



Twelve months to deliver offshore wind energy





Introduction

The Irish Government's plans for offshore wind energy are at serious risk.

Last year Wind Energy Ireland, supported by international expertise from some of the world's most advanced offshore renewable energy markets, published *Building Offshore Wind*.

It set out the best path to reaching the objective set in the Programme for Government of 5,000 MW of offshore wind by 2030.

The report identified the key technical and policy blockages that are impeding development, and identified what needed to be done, by whom and by when.

None of these targets have been, or will be, met.

We must acknowledge that over the previous 18 months our Government has had to deal with an unprecedented healthcare crisis and to coordinate our response to a global pandemic.

It is also true that in many cases the relevant Government departments and State agencies responsible for enabling the development of offshore wind energy were – and in some cases remain – chronically short of staff and resources.

There has been progress. The National Marine Planning Framework is complete. The Maritime Area Planning Bill has been published and is clearly the Government's top legislative priority. The model for our offshore electricity grid has been identified.

But this does not change the fact that we are losing time and that, today, we are less likely to hit our 2030 target than we were when the original Climate Action Plan was published.

We can – and will – develop offshore wind farms before the end of the decade.

But whether we will develop enough to meet our 5,000 MW by 2030 target, to cut carbon emissions in the energy sector to under 4 million tonnes, depends on what our political leaders – **both in Government and in Opposition** – do in the next 12 months.



Seven urgent actions for the next twelve months

Time is running out. To ensure we can develop the projects needed to meet the ambition set in the Programme for Government of 5,000 MW of offshore wind energy these seven actions must be delivered within the next 12 months.

FORESHORE LICENCES

Foreshore Licence applications must be processed as quickly as possible. Delays cannot be allowed to continue. It is crucial that, by Q1 2022, enough projects have Foreshore Licences to ensure we can reach 5,000 MW.

RESOURCES

Developing 5,000 MW of offshore wind energy by the end of 2030 will place an enormous burden on the relevant Government departments, An Bord Pleanála, NPWS, EirGrid, ESB Networks and the CRU. They must be properly funded in the coming budget.

RENEWABLE ELECTRICITY SUPPORT SCHEME (RESS)

A firm commitment on the date for the first auction must be communicated as soon as possible. We need clarity on the timeline for further auctions and how we can include a preference category to support floating wind energy.

MARITIME AREA PLANNING BILL

This must be passed before the end of 2021 and amended to ensure Phase Two projects can get a Maritime Area Consent (MAC) next year. All projects must be enabled to adopt a flexible design so the best – and most cost-effective – technology can be used, to retain their MACs and to re-apply for planning permission if initially unsuccessful, and to carry out surveys beyond the 12 nautical mile limit.

OFFSHORE GRID

An Offshore Grid Steering Committee must be set up to bring together industry, EirGrid, the CRU and DECC to ensure the successful implementation of the new offshore grid model, to develop technical offshore grid standards and to rapidly process grid offers. Successful implementation will include regular engagement with EirGrid for projects and providing developers with comprehensive technical specifications for offshore equipment.

A STRONGER GRID

The Irish electricity grid is not currently strong enough to accommodate 5,000 MW of offshore wind energy. EirGrid's grid development strategy, due before the end of the year, must have strong political and public support right across Irish society. It will be a litmus test, identifying those who are committed to tackling climate change and those prepared only to talk about it.

IRISH SUPPLY CHAIN

It is now more than likely that the first new offshore wind farms will be built from ports outside of the State. Time has nearly run out. Strategic investment must be directed into an east coast port before the end of the year. A south or west coast port must soon be identified for future projects, including floating wind energy.



Tracking progress on offshore wind energy

Last year, Wind Energy Ireland published [Building Offshore Wind](#), setting out a series of eight policy recommendations and deadlines which provided the best and fastest route to developing 5 GW of offshore wind energy by 2030.

Below, we review progress to date on each of these actions.

1. Ensure sufficient resources are available to issue foreshore licences for all projects that can deliver pre-2030 by Q4 2021.

Status Red: Target will be missed. Urgent action needed.

Immediate Government action is needed to fix the Foreshore Licence system.

Licences have not been granted to all of the Phase One projects yet, and the majority of potential Phase Two projects are also awaiting licences – some for more than two years. Such delays at this early stage cannot continue. If more resources are needed, they should be provided.

2. Conclude National Marine Planning Framework by Q4 2020.

Status Orange: Target delivered, but later than expected.

The NMPF was approved by Cabinet in March this year and officially launched on 1 July, 'Marine Planning Day'.

While late, the publication of Ireland's first Marine Spatial Plan is an important step in delivering a robust consenting regime for the maritime area and those involved in delivering this important policy should be commended.

3. Enact the Maritime Area Planning (MAP) Bill by Q1 2021.

Status Orange: Target missed, but significant progress has been made.

The commitment in the Programme for Government to have enacted the Maritime Area Planning Bill by Q1 2021 was not met.

However, the final version of the Bill was published in August and it is clear that the Government is treating it as their top legislative priority for the rest of the year.

It must be delivered by the end of 2021, with supporting secondary legislation brought forward as quickly as possible.



4. Add at least 10 new people to An Bord Pleanála with appropriate skillsets for offshore wind & begin engaging with offshore projects by Q4 2020.

Status Orange: Target missed, but there has been progress.

The delivery of 5,000 MW of offshore wind energy by the end of 2030 will require An Bord Pleanála to process numerous applications for offshore wind farms in a very short space of time. The size and complexity of these projects is completely different to onshore renewable energy projects.

Demands on ABP and supporting agencies such as NPWS will be significant, and it is crucial that they are sufficiently resourced when projects begin to enter the consent process in early-to-mid 2022.

ABP will soon be establishing a new Marine and Climate team to process offshore wind consent applications. This is an important and welcome announcement. This team must be given the necessary resources and expertise to deal with the pipeline of applications ahead.

5. EirGrid and An Bord Pleanála need to engage with projects from the outset so projects can get a final grid offer and consent for a grid connection within 1.5 years on average after a RESS auction.

Status Orange: Incomplete and additional work now needed.

The designation of EirGrid as the system operator and asset owner of Ireland's offshore electricity transmission system has given rise to several work streams that must be addressed before the first RESS auction and risks adding costs to the development of projects.

EirGrid must immediately increase the level of engagement with the Phase One projects and ensure monthly meetings at individual project level are delivered as WEI recommended in Building Offshore. EirGrid must also begin engaging with post-Phase One projects that will deliver the additional capacity to achieve the 5GW target.

Resources must be made available to EirGrid to ensure that enough offshore wind generators obtain a grid offer and get consent for their grid connection in time to deliver for 2030.

6. Sufficient resources and incentives in PR5 to deliver project grid connections in a timely and cost-effective manner by Q1 2021.

Status Orange: Some progress made.

Following a positive PR5 outcome in late 2020, EirGrid and ESBN must recruit sufficient resources and expertise to support Offshore Programme delivery.

They will need to ensure that any required works at the connection point substation are completed in time for the wind farm connection.



7. First Offshore RESS auction by Q1 2021 with sufficient volumes auctioned by 2025 to meet the 2030 targets.

Status Red: Target missed. Urgent action needed.

The first O-RESS auction, due to take place in 2021 according to the Programme for Government, has been delayed until late 2022 at the earliest. It now appears DECC will only hold two auctions to procure the needed 5,000 MW, instead of the three originally planned.

It is imperative that auctions take place with sufficient volumes and competition to ensure the 5,000 MW can be reached. Industry needs clarity on auction timelines as soon as possible. Plans to include a floating wind preference category should also be outlined soon.

8. EirGrid to publish Power Systems Vision 2030 indicating what is required for 2030, EirGrid & industry to engage on the development of an 'All Island Grid Capacity Forum' by Q4 2020.

Status Orange: Target missed, but there has been progress.

While the target has been missed, EirGrid ran a highly successful public consultation to inform its vision for 2030, Shaping Our Electricity Future, which is expected to be published later this year.

As of yet, there is no sign of progress on the All-Island Grid Capacity Forum and action here would be very positive.

The most significant challenge Ireland faces in achieving its renewable energy goals is strengthening the grid to accommodate higher levels of wind energy.



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