



National Marine Planning Framework Draft Consultation Submission

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Executive Summary

IWEA would like to thank the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (DHPLG) for the opportunity to comment on the National Marine Planning Framework Consultation Draft.

IWEA believe that Ireland's marine spatial plan is essential for facilitating the deployment of offshore wind energy in Ireland, achieving our future climate ambitions and central to achieving 70% renewable electricity by 2030.

Ireland has an opportunity with its Marine Planning Framework to set out the direction for marine development over the next twenty years. IWEA believes it is essential that Ireland's marine planning system effectively enables the development of offshore wind in keeping with the objectives of the Climate Action Plan. The timely implementation of the NMPF and the Marine Planning and Development Management Bill which underpins it will be crucial in realising this opportunity. Offshore wind energy development is central to Ireland reaching its climate targets, reducing reliance on fossil fuels, improving air quality whilst also bringing significant socio-economic benefits to coastal communities.

However, there are challenges relating to specific policies within the NMPF Consultation Draft that we believe need to be addressed. These have been summarised below, but we invite you to consider these in more detail alongside of proposed recommendations within the main body of our submission.

- Amendments are required in relation to ORE Policy 9 Visual Assessments taking cognisance of to the EIA Directive requirement for cumulative impact assessment
- Balancing the public benefits of offshore wind projects and the importance of the contribution of offshore wind farm development in achieving national targets relating to climate change with the potential impact on seascape and landscape is critical
- The NMPF does not clarify how it envisages the management of ongoing applications and 'Relevant Projects' as described under the transitional provisions in the MPDM legislation. This may lead to uncertainty and potential delay for these projects
- The Natura Impact Statement and AA Screening Report should consider further investigation of the potential conservation benefits offshore wind developments may have on designated EU sites alongside of co-existence between offshore activities, in particular fisheries
- IWEA fully supports Fisheries Policies as set out in Section 5 of the policy and would also welcome the establishment of guidance similar to the FLOWW (Fishing Liaison with Offshore Wind and Wet Renewables Group) UK guidance to foster good relations between the fishing and offshore renewable energy sectors and encourage co-existence of the industries
- Learnings and experiences of the consenting processes for existing international ORE developments and from developers operating within the Irish market who have experience of consenting processes in neighbouring jurisdictions will be key to creating a fair, transparent and effective method of project delivery
- It is critical that terrestrial land-use planning policies and plans developed by local planning authorities are consistent with the NMPF. Policies concerning coastal infrastructure provision, port/harbour development, coastal amenity development and protection as well as land-use zoning need to be developed with a clear understanding of the locations of, and opportunities provided by, the intended offshore wind development sites

- It is essential that regulatory resourcing is ensured to deliver investment and Ireland's climate action commitments. As consenting is the first step in the offshore wind project lifecycle, it is imperative that support is established if current and future offshore renewable energy projects are to be successful
- Marine Protected Areas Policy 4 can be interpreted as having a very broad scope which we believe requires clarification and refining to allow offshore wind farm development
- IWEA welcomes the Marine Planning guidelines however, any delay to the implantation of marine planning guidelines must not be allowed to delay the submission of applications to the consenting authority.
- IWEA have concerns that if the State adopts a narrow or rigid approach to zoning, whereby sub-optimal zones are identified, there is a real risk that sites will ultimately not be cost-efficient or deliverable for developers
- IWEA believe it is critical that spatial designations take account of areas already identified in the OREDP Plan as this is essential if the target of 3.5 GW is to be delivered by 2030. The Relevant Projects should not be delayed by a new zoning process
- We believe that certain criteria need to be put in place around competing industries and zoning. The NMPF states that preference will be given to offshore wind in specific zones but fails to clarify how preferences will be treated when it comes to other interests or industries
- The risk of legislative delay is the biggest risk to achieving Ireland's targets. The urgency cannot be overstated of DHPLG delivering a coherent policy framework for offshore wind in conjunction with DCCA.E.

1 Introduction

IWEA welcomes the publication of the National Marine Planning Framework (henceforth referred as the NMPF) which has been drafted under the legal mechanism brought into effect under Part 5 of the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act, 2018 [transposing the Marine Spatial Planning Directive (2014/89/EU)]. As part of the public consultation process, IWEA would like to submit the following points regarding the draft NMPF and its supporting documents. We ask that the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (DHPLG) consider the below comments and recommendations when establishing the final NMPF. IWEA strongly believe that offshore wind projects can catapult Ireland towards reaching the climate action targets set by the Government and the EU. We hope that the NMPF will support the delivery of offshore wind projects through policy objectives, zoning and supporting the timely delivery and publication of key legislation. The Covid 19 public health emergency presents unprecedented challenges. Dealing with the crisis will undoubtedly be a major focus of the next Dáil. Tackling climate change and ensuring sustainable economic development needs to continue to be a priority. Facilitating the progression of the NMPF and Marine Planning and Development Management Bill (MPDM Bill) is therefore critical.

2 Offshore wind opportunity for Ireland

Ireland has an opportunity with its Marine Planning Framework to set out the direction for marine development over the next twenty years. IWEA believes it is essential that Ireland's marine planning system effectively enables the development of offshore wind in keeping with the objectives of the Climate Action Plan. IWEA welcomes the planning objectives and planning policies in relation to Offshore Renewable Energy (ORE) Development which seek to support the establishment of Ireland as a world leader in ORE deployment, support Ireland's decarbonisation journey, provide enhanced security of supply for Ireland and ensure good regulatory practices in ORE development.

Offshore wind energy is at the heart of the Climate Action Plan's ambition to cut CO2 emissions in the electricity sector by two-thirds and increase the renewable energy share of electricity demand to 70 per cent by 2030 from its current 35 per cent. Already Ireland has an offshore wind energy pipeline of more than 12 GW at various stages of development off its coast, enough to supply more than all of Ireland's electricity needs.

With the right policy and regulatory framework Ireland can become a world leader in offshore wind deployment and ensure we are in the position to meet our international and EU climate commitments. Europe is stepping up its ambition in relation to climate change with the European Green Deal seeking to make the EU the world's first climate neutral continent by 2050. Ireland needs to be able to keep pace with European ambition and the response required to tackle climate change.

Offshore wind development will not only help Ireland reach its climate targets, reduce reliance on fossil fuels, and improve air quality, it will also bring significant socio-economic benefits. Delivering just the 3.5 GW of offshore wind energy required under the Climate Action Plan will require an initial investment worth €8.6 billion¹, create thousands of jobs in planning, development and construction and hundreds of long-term jobs in operations and maintenance. Offshore wind can also unlock new infrastructure investment in Ireland's coastal communities through the upgrading of port and harbour facilities. Examples of the transformative impact of offshore wind can be found across the UK and Europe.

Ensuring Ireland has a marine planning system which is fit for purpose is critical to ensuring Ireland is able to reap the benefits of offshore wind and drive the decarbonisation of its electricity supply. The decarbonisation of electricity is critical to Ireland's plans for heat and transport with 500,000 deep retrofits and almost 1 million Electric Vehicles planned by 2030.

2.1 Need for timely implementation of NMPF and supporting legislation

It is stated on page 21 of the draft NMPF that the MPDM "*will be a cornerstone of the future marine planning system in Ireland*". IWEA welcomes this statement and is pleased to see that, through the NMPF, strong recognition is given to the MPDM's important role in the future of marine planning in Ireland. It is well established that Ireland has huge potential to develop a strong commercial offshore wind sector. Unfortunately, without a robust modern marine planning regulatory regime, Ireland has

¹ <https://windeurope.org/about-wind/statistics/offshore/european-offshore-wind-industry-key-trends-statistics-2018/#explore>

been unable to capitalise on its offshore wind potential to date. When enacted, the MPDM will pave the way for this sector to thrive in the years to come.

2.2 The Challenge – timing of implementation with other Key Legislation

The Climate Action Plan 2019 recognises offshore wind's potential to significantly contribute to Ireland's 2030 EU renewable energy targets. However, given the significant lead-in times involved in bringing an offshore wind project to commercial operation (for example, pre-planning survey work, consenting phase, securing a grid connection, securing a Renewable Electricity Support Scheme contract, achieving financial close and the project construction work), it is important that the NMPF is finalised and statutorily 'made' and the MPDM legislation is enacted as soon as possible. For practical purposes it is extremely unlikely that any offshore wind project which has not received planning permission before the end of 2025 and/or does not have a supporting Renewable Energy Support Scheme (RESS) auction to compete in will be built in time to meet the 2030 targets. This makes it essential that the MPDM is enacted and all secondary legislation implemented as soon as possible.

The Government is due to implement its first Renewable Electricity Support Scheme auction later this year (known as RESS 1). It is generally acknowledged that offshore wind will not be able to meet the qualification requirements for RESS 1. However, the industry is hopeful that offshore will have a significant role in later auctions which are expected to take place in 2021 and either 2023 or 2024 according to the Climate Action Plan. The industry is hopeful that the terms and conditions of such auctions will include a specific technology cap solely for offshore wind or stand alone auctions for offshore wind will be facilitated.

IWEA is concerned that delays, relating to the formation of a new Government, are impacting upon deadlines for the NMPF and the MPDM Bill outlined in the Climate Action Plan 2019.

Further delays will certainly affect the delivery of all offshore wind projects, not only the 'Relevant Projects' but also the enduring projects which are already under significant pressure to deliver for 2030. The risk of legislative delay is, arguably, the single biggest risk to achieving Ireland's target of at least 3.5 GW of offshore wind by 2030. The urgency cannot be overstated of DHPLG delivering a coherent policy framework for offshore wind in conjunction with DCCA. It is critical to developing an offshore wind industry in Ireland along with the associated supply chain and strategic investment.

The timing and delivery of a range of policy areas e.g. consenting, grid, route to market and supply chain are integral to success. It is important to appreciate that every policy area is interlinked. Delays and difficulties in one will ripple through the timeline. The absence of progress in any one area will prevent work commencing and/or progressing in others.

2.3 Our Recommendation

We are very hopeful that the timing of both the NMPF and the MPDM Bill will complement other key legislative measures affecting the renewable energy sector.

Taking into consideration the project development lead-in times, it is imperative that offshore wind is able to capitalise on a route to market with RESS to contribute to Ireland's 2030 renewable energy

targets. Having the MPDM Bill enacted and the NMPF adopted well in advance of an offshore RESS will be a key step in this process.

It is imperative therefore that the timing, implementation and adoption of key legislation is considered, managed appropriately and expedited.

We recommend that timelines for the provision of offshore wind projects are considered alongside of the need for the timely provision of essential legislation and associated resources required to facilitate the progression of at least 3.5GW of offshore wind by 2030. If further delays occur, it may be necessary to redesign the sequential nature of the policy milestones in an innovative manner whereby they can be facilitated in parallel.

2.4 Relevant Project in the NMPF

The NMPF does not clarify how it envisages the management of ongoing applications and 'Relevant Projects' as described under the transitional provisions in the MPDM legislation. This may lead to uncertainty and potential delay for these projects.

2.5 Our Recommendation

IWEA request that the NMPF sets out how the 'Relevant Projects' are envisaged to fit within the framework, in line with action 25 of the Government's Climate Action Plan for the development and management of Transitional ORE projects, and which would therefore facilitate the stated objective to develop 'a transitional protocol to enable focus on applications within the scope of emerging policy'.

3.0 Consenting

The MPDM Bill will introduce two new forms of State consent; Planning Interest and Maritime Area Consent (MAC). Planning Interest looks at the financial capability of a developer to actually deliver on a project and aims at reducing the hoarding of sites.

3.1 The Challenge – potential delay in policy delivery

In short, there is likely to be approximately a four-year period from applying for Planning Interest to securing a Marine Area Consent (MAC). Any delays in the delivery of a policy will impact upon project timelines and the ability of relevant and enduring projects to contribute to the 2030 targets.

Originally, the final version of the General Scheme of the MPDM Bill was due to be submitted to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government before the end of September. The Bill itself was to be published, according to the Climate Action Plan, before the end of Q4 2019. It is now Q2 2020 and while the General Scheme has been published there is no sign of the Bill itself nor, pending the relevant Oireachtas committee being established, any indication as to when it might be published or when pre-legislative scrutiny may commence. We also understand there may be an additional period of public consultation which will likely extend the process further. In the context of the current Covid-19 crisis it could be Q3 or even Q4 of 2020 before pre-legislative scrutiny of the Bill can take place.

The Bill is already at least a full quarter delayed against its Climate Action Plan target. At the current rate of progress there is no possibility of meeting the Climate Action Plan's deadline for enactment of the MPDM Bill and there is a serious risk that we will soon be approximately one year behind the plan's envisaged timeline.

There is also significant potential for further delays to arise given multiple departments (and interests) involved in the decision making process but also more recently with the ongoing Covid-19 crisis.

3.2 Our Recommendation

IWEA recommends that DHPLG (both MSP and Foreshore) and DCCAIE interact regularly with industry to flag any issues or bottlenecks that arise with the delivery of a new policy framework for offshore wind and address same to ensure that projects can be delivered and the 2030 targets can be achieved.

4.0 ORE Planning Policies

IWEA welcome the ORE planning policies outlined in the draft NMPF which seek to:

- Support the establishment of Ireland as a world leader in ORE deployment
- Support Ireland's decarbonisation journey through increased use of ORE while delivering significant and sustained benefits, import substitution, fiscal return, national and local economic development and technology learning
- Provide enhanced security of supply for Ireland in the short and medium term, in accordance with the Government White Paper on Energy
- Ensure good regulatory practices in ORE installation and generation, including decommissioning of existing facilities, at end of life, according to international best practice

4.1 The Challenge – Visualisation Assessment

IWEA believe amendments are needed to ORE Policy 9 which deals with visualisation assessment.

ORE Policy 9: *"A permission for ORE must be informed by inclusion of a visualisation assessment that supports conditions on any development in relation to design and layout. Where a development consent is applied for in an area already subject to permission, proposals must include a visualisation assessment to inform design and layout. Visualisation assessments must demonstrate consultation with communities that may be able to view any future ORE development at a given site with the aim of minimising impact. Visualisation assessments will be informed by specific emerging guidance but in absence of this should include elements identified in related policy and good practice."*

ORE 9 requires a visualisation assessment to be included in all project applications. The policy includes community consultation as follows: *"Visualisation assessments must demonstrate consultation with communities that may be able to view any future ORE development at a given site with the aim of minimising impact."* This text is not clear and should be clarified. "Any future ORE" may refer to the specific project, which is the subject of the application. Alternatively, it may mean future projects, other than the specific project. In the latter case, it may not be possible to comply with the community consultation requirement in relation to such an assessment.

4.2 Our Recommendation

We recommend the policy be reworded, in a manner similar to the EIA Directive requirement for cumulative impact assessment.

Proposed addition to ORE Policy 9:

"Visualisation assessments must demonstrate consultation with communities that may be able to view the proposal and any other ORE development, which has received development consents to proceed, at a given site at the time the consent application is made, with the aim of minimising impact."

5.0 SEA Requirements

Ensuring proposals for development take proper account of the impact on landscape and seascape is a critical part of sustainable development. All offshore wind projects are required to demonstrate how they can avoid, minimise or mitigate significant adverse seascape and landscape impacts through an Environmental Impact Assessment which will also take into account cumulative impacts.

5.1 The Challenge – Seascape and Landscape

We understand that the Marine Institute is undertaking work on the methodology and identification of preliminary/draft Seascape Character Types and Seascape Character Area at a national and regional level to inform Ireland's approach to marine spatial planning as well as contribute to Ireland's National Landscape Strategy 2015-2020. This is an important piece of work. A consistent approach to the classification of landscape and seascape is required to ensure developers can bring forward projects with certainty.

It should be noted that the location of potential offshore wind projects in Ireland may vary in terms of proximity to the Irish shoreline. Due to the existing geological and bathymetric conditions around Ireland fixed bottom offshore wind infrastructure will be located closer to the shoreline. This is in keeping with the development of marine wind infrastructure across the globe with projects located at varying distances from the coastline in both nearshore and offshore environments. Proximity to shore will be particularly important when considering impacts associated with seascape and landscape. Wind farm design will be cognisant of this element and the impact of any potential development on the coastal environment will be thoroughly assessed in an EIA with appropriate mitigation measures applied where necessary. Commercial scale offshore wind farms will be new for coastal communities in Ireland. Their potential impact on existing landscape will therefore need to be handled carefully.

5.2 Our Recommendation

Balancing the public benefits of offshore wind projects and the importance of the contribution of offshore wind farm development in achieving national targets relating to climate change with the potential impact on seascape and landscape is critical. We welcome the intention of DHPLG to issue guidance to Consent Authorities on how public benefits and significant impacts are to be balanced.

5.3 The Challenge – potential issues for plan implementation

The NMPF SEA report presents a specific Climatic Factors SEA Objective, which is: *“to minimise emissions of greenhouse gases”*. With all such plans and subsequent objectives, there are potential issues that may impact its implementation. Outlined within this submission are several potential issues IWEA have highlighted which may impact the implementation of the NMPF, particularly the ORE policies and the above climatic factor objective.

5.4 Our Recommendation

While it is noted that the SEA report outlines certain monitoring requirements and remedial actions, we ask that the DHPLG take into consideration the potential issues highlighted within this submission and ask that the recommendations presented here are reflected within the NMPF and indeed in its timely implementation.

6.0 Natura Impact Statement and AA Screening Report

It is suggested in the AA Screening Report and the NIS that there is potential for offshore wind to have both positive and negative effects on the protection and conservation of designated sites.

6.1 The Challenge – Offshore Wind and Habitat Conservation

While it is acknowledged that the construction of offshore wind farms is identified as having the potential to create permanent and/or temporary habitat loss or fragmentation, it is also noted that areas of proposed developments will be assessed in accordance with the EIA and Habitats Directives.

With the exception of the seven turbines installed on the Arklow Bank, offshore wind development in Ireland is in its infancy. However, there are well developed industries across Europe that Ireland can look to with respect to best practice measures across a broad range of areas including the environmental impacts of windfarm development.

6.2 Our Recommendation

The development of offshore wind has the potential to create positive and negative impacts on the conservation of designated sites around Ireland. While it is noted in the NIS that each individual offshore wind project will be subject to a case-by-case site specific AA, we believe that further emphasis and investigation should be put into identifying the potential positive effects of offshore projects that have been seen in other jurisdictions on designated sites.

We believe that there should be further investigation of the potential conservation benefits offshore wind developments may have on designated EU sites. There is also significant potential for co-existence between offshore activities, in particular fisheries.

IWEA supports early and ongoing engagement between industry, the consenting authorities and key stakeholders including both statutory, such as National Parks and Wildlife Service and NGOs such as Bird Watch Ireland in relation to the development of up to date guidelines for windfarm development. However, any delay to the implementation of marine planning guidelines must not be allowed to delay the submission of applications to the consenting authority. In the absence of statutory marine planning guidelines best practice and industry standards should be applied to ensure a robust EIA and AA process.

7.0 Stakeholder Engagement

Developing relationships with communities and all marine stakeholders through effective engagement is a fundamental part of IWEA's approach to developing infrastructure.

We believe that responsible development and genuine community engagement are pre-requisites if the offshore wind energy industry is to be successful and if Ireland is going to achieve its transition to a low-carbon society. IWEA is currently partnered on a SEAI research project focussed upon community engagement best practice for offshore wind energy

How the public and other key stakeholders perceive offshore wind energy will be a key part of this engagement.

IWEA is liaising closely with the Eirwind project in MAREI, UCC, on the dissemination of their research results. Eirwind is a MaREI Centre's (UCC) industry-led collaborative research project in co-designing the opportunity around the sustainable development of Ireland's marine resources, using offshore wind as the catalyst for innovation and impact. The project utilises the concepts of Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) where relevant, including interactive use of advanced data-analysis, strategic planning, Irish marine and renewable energy policy initiatives and stakeholder management. Work Package 4: Governance Deliverable 4.7 Public Perception Report ² focusses on the public perception of offshore wind in Ireland. The Eirwind study results appear positive towards offshore wind in Ireland supporting the need for the timely deployment of offshore wind projects in Ireland. Some key highlights from the study include:

- 87% of respondents would facilitate development of an offshore wind farm in their locality, either through active support or not objecting
- 93% of respondents would facilitate development of an offshore wind farm outside of their locality, either through active support or not objecting
- 65% of respondents believed that Ireland is too reliant on foreign energy
- 78% of those who took part in the survey believed or believed strongly that generating electricity from offshore wind farms would make a difference to Ireland's carbon emissions
- 63% of respondents believed that the government is not doing enough to reduce carbon emissions
- 71% believing that the Irish Government should invest in offshore wind farms with 10% believed that the Irish Government should not invest in renewable energy
- 63% of contributors believed that offshore wind farms could create jobs in the surrounding area
- 60% of those who answered shared the opinion that seeing offshore wind turbines made them feel that they were helping to stall climate change

IWEA is fully supportive of extensive public and stakeholder engagement for the NMPF led by the MSP team in DHPLG. IWEA is represented on the NMPF Stakeholder Advisory Group (previously the MSP

² Cronin, Y., Cummins, V. Co-designing opportunities towards the development of Irish offshore wind - Work Package 4: Governance Deliverable 4.7 Public Perception Report – Part 2, Eirwind, MaREI, UCC

Advisory Group) and has contributed to this formal mechanism established to facilitate participation from the relevant stakeholder groups that exist for the marine space.

Separately IWEA has welcomed direct engagement with DHPLG on the development of both ORE specific and overarching marine planning policies for the NMPF to date. We have found this process to be constructive and wish to continue with these channels of engagement as the plan progresses.

IWEA is supportive of the information sessions that have been held throughout the consultation process for the Baseline Report and the draft NMPF, the latter of which included sector specific information sessions allowing IWEA the opportunity to present on the future of the offshore wind industry and how the NMPF and wider planning / consenting process will facilitate this. Similar to IWEA's direct engagements with DHPLG on marine planning policies, we would welcome the opportunity for further direct engagement on the offshore wind industry's concerns and recommendations set out in our presentation at the NMPF information session on 12 February 2020 and which are expanded upon in greater detail within the body of this consultation response.

IWEA welcomes the ten policy actions and enablers identified in the Offshore Renewable Energy Development Plan (OREDP). These policy actions remain valid for the NMPF. However, we have concerns about these actions being progressed by the Offshore Renewable Energy Steering Group (ORESG), as proposed in the draft NMPF. As a representative on this steering group, IWEA is concerned that these meetings did not happen within 2019 and recommend that this forum be reprioritised and / or repurposed to prevent delay and ensure progress of these policies that are key to the development of the sector.

7.1 The Challenge – Definition of community

IWEA fully supports the guiding principles for a marine planning system outlined within the Marine Planning Policy Statement published in October 2019. These overarching policies and principles of transparency, public engagement, governance, environmental assessment, climate action and socio-economic benefit are key to an informed marine spatial plan and to the success of offshore wind energy development in Ireland.

As part of this initiative, IWEA will work with all stakeholders to develop initiatives and conversations that support community engagement. IWEA is committed to working nationally with the Government on the design and implementation of best practice in relation to community engagement. However, it should be noted that there is currently no agreed definition of the 'community' as it applies to the development of offshore wind energy. This term is used frequently in referring to the group of people with whom a project should engage with and it is also central to identifying the group of people who would be entitled to various forms of community benefit.

IWEA fully supports Fisheries Policies as set out in Section 5 of the policy and would also welcome the establishment of guidance similar to the FLOWW (Fishing Liaison with Offshore Wind and Wet Renewables Group) UK guidance to foster good relations between the fishing and offshore renewable energy sectors and encourage co-existence of the industries .

7.2 Our Recommendation – Definition of Community

IWEA believes that DCCAE and DHPLG should work with industry to come up with a working definition of ‘community’. This definition should be flexible as the concept of a project’s ‘community’ can vary depending on the individual circumstances of each project but some form of common principle, guidelines or terminology should be developed.

IWEA will work closely with State bodies in taking public interest in EU and international obligations regarding the protection of the marine environment. As offshore wind will be a key tool in the fight against climate change it is imperative that the wind industry works closely with the members of the public, State bodies, environmental networks and NGOs and Fisheries to ensure offshore wind energy is developed sustainably and transparently.

Section 11.11 of the draft NMPF highlights ORE as central to a long-term vision in transitioning the energy sector to a low-carbon system and the importance of an inclusive process of engagement and consensus building with local communities and the wider society. IWEA supports this and learnings from the experiences of the consenting processes for existing international ORE developments and from developers operating within the Irish market who have experience of consenting processes in neighbouring jurisdictions will be key to creating a fair, transparent and effective method of project delivery.

7.3 The Challenge – Supply Chain

IWEA welcomes the acknowledgement in section 11.16 of the draft NMPF of the positive socio-economic benefits that offshore renewable energy can bring to coastal communities. We are enthusiastic about the possibilities of working with Government departments such as DHPLG, DCCAE, DBEI and DAT to ensure that communities see long-term benefits from the development of offshore wind energy.

We are also conscious that the marine environment is one that is shared. Other individuals and groups use it for commercial, leisure and/ or social activities. Birds and other wildlife call it home. Early and effective engagement with these stakeholders and the organisations that represent them or act on their behalf must be central to ensuring sustainable marine development. IWEA has already commenced this work but we are conscious of our responsibility – our obligation – to expand these efforts.

The publication of the draft NMPF is a key step in indicating to investors that Ireland’s marine space is one in which there is a space to establish Ireland as a world leader in ORE development. It should be highlighted that Ireland will be competing with other countries in a global supply chain where there are limits on the number of specialist vessels and skilled workers available to develop offshore projects. Without clear regulatory certainty we are at risk of losing the supply chain to more mature or streamlined markets.

7.4 Our recommendation – Supply Chain

Delivering just the 3.5 GW of offshore wind energy required under the Climate Action Plan will require significant investment, create thousands of jobs in planning, development and construction and hundreds of long-term jobs in operations and maintenance. IWEA would like to continue working closely with Government departments and supporting agencies to harness the global supply chain and create a domestic one to deliver this energy transition.

IWEA recently commissioned a report by the Carbon Trust on the offshore wind supply chain in Ireland, *Harnessing Our Potential, investment and jobs in Irelands offshore wind industry*, which sets out dozens of recommendations for the required initiatives key to a successful offshore wind industry in Ireland. The most urgent of which are:

- First, strategic investment driven by the Government or the private sector must be directed into one or more Irish ports to take advantage of the commercial opportunity of delivering 3.5GW of offshore wind by 2030. This report includes a detailed analysis of the suitability of 16 ports around Ireland to support the development of offshore wind farms and to provide operations and maintenance services.
- Then, Government must bring together industry, ports and local communities to develop offshore wind enterprise zones. These should be located around those ports identified as suitable to support offshore wind energy projects and must serve as hubs to attract international investment and create links to Irish businesses and suppliers.
- Next, Enterprise Ireland should be supported to continue its excellent work to date on developing offshore wind clusters for Irish companies. This would enable those businesses to develop their resources and capacity to a point where they can not only support the development of offshore wind domestically but also compete effectively in the European and even global markets.
- Finally, Ireland must address the skills shortage faced in trying to maximise local employment opportunities. The Government must coordinate the work of schools and universities, existing training bodies and skills development programmes, to identify the most cost-effective ways to eliminate the skills gap. Central to this must be the development of specialist marine apprenticeship schemes and working with academic institutions to develop a skills development plan for offshore wind.

8.0 Linkage to Terrestrial Planning

As has been clearly set out in Section 2.2, it is expected that the process for preparation of the NMPF is fully aligned with the arrangements for the National Planning Framework. It is envisaged that the NMPF is a parallel document to the National Planning Framework and IWEA endorses and fully supports the intention, as set out in Section 2.37, that national, regional and local terrestrial plans will be required to be consistent with the NMPF under the Planning and Development Act, 2018.

Specifically, as outlined in Section 21.4 of the NMPF, the statutory provision under Part 5 of the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act, 2018 includes the requirement that *‘the objectives of the NMPF must be supported and implemented by all public bodies that have a role in making policies, plans or programmes relevant to the maritime area.’*

8.1 The Challenge – Alignment and consistency between land and marine policies

It is critical that terrestrial land-use planning policies and plans developed by local planning authorities are consistent with the NMPF. Policies concerning coastal infrastructure provision, port/harbour development, coastal amenity development and protection as well as land-use zoning need to be developed with a clear understanding of the locations of, and opportunities provided by, the intended offshore wind development sites. These sites are specifically identified in the figure **Marine Renewable Energy and Infrastructure** on page 125 of the NMPF and in future designated zones envisaged under the process set out in the *Marine Planning and Development Management Bill*.

Equally terrestrial plan-making authorities need to have due regard to the potential need for new/upgraded local electricity transmission infrastructure to facilitate the connection of new offshore wind energy development sites.

8.2 Our Recommendation

IWEA welcomes the proposal for a single development consent application for both the land and marine based elements of an offshore wind farm project as envisaged under the *MPDM* and believes that this approach will ensure that any EIA undertaken will be more resilient and robust.

IWEA recommends EirGrid should work closely with DHPLG and local authorities on the requirement for county and Local Area Plans to consider suitable land banks for zoning for electricity infrastructure and in particular adjacent to existing infrastructure.

Innovation in thinking however must be brought to the development consenting process due to the rapid changes in turbine technology which are bringing down the costs of renewable energy across Europe. Fixed numbers, locations and heights of turbines within a development site limit the ability of a developer to use the latest technology which may be available to the market at the construction stage – this is a result of the duration of the development consent application, preparation and decision-making processes, which unfortunately have proven lengthy in numerous cases historically.

The 'Rochdale Envelope' approach is employed where the nature of the proposed development means that some details of the whole project have not been confirmed (for instance the precise dimensions of structures) when the application is submitted, and flexibility is sought to address any uncertainty. Such an approach has been used under other consenting regimes including development consent order applications for offshore wind projects (such as the Town and Country Planning Act, 1990 and the Electricity Act, 1989) in the United Kingdom in circumstances where applications are made at a time when the details of a project have not yet been fully resolved. This approach can be applied whilst still achieving assessment obligations under the EIA and Birds and Habitats Directives.

IWEA recommends the application of a 'Rochdale Envelope' model of consenting for projects as a policy objective.

9.0 Regulatory Resources and Expertise

Section 3.8 of the NMPF states, “This Environment section of the NMPF intends to help realise the opportunities Ireland has to continually improve its marine and coastal environment. However, it should be recognised that in relation to policy related to management of marine Environment matters, that the NMPF is but one part”. IWEA also recognise this challenge and would agree and emphasise the point made in section 2.40, “decisions on applications for consent should not be delayed in anticipation of plans being adopted for the first time”. This is of particular note for the ‘Relevant Projects’.

It is essential that regulatory resourcing is ensured to deliver investment and Ireland’s climate action commitments. As consenting is the first step in the offshore wind project lifecycle, it is imperative that support is established if current and future offshore renewable energy projects are to be successful.

~12 GW of Irish offshore wind project capacity is at risk without the provision of increased and revised regulatory resources according to a recent report by *The Carbon Trust, Harnessing our potential*³. To deliver future ambition for Irish offshore wind, increased regulatory resources are required to:

- Ensure sustainable and timely project delivery;
- Find solutions for strategic deployment challenges; and
- Ensure deployment is supported by an effective and efficient regulatory process.

9.1 The Challenge – Resources

Government Departments (for example, DHPLG and DCCA) and Government agencies (for example ABP MI, NPWS, SEAI and GSI) are under-resourced to effectively support the delivery of at least 3.5 GW by 2030. Critical issues for all phases of project development include:

- Recruitment and retention of technically competent and experienced staff; and
- Appropriate licensing charges for industry (to be determined in regulations to support the MPDM Bill).

9.2 Our Recommendation

Industry would like to work with the Government to identify the resources required by the relevant statutory bodies to facilitate the development of the predicted volume of projects and ensure that these are put in place before the end of Q3 2020.

IWEA also makes the following recommendations:

- Resource provision within these timeframes is also required to support deployment post-2030 (some of the projects in the pipeline may not be operational by 2030 but these still require resource support e.g. future projects) and is even more critical if ambitions are extended beyond 3.5 GW by 2030.

³The Carbon Trust, *Harnessing our potential*, Investment and jobs in Ireland’s offshore wind industry, March 2020

- Addition of senior strategic resources to be considered. Loss of strategic oversight hinders ability to work through complex issues before they become specific project problems and restricts linking overall Government aims for offshore wind and conservation ambitions.

9.3 The Challenge - Marine Protected Areas Policy 4

Section 3 of the draft NMPF states that “Until the ecological coherence of the marine protected area network is confirmed, proposals should demonstrate that they will, in order of preference: (a) avoid, (b) minimise, or (c) mitigate adverse impacts on features that may be required to complete the network, or (d) if it is not possible to mitigate adverse impacts, proposals should state the case for proceeding.”

This policy can be interpreted as having a very broad scope which we believe requires clarification and refining to allow offshore wind farm development. As it currently reads, this policy could be interpreted as meaning that until the number and boundaries of marine protected areas are finalised, a proposal would have to demonstrate that it will not have an effect on any feature, habitat or species which could possibly be required to complete the network. These features could include any habitat or any species at any location in the Irish marine area.

9.4 Our Recommendation

IWEA propose amending Marine Protected Areas Policy 4 as follows:

“Until the ecological coherence of the marine protected area network is confirmed, proposals should identify, by consultation with the competent authority with responsibility for designating such areas, the features, under consideration at the time the application is made, that may be required to complete the network. The proposals should demonstrate that they will, in order of preference: (a) avoid, (b) minimise, or (c) mitigate adverse impacts on such features, or (d) if it is not possible to mitigate adverse impacts, proposals should state the case for proceeding.”

10.0 Zoning / Spatial Designation

ORE Policy 2: *“Preference will be given to proposals for offshore wind farms, including relevant enabling projects and infrastructure, in areas identified as designated zones for offshore wind, under the zoning process set out in the Marine Planning and Development Management Act”.*

The NMPF reiterates that the process of zoning will be carried out through the MPDM Bill. IWEA welcomes the opportunity for offshore wind to be given a specific designation or zone under the proposed zonal designation process under the MPDM Bill (high-level detail of which is set out in Appendix D of the NMPF).

10.1 The Challenge – Zoning Approach

IWEA have concerns that if the State adopts a narrow or rigid approach to zoning, whereby sub-optimal zones are identified, there is a real risk that sites will ultimately not be cost-efficient or deliverable for developers. Significant up-front analysis is invested by developers, at considerable expense, to identify suitable sites for offshore wind projects, e.g. wind resource, seabed analysis, ecology studies etc, and these assessments will change over time as new technology emerges. As any such zonal designation process will likely be lengthy (we note that a public consultation process will be involved, and full environmental assessments must be carried out) this may result in further delays for the delivery of the ‘Relevant Projects’.

10.2 Our Recommendation

We believe the hybrid approach involving zoning for specific activities is sensible. The General Scheme of the MPDM Bill provides the Minister with powers to establish Strategic Marine Activity Zones (SMAZ). The SMAZ represents a prescriptive mechanism to support offshore wind development but it is important to recognise that there will be other very suitable areas outside of these zones. Other pathways to development should be facilitated. In order to establish a zone, the Minister will need to prepare a draft marine planning scheme which would be subject to public consultation. It is essential that the Government’s approach be developed carefully, drawing on the best scientific data, evidence base and extensive consultation with, and participation by, all relevant stakeholders.

An inadvertently rigid approach to zoning could stifle the ability of Ireland’s offshore renewables industry to develop. Spatial designations should also take account of areas already identified in the Offshore Renewable Energy Development Plan (OREDPA) as being suitable for offshore wind development such as the East Coast (North), East Coast (South) and South Coast. Developers have already identified sites on the basis of the signal provided in the OREDPA. It is critical that spatial designations take account of areas already identified in the OREDPA as this is essential if the target of 3.5 GW is to be delivered by 2030. Ireland’s approach to zoning needs to be developed carefully. The ‘Relevant Projects’ should not be delayed by a new zoning process. The designations as outlined in the OREDPA identifies suitable areas that can be progressed as part of the ‘Relevant Projects’ as this is essential if the target of 3.5 GW is to be delivered by 2030.

A robust socio-economic assessment of the proposed zones is required to ensure the most optimal areas are identified. It is also important that offshore wind is prioritised when carrying out the zonal designation process under the MPDM Bill.

10.3 The Challenge – competing industries and zoning

As noted in the draft NMPF, there may be direct competition for space between offshore wind projects and industries such as marine aggregates and mining. It is specifically mentioned that there are areas along the east coast of Ireland that provide opportunities for both marine aggregates and offshore wind energy projects. This will result in competing industries looking to utilise such areas. We believe that certain criteria need to be put in place around this. The NMPF states that preference will be given to offshore wind in specific zones but fails to clarify how preferences will be treated when it comes to other interests or industries.

10.4 Our Recommendation

IWEA recommend that specific activities are clearly defined in the zoning approach employed within the NMPF and the MPDM Bill. There are a number of areas in the MPDM Bill that require consideration in order to ensure the process for designating zones works effectively including the planning interest application process and how this will be managed, the rights associated with a planning interest and its duration.

11.0 Conclusion

While IWEA welcomes the publication of the draft NMPF, IWEA have identified several key challenges which we would like to bring to the attention of the DHPLG. We hope that the above comments and recommendations are considered and reflected in the final publication of the NMPF.