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Updated grid plan will match onshore target

Ireland's updated grid expansion blueprint will align with the government's onshore wind ambitions. **p2**



Regulator CRU aims for new grid allocation round in 2023

Energy regulator CRU is planning a fifth grid allocation round under the Enduring Connection Policy (ECP) regime. **p3**



Irish charge sapped by network woes

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Today, Simply Blue Group's
Val Cummins **p6**

Ryan vows to complete offshore policy jigsaw

Irish Energy Minister Eamon Ryan has pledged to deliver a complete and stable offshore wind policy regime by 2025.

Ryan today told delegates at Wind Energy Ireland 2023 that a government-led offshore renewables taskforce is aiming to accelerate the start-up of the sector.

"The focus is not on 2030 or on 2050. It is on the next three years; what we can do in the lifetime of this government and what we can deliver by 2025," he said.

Dublin's target is to get Phase 1 projects contracted before 2025 and delivered by 2030. The delayed Phase 2 policy statement will be published in the "next week or two".

The coalition will put in place an enduring long-term Phase 3 process for offshore wind, which will be State-led, during the lifetime of the current Fianna Fáil-Fine Gael-Green Party government.

"The taskforce has a key role in delivering that," Ryan said.

He added that Dublin will publish key strategy documents this year on hydrogen, interconnection, net zero and an updated



2025 FOCUS: Irish Energy Minister Eamon Ryan

Photo: WEI

offshore renewables development plan, which will identify preferred areas for projects and transmission assets.

Ryan said there is no disagreement in the coalition about supporting the sector and wider energy transition. "We are just impatient to deliver as fast as we can," he stated.

Dublin's commitment is evidenced by the passing of marine planning legislation, the establishment of regulator MARA and the holding of two RESS auctions.

"We know we need to learn, to tweak and change (the auctions) and we will do that," said Ryan, adding that the regime is part of the government's "steady" and "relentless" focus on

renewables expansion. "We will continue to deliver," he said.

Meanwhile, the government is reforming the planning system – which Ryan branded the "biggest constraint" in the market – with new legislation he said could go through the Oireachtas before the summer.

While the laws do not turn the consent process "upside down", it will be "critical" for the energy transition by giving certainty to developers and "reducing" timelines as well as the "legal quagmire" some projects have been stuck in.

Ryan committed to providing additional resources to An Bord Pleanála to ensure it can deal with the anticipated level of project planning applications.

TRENDING ON reNEWS.BIZ

ESB signs renewables MoU with Irish port

ESB and the Port of Cork Company have signed a memorandum of understanding which will enable both parties to utilise and share their expertise to progress plans for Ireland's offshore wind and green hydrogen developments.

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UK offshore wind pipeline 'approaching 100GW'

Research published by RenewableUK's EnergyPulse data analysts shows that the UK's pipeline of offshore wind projects at all stages of development stands at almost 100GW – an increase of 14GW over the past 12 months.

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Scottish port looking for new renewables projects

Hunterston Port and Resource Campus is calling on renewable energy developers to join its growing community. Having been granted national development status it can now facilitate new developments including offshore wind and hydrogen projects.

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Clearwise to acquire German wind project

Utility Clearwise is to acquire the 18.6MW Weilrod 2 wind farm after the scheme secured a construction permit. German developer ABO Wind will oversee construction with commissioning planned for 2025.

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Corio calls for streamlined offshore licensing regime

The licensing and leasing process for Irish offshore wind farms must be streamlined to ensure the country does not miss out on maximising the benefits of the sector.

Developer Corio deputy chief executive Alejandro de Hoz said securing the go-ahead for offshore survey works should be accelerated.

The existing foreshore licence regime is beset by delays of up to two years, Wind Energy Ireland 2023 heard this week.

De Hoz said that deploying survey equipment as well as

vessels is costly and time-sensitive.

“Approval of surveys needs to be streamlined to reduce inefficiencies.”

The Corio man added that leasing for future projects also requires clarification, and offshore regulatory body MARA needs to be established to provide an “efficient” system.

De Hoz also stressed that Phase 2 rules are “urgently needed”, as is a planning regime underpinned by well-resourced statutory authorities.

Updated grid plan will match onshore target

Ireland’s updated grid expansion blueprint will align with the government’s onshore wind ambitions.

Eirgrid chief innovation and planning officer Liam Ryan confirmed to WEI 2023 delegates the revised ‘Shaping our Electricity Future’ will take account of the 9GW by 2030 target.

The first version of the document, published in 2021, caused controversy in the sector as it was based on adding just 1.3GW of new

onshore wind capacity, short of the 4GW-plus that will be required to hit Dublin’s end-decade goal. There is currently around 4.4GW of capacity online.

“Shaping (our Electricity Future) 1.1 will align with government policy on targets set down in renewables for onshore wind, offshore wind and solar,” Ryan said.

The blueprint is to be published in the summer, with Eirgrid exploring releasing the document in June.

Ryan told delegates the TSO is delivering hundreds of grid upgrade and reinforcement projects. “It’s a step change but we need to do more,” he said.

Meanwhile, Eirgrid is starting work on network planning for 2050. The ‘Future Energy Scenarios’ document will look at hydrogen and other sectorial innovations, as well as whether the country will be a net energy exporter.

It will go to public consultation later this year.



SEEKING CLARIFICATION: Corio deputy chief executive Alejandro de Hoz

Photo: WEI

Stability needed to unlock offshore finance

Ireland needs a stable offshore regulatory regime to attract the finance required to support the build-out of new projects, WEI 2023 has heard.

SSE Renewables chief financial officer Barry O’Regan told delegates that banks need an understandable set-up to release cash, plus a line of sight on a project pipeline.

He said SSE was able to raise billions of pounds of debt to support the 1.1GW Seagreen and 3.6GW Dogger Bank in the UK due to the stable nature of the country’s Contracts for Difference regime.

Over 30 banks were involved in the latter project. The developer was unfamiliar

with some of the funders, but they were there due to the stability of the CfD, O’Regan said. There is a “wall of capital” that wants to invest in renewables, be that debt or equity.

AIB energy director Jim Arigho added that funders want policy they are familiar with in other markets.

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Regulator CRU aims for new grid allocation round in 2023

Energy regulator CRU is planning a fifth grid allocation round under the Enduring Connection Policy (ECP) regime.

Director of decarbonisation Phil Hemmingway told delegates at WEI 2023 that the tender strategy will be set out during the first quarter of this year.

The round, to be run by Transmission System Operator Eirgrid, will likely take place late this year, and rules will be "not dissimilar" to

the last one – ECP 2.3 – which closed in September. Results are due shortly.

It will be the fifth process run by the TSO since the ECP regime started in 2018.

Hemmingway said the new allocation will take place in parallel with the drawing up of a long-term, enduring grid processing system.

This process will replace both the old gate system – which ground to a halt well over 10 years ago – and the transitional ECP set-up.

The enduring regime will be consulted on with industry before it is formally introduced.

The CRU has meanwhile established a new decarbonisation division, made up of four sub-divisions, including one that will deal with ECP.

Another will manage the offshore sector, while a separate arm will look at new and emerging regulatory frameworks that could include hydrogen.



TENDER POINTS: CRU's director of decarbonisation Phil Hemmingway Photo: WEI

'Politicians can be too receptive to wind farm objections'

Some politicians are too amenable to individual complaints or objections against wind farms, delegates were told on Tuesday.

FuturEnergy Ireland chief executive Peter Lynch said a "small cohort" of people with individual issues are being "given the red carpet treatment" by some elected representatives.

He stressed that everyone is entitled to their say but said politicians are being "far too responsive" to some concerns.

For all the talk of a climate emergency, "the reality on the ground is massively removed from that".

"Political leadership is too narrow" in Ireland around the energy transition and more voices are needed, Lynch concluded.

All options on table in bid to beef up permit staff

The government is investigating every possible route in a drive to bolster staff numbers at An Bord Pleanála, Wind Energy Ireland 2023 has heard.

Energy Department DECC assistant secretary Matt Collins told delegates on Tuesday that the agency,

which deals with the majority of permitting for onshore wind, is in "active recruitment".

Around 60 new posts have been approved by the government in the last two years, he added.

"Every route available" is being explored to "move

people in as fast as we can" to An Bord Pleanála, which will also handle offshore wind permitting.

Dublin will meanwhile publish the Phase 2 offshore wind rules "shortly", Collins stated in his address.

The policy, which will establish key licensing and

leasing processes for the up and coming batch of projects, is the next "incremental" step on Ireland's offshore wind journey, he added.

This important blueprint will allow the country to fully tap into the abundant offshore wind resource around its coast, he said.



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Irish charge sapped by network woes

There has never been a more exciting time for the Irish wind industry, with two RESS auctions under its belt, a first offshore auction on the horizon, and a growing number of projects seeking planning applications.

The health of the market is underlined by the number of developers now active in securing sites, and this is testament not only to the excellent wind conditions on offer, but also the stable and supportive policy environment.

Despite some high profile objectors, our industry has always enjoyed great support from the wider public, who understand and appreciate the critical role wind energy plays in the fight against climate change.

In the past 18 months we have also seen the economic benefits of a vibrant wind industry really start to hit home, as it enabled Ireland to spend €2bn less on imported gas in 2022. There is growing

Grid capacity and connectivity remain major concerns for the Irish wind industry, writes EDF Renewables Ireland head of development **Jenny Howard** (pictured)

recognition that every additional wind turbine is helping to drive down the cost of electricity for households and businesses alike.

However, this excitement is tempered by challenges. We are less than seven years away from 2030, and the pace of delivery of wind projects will have to greatly accelerate if our renewable energy targets are to be achieved.

There are of course a number of obstacles to doing so, but one in particular stands out as the most significant to electrifying Ireland's economy and society, and that is the urgent need to build new, high-voltage grid infrastructure and increase connectivity and capacity on the system.

This is all the more true in those parts of the country where our wind resource is

greatest but where there are too few connection points for those schemes to easily access the national grid.

As a result, the projects that could make the greatest impact and have some of the highest generating capacities can end up sitting on the shelf for years at a time.

Over the years there have been a number of plans in place to put Ireland's grid capacity on a par with its renewable energy ambitions. But too often they have remained just that: plans.

The industry urgently needs to see a substantial programme of investment, innovation and upgrading of Ireland's national grid, to increase the number of connection points and overall capacity on the system in time to deliver on our 2030 renewable energy targets.

Doing so will be all the more important as new demand comes online, and the risk of constraints and curtailment increases.

This is not to deny the importance of other obstacles to streamlining the delivery of projects and achieving the thriving wind industry we are all working towards.

Delays in the planning system are an ongoing issue, and the upcoming Planning and Development Bill will need to be adequately resourced if it is to make a real contribution to tackling this.

As we all know, however, substantial infrastructure development takes time, something that is in relatively short supply if we wish to truly capitalise on Ireland's immense renewable energy potential.



We have so much to be proud of in Ireland when it comes to the amount of our electricity currently supplied by renewables.

Wind energy alone is consistently accounting for over a third of all electricity generated, and our 75% System Non-Synchronous Penetration (SNSP) makes us a world leader in the amount of renewable electricity our system can accommodate.

Ensuring projects can connect into the system to take advantage of this remains the key challenge facing the wind industry today, and as we approach 2030 that challenge will only become greater. ■



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THE INTERVIEW reNEWS



Simply Blue Group's **Val Cummins** (left) speaks about the developer's floating wind projects and the challenges that lie ahead for the technology in Ireland

Q What first attracted Simply Blue Group to develop floating wind in Ireland?

A Simply Blue Group is a global Irish company, headquartered in Cork. Ireland is a great place to do business, as well as being an exciting market for offshore wind. It has one of the most extensive continental shelves in Europe, as well as one of the best wind resources. This makes it ideal for floating offshore wind at scale, with up to 75GW of potential off the Atlantic coast and 50GW in the Celtic Sea.

Q What development work has been undertaken to date at the up to 1.3GW Western Star and 1.3GW Emerald floating wind projects?

A Emerald and Western Star are arguably the most progressed floating offshore wind projects in Ireland right now. They have been developed to help the government meet its climate targets for 2030. This means that significant work has been undertaken at risk, to identify the sites and their suitability for different technology platforms. A major milestone was reached at the start of February when Emerald completed public consultations on the scoping study. The Western Star team will be launching its public consultation this month.

Q Both projects are in relatively remote waters. How does Simply Blue Group plan to overcome grid connection challenges?

A Both projects are in strategic locations, within proximity of Cork Harbour and Shannon Estuary respectively. Grid availability was one of the factors that influenced site selection. Both projects are designed to facilitate two routes to market: 400MW to the grid and to energy parks. For example, our partnership with Irving Oil is facilitating studies on the opportunity to repurpose Whitegate Oil refinery in Cork Harbour to an e-fuels production hub. Regulatory changes are required to support this, including updating legislation to facilitate private wires and hybrid grid connections.

Q Which floating technologies are being considered for these projects, and have you engaged with the supply chain?

A We are at a pre-FEED stage in engineering, which means that we are engaged in technology reviews to shortlist the best foundations for our site conditions. We are actively engaged with the supply chain with regard to this process at present.

Q What would Simply Blue Group like to see from government to help realise floating wind in Ireland?

A Our most important message to government right now is to shift gear into crisis response mode. Offshore wind is key to our national response to dealing with climate change, but we will not meet our targets with current governance arrangements. The

establishment of the new Maritime Area Regulatory Agency (MARA) is most urgent. Maritime Area Consents (MACs) and marine investigation licences need to be issued to all projects in Phase 2, irrespective of technology, by the end of 2023. At the moment, this is a challenge.

Q Last year, Shell took a strategic decision to exit Western Star and Emerald. How has this impacted on your plans, and what are the next steps?

A Simply Blue Group took a decision to maintain project schedules for both projects. We have achieved this by increasing group resources to the project teams. At the same time, we are actively working on identification of a new joint venture partner that will be a good cultural fit for the long-term, and that will help us to achieve MACs in Phase 2.

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