



Building Irish Energy Independence: Priorities for the next Dáil

Wind Energy Ireland General Election Manifesto

www.windenergyireland.com

About Wind Energy Ireland

Wind Energy Ireland represents Ireland's wind energy industry, working to promote wind energy as an essential, economical and environmentally friendly part of the country's low-carbon energy future.

Our 200+ members have come together to plan, build, operate and support the development of the country's chief renewable energy resource.

We create jobs, invest in communities and reduce carbon emissions. We work to end Ireland's dependency on imported fossil fuels and we are leaders in Ireland's response to the climate emergency.





Introduction from Wind Energy Ireland CEO, Noel Cunniffe

Ireland can be a leader in Europe's energy revolution. We have the natural resources, we have the project pipeline and we have the ambition to build a zero-carbon society.

Ireland's wind farms helped avoid 4.2 million tonnes of carbon emissions last year, and nearly €1.3 billion in spending on gas, because they provided over a third of our electricity. Wind energy is the country's cheapest form of renewable energy and essential to ensuring we build a competitive economy.

Over the last few months, we have seen significant progress such as the passing of the Planning and Development Act, the results of the fourth Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS 4) auction, the approval of the South Coast Designated Maritime Area Plan (DMAP) and the launch of the new Offshore Wind Skills Action Plan.

Budget 2025 also saw the Government commit to spending €750 million to upgrade our existing grid infrastructure, while resourcing at key State agencies, including An Bord Pleanála and the National Parks and Wildlife Service, has also increased, both welcome measures.

While there are reasons to be optimistic, we cannot mistake progress for success; the Climate Change Advisory Council (CCAC) said in its Annual Review 2023, that, at the current rate of policy implementation, Ireland will not meet the targets set in the first and second carbon budget periods unless urgent action is taken and emissions begin to fall much more rapidly.

Our planning authorities, at local and national level, lack the resources and the capacity to do the job required of them. Even with the commitment to grid investment, there is still a significant way to go before our grid will be able to accommodate the pipeline of wind and solar projects that are needed to end our dependency on imported fossil fuels.

In the first three quarters of this year, just 291 MW of wind energy projects were granted planning permission when we needed around 1,352 MW to be approved during the same period to help reach our Climate Action Plan of 9,000 MW target by 2030. It is vital that the deployment of onshore renewable energy accelerates in the remaining years of this decade and beyond.

As part of the first stage of developing Ireland's offshore wind resource, six Phase 1 offshore wind projects, both those successful in last May's auction and those pursuing other routes to market, are submitting their planning applications to An Bord Pleanála (ABP).

Delivering all Phase 1 projects safely through the planning system needs to be a national priority.

The scale of the changes required to achieve our energy transition are significant, but this is also a huge opportunity for Ireland.

The good news is that we have the ambition to lead Ireland's efforts to achieve the legally binding reductions in our carbon emissions and achieve its climate targets, as required by the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2021.

And the choices we make in the next General Election will shape our energy future, that of our children and our country. We must harness the potential of Irish wind energy to deliver cleaner power, cheaper power and to lay the foundation for Irish energy independence.



Noel Cunniffe
CEO, Wind Energy Ireland

To succeed, we must choose policies that deliver a long-term sustainable future but also rapid action to:

1. **Create and resource a planning system** that can build a zero-carbon society for Ireland.
2. **Prioritise the development of Ireland's electricity infrastructure** to support the electrification and decarbonisation of our energy system.
3. **Accelerate onshore wind energy** deployment.
4. **Plan for** the long-term potential of **offshore wind energy**.
5. **Support skills development** to build the workforce Ireland will need to decarbonise.
6. **Set Ireland's vision** for the deployment of renewable energy **post 2030**.

Wind Energy Ireland Priorities for General Election

1. Create and resource a planning system that can build a zero-carbon society for Ireland

Ireland's target to generate 80 per cent of our electricity from wind and solar power by the end of 2030 requires an unprecedented effort across the private sector and key State agencies like An Bord Pleanála to deploy renewables in a short number of years.

We have enough renewable energy projects in the pipeline to achieve our 2030 Climate Action Plan targets but we urgently need a planning system that will keep pace with the scale of renewable energy deployment we need.

Extra resources for An Bord Pleanála, the NPWS and other planning bodies are very welcome and we hope to see a continued improvement in decision timelines. **But we are seeing an increase in the number of refusals of projects because of anti-wind County Development plans, where local authorities have changed the zoning of the land to prevent wind farms being built.**

If we are to treat the climate emergency with the seriousness that it merits, the next Government should continue to invest in our planning authorities to ensure they have adequate resources to process applications for renewable energy projects.

Aligning County Development Plans with national policy on climate action is also necessary to ensure that Ireland is in a strong position to cut its carbon emissions and deliver cleaner energy for communities across the country.

The next Government must:

- a) **Implement the new Planning and Development Act** to require all planning authorities to carry out their functions in a manner consistent with Ireland's climate obligations as set out in Section 15 of the Climate Acts.
- b) **Speed-up the planning process for wind energy projects** by ensuring An Bord Pleanála can make decisions in line with the mandatory timelines set out in the new Planning and Development Act.
- c) Finalise the **Wind Energy Development Guidelines**.
- d) **Align County Development Plans with national policy** for onshore wind energy to ensure that national and European climate objectives are prioritised.
- e) **Instruct An Bord Pleanála and all planning authorities to prioritise for decision applications from renewable electricity projects** and supporting technologies such as grid infrastructure and battery storage.
- f) In partnership with An Bord Pleanála and local authorities involved in the environmental assessment of renewable energy, **agree and recruit the number and type of staff** they will need to achieve Ireland's Climate Action Plan targets.
- g) **Fully implement the EU's Renewable Energy Directive III** and support the political ambitions of *REPowerEU* to accelerate renewable energy deployment.

2. Prioritise the development of Ireland's electricity infrastructure to support the electrification and decarbonisation of our energy system

To achieve the level of electrification that is needed to decarbonise our society, the electricity grid must be robust enough to accommodate the increasing volumes of renewable energy on our electricity system.

Electrifying our heat and transportation systems must be a central part of any effort to reduce carbon emissions and eliminate our reliance on imported fossil fuels.

Ireland spends one million euro an hour importing fossil fuels to provide energy while, so far in 2024, over 14 per cent of the power produced by Irish wind farms is lost as the grid is simply not strong enough to accommodate it.

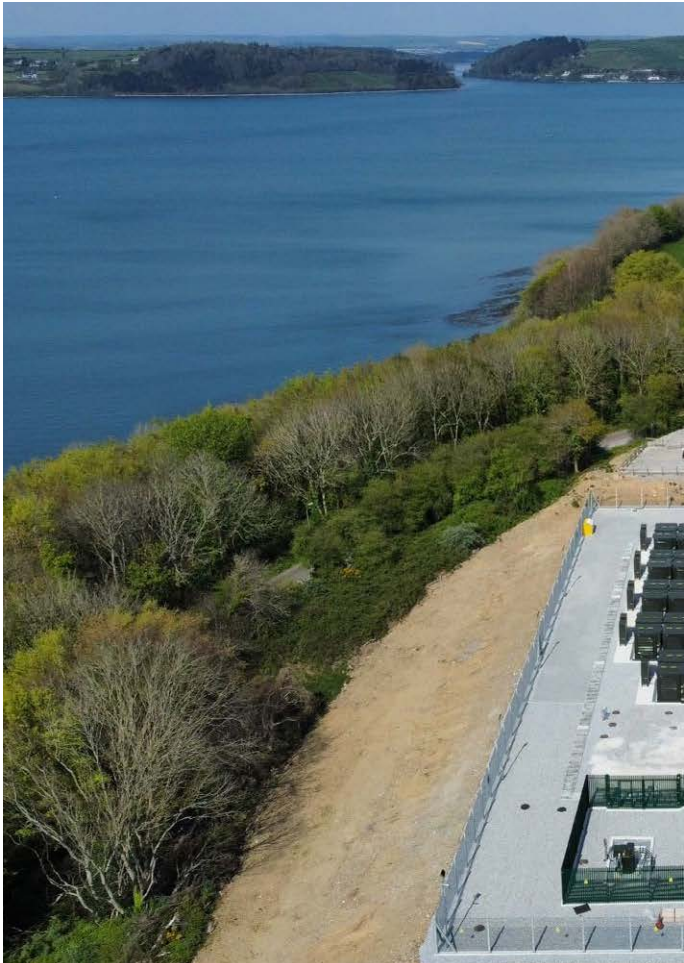
Investing in upgrading our electricity grid infrastructure and increasing our energy storage capacity will maximise Ireland's potential to produce clean electricity and support our transition to a zero-carbon economy.

We know that electricity generated from Irish wind farms replaces imported fossil fuels. The more wind we can get on the electricity grid, the less we rely on imported gas and the more we can cut our carbon emissions and keep that money at home.

While we welcome the recent funding announced by Government in Budget 2025 to reinforce the existing infrastructure, a commitment to proactively supporting EirGrid and ESB Networks to build a much stronger grid should be a key focus in upcoming elections.

The next Government must:

- a) Provide **political support**, at every level, for the reinforcement of our electricity grid as set out in EirGrid's *Shaping Our Electricity Future*. Reinforcing the grid and building new grid must be understood as a national priority on a par with ensuring Ireland has a secure food and water supply.
- b) **Accelerate the construction** of the proposed **North-South Interconnector** and other key grid infrastructure projects to facilitate greater co-operation between Ireland and Northern Ireland under the Single Electricity Market (SEM).
- c) Provide **political support at every level for energy storage** as a key enabler of renewable electricity and a zero-carbon power system.
- d) Implement the **national energy storage strategy** with input from industry to set clear objectives and actions and align stakeholders on delivering these.
- e) Put in place **investment frameworks for long-duration electricity storage**. There is no investment signal today for this and large infrastructure projects require certainty to secure financing.
- f) **Deliver the Private Wires Policy** in line with EU Electricity Directive and support the development of Private Wire projects to meet climate targets, such as facilitation of non grid connected hydrogen production, and further grow the Corporate Power Purchase Agreement (CPPA) market.
- g) Produce an **Electrification Action Plan** to speed up the electrification of heat and transport.
- h) Ensure that funding and financial incentives are in place for key infrastructure e.g., EV charging points, to **facilitate commercial car fleet electrification, industrial and domestic heat electrification and thermal storage**.





3. Accelerate onshore wind energy deployment

Onshore wind energy will save more carbon emissions in this decade than any other technology. It is estimated that Irish wind farms saved approximately 4.2 million tonnes of carbon last year which is roughly equivalent to the amount of carbon produced by 1.9 million cars.

The continuing thriving onshore wind pipeline shows that the Irish wind industry is ready to do even more. At present, there is over 11,000 MW of onshore wind energy projects at various stages of development, all hoping to compete to deliver part of the 4,000 MW additional capacity required to hit our target by 2030.

There is also significant potential in Ireland for repowering old wind farms that are nearing the end of their lifespan.

Analysis by Wind Energy Ireland shows that, by 2025, almost 1,500 MW of today's operational onshore wind generation capacity will be aged 15 years or more. Ireland needs dedicated policies to support the repowering of existing onshore wind assets and further contribute to our renewable energy targets.

The faster we can build and connect onshore wind farms onto the electricity system, the more secure we make Ireland's energy supply, the more money will be returned to people's pockets and our carbon emissions will be reduced.

The next Government must:

- a) **Develop a clear timetable for onshore renewable energy auctions** through to 2030 and extend the duration of contracts in these onshore renewable auctions to 20 years as it is already for offshore wind auctions.
- b) **Provide the Accelerating Renewable Electricity Taskforce** in the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications the same **resources** as its offshore counterpart. Instruct it to develop an action plan for meeting Ireland's 2030 onshore wind target.
- c) **Reduce the length of time** between a project applying for a grid connection and receiving their grid connection offer to a maximum of 9 months.
- d) Prioritise putting in place a policy for the **streamlining of repowering and applications to extend operational life**, including the insertion of a presumption in favour of granting planning permission for such.
- e) Ensure that the **lifetime of planning permissions** for any new onshore wind farm is extended to match the operational lifetime of the grid connection, as set by the CRU, of up to 50 years.
- f) To encourage public support for onshore wind energy make any **payments to near-neighbours** under the Renewable Electricity Support Scheme, or their CPPA equivalent, tax-free.

4. Plan for the long-term potential of offshore wind energy

Momentum is growing behind Ireland's offshore wind energy revolution.

The Irish offshore wind industry reached important milestones in its development with the award of the first Maritime Area Consents under the new Maritime Area Planning Act at the end of 2022 and its first offshore renewable electricity auction (ORESS 1) in April 2023.

We also welcomed the publication by the Government's Offshore Wind Delivery Taskforce of an indicative roadmap near the end of last year, outlining a timetable for Ireland's next offshore wind energy auction (ORESS 2.1).

Beyond 2030, it will be crucial for Ireland to have in place a robust long-term plan for the development of offshore wind which clearly sets out the steps that will be required to meet 2040, and ultimately, 2050 targets. Ireland's long-term ambitions present a wealth of opportunities for both fixed-bottom and floating offshore wind in our vast, deeper waters around the coast of Ireland.

Developing Designated Maritime Area Plans

To develop our offshore wind projects, we need to be able to simultaneously construct multiple offshore wind farms at the same time. The finalisation of Ireland's first Designated Maritime Area Plan (DMAP) for the South Coast earlier this year was a positive development.

Ensuring that DMAPs for the East and West coasts are developed at pace will also be critical, as well as ensuring that the Maritime Area Regulatory Authority (MARA) has the necessary resources to carry out its regulatory function and operate an efficient licensing system to support offshore wind delivery.

Building Port Infrastructure

The development of new ports, or the expansion of existing ones so that they can be used as staging and marshalling facilities for offshore wind projects, also needs to be a national priority.

The recent funding announcement for the Port of Cork to develop its facilities was very welcome. However, funding like this for one port, and the capital that all Irish ports will raise themselves, will not be enough to put in place the infrastructure needed for Ireland to meet our offshore wind goals.

It is vital that industry, Government and key State agencies continue to collaborate to ensure alignment in the development of our ORE sector with efforts to improve and protect marine biodiversity through designation of Marine Protected Areas.

The next Government must:

- a) Ensure that the Maritime Area Regulatory Authority (MARA) has the necessary **resources** to operate an efficient licensing system to support offshore wind delivery.
- b) **Allocate additional resources to the NPWS** to ensure they have the sufficient, and adequately skilled, number of staff resources to support the sustainable development of offshore wind energy.
- c) Agree and allocate the necessary **resources to the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications (DECC)** to enable it to design multiple Designated Maritime Area Plans simultaneously to help speed up the delivery of offshore wind.
- d) **Support the development of Ireland's supply chain** through the implementation of Powering Prosperity – Ireland's Offshore Wind Industrial Strategy.
- e) **Develop a robust long-term plan for the delivery of offshore wind in Ireland** through the ORE Future Framework which will ensure the ongoing progression of fixed-bottom offshore wind, while also creating an enabling step to kick-start floating offshore wind deployment in Ireland.
- f) Publish and pass the **Marine Protected Areas Bill** and give MARA the resources it will need to identify these areas and enforce compliance.
- g) Amend the National Ports Policy to facilitate continued investment in **strategic port development** to facilitate construction and operational phases. This will help to ensure that Irish offshore wind farms are built, operated and maintained from Irish ports and harbours.



5. Support skills development to facilitate the workforce and development needs of Ireland's renewable energy industry

Our long-term security of energy supply will require a combination of renewables, significant grid development and reinforcement and importantly, we will need skilled workers to support the green transition.

The Irish wind industry currently employs around 6,000 people today and it is anticipated that thousands more will be employed in the offshore wind sector by 2030 if Government and industry work together to invest in developing our workforce.

The rollout of robust training initiatives for renewable energy has the potential to create significant employment opportunities for Ireland, both in terms of securing a sustainable energy supply future for the country and in terms of our economic potential to become a net exporter of energy to the rest of Europe.

Offshore Wind Skills Action Plan

For the next Government, implementing the Offshore Wind Skills Action plan and supporting the development of further training and education initiatives to promote the renewable energy sector to school leavers or those looking to change careers, will be critical.

This will help to ensure that there are more specialists such as ecologists, engineers, health & safety and environment professionals, technicians and seafarers to fill the jobs and skills that we need to build and maintain our renewable energy resources.

By investing in the right training programmes and taking a proactive approach to skills development, we can cut our carbon emissions, cut electricity bills and create jobs.

The next Government must:

- a) **Continue to invest in Government educational and training bodies like Skillnet Ireland** to support the delivery of the renewable energy workforce across wind, solar and other energy assets.
- b) **Establish a skills fund** which allows companies (or further education institutions in collaboration with companies) to bid in for match funding for appropriate training initiatives. Matching funding will help encourage investment in training programmes as companies will share the financial burden.
- c) **Support the development of training and education initiatives** to promote the renewable energy sector to school leavers and, for example, those returning to work after a career break or looking to change careers (see www.workinwind.ie for example).
- d) **Match the actions of the Offshore Wind Skills Action Plan** with the investment and resources to implement its recommendations in a timely manner.
- e) **Develop a system to measure the impact of training initiatives** to ensure funding remains useful and encourage uptake in training courses.



6. Drive Ireland's vision for the deployment of renewable energy post 2030

Ireland's transition to a zero-carbon society is critical to Ireland's quality of life.

The climate emergency must be at the centre of policymaking to achieve a goal of net-zero emissions by no later than 2050. The next Government needs to invest in supporting structural and behavioural change to enable our transition to a climate neutral, climate-resilient, country.

Whether it is increasing our usage of electric vehicles or installing solar panels, educating businesses and communities about sustainable solutions should be at the forefront of the Government's efforts to inspire people to change.

As we transition to a climate neutral future, Government must also ensure that the pathway to decarbonisation is underpinned by affordability for consumers and businesses, and security in how we access and use energy in our everyday.

Having an affordable, accessible and reliable source of clean energy is vital for consumers to have confidence in our green transition.



The next Government must:

- a) **Create a new National Climate Emergency Communications Unit** in the Department of An Taoiseach to devise and deliver a series of climate communications campaigns focused on amplifying climate messaging to target audiences across Irish society to build support for the delivery of onshore and offshore wind energy and electricity grid infrastructure.
- b) **Establish a cost of renewable energy taskforce** to identify ways to reduce the cost of developing both on and offshore renewable energy.
- c) Ensure that **Ireland receives a decision on State aid approval in 2025** to continue running the Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS), or a new support scheme, for onshore and offshore wind projects beyond 2025.
- d) **Create a new forum led by the Taoiseach** that brings together Government and industry stakeholders to identify solutions to address key challenges to delivering on our renewable energy targets.
- e) Set out a **clear timetable and implementation plan** to roll out green hydrogen and work with industry to identify non grid applications for the use of wind energy.
- f) **Establish a clear and common plan for the State, System Operators and industry** to develop Ireland's long-term renewable resource for domestic consumption and international export.



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