



Wind Energy Ireland Opening Statement to the Joint Committee on Enterprise, Trade and Employment

On behalf of Wind Energy Ireland I would like to thank the chairperson and the committee for the opportunity to join you this morning.

I am joined by my colleagues, Justin Moran, Director of External Affairs, Vanessa O'Connell, Head of Inis Offshore Wind and Vice-Chairperson of our Offshore Supply-Chain Working Group, and Kieran Ivers, CEO of Green Rebel.

Wind Energy Ireland represents the Irish wind industry, working to promote wind energy as an essential part of our low-carbon energy future.

It is important to emphasise we represent the whole supply-chain. As you might expect, our members manufacture turbines, develop projects and operate wind farms.

But they also include Irish engineering, transport, surveying and planning companies. Together, our industry employs approximately 6,000 people.

For us, it is not enough that we develop the 5,000 MW of offshore wind energy set out in the Climate Action Plan and the even greater potential in the deeper waters off our south and west coasts.

We want to see Irish wind farms creating jobs in Ireland, supporting Irish businesses, providing training and education opportunities for Irish workers, and growing a thriving new industry.

I would like to begin by briefly telling you the story of two countries – Ireland and Scotland.

Ireland's only existing offshore wind farm, Arklow Bank, became operational in 2004, nearly two decades ago. It consists of seven wind turbines and, at the time, it was one of the largest offshore wind farms in Europe.

It was the first time a wind turbine with a generating capacity of 3 MW was ever installed anywhere in the world and it is still operating today.

I would ask members to consider this for a moment; at one time Ireland was at the cutting edge of offshore wind energy. And then we stopped.

It was a full three more years before the first Scottish offshore wind farm started generating electricity. But Scotland did not stop.

As of 2019 there were 4,700 people employed in Scotland's offshore wind sector and it contributed nearly a billion pounds sterling to the Scottish economy.

Today, there is almost 2,000 MW of offshore wind operational in Scotland and another 8,400 MW in construction or advanced development. It is no surprise that in 2020 renewable energy provided 97 per cent of Scotland's power.



Put simply, in the 2000s, we did not take advantage of an enormous opportunity and I am here today to ask for the support of committee members to ensure we do not make the same mistake.

With climate change and the crisis in Ukraine there is an even more urgent responsibility to transform our energy system to one that is clean, secure and equitable, while protecting our marine environment and securing the confidence of fishing and coastal communities.

Offshore wind will deliver greater energy security. It is the key to our energy independence.

And with the right approach, with Government, industry and coastal communities working together, we can build a whole new industrial sector, supporting regional development, creating thousands of jobs and driving sustainable growth.

Other European countries, like Poland and Britain, have put in place an industrial strategy and a 'Sector Deal' between the domestic offshore industry and those governments. These bring together the offshore renewables industry, the relevant State agencies and Government departments to maximise the value of the industry domestically for clean growth which includes a strong focus on building the domestic supply-chain.

We want a Sector Deal for Ireland.

First, however, we need to ensure our port infrastructure is ready.

Investment in ports

In May 2020 we published [Harnessing Our Potential](#), produced by the Carbon Trust a leading UK-based consultancy, which is still the most comprehensive analysis to date of Ireland's offshore supply-chain potential. It included a thorough examination of Irish ports and harbours.

Ports have two key roles in supporting offshore wind energy. They can serve as an operations and maintenance base for an offshore wind farm and then larger ports, with extensive infrastructure, can provide construction or marshalling services.

Several Irish harbours are suitable as operations and maintenance bases and committee members may be aware that two of our members – Codling Wind Park and SSE with their Arklow Bank Wind Farm – have already announced that, if their projects are successful, they will use Wicklow and Arklow harbours respectively as their bases.

Each base translates to approximately 80 full-time jobs and is normally accompanied by extensive investment in local services and port infrastructure.

However, when it comes to construction and marshalling services, at present, only a single port on the island of Ireland – Belfast Harbour – can do this. While the facilities at Belfast are first-class we will need much more. We cannot deliver our offshore energy ambitions from a single port.

It is important for committee members to appreciate that if projects cannot find suitable available ports in Ireland they can, and will, build from ports on the west coast of Britain, from France and even from the Netherlands. Some of these ports are already engaging with our projects. Irish wind farms could create jobs in Cherbourg and support businesses in Rotterdam.

As we stated in May 2020, strategic investment must be directed urgently into Irish ports to enable them to build the infrastructure needed to support the construction of offshore wind energy.

We are currently carrying out a new analysis of existing port infrastructure and the expansion plans to meet the needs of offshore renewables that a number of these ports are bringing forward. We will complete this over the summer and I look forward to sharing it with you all.

The Skills Gap

As well as an infrastructure gap, we face a skills gap.

We will, for example, need hundreds of new wind turbine technicians. Right now, with the support of Skillnet Ireland, we are training about 10-20 every year with our partners in Green Tech Skillnet. In addition, a turbine technician apprenticeship programme in Kerry is awaiting validation, but this will not be enough.

Already we are seeing our members and State bodies struggling to recruit ecologists, marine biologists and planners. We will need literally thousands of civil, electrical and marine engineers.

Speaking to colleagues from the British and Scottish offshore wind energy industry at an Enterprise Ireland event last week I was struck by how they too were identifying the shortage in skills and personnel as one of their most significant challenges.

Last year the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs published the [Skills for Zero Carbon report](#) and I would like to highlight just a small number of their recommendations:

- Coordinate planning for training within the renewable energy sector through partnerships between Government, industry and training providers;
- Prioritise training for jobs in renewable energy which are set to be in high demand including marine planners, turbine technicians, hydrogen specialists and other technical roles;
- Expand existing maritime training to meet demand from the offshore energy sector; and
- Engage with the fishing community to give people with experience working at sea the option to transfer into the offshore wind sector.

The report concluded by saying:

Given the urgency of meeting Ireland's climate action goals, it is crucial that these recommendations are prioritised...centrally driven by Government, through a High-Level Implementation Group, working in close collaboration with industry and the education and training system.



We fully endorse this report and would urge the Committee to support the establishment of this implementation group as quickly as possible.

Progress to date

It is important to acknowledge several significant recent positive initiatives taken by the Government.

Late last year the Department of Transport published an [updated Policy Statement](#) setting out a strategy for commercial ports to facilitate offshore renewable energy.

It also worked successfully with other EU member states to amend the Connecting Europe Fund criteria to allow EU funding of port infrastructure for offshore wind. This has enabled some Irish ports to apply for that funding to expand for servicing offshore wind energy, but not all.

The department has also established a Port Co-ordination Group to discuss issues around port infrastructure; however, at present, the group includes no representation from the offshore wind industry and we believe that is a missed opportunity.

We would also like to welcome the establishment of the cross-departmental Offshore Wind Delivery Task Force which will include a focus on supply-chain issues.

Our industry would welcome the opportunity to join this task-force, to work together to ensure that there is a determined focus on maximising the economic benefits of offshore wind energy to Ireland.

Finally, I would like to particularly commend the efforts of Enterprise Ireland which last week launched an Irish offshore wind supply-chain cluster – the Gael Offshore Network – which consists of over 65 Irish companies including many of our members.

Irish businesses are already getting ready for Ireland's offshore renewable potential and some are starting to compete internationally.

We have enough offshore wind to power our country and export energy as both electricity and green hydrogen. The need is there. The potential is there.

If Irish ports and businesses are not able to take advantage of this opportunity, there is no doubt others will step in. The chance to develop a skills base, and an industry, that can compete internationally in a rapidly growing global renewable energy market will be lost.

This is the time for Ireland to seize the opportunity, to bring together industry, policymakers and communities to ensure these multi-billion-euro investments in zero-carbon generation create thousands of skilled jobs at home and regenerate coastal communities right around the island.

We need to unite industry, Government, the relevant State agencies and our fishing and coastal communities behind a shared vision for true energy independence and the creation of a thriving offshore renewable energy industry.

ENDS