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Bottlenecks put 6GW onshore target at risk

Ireland will miss its mid-decade onshore wind capacity target if permitting, grid and route to market issues are not resolved, Wind Energy Ireland 2023 has heard.

Trade body WEI chief executive Noel Cunniffe today told delegates in Dublin the pipeline is around 400MW short of the 6GW the Irish government wants by 2025.

There is currently around 4.4GW online and 1.2GW of consented schemes with grid offers and routes to market, he said at the group's annual conference.

However, this is not enough for the mid-decade goal and delivery on a range of targets is needed this year.

Cunniffe told the event that 1.1GW of projects are in the planning process, with around one-third awaiting adjudication since 2020.

"That shows what a bottleneck the planning system is and why we need to accelerate it."

The WEI man said this year must see grid upgrades taking place to facilitate the additional capacity and an ambitious third RESS auction.

"Acceleration is key. A lot of people do not realise, but onshore wind will deliver



ACCELERATION TIME: From l-r: Wind Energy Ireland chief executive Noel Cunniffe, FuturEnergy Ireland chief executive Peter Lynch, Minister of State Malcolm Noonan and Energia Group chief executive Ian Thom Photo: reNEWS

more savings on emissions than any other sector in the Climate Action Plan. If we do not get it right we will fail to deliver," he said.

Meanwhile, the offshore wind pipeline has grown to over 50GW, according to WEI's latest figures.

The majority, or 31GW, is competing for 2030 delivery with an additional 20GW eyeing development for the next decade.

Research shows the pipeline of wind projects is there for both onshore and offshore to deliver this decade's goals, but Cunniffe reiterated that both planning and grid need urgent attention.

He called for greater resources to allow national planning authority An Bord Pleanála and other state agencies to employ the "right people".

Plans by the government to speed up permit decisions are welcome but will fail to work if the right expertise is not in the consent authorities, he continued.

Meanwhile, the country needs a twenty-first century grid plan and system operators Eirgrid and ESB Networks must be staffed up, he said. Cunniffe also called on the wind industry to support the SOs by becoming "activists" for developing the grid.

TRENDING ON
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SSE unveils debut PV-storage project in Ireland

SSE Renewables has taken the wraps off a hybrid solar-battery project at its Richfield wind farm in County Wexford. The 21MW PV array and 10MW storage scheme will be the developer's first move into solar energy generation with battery storage in Ireland.

[Click here](#)

Irish wind hits January high

Irish wind farms had a strong start to the year with a new record for the most electricity ever produced in the month of January. The January Wind Energy Report, published by Wind Energy Ireland, showed that 41% of the country's power came from wind, up 9% on January 2022.

[Click here](#)

NTR adopts turbine monitoring system

Irish investor NTR is rolling out the WindEagle turbine monitoring technology across its asset base in Ireland and the rest of Europe. The kit, developed by Epsiline, is being used after a proof of concept trial demonstrated its "high potential value".

[Click here](#)

Valentia Island explores role for green hydrogen

The Brussels-based Clean Hydrogen Partnership has picked Valentia Island in County Kerry to receive support to explore clean energy solutions that will help Ireland on its path to net zero.

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Irish wind regulations need 'major overhaul'

Wind energy policy must be dramatically overhauled to support delivery of the energy transition. **p2**

Energia calls for offshore clarity with Phase 2 rules

Energia Renewables is seeking "urgent" clarity from the Irish government on the Phase 2 offshore wind rules. **p3**



Deliver now to keep targets within sight

Wind Energy Ireland CEO Noel Cunniffe highlights positive signals on planning and grid reforms but stresses 2023 must be the year of delivery. **p5**

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RENEW THE WAY THE WORLD IS POWERED.



Irish wind regulations need 'major overhaul'

Wind energy policy must be dramatically overhauled to support delivery of the energy transition.

Energia Group chief executive Ian Thom informed WEI 2023 on day one that grid delivery is one of the key issues facing developers.

He told delegates that forward planning of the power network by the State and agencies is needed to minimise uncertainty and allow companies with

experience to deliver the right generation technology at scale.

Thom called for a "one-stop-shop" for projects to secure grid access, in line with European Union requirements.

In addition, Eirgrid must provide clarity on its 'Shaping our Electricity Future' strategy, which has identified just 1.3GW of additional onshore wind capacity. Around four times this capacity is required.

The transmission system operator's chief infrastructure officer Michael Mahon later told delegates a blueprint update is being worked on.

On planning, Thom said a backlog needs to be cleared, while route to market requires a long-term support scheme mapping out beyond 2025.

Meanwhile, in offshore wind the establishment of a regulatory set-up that allows for clear seabed licensing is critical. Thom stated that, unlike in the first round this year, planning permission should be required for future offshore wind auctions.

The Energia boss said Ireland's ambition is to be welcomed, but a "laser focus" is now needed on delivery.

"We do not have the luxury of waiting. We need to move quickly and pragmatically to maximise the significant opportunity we have to decarbonise the power sector as soon as possible."

GE wins debut deal for 6MW onshore turbines

GE Renewable Energy has secured a deal to deploy its 6MW onshore turbines in Ireland for the first time.

The US manufacturer has been selected by Energia Renewables to supply 6.1MW units for the 49MW Drumlins Park project in County Monaghan.

Eight machines will feature at the project, where construction is already underway. The contract

includes a 25-year full service agreement.

Installation is to take place later this year.

Energia Renewables managing director Peter Baillie said the debut deal with GE is "illustrative" of the developer's "focus on innovation and excellence".

The project is being financed via a corporate power purchase agreement with software giant Microsoft.

Offshore regulator MARA primed for March rollout

New offshore regulator MARA will be established next month, Wind Energy Ireland 2023 has heard.

Minister of State Malcolm Noonan told delegates the body, which will deal with licensing and leasing for wind projects, will help to provide a "robust" regime for the country's nascent sector.

MARA will start accepting applications for Maritime Area Consents from Phase 2

projects in the second quarter of the year.

"This will be a well-resourced, modern and professional agency," he said.

Meanwhile, the government continues to work on delayed onshore wind planning guidelines. The scope of the updated rules "has yet to be determined", Noonan stated, and once completed will be subject to a public consultation.



GRID REFERENCE: Energia Group chief executive Ian Thom addressing conference delegates Photo: WEI



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Energia calls for offshore clarity with Phase 2 rules

Energia Renewables is seeking “urgent” clarity from the Irish government on the Phase 2 offshore wind rules.

The developer, the main sponsor of this week’s Wind Energy Ireland 2023 conference, said it currently lacks any detail on how or when it can secure a Maritime Area Consent (MAC) or seabed exclusivity for two of its projects.

The government was due to issue the Phase 2 rules setting out the development regime for wind farms not included in the Phase 1 process last year, but has yet to do so.

Energia is progressing the 800MW South Irish Sea off County Wexford and 800MW North Celtic Sea off County Waterford, and says it can deliver both by 2030 if given a chance.

Offshore manager Eoin McPartland said the company has committed a



TESTING TIMES: A vessel conducting recent surveys on Energia Renewables wind farm sites off south-east Ireland
Photo: Energia Renewables

“significant level of resource both in terms of building an experienced offshore development team and development expenditure”, despite “significant risk and uncertainty regarding seabed exclusivity, grid access and development pathway”.

“Having completed site investigation surveys and long lead environmental surveys, the projects are among the most progressed in development in Irish waters and, in some cases, have achieved these milestones ahead of Phase 1 projects,”

McPartland told reNEWS ahead of the event in Dublin.

“However, we lack a MAC which provides the level of certainty required to continue investing in development, and also provides the projects the ability to engage with An Bord Pleanála as well as allow Eirgrid to focus its resources on such schemes.

“Effectively the planning applications for these projects, which will be ready in the first half of 2024, could sit on a shelf while the government continues to prolong the uncertainty

around the Phase 2 MAC process. Clarity around the process and timing is urgently required.”

There are over 25GW of projects at various stages of development vying for inclusion as Phase 2 sites, and McPartland said the rules for the process must ensure that those selected are deliverable by 2030.

“If the net is cast too wide or on technologies which remain nascent, and as such cannot deliver at scale, the government will overwhelm their own resources with projects that are not at a suitable stage of development to be realised,” he explained.

Meanwhile, he warned that there is further uncertainty about the follow-up phases.

“This is not conducive to establishing an offshore wind industry or providing the necessary investment signals to the supply chain,” he said.

Irish appetite for wind hits record highs

Four out of five Irish people support wind farm development in the country, according to new polling released at Wind Energy Ireland (WEI) 2023.

The study, carried out for WEI by Interactions Research, shows positive sentiment is up 6% year-on-year and is the highest recorded since annual tracking started in 2018.

Cheaper electricity bills were ranked as the top benefit of the sector, with 45% of respondents saying wind helps cut power prices.

The survey also revealed support for offshore wind, with 83% of those polled saying the industry would help with Ireland’s energy security, although only 31% thought Ireland was doing enough to develop the sector.

WEI chief executive Noel Cunniffe said: “We are not building new wind farms, on or offshore, at the pace we need them.”



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Deliver now to keep targets within sight

Positive signals on planning and grid reforms but 2023 must be the year of delivery, writes Wind Energy Ireland CEO **Noel Cunniffe** (pictured)



In 2023 Ireland will move past the important work of designing strategies and preparing plans to delivering on the ground, or we will need to accept that the targets set out in the Climate Action Plan will not be achieved.

Under the new plan the goals for wind energy have been set as 6GW of onshore by the end of 2025, growing to 9GW by 2030, alongside at least 7GW of offshore – of which 2GW will be used for green hydrogen production. The ambition is huge and work is underway.

Eirgrid is busy working to update its Shaping Our Electricity Future strategy to reflect Ireland's growing ambition. The onshore Wind Energy Planning Guidelines are being revised to ensure they can support the development of renewables.

The government's Offshore Wind Delivery Taskforce is up and running. New planning reform legislation has just been published.

Maritime Area Consents have been granted, and the terms and conditions

for the first Offshore Renewable Electricity Support Scheme are finalised. This is all progress, but it means nothing without turbines going in the ground and in the water.

We can reach our targets. We have the pipeline of projects to deliver. We have the investment. What we need is delivery.

We find ourselves, over three and a half years since the first Climate Action Plan was published, still struggling with a broken planning system incapable of delivering energy projects quickly enough and an electricity grid crying out for reinforcement.

Eirgrid and ESB Networks have clearly upped their game. Projects are being connected, albeit slower than we would hope, and applications are going in for grid reinforcements, but our planning system remains completely unfit for purpose.

An Bord Pleanála is still desperately under-resourced. It lacks the necessary skills and expertise.

Onshore projects are spending more than a year in the planning system and then, if and when they secure permission, they are challenged in the courts. On more than one occasion last year, when a judicial review

was allowed of a grant of planning permission for a wind farm, An Bord Pleanála did not even defend its own decisions.

Government proposals to reform the planning system to try and speed up the process are welcome, but are only a small part of the solution.

An Bord Pleanála needs a massive investment of funding and personnel. It does not matter what legislative reforms are enacted if there are not enough inspectors, ecologists and planners ready to implement them.

As we strengthen our planning system, we need to see a similar level of focus

on properly resourcing the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU) and ensuring it is delivering on its responsibilities. Right across on and offshore renewable energy there is still an unacceptable level of uncertainty on exactly how new wind farms will be able to connect to the electricity grid.

Eirgrid's essential work on system services – supporting the integration of renewable energy onto the system – is stalled as they wait for the CRU to put the resources in place, while our members are struggling with a completely unworkable decision on Articles 12 & 13 of the Clean Energy Package which needs to be urgently revisited.

Ireland must connect an annual average of 560MW of onshore wind alone between now and 2030. We have only once connected more than 500MW in a single year. On top of that we need to achieve 7GW of offshore wind.

We cannot deliver the Climate Action Plan without a robust planning system and effective regulation. Time is running out. ■

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THE INTERVIEW reNEWS



Setting the scene for WEI 2023 Statkraft Ireland managing director **Kevin O'Donovan** (left) talks about the company's growing ambitions for the country in offshore and onshore wind

Q Statkraft recently announced a new offshore wind joint venture in Ireland with Copenhagen Infrastructure Partners. What advantages are there to this partnership?

A Copenhagen Infrastructure Partners, or CIP, is an extremely experienced and credible development and delivery partner for our planned offshore wind projects. Not only will CIP complement our development track record in Ireland, but Statkraft's wider ambition to re-enter offshore wind. The development capabilities and expertise CIP can bring will help us to deliver our North Irish Sea Array (NISA) project while enabling Statkraft to become a leader in offshore. This is two industry heavyweights joining forces to harness Ireland's offshore wind potential or, as a LinkedIn commenter remarked following the announcement, 'It's like Messi and Ronaldo finally playing for the same team'.

Q NISA is among the first offshore wind projects in Ireland to receive a Maritime Area Consent. How important is this milestone and what are the next steps for the project?

A It is a huge milestone for Ireland's journey to a decarbonised energy system and energy security – two extremely important issues for the country. Enabling industry to harness the clean energy that lies just off our coast is essential if we are to meet the government's target of connecting at least 5GW of offshore wind capacity to the grid by 2030. In terms of next steps, the findings of our recent offshore surveys are being incorporated into our final design proposal which will be submitted to An Bord Pleanála this year. Before that, however, we will be participating in the State's first offshore auction (ORESS 1).

Q Statkraft and CIP also have plans to develop the 500MW Bore Array to the south-east of Ireland. What progress has been made towards delivering this project?

A The Bore Array is a Phase 2 project under development with intended commissioning pre-2030. Over the next couple of years there will be extensive stakeholder engagement as well as consenting, surveys and engineering work taking place. Site investigations of the proposed development area will feed into the detailed design of the project, and any information gathered will be used for the Maritime Area Consent process.

Q On land, Statkraft has a large pipeline of wind farms, including the 58MW Moanvane and 56MW Cushaling. How is construction of these projects progressing?

A Works are ongoing at Moanvane in County Offaly, and the project is currently running on schedule. It appears on track to be operational towards the end of 2024. Also, just before Christmas, we announced that construction would be starting on Cushaling wind farm in the new year. We are extremely happy about Cushaling because the technology being used on the project is a first for Ireland. It will be the site of the inaugural installation of the Vestas V162-6.2 MW EnVentus turbine. These machines have a tip height of 185 metres, making them the largest turbine on any wind farm in the country.

Q In November, Statkraft secured its first power purchase agreement (PPA) in Ireland, with a deal to supply 366MW of clean energy to Microsoft. What role does Statkraft see for PPAs in its future Irish wind portfolio?

A The deal with Microsoft was significant because it demonstrated Statkraft's experience of sourcing alternative routes to market for its renewable energy projects. Looking ahead, we see PPAs as not only a way of helping

to deliver the energy transition, but contributing to the government's 2030 target that 15% of our electricity demand will be met by renewable energy sources tied to PPAs. As the cost of wind energy continues to fall and we see an anticipated increase in corporate PPAs, we believe that there are big opportunities ahead.

Q The Irish government recently consulted industry on its next round of the Renewable Energy Support Scheme (RESS). What changes would Statkraft like to see implemented ahead of future auctions?

A It is essential that the RESS processes continue in a stable manner to provide certainty that renewable projects can be delivered in Ireland. There are some changes to the RESS structure that can result in lowering bid pricing and benefit the consumer – specifically, the inclusion of indexation in the RESS contract would allow bidders to the auction to take out that uncertainty in their bid.

It is also vital for ORESS 1 that we kickstart the offshore industry in Ireland, in particular the offshore supply chain which has a global outlook. While Ireland has huge potential, it is currently a small and immature market from a global perspective. A significant number of projects securing capacity in the ORESS 1 will result in the Irish market getting to the minimum size for the offshore supply chain to focus on Ireland as one of their core markets. A smaller first auction will result in uncertainty for the supply chain, as there would only be a limited number of projects. This is ultimately going to reduce the available supply chain and stop companies committing to establishing a base for their business in Ireland.

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Annual CONFERENCE 2023

Day 2 Highlights

Chair Address

(Chair tbc)

09.30-09.35, Plenary Room

Keynote Address

Eamon Ryan *Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications & Minister for Transport*

09.35-09.50, Plenary Room

Keynote Sponsor Address

Alejandro De Hoz *Deputy CEO, Corio Generation*

09.50-10.10, Plenary Room

Financing the Climate Action Plan Delivery for Energy

Panel Discussion

Chair – James Delahunt *Partner, Corporate Finance, KPMG*

Barry O'Regan *Chief Financial Officer, SSE Renewables*

Karen Doyle *Head of Business Development, Gas Networks Ireland*

Jim Arigho *Director, Energy, Climate Action & Infrastructure, AIB*

Éamon Ó Cuív *Partner, McCann Fitzgerald*

10.10-11.30



Networking opportunity

11.25-12.00, Exhibitor Hall and Research Poster room

Planning presentations and Q&A

Chair Introduction

Brian Keville *Environmental Director, MKO*

Getting Planning Reform Right

Danielle Conaghan *Head of Environment and Planning Group, Arthur Cox*

A Planning System that can Accelerate Renewable Energy Deployment

Claire Walsh *Project Manager, Statkraft Ireland*

The Planning and Development Bill as an Enabler of Net Zero

Terry Sheridan *Principal Officer, Planning Policy and Legislation, DHLGH*

12.00-13.15

Lunch

13.15-14.30, Restaurant

Navigating Offshore presentations and Q&A

Chair Introduction

Val Cummins *Director, Simply Blue Energy*

Accelerating Offshore in a Challenging Economic Environment

Jan Hagen *SVP and Regional CTO, Vestas*

Offshore Renewable Energy Policy Update

Conor McCabe *DECC*

Getting Ready for ORESS 1

and Lessons Learned for Ireland's Offshore industry
Scott Sutherland *Codling Wind Park*

Delivering Offshore Wind and Restoring Biodiversity

Madeline Hodge *Lead Sustainability Advisor, Orsted*

14.30-16.00



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Closing Address

Noel Cuniffe *Chief Executive Officer, Wind Energy Ireland*

16.00-16.05, Plenary Room



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