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## LIVE @ WEI 2024



30 January 2024



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### Offshore 'needs certainty on south coast tender site'

Approval of the south coast offshore wind zone for this year's Phase 2.1 auction is a top priority for the sector. **p2**

### Laser focus on delivery is key to meeting goals

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# Sinn Féin vows to back wind sector

A Sinn Féin-led government will work with industry to unleash the full potential of wind, WEI 2024 has heard.

The party's leader Mary Lou McDonald said her administration, if elected, will deal with delays in the permitting system and investment in public infrastructure.

"We will bring the pace, urgency and can-do attitude the state is currently lacking," the leader of the opposition told delegates on Day 1 in Dublin. Her government would collaborate with business, semi states and all partners to "realise investment". "We want to work in partnership with you to generate, create and innovate – and succeed," she said.

McDonald said she understands the "gravity and urgency" of the situation, as well as the "scale of the opportunity to be seized".

"There is no time to waste. There is far too much at stake." As it stands, Ireland will not hit the 9GW onshore wind target by 2030 at the current rate of progress, she said.

She told delegates the industry is playing its part but



**PLEDGE:** Sinn Féin leader Mary Lou McDonald Photo: Conor McCabe

said the state is not "pulling its weight".

"The government has to get its act together to bring the pace, urgency and ambition to deliver the plan and actions to realise the full potential of wind," she said.

"That shoulder to the wheel approach is still missing."

She said the planning system remains under-resourced, adversarial and racked with uncertainty while the grid is not fit for the 21st Century.

This has "very real consequences", such as the undersubscribed RESS 3 round last year, which saw prices increase. "Some of

the reasons are beyond government control but a lot of the increase was due to policy decisions, planning, grid and auction design."

The government must "step up" to deliver a proper planning system and must also tackle "decades of inaction" on the grid system.

On the latter, McDonald told delegates the country cannot afford a "continuation of the stop-start delay approach".

The next general election will take place before March 2025, and is more likely to be held later this year, according to political analysts.

### WEDNESDAY'S HIGHLIGHTS

#### Going global

Wind Energy Ireland's Justin Moran chairs a session looking at the international perspective on wind going beyond 2030. WindEurope's Viktoriya Kerelska and GWEC's Rebecca Williams are among the speakers. **0930-1030**

#### Government response

Finance Minister Michael McGrath is due to give the keynote on Day 2 and is sure to respond to opposition leader Mary Lou McDonald's address on Tuesday. SSE Renewables offshore development director Maria Ryan will outline the main industry views.

**1030-1105**

#### Permission for take-off

Reform of the permitting system is the subject of the third session on Day 2. FuturEnergy Ireland's Sinead O'Malley and Michael Watson of consultancy MKO are among the speakers who will give speeches on consenting. Followed by a Q&A.

**1140-1255**

#### Going offshore

The final session of WEI 2024 will focus on how to deliver offshore wind sites in Ireland. Vanessa O'Connell, the project director of RWE's Dublin Array wind farm, and Rob McGuinness, director of the government's offshore delivery task force, are scheduled to address delegates.

**1430-1600**

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# Development process 'must be overhauled'

The development process for onshore wind requires to an overhaul to support the delivery of more projects, Wind Energy Ireland 2024 has heard.

Ireland needs better sequencing of planning, grid and route to market, according to Statkraft Ireland managing director Kevin O'Donovan.

O'Donovan said delays securing permit decisions means developers can't enter relevant ECP grid connection offer rounds, which in turn holds up bids in RESS auctions.

He told delegates in Dublin a delayed permit call this month on one of the Norwegian company's projects means it cannot seek a connection in an upcoming processing round.

This has resulted in the wind farm being unable to be entered into RESS 4 later this

year, leaving it to bid in an auction in 2025.

"If successful we might not make an investment decision until late 2025 or into 2026 and it will take another few years to build it," he told Day 1 of the event.

O'Donovan said more regular ECP batching rounds and tweaking RESS rules to allow an "off ramp" for projects with legal challenges would help.

The changes are required as onshore wind will still be the main contributor to hitting the country's 2030 targets, he told the conference.

"We must not lose sight of that at an industry or policy level," he said.

O'Donovan said he nevertheless remains positive about the status of the sector.

He estimated 3GW of projects could secure planning permission between now and 2026 if An Bord



**PLANNING MESSAGE: Kevin O'Donovan**

Photo: Conor McCabe

Pleanala maintains the current pace of decision-making.

The authority approved around 500MW of sites in the last quarter after not making any rulings in the previous 12 months, he said.

O'Donovan said there will be challenges repeating this run-rate but added it shows with resources and commitment the system can work.

## Offshore 'needs certainty on south coast tender site'

Wind Energy Ireland chief executive Noel Cuniffe said approval of the south coast offshore wind zone for this year's Phase 2.1 auction is a top priority for the sector.

The selection of the South Coast Designated Maritime Area Plan must happen before the Dáil summer recess, Cuniffe said, if Irish goals for offshore development and emissions reduction by 2030 are to be met.

Public submissions for the area closed in October.

"We need to make sure we support government to get that over the line," he said. In

addition to the approval of the zone, Cuniffe identified two chief needs for the wind sector. First, he called for addressing chronic delays in planning procedures that have stalled projects.

While praising the increased resources given to An Bord Pleanala in the past years, more were needed and decisions could be further streamlined, he said.

Second, industry needs to mobilise public support for grid schemes that would increase the availability of connections for new sites coming online, Cuniffe said.

## European rules 'undervalue Ireland'

There are a suite of European regulations in the pipeline that may not adequately respond to the needs of the Irish energy market unless local stakeholders are actively engaged in consultations, WEI 2024 has heard.

Jim Gannon, chairman of regulator CRU, told delegates the country's

energy resources may be undervalued depending on how certain regulations are penned.

European regulations, he said, tend to focus on larger markets in central Europe, where conditions for electricity production are fundamentally different than in Ireland.



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We have been able to achieve so much because of an alignment between industry, the state and communities across the island of Ireland, working together to build a secure energy future alongside a thriving green economy. We need to take

# Laser focus on delivery is key to meeting goals



All political parties in Ireland must fully back need to accelerate deployment of renewable energy and associated grid infrastructure, says Wind Energy Ireland chief executive **Noel Cunniffe**

that spirit of co-operation and build on it if we are to reach our Climate Action Plan targets. Seventy-one months from now we are expected to have nearly doubled our onshore wind capacity and go from a standing-start to a rapidly growing offshore wind industry.

The projects and investment are ready. Government departments and agencies are resourcing up and developing the policies that will shape how we build assets and buy and sell power.

We need those policies, and the plans, strategies and ideas. But we must also see delivery. We need turbines

getting in the ground more quickly than ever before which means a fit-for-purpose planning system. We must witness the cables that will reinforce our grid being laid.

And, in what will certainly be an election year and possibly even a General Election, we need political parties marching in lockstep behind the need to accelerate the delivery of renewable energy and the building of grid infrastructure.

The days of tolerating someone opposing a wind farm or overhead line for the sake of 30 or 40 first preference votes must end. Those who are undermining

climate action and stand in the way of Irish energy independence need to be called out, not applauded.

Everyone has a part to play to bring about a renewables revolution. Decisions will not just be made in government buildings or boardrooms, but around kitchen tables and in community halls.

Industry needs to work with government, business and the climate justice movement to inform and empower every community and citizen to speak out for action, for more wind farms, for a stronger electricity grid, for an Ireland that is energy independent, with warmer homes, cleaner

air and tens of thousands of new green jobs.

Finally, as we look to where our industry is going, we cannot forget those who were there at the beginning. Eddie O'Connor revolutionised how we produce and use electricity in this country. Ireland's wind sector was built on the foundations he and others laid in the 1990s and their vision of a cleaner, more prosperous, energy future for all of us. Working together to make his vision a reality is the best way to honour a man who gave us so much. ■

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**editorial@renews.biz**  
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# THE INTERVIEW reNEWS



EDF Renewables Ireland senior business development manager **JP Wallace** (left) speaks about the challenges the country faces in hitting its binding 2030 targets and building a net-zero future

## Q What is EDF Renewables' key message for delegates at WEI 2024?

**A** We are less than six years away from 2030, and the pace of delivery of wind farms will have to increase rapidly if we are to come close to meeting our renewable energy targets.

In the short-term, that means ensuring projects are assessed and move through the planning system as swiftly as possible, and we hope the new Planning and Development Bill will make a significant impact in that regard.

But it also remains the case that Ireland does not have a strong enough grid system to handle current and planned future levels of renewable energy generation. If we are to harness our considerable resources, we must invest significantly in grid infrastructure, and increase network capacity and connectivity around the country.

## Q What is EDF Renewables' message for politicians at the conference, including Sinn Féin leader Mary Lou McDonald who is speaking on day one?

**A** The recent KPMG report just before Christmas should be a wake-up call to anyone who wants to reduce Ireland's emissions and have a society powered by renewable energy.

It is important politicians of all stripes focus on

meeting our binding carbon budgets, both for 2030 and the interim targets. We will not be successful unless we do everything we can to maximise the deployment of additional onshore renewables in the short term.

As an industry that means we need certainty and a commitment to the continuation of RESS beyond its current lifespan and the conclusion of RESS 5 next year. We would also welcome an onshore wind taskforce that includes industry representation, as this will accelerate delivery of Ireland's onshore wind pipeline, allowing the sector to do the heavy lifting in the interim while offshore projects are delivered.

It is also crucial industry has a seat at the table when it comes to tackling the challenges holding us back from achieving the net-zero future we all want to see.

## Q Can you give an update on the company's onshore portfolio and when we might see projects enter future ECP and RESS rounds?

**A** This year will see EDF Renewables submit its first onshore wind planning applications in Ireland, with Seskin, Lackareagh and Kellystown projects all intending to submit applications in the first half of this year.

In addition to these, work continues on a number of our other projects around the country, and we will be announcing plans for a couple of new greenfield sites later in 2024 as well.

## Q How can the Irish permitting system be improved to streamline planning?

**A** The new Wind Energy Development Guidelines are urgently needed, both for developers and communities seeking clarity around what they can expect for new projects. Hopefully we will see progress in 2024. The Planning and Development Bill will also be a key piece of legislation and the improved timelines for planning decisions are very welcome, as we need to be prioritising renewable energy schemes if we are to have any chance of achieving our 2030 targets.

## Q How does the grid need to change and what is your view of the second version of Eirgrid's Shaping our Electricity Future?

**A** It is well-established that Ireland's grid is currently not fit for purpose and was designed to facilitate an energy system powered by fossil fuels. There is a lot to like in the second version of Shaping Our Electricity Future, and crucially it recognises the scale of the challenge facing the country. The report relies heavily on new technologies and arrangements supplementing the existing network, but the two are not mutually exclusive. In many instances these innovations are at a very formative stage, and they should play a key supporting role in bearing some of the load while necessary improvements are made to bolster and upgrade Ireland's infrastructure.

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