainty.



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Rising to the growing renewables challenge

Stakeholders at IWEA 2020 determined to resolve grid and planning headaches, writes association chief executive **David Connolly**



Over the first three days of our annual conference the most inspiring aspect was the commitment — across our industry, policymakers and system operators — to rise to the challenge we face to reach our 70% by 2030 renewable electricity target.

That challenge cannot be underestimated. As things stand it is impossible for Ireland to reach our goal set in the Climate Action Plan. This is not a lack of projects. We know the pipeline is there, and growing, to deliver the wind energy targets set out in the plan.

The problem is that we have neither an electricity transmission grid nor a planning system that will enable us to build and connect enough wind farms to reach our 2030 targets.

Already our existing plants are saving Ireland close to 3.5 million tonnes of carbon dioxide every year and nearly half a billion euros in foreign fossil fuel imports.

But as the amount of renewable electricity on the system rises, so does the challenge of integrating it onto our electricity system.

Over the first six months of 2020 we lost enough wind energy to power the city of Galway for a year, almost an eighth of our total potential wind generation.

Wind energy is lost when wind farms are 'dispatched down'. This happens when a wind farm is instructed to reduce the amount of electricity it is producing because the grid is not strong enough to cope with the volume of renewable

electricity available. This increases our dependency on fossil fuels and produced at least an additional 47,000 tonnes of CO₂ every month so far this year.

Although Ireland, through the efforts of Eirgrid and ESB Networks, is a world leader in the integration of renewable electricity, the transmission system is struggling to cope with rising levels of renewable power, a challenge that will only grow as new wind and solar farms are built.

Put simply, we cannot achieve our 2030 targets with today's electricity system.

What was clear from the contributions during the conference from Minister

to strengthen the grid to take thousands of megawatts of onshore and offshore wind energy we expect to connect over the next 10 years.

This additional capacity will be built on the foundation created by the 4200MW of onshore wind energy connected over the last 20 years.

Ireland is now number one in the world for the share of electricity demand met by onshore wind but to deliver the Climate Action Plan, we need to deliver the same amount again in half the time.

We cannot do this with a planning system that is now one of the biggest barriers to

our efforts to tackle climate change.

One of the key challenges we face are the

timelines for decisions. An analysis of wind farm appeals decided by An Bord Pleanala between 2017 and mid-2019 found that, on average, decisions took 66 weeks.

This is far in excess of An Bord Pleanala's 18-week statutory target and, while

the situation is improving, the board needs the resources to cut timelines and to prepare for assuming responsibility over planning for offshore wind energy.

The new Wind Energy Guidelines must be finalised and they must strike the right balance between the fight against climate change and the concerns some may have around renewable energy.

The new guidelines must be based on evidence. They must rest on a robust scientific analysis.

And we will not be able to develop offshore wind energy without an offshore planning system. It was very welcome to hear Minister Ryan describe the Marine Planning and Maritime Development Management Bill, which will create that system, is considered by the government to be one of the most important pieces of legislation they are bringing forward.

An effective planning system and a stronger transmission grid will together provide the foundation for a modern electricity system, which will rely on renewable energy to power our homes, our economy and our society. ■



Eamon Ryan, Eirgrid's Mark Foley and ESB Networks' Paddy Hayes is that they are determined to resolve this problem.

Key to this is ensuring that they get the resources they need from the CRU under Price Review 5 to enable them

THURSDAY'S HIGHLIGHTS

Keynote session

9am-9.30am

IWEA's Noel Cunniffe gives one of the morning keynotes by outlining the findings of the 'Saving Power' 70by30 implementation plan study. Statkraft Ireland director Peter Harte chairs.

Market design to integrate renewables

Session 2, 9.45am-11.15am

A number of speakers, including Mark Turner of Baringa Partners, address the power system of the future and what it will need to increase the level of green energy.

Congestion management and smart networks

Session 3, 11.30am-1pm

Speakers including Fluence market applications manager Amir José Daou Pulido and ESB Networks active system manager Ellen Diskin give their take on a range of issues including storage and distribution system opportunities.

Conference wrap up

1pm-1.15pm

IWEA chief executive David Connolly closes the four-day 2020 event.



Publisher

Renews Limited

St George's House,
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ISSN 1478-307X

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