

13 April 2022

Grid the weak link in Irish growth strategy



Investment in new renewables projects in Ireland will slow to "a trickle" if more is not done

to overhaul grid access, RWE Ireland chair Cathal Hennessy told WEI 2022 on day one. **p2**

Offshore permitting pinch point at ABP

An Bord Pleanála needs an injection of expert staff to ensure phase-one offshore wind projects can get through the system in time to deliver power as planned by 2028, WEI delegates will hear this week. **p3**

Cascading crises make undeniable case for renewables

WEI chief executive Noel Cunniffe says the need for energy independence demands government fix perennial challenges of grid and planning. **p4**

Learning about the birds and the bees

Trinity College Dublin is leading a research project to measure and foster biodiversity at Ireland's wind farms **p5**

THE INTERVIEW reNEWS

Today, EDF Renewables head of development Ireland Kevin Daly. **p6**

'Sky-high' onshore wind costs puzzle

Sinn Féin leader Mary Lou McDonald has called on the government to investigate the high cost of onshore wind in Ireland.

The Dublin TD, who many political analysts predict could become the Taoiseach after the next election, questioned the "sky high" €74 per megawatt-hour price from the first RESS auction in 2020.

McDonald claimed this was the highest of any competitive tender in Europe over the past two years.

"Why are renewables prices so high when we have such an abundant wind resource?" she asked delegates during a keynote address on the morning of day one of Wind Energy Ireland 2022.

The TD put the blame at the current government's door, saying the Fianna Fail-Fine Gael-Green administration needs to speed up work on reforming the planning and grid systems.

McDonald said the auction prices should be probed "immediately" by government given contracts of 15 years have been awarded. "We need a pace from government that is appropriate to the scale of



URGENCY: Sinn Féin leader Mary Lou McDonald Photo: WEI

the challenge which matches the very impressive drive and enthusiasm that exists within the wind energy industry to develop capacity and get the job done," she said.

The leader of the main opposition party meanwhile warned that if prices remain so high Ireland will struggle to tap into a future green hydrogen export market.

A meeting between government, industry and stakeholders is "urgently" needed to "work out ways of delivering renewables more cheaply", she added.

McDonald said if prices are similarly high in this year's second onshore RESS auction, the Oireachtas Climate Change

Committee must examine what can be done to lower costs in the offshore round due to take place next year.

Speaking after McDonald, RWE Ireland chair Cathal Hennessy pointed to risks faced by developers as contributing to the high costs including planning, grid and route to market certainty.

Nevertheless, McDonald said onshore and offshore wind can "spearhead" the country's energy revolution and be a "game-changer" to help lead the nation's effort to become a leading clean energy market.

Meanwhile, she said Sinn Féin will work "constructively" with stakeholders to establish a consensus on energy policy that makes renewables the centrepiece.

McDonald also insisted the island of Ireland needs a second offshore wind port to support the construction of future projects. Belfast, the only current site capable of marshalling foundations and turbines, "cannot do it alone".

Various sites are under consideration but selection of a suitable port needs to be "accelerated and expedited".

TRENDING ON reNEWS.BIZ

Nordex cyber attack 'limited to internal IT'

Preliminary analysis from an investigation into a cyber security incident that hit turbine supplier Nordex at the end of last month suggests the impact has been limited to internal IT infrastructure. "There is no indication the incident spread to any third-party assets," Nordex said. [Click here](#)

Octopus opens €3.5m Nordic clean power platform

Octopus Renewables Infrastructure Trust is to set up and fund Nordic Renewables, a new 400MW development platform focused on energy assets in Finland. [Click here](#)

SPR and Shell sign ScotWind leases

ScottishPower Renewables and Shell have signed their options to lease agreements for the MarramWind and CampionWind floating wind farms off the east and north-east coasts of Scotland totalling 5GW. [Click here](#)

Philippines to launch offshore wind roadmap

The Department of Energy in the Philippines and the World Bank Group, with funding from the Energy Sector Management Assistance Program, are to launch the first-ever offshore wind roadmap for the country on 20 April. [Click here](#)

RWE and WEI turn spotlight on planning

RWE and Wind Energy Ireland have separately called on Dublin to speed up planning decisions on renewables projects in order to deliver the country's 2030 green goals.

WEI said Planning Minister Darragh O'Brien must instruct An Bord Pleanála to prioritise applications from renewables projects and related grid infrastructure.

It also urged Public Expenditure Minister Michael McGrath to ensure ABP, the National Parks & Wildlife Service and other key environmental stakeholders get the resources they need in this year's budget to properly process applications.

RWE Ireland country chair Cathal Hennessy said renewables can only help the country meet its greenhouse gas reduction targets "if... adequate resources are available within key areas such as planning and energy provision".



CONCERNS: Cathal Hennessy

Photo: WEI

Grid the weak link in Irish growth strategy

Investment in new renewables projects in Ireland will slow to "a trickle" if more is not done to overhaul grid access, WEI 2022 has heard.

RWE Ireland chair Cathal Hennessy said new network policy and vision is required to increase interconnection with continental Europe and reinforce the existing transmission system.

Hennessy said it is "unacceptable" that developers lack "firm grid

access" for projects, which is not the case in many other European markets.

The issue "increases financial risks" for projects in Ireland, he added.

The RWE man also said transmission system operator Eirgrid's key policy document *Shaping our Electricity Future* is now "out of date" as it is based on a 70% rather than the newer 80% renewable electricity target.

Hennessy believes the

blueprint should be updated to take account of even greater ambition in light of the current energy crisis.

In addition, developers need long-term clarity on grid policy beyond 2025 while Eirgrid and distribution network operator ESB Networks need resources.

"We have concerns at the moment that the resources are not being made available to deliver on the climate targets," he added.

Speed of the essence to meet climate targets, says WEI chief

The around 9GW of onshore and offshore wind needed to deliver climate targets must come online by 2028, two years earlier than the government's timeline, delegates in Dublin heard on day one of the conference.

Wind Energy Ireland chief executive Noel Cunniffe said initial findings from research commissioned by the

group show an "accelerated decarbonisation" scenario in which renewables generation goes live as quickly as possible will help the country's stay within its carbon budget.

Offshore, the 5GW government ambition will be required by 2028 while onshore new projects totalling around 4GW, to

add to the 4.3GW currently online, will also be needed around two years early to stay on track.

"Speedy renewables is everything," said Cunniffe.

The WEI boss meanwhile said the projects are there to deliver the goals.

The latest pipeline survey shows more than 28GW of offshore wind farms are

in development targeting pre-2030 commissioning. A further 15GW is being planned for delivery in the next decade.

Onshore, around 10GW in total is at various stages of development, including 1.8GW of consented projects and a further up to 800MW permitted and with a route to market established.



Planning and
Environmental
Consultants

Planning For Your Irish Wind Farm Development Pipeline To 2030

With the Irish Government's Climate Action Plan calling for another 4GW+ of onshore wind energy by 2030, and planning consent a pre-requisite for the ECP grid process, now is the time to consider the planning and environmental requirements for your company's project pipeline.

MKO identify wind farm sites, prove their feasibility, secure landowner agreements, produce the necessary environmental reports and prepare planning permission applications to deliver consents for shovel-ready projects.

Our track record is unrivalled. Talk to us.

www.mkofireland.ie



Offshore permitting pinch point at ABP

An Bord Pleanála needs an injection of expert staff to ensure phase-one offshore wind projects can get through the system in time to deliver power as planned by 2028, WEI delegates will hear this week.

Arno Verbeek, project director of EDF Renewables and Fred Olsen Seawind's 1.5GW Codling Bank development off County Wicklow, said the issue of permitting delays is now the chief concern for the six projects totalling 4.5GW in the vanguard of the country's nascent sector.

Some progress is being made on grid and route to market with the first offshore wind auction O-RESS 1 due to open later this year, but Verbeek said there remain question marks around the ability of ABP to make swift and solid decisions.

The Codling man said the planning authority must aim to stick to its own guidance of making consent calls within 18 weeks, even though decision-makers on onshore wind projects almost always take longer to deal with applications.

All six phase-one offshore wind farms will need approval by ABP under the new Maritime Area Planning (MAP) permit regime.

Verbeek said developers will file applications once grid offer and O-RESS processes have been completed at some point next year, and securing quick decisions will be vital to accelerating projects through financing and into construction.

However, many in industry feel there is little sign the authority has the staff headcount or expertise required to deal with the paperwork despite some recent recruitment.

Verbeek pointed to an added complexity in the Irish system as a result of strict rules that are likely to govern offshore wind. Developers will not be able to file applications based on the

project-envelope approach common in many markets such as the UK and will need to provide specific details on the hardware being proposed, he noted.

The exact rules for the permitting regime are expected to become clear once secondary legislation for the MAP Bill is published but energy department officials in Dublin have made clear to developers the project-envelope approach will not be allowed.

This will generate more paperwork for reviewers, who will need to be experts to understand the material, said Verbeek.

"It is mainly driven by a resource issue and I think it is getting worse," he added, pointing to global expansion of renewables and the demand for talent.

"There is an increase in demand for (people) globally right at the time when the key departments and agencies need to ramp up resourcing," he said.

"These experts are also being hunted by developers and they are more successful than government (at attracting them)."

The likelihood of judicial reviews of decisions will add to the challenge for ABP. "The last thing we want to happen is a ruling to be torn apart in the courts," Verbeek said.

Developers have so far been unable to organise pre-application consultation meetings with ABP, which provide useful information on how to prepare planning applications.

Once leases, known as MACs, are granted later this year talks should be able to commence.

Verbeek said offshore wind must be counted as projects of "national importance" to underline the critical need for swift decisions.

"In Ireland we are at the end of a very long gas pipeline. We are at the mercy of imports while we have six phase-one projects that are

all viable and in my view ready to go.

"We are ready to participate in O-RESS 1 and we want to get into the water."



EXPERTS IN DEMAND: Codling Bank project director Arno Verbeek

Photo: Codling Wind Park



N163/6.X

HIGHLY FLEXIBLE SITEABILITY

6 MW+ POWER OUTPUT

LIFETIME EXTENSION UP TO 35 YEARS

MAXIMIZED POWER. EXTENDED LIFETIME.

**The next steps in the evolution
masters the 6 MW+ class**



Cascading crises make undeniable case for renewables

We are living in one of the greatest energy crises of our times.

Irish electricity consumers are under steadily growing pressure as suppliers pass on rising costs driven by increased fossil fuel prices.

The recent IPCC report

Energy independence demands government fix perennial challenges of grid and planning, writes WEI chief executive **Noel Cunniffe** (right)



emphasised again the danger humanity faces and, last month, temperatures at the north and south poles were a

staggering 30 to 40 degrees Celsius above average.

And, on our television screens every night, we

witness the brutal and unprovoked Russian invasion of Ukraine. It has created an enormous refugee crisis, destroyed countless homes, towns and cities and cost the lives of thousands of innocent Ukrainian civilians.

Shamefully, this is funded by Europe, which has spent as much as \$1bn a day on Russian oil, coal and gas imports since the fighting began.

Europe is literally paying for the rockets and bombs hitting Mariupol and Kyiv.

Spiralling costs for consumers, the terrifying acceleration of climate change and the necessity to end Europe's dependence on imported Russian fossil fuels are coming together to make an indisputable case for speeding up the development of renewable electricity.

We must respond.

At our Annual Conference we are launching our new strategy, Building a Zero-Carbon Ireland, which will drive our



activity over the next three years and beyond.

We believe a zero-carbon electricity system is possible by 2035. We do not underestimate the challenge but we know we have the pipeline of projects, on land and at sea, to deliver.

We have the investment and the project teams with the funds and the skills to deliver.

Eirgrid's *Shaping Our Electricity Future* strategy must have strong political and public support for it is a litmus test that will identify those who are committed to tackling climate change.

However, even if all the reinforcements proposed in that strategy were delivered it would not be enough to meet Ireland's carbon budget targets. It undermines our attempts to connect significant volumes of onshore wind and floating wind energy in the 2020s. We

need to go beyond it and we will shortly be publishing new research showing how that strategy can be developed so we can meet our electricity sector carbon budget target for 2021-30.

But connecting projects to a stronger grid is only possible if we can get those projects through the planning system.

Recent research from MKO shows An Bord Pleanála is taking more than a year to make decisions on planning applications that are supposed to be reached within 18 weeks.

If we are committed to replacing expensive, imported, fossil fuels with cheaper, indigenous, renewable energy then Minister O'Brien must instruct An Bord Pleanála to prioritise applications for renewable energy and grid infrastructure.

He will also need to greatly increase the resources allocated to the Board. If it is struggling to deal with applications for onshore wind farms today, how will it cope with the volume we expect in the coming years to say nothing of applications of more grid

infrastructure and for offshore wind farms from 2023 onwards?

We cannot decarbonise our electricity system and make Ireland energy independent without wind farms. We cannot build wind farms if we cannot get planning permission to do so. We need to prioritise, to resource and to reform.

Grid and planning might be perennial challenges but today we have a unique opportunity to make the case to the government and to other key policymakers that now is the time to fix, finally, a system that is simply not working.

The prize for doing so is nothing less than an Ireland that is energy independent with warmer homes, cleaner air and with a renewable energy industry employing tens of thousands of men and women who will lead our fight against climate change. ■

HFW

LAWYERS FOR OFFSHORE WIND

CONTRACTS | PROJECT ADVICE | DISPUTES

70% Acted on **70%** of the UK's offshore wind farms

<p>MAX WIELICZKO Partner T +44 (0)20 7264 8036 E max.wieliczko@hfw.com</p>	<p>MICHAEL SERGEANT Partner T +44 (0)20 7264 8034 E michael.sergeant@hfw.com</p>
<p>RICHARD BOOTH Partner T +44 (0)20 7264 8385 E richard.booth@hfw.com</p>	<p>BEN MELLORS Partner T +44 (0)20 7264 8060 E ben.mellors@hfw.com</p>

www.hfw.com/offshore-wind

Americas | Europe | Middle East | Asia Pacific

Learning about the birds and the bees

Renewables developers in Ireland are backing a four-year project that aims to provide methods and measures to maximise biodiversity at onshore wind farms.

The Nature+ Energy project, led by Trinity College Dublin, is using principles of “natural capital accounting” to first create baseline data of biodiversity at 10 “exemplar wind farms” across Ireland.

Habitats in and around turbines and other assets, including hedgerows, grasslands, bogs and water courses, can be nurtured and maintained to sustain wildlife, increasing biodiversity.

The 10 wind farms span facilities at various stages of operational lifetime and are situated in different areas to reflect different diversities of local habitats.

A mix of environmental monitoring techniques,

Trinity College Dublin heads research project to measure and foster biodiversity at Ireland’s wind farms, writes **Sara Verbruggen**

including the established acoustic systems for birds and bats, plus newer approaches, will be being deployed at the wind farms to collect data on calls of local birds and evidence of other wildlife activity.

This information will be fed into machine learning algorithms to create open source sets of data to support monitoring of biodiversity.

Greater biodiversity provides “ecosystem services” such as carbon sequestration and pollination, according to Trinity zoology professor Ian Donoghue, who is leading the project and spoke on the afternoon of day one at Wind Energy Ireland 2022.

“The value of these natural assets and the benefits that flow from them extend beyond what is typically measured in financial terms,” he told reNEWS ahead of the Dublin conference.

A future output of the project is development of a decision support tool to inform approaches to increase biodiversity at sites.

He said some measures will be “more generic”, such as planting hedgerows to attract insects and small birds, while others will depend on

factors such as habitat type, size of wind farm and local geography.

Nature+ Energy is a collaborative public-private project between MaREI, Trinity and Maynooth University and industry, including Wind Energy Ireland and nine sector players such as developers Ecopower, ESB and SSE Renewables as well as project investor Greencoat Renewables.

Permitting remains a key obstacle to Ireland achieving its 80% by 2030 renewable electricity target. Opposition to onshore wind farms mean they can take years to develop. If owners and operators adopt natural capital accounting-based approach and invest in maintaining biodiversity at sites, that could provide a reputational benefit, according to the experts.

Donoghue said: “My experience with the project partners has been a feeling that they have bought into this.

“They are not here for greenwashing because what we are setting up is a means to demonstrate natural assets on wind farms, which can be of value to wind farm



NATURAL ASSETS: ESB and BnM’s 89MW Oweninny 1 wind farm in County Mayo. ESB is one of the industry partners on the Nature+ Energy project

Photo: ESB/Bord na Mona/Shannon Images

owners/operators, the farmer or landowner leasing the site, neighbours and local communities.”

Eirgrid is the latest transmission system operator to join the Offshore Coalition for Energy and Nature (OCEaN).

The EU’s Renewables Grid Initiative established OCEaN in recognition of both a climate and also a biodiversity crisis. It has 26 members at present, comprising various NGOs, TSOs and also offshore wind developers.

Bringing all these different actors together to talk to each other has been a “big challenge in itself”, said Cristina Simioli, OCEaN’s project manager, who also addressed delegates on day one of WEI2022.

The first year has focused on creating a common understanding among all members.

“Defining environmental concepts at the beginning has been an important step to move towards OCEaN’s mission, which is to create a pact between energy and nature,” she told reNEWS ahead of the event. “Our idea is that we need to tackle

the two crises together with concrete solutions.

“At the same time accelerating offshore renewables permitting is the number-one topic in all discussions regarding offshore wind, especially in the current energy crisis.

“In some cases addressing the environmental risk of projects can create delays and translate into a financial risk so there is recognition this needs to be addressed and is why these different organisations decided to sit round the same table.”

She said the aim is for a pact and solutions to go beyond “avoiding and mitigating” environmental impacts towards a “restoration pathway” so the state of the ocean is improved.

Reaching this agreement has been a key first step, said Simioli.

Eirgrid chief executive Mark Foley said the company is “very pleased” to be joining the coalition.

“Working with and learning from other TSOs, NGOs and wider industry, we see the potential for a collaborative approach achieving a better outcome for all.” ■

reNEWS

Publisher
Renews Limited
PO Box 808,
Winchester, Hampshire,
SO23 3TS, UK

ISSN 1478-307X

© All articles appearing in reNEWS are protected by copyright. Any unauthorised reproduction is strictly prohibited.

editorial@renews.biz
renews.biz

2022 Offshore Conference

Save the date
21st & 22nd September 2022

Main Sponsors: **sse Renewables**

Supporting Sponsors: **codling wind park**, **DP ENERGY**, **enèrgia group**, **ESB Energy for generations**, **MASON HANES & CURRAN**

WIND ENERGY IRELAND

THE INTERVIEW reNEWS



Setting the scene for WEI 2022 senior industry figures talk to renews about vital issues shaping the sector. Today it's the turn of EDF Renewables head of development Ireland **Kevin Daly** (left)

Q What is your main message for the Irish renewables sector ahead of Wind Energy Ireland 2022?

A Ireland's renewable energy industry is at a pivotal juncture, one where the possibilities have never been so great, nor the challenges so tough. We have a unique opportunity in the coming years to end our reliance on imported fossil fuels and become a net exporter of low-carbon energy. With energy security set to be a key economic driver over the next decade, transitioning to an electrified economy with security of supply will also make us more attractive to foreign direct investment.

Q How big a role can onshore wind play in the context of Irish energy security, and should the government increase 2030 targets?

A Onshore wind has a critical role to play in extending and safeguarding Irish energy security and ensuring the government meets its Climate Action Plan targets. The wind industry has long championed onshore wind energy not only as a means of fighting the climate crisis and reducing energy costs but also as a way of increasing energy independence. It's quicker and cheaper to deploy than most other forms of energy and should be at the heart of Ireland's energy security strategy.

That doesn't necessarily mean we need to increase our targets, which under the Climate Action Plan are already suitably ambitious, and between ourselves and other developers there are more than enough projects in the pipeline to meet those targets. But it does mean we must focus on removing existing barriers to the rapid roll-out of onshore wind across the country.

Q What is the chief barrier to onshore wind deployment in Ireland and what should/can be done to address it?

A There are two main obstacles that must be overcome if Ireland is to enable the rapid roll-out of onshore wind and meet its 2030 targets. First, there is an urgent need to build new, high-voltage grid infrastructure to increase the system's capacity as generation (and new demand) come online and the risk of constraints and curtailment increases. Any effective management plan to minimise the risk to renewables and the system as a whole must include the construction of additional grid infrastructure.

The other ongoing issue facing the industry is delays in the planning system, and this is being driven by a lack of resources and appropriate expertise. We are already seeing significant backlogs with regard to planning decisions, and the government must ensure that local planning authorities and An Bord Pleanála are adequately resourced to deal with the large volume of planning applications that are coming down the line.

Q The financial difficulties being experienced in the renewables supply chain are well documented. What is the role of developers in ensuring there is a sustainable supply chain to support the delivery of onshore and offshore wind projects?

A Ireland is a relatively small consumer in the global renewables supply chain and to a great extent we will always have to accept prevailing market prices when it comes to technologies like onshore wind or solar. However, floating offshore wind is one area

where Ireland could become a significant if not the largest deployer of technology, and in that event we would have much more influence on the supply chain.

The key to building out the supply chain is to provide long-term stability as a market, so again it goes back to tackling the issues that are holding us back as an industry and preventing renewables in Ireland from reaching its full potential. If as an industry we can provide that long-term stability and certainty, with a growing number of projects coming online in an efficient way, then suppliers will find Ireland a more attractive place to do business and price accordingly.

Q What are EDF Renewables' targets for onshore wind construction in Ireland this decade and what is the company's strategy for achieving this?

A Our aim is to deliver up to 10% of the 4GW of onshore wind targeted in the most recent Climate Action Plan for 2030. To achieve this, we've accumulated around 1GW of early-stage projects that we are assessing and hope to submit to planning in the next few years.

It's a very exciting time for us as we continue to grow not just our pipeline but our business footprint in Ireland. Since entering the market in 2019 we've continued to grow our team and Minister Ryan officially launched our new office in Dublin last September.

Our onshore wind portfolio includes recently announced projects in Mayo, Clare and Carlow, and our pipeline is well spread out around the country. We've a talented team who are all working extremely hard to complete EIAR and planning work, and consulting extensively with local communities, to have our first onshore wind projects operational by 2026.

reNEWS IRELAND REPORT

21 JULY 2022

Unrivalled coverage and analysis of renewables in Ireland & Northern Ireland

Exclusive data tables on pipeline projects

In-depth focus on key annual developments

**BOOK
YOUR
SPACE
NOW!**

Stay on the inside track

SPEAK TO sales@renews.biz

