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Eirgrid and Dublin plot to keep the power flowing

Eirgrid is working with the Irish government to put in place a new policy framework to deal with surging power demand and the need for more renewables, the system operator's chief executive Mark Foley (pictured) told Wind Energy Ireland 2021 delegates. **p2**

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Rising to the renewables challenge in Ireland

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Twisty road ahead for wind farm repowerings

The nascent Irish repowering market is gathering steam after the first consent decision laid down a blueprint for breathing new life into ageing sites. **p6**

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Dublin pedal to the metal for offshore

Planning Minister Peter Burke has pledged to speed up permitting for key offshore wind site investigation licences.

Burke told the Wind Energy Ireland annual conference 2021 on Tuesday that officials are to "put aside (the) prioritisation framework" reserving the process solely for the so-called relevant projects, a batch of five wind farms placed in a fast-track regime in 2019.

Site investigation licences, which are required to carry out surveys and other development work for proposed offshore wind farms, will now be processed chronologically, the minister told delegates.

The Planning Department has around 50 live applications on its books, around half of which have been filed since September last year.

Many developers seeking the go-ahead for a raft of new sites have criticised how long it takes with most of the applications yet to be determined.

Burke said the flood of applications has coincided with an uptick in requests for other marine infrastructure.



ONSHORE WAIT: Planning Minister Peter Burke (above) declined to specify when long-delayed new onshore wind planning guidelines will be published. The Fine Gael-man said work on noise, setback and shadow flicker is being finalised to update guidelines dating back to 2006. The measures will apply to future applications only, as well as repowering, he added.

Screengrab: reNEWS

He added extra resources have been added in the department for dealing with the paperwork and "excellent progress" has been made on processing applications from the relevant projects.

The government is meanwhile to beef up the role of the proposed new Marine Area Regulatory Authority, Burke told delegates.

MARA, originally planned as an enforcement agency under the proposed new marine planning system, will now take on the assessment and granting of marine area

consents and licensing. The agency will be established by the upcoming Maritime Area Planning Bill and will be a "well resourced" and "modern, professional" outfit, said Burke.

He added the "end is in sight" for the Bill, which was previously known as MPDM, with the legislation to be published in the "coming weeks."

Burke said a new marine planning framework, which will set up a long-term spatial plan for the sea, will be formally established shortly.

TRENDING ON reNEWS.BIZ

GDG wins offshore ground modelling treble

Irish offshore engineering consultancy GDG has been awarded three ground modelling contracts for developers progressing offshore wind projects in the Celtic Sea, Irish Sea and Atlantic Ocean.

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ESB unveils Moneypoint green energy hub

Irish utility ESB has unveiled plans for a multi-billion euro project to transform its Moneypoint coal plant in County Clare into a major new green energy hub including 1.4GW of floating offshore wind.

[Click here](#)

Statkraft wraps up second Irish battery project

Statkraft has completed the construction of its second large-scale battery project in Ireland, a 26MW plant in County Kerry. The Kelwin-2 battery project, in Tarbert, will provide reserves to the country's power grid under a contract with Eirgrid.

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Ocean Winds reveals Irish offshore ambitions

Ocean Winds has set up a project delivery company and applied for a foreshore licence to undertake site investigations for the up to 1.6GW Cailleach wind farm off County Wicklow, the first of a number of potential developments in Ireland.

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Eirgrid and Dublin plot to keep the power flowing

Eirgrid is working with the Irish government to put in place a new policy framework to deal with surging power demand and the need for more renewables, Wind Energy Ireland 2021 has heard.

The system operator's chief executive Mark Foley (pictured) told delegates the effort, which includes collaboration with energy regulator CRU, is focused on dealing with the uptick in demand from power-hungry data centres, which are due to come on stream in the coming years.

Eirgrid is "engaged deeply" with officials to ensure there is no disruption to supply in the near and medium term.

Foley said the Irish system was "extremely tight" over the winter due to power plants going offline and weather patterns. Recent blackouts in Texas are a "frightening

example" of what can go wrong.

"Nothing would do more damage to ambitions than for the lights to go out and people to be pointing the fingers at renewables for being the reason," he added.

Foley meanwhile said he is confident about delivering 70% renewables by 2030 thanks mainly to the track record of delivery across

the energy sector. New data show green electricity hit 43% of supply in 2020, beating the government's 40% target. Foley said this was a "staggering" result for the country.

The Eirgrid boss meanwhile said the system operator will have to "massively increase" its performance to deliver 10GW of new renewables connections in this decade

to unlock the 2030 targets. The company has made a strong start to this with more than 120 connection offers processed last year for over 1GW of renewables projects.

However, Foley warned that Covid-19 complications mean its infrastructure construction programme is not progressing at full tilt.

He welcomed the government's plan for a



gradual reopening of the economy, which should allow the pace of building work to pick up.

Photo: Eirgrid

Onshore and offshore pipeline reaches 25GW

Irish developers have amassed an onshore wind farm pipeline of 10GW, according to the latest Wind Energy Ireland figures.

Acting chief executive Noel Cunniffe told delegates at the group's annual conference that the majority of the projects are in early-stage development.

The figures, based on the

latest survey of WEI members, show around 1GW of sites are awaiting planning decisions while a further 1.7GW have consent.

Some 700MW of the latter already have routes to market through corporate power purchase agreements or last year's RESS-1 auction.

The research shows there is enough capacity

being developed to hit the government's target of having 8.2GW online by 2030, said the WEI man.

Meanwhile, more than 22GW of offshore projects are now in development, the majority of which are fixed-foundation schemes, according to the figures.

Cunniffe estimated that this equates to around 15GW

of capacity once overlapping project boundaries are resolved.

The acting WEI boss urged developers to advance as many projects as possible as there will also be further attrition in the planning process. As much capacity as possible is needed to ensure there is competition in upcoming RESS auctions.

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THE INTERVIEW reNEWS



Setting the scene for WEI2021 senior industry figures talk to reNEWS about the vital issues shaping the sector. Today it's the turn of **Arno Verbeek**, Codling Wind Park project director (*left*)

Q What is the number-one challenge facing the offshore sector right now?

A There are many but the biggest is probably Ireland's electricity transmission grid. Eirgrid estimates that the east coast can accommodate just 1.5GW to 2GW of wind energy at present. Without major reinforcements it will not be possible to meet the 5GW by 2030 ambition set out in the 2020 Programme for Government. The offshore sector needs to have confidence that the grid will be reinforced and capacity will be available in time.

Q Is government policy moving quickly enough to deliver 5GW by 2030?

A There is no doubt government is taking offshore wind seriously and progress is being made but delivery of relevant policy and legislation over the next 12 months will dictate if the 2030 target is met. Policy development must be accelerated and legislation delivered in a few key areas in particular:

- The Maritime Area Planning Bill 2021 (formerly the Marine Planning and Development Management Bill), which creates an offshore planning system.
- Setting out appropriate terms, conditions and a timeline for the first offshore wind energy auction,

providing a clear signal to industry of Ireland's intent.

- Delivering a grid policy that creates a level playing field for projects and ensures the best and cheapest projects are delivered for the Irish consumer.

Q What is your reaction to Eirgrid's recent grid policy consultation and the best option that will suit the offshore industry?

A This is an important consultation that will shape Ireland's future grid policy, and I encourage the public to take the time to provide feedback. From an offshore wind perspective, an urgent decision is required given there are less than 10 years to develop the transmission network on the east coast if Ireland is to achieve its ambitious renewable energy objectives. We are examining all the options carefully but in the long run the best outcome for Ireland will be one that enables all technologies to deliver to their full potential at the lowest cost.

Q What are the learnings that Ireland can take from overseas offshore wind markets to deliver projects?

A With more than 22GW of offshore wind installed capacity in Europe, Ireland has the opportunity to fast-track its progress to become a world leader

by taking on board many lessons learned. You only need to look at the UK to see the unparalleled success of the Contracts for Difference regime and the importance of providing developers with certainty. A clear and supportive planning regime and industry, government and communities working in partnership are other learnings to embrace. Ireland can also benefit from Europe's offshore wind talent pool to help build its own talent pipeline for the future.

Q What gives you the confidence or otherwise that Ireland can hit its 2030 offshore target?

A We are facing a global climate crisis. Sea levels are rising and the climate is warming with devastating consequences for communities and the environment. Ireland is not immune to this and the government has recognised the challenge by making ambitious commitments. We need to remove much more CO₂ from the atmosphere and transform our energy industry. We need more renewable energy and Ireland is extremely well positioned to take advantage of offshore wind to deliver this. With collaboration, determination and the political will to succeed, Ireland can unlock the most significant energy resource on the island to the benefit of generations of Irish people.



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Rising to the renewables challenge

The country successfully achieved 40% renewable electricity in 2020 with wind energy leading the way, according to Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland's indicative figures.

Wind energy has transformed Ireland's electricity system over the past 10 years, cutting millions of tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions each and every year and reducing our dependency on imported fossil fuels.

We are incredibly proud of the contribution our members have made to achieve this and it would not have been possible without the work of Eirgrid, ESB Networks and regulator CRU in developing the grid and integrating renewable energy in such volumes.

It is also to the credit of Minister Eamon Ryan that the supports he put in place for renewable electricity when he was last in this department enabled us to develop the 4200MW of onshore wind

Industry up to the job of delivering net zero in Ireland by 2050, writes Wind Energy Ireland acting chief executive **Noel Cunniffe** (right)



of something that I believe the next generation will look back on with pride; that at this time we took the first steps to giving them a sustainable, secure future.

capacity that delivered this target.

Achieving our 2020 goal puts us in a strong position to continue developing wind generation to meet our 2030 ambitions. Rapid progress has continued in recent months as the first RESS-1 projects entered construction.

This year is promising to be just as busy as 2020 with critical consultations

over the next three months. It will set in place the strategy to develop the electricity grid, electricity market and system operations out to 2030.

The government has also opened a consultation on the next version of the Climate Action Plan, which we expect to raise the ambition still further.

In addition, we have seen progress on getting an

Planning Bill. But there is still more to do.

The coming months will make the roadmap to achieving at least 70% renewables clearer but one thing is for certain, industry is continuing to deliver its side of the bargain.

Our pipelines are more than capable of meeting the 5GW offshore wind and 8.2GW onshore wind target.

An historic day for future generations in Ireland was marked on 23 March 2021.

The government approved the

landmark Climate Bill, which puts Ireland on a path to net zero emissions by 2030 and mandates a 51% reduction in emissions over the next decade. This is the beginning

Just a few weeks ago our answer to the challenge set out in the Climate Bill was published in the *Our Climate Neutral Future: Zero by 50* report, which was developed by MaREI, the SFI Research Centre for Energy, Climate and Marine, hosted by University College Cork, on behalf of Wind Energy Ireland.

The report identifies how meeting a net-zero carbon economy will mean an almost trebling of Ireland's electricity demand by 2050 with more than 20GW of wind generation required to meet just our domestic electricity demand.

Delivering this future will require unprecedented action across every level of Irish society but we as an industry can, and will, rise to the challenge. ■



and decisions coming thick and fast. Eirgrid and SONI's recently published Shaping Our Electricity Future consultation will be a key focus for all our members

offshore consenting regime in place with the approval of the National Marine Planning Framework and steady progress on the recently renamed Marine Area

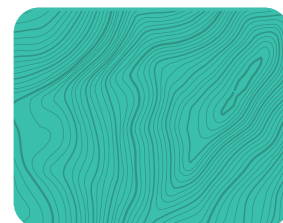


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POWER JUMP: SPR has won approval to boost its 15MW Barnesmore wind farm in Donegal to 70MW

Photo: SPR

Twisty road ahead for repowerings

1.5GW of the Irish onshore fleet is heading towards end-of-life decision territory, writes **Ellie Robinson**

The nascent Irish repowering market is gathering steam after the first consent decision laid down a blueprint for breathing new life into ageing sites.

An Bord Pleanála recently approved ScottishPower Renewables' proposal to revamp its 15MW Barnesmore wind farm in Donegal as a 70MW development.

Planners ruled out any impacts from the redevelopment on landscape, ecology, residential amenities or from construction traffic. The developer has yet to disclose details about a way forward but expects to spend €90m to replace 25 Vestas V42-600kW turbines with 13 modern units.

More planning applications are set to follow with Wind Energy Ireland research suggesting developers of around 250MW of projects are currently looking at updating proposals.

ESB and Enercon's Crockahenny wind farm, also in Donegal, is next in line with early-stage plans being formulated to

swap 10 turbines for two taller structures to achieve the same 5MW capacity. Barnesmore and Crockahenny have both been operational since the late 1990s.

Brian Keville, environmental director at planning consultancy MKO, said Irish wind farms are now getting to the age profile where developers have to think about end-of-life options. In total, estimates suggest 1.5GW of capacity will be more than 15 years old in the coming years and may face repowering decisions.

Keville said that progress in turbine technology is "definitely a factor" when developers decide to repower. "There is this new opportunity for higher yields from the same area site."

However, infrastructure such as new housing may restrict expansion plans due to limits on land availability and noise requirements. Also, transporting larger blades could be tricky on the country's rural roads.

In addition, environmental assessments now take considerably longer than they

did 20 years ago when some of the wind farms now coming to the end of their lives were built.

Keville added another significant challenge could arise from about a quarter of sites being in designated areas of environmental importance.

"I think environmental sites will be more of a concern," said Ken Boyne, managing director of engineering consultancy Ionic. "That can lead to problems going into planning for something different. Developers are going to be faced with new challenges."

Large developers in particular will need to give a great deal of thought and come up with a strategy for satisfying environmental concerns. "From a technological perspective it is about how much of the original infrastructure can be used. It is a completely different technological challenge," Boyne said.

Government support for wind farm repowering will be critical, noted Gavin Blake, head of energy and natural

resources at Dublin law firm ByrneWallace.

EU legislation will be a factor. Environmental impact assessments will be required and thresholds for objections need to be resolved, according to Blake.

While local communities will be used to having wind farms in the neighbourhood, concerns could be raised from farther afield, particularly from the "professional groups", he said.

Keville meanwhile said he is hopeful the additional capacity from next-generation turbines will increase overall generation.

Blake added: "A lot will hinge on the Wind Energy Guidelines. They are going to bring with them high thresholds in terms of setback limits. Putting up a larger turbine or even the same turbine could be a struggle."

WEI said it believes a specific planning system approach to repowering applications is needed to smooth the path to consent bearing in mind an existing wind farm may have been on the site for decades. ■

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IRELAND

REPORT

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