

**Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment**

**Opening Address**

**Joint Committee on Environment and Climate Action**

**8<sup>th</sup> of March**

Chair, Committee Members,

I welcome the opportunity to outline to the Members of the Committee, the actions and initiatives that the Department and Enterprise Ireland are engaged in with businesses, to support the development of Ireland's offshore wind resource.

I'm Marie Bourke Principal Officer, in the Department's Climate Action policy unit. I would like to introduce my three colleagues who are accompanying me today:

- **Mark Christal**, Divisional Manager for Food and Sustainability, Enterprise Ireland
- **Liam Curran**, Senior Technologist, Marine/Water/Wastewater Technologies, Enterprise Ireland
- **Dr Alan Power**, Assistant Principal, Labour Market and Skills, Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (video).

Wind energy will be critical in enabling our transition to a low carbon economy. Meeting our national climate targets will require a significant increase in the deployment rates of renewable electricity, including offshore wind, compared to those achieved in recent years.

The development of offshore wind energy will bring significant economic and employment opportunities to Ireland. The Department and its development agencies are active in further developing these supply chain activities.

I will briefly address 3 of these activities relevant to the Committee's deliberations:

1. Enterprise Ireland's activities in developing SME capability in offshore wind supply chains
2. Research by the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs to identify the future skills requirements for the offshore wind sector
3. Regional developments including, Regional Enterprise Plans and the Shannon Estuary Economic Taskforce.

**1. Enterprise Ireland – Supply chain for Offshore Renewables**

Enterprise Ireland has been working with Irish SMEs to develop their capability in the offshore wind sector. It has developed an Irish Offshore Wind supply chain cluster (*The Gael Offshore Network*) which

consists of over 65 Irish companies. These companies provide a range of products, services, and skillsets appropriate to the Offshore Wind Industry, (Environmental and Geotechnical Consultancy, Seabed Surveys, Vessel support services, Harbour upgrades, Offshore Communications systems, Onshore Sub Station Construction and Operations and Maintenance services).

As per the agency's remit, Enterprise Ireland is primarily focused on helping Irish SMEs bring this capability to export markets. By far the largest and easiest to access market opportunity is the UK, which is the world leader in Offshore Wind. EI's London Office has been building connections between Irish SMEs and the UK Offshore Wind Project Developers, Original Equipment Manufacturers, and Tier 1 Contractors to ensure the greatest possible penetration of the UK market.

**By facilitating Irish SME's entry into the UK offshore wind industry, EI is helping these companies to build the appropriate capability and offerings to industry that not only operates in the UK and globally, but who are also going to be major stakeholders in the Irish offshore wind sector.** Securing reference sites in Ireland will be advantageous for the supply chain as these companies seek to win business internationally in the years ahead.

A future end use of Ireland's potentially enormous offshore wind resource is the production of Green Hydrogen, a key future decarbonisation fuel. Green Hydrogen can play a very significant role in the decarbonisation of the Irish Energy system, and Ireland has an offshore wind resource so large that it may in time be able to be a net exporter of Green Hydrogen to mainland Europe.

#### ***Enterprise Ireland – Offshore wind cluster events***

EI organised several sector events over the last 3 years to help the offshore wind cluster companies engage with the the sector, including

- a Showcase of Irish capability for the UK market,
- a Market Study Visit to Lowestoft and Great Yarmouth (East Coast of England) to understand how the industry operates out of a port hub,
- a Dutch virtual event to showcase Irish capability to Dutch Tier 1 Contractors,
- a virtual event to showcase Irish capability to the Norwegian energy company Equinor, and
- commissioned market scoping study for Irish SMEs focusing on supply chain opportunities in the UK, Denmark and Norway (published in Q1 2022).

EI is planning an industry forum in Croke Park, on June 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> 2022 to focus on export market opportunities, particularly in the UK market and also opportunities for the supply chain domestically.

EI is also organising a national Irish pavilion for *Global Offshore Wind* – an industry trade show in Manchester in late June.

## 2. Expert Group on Future Skills Needs

From a skills policy and employment perspective, the Department is committed to identifying and driving the delivery of the skills required to deliver on the ambitious wind energy targets.

The Expert Group of Future Skills Needs (the EGFSN), the secretariat for which sits within the Department, published its study - *Skills to Enable the Low Carbon Economy to 2030*.

As part of its study the Expert Group examined the skills needs arising from offshore wind energy generation targets in the 2019 Climate Action Plan.

**Demand for labour associated with offshore wind development is forecast to increase from a minimal 2020 baseline level of employment (low 100s) to c.2,500 mid-decade** and will fluctuate around this level to 2030.

Its modelling was based on 5 phases of offshore wind energy from planning, development, installation, operations through to decommissioning.

Across these phases, the Expert Group identified a range of skills that are required in

- **Engineering**, for design, construction, and operation of wind energy developments
- **Environment, Science and Humanities**, for the planning/design phase
- **Construction and Technical Services**, for construction, maintenance and repair
- **Legal and Professional Services**, including financial services to developers
- **Transport and Logistics**, for construction phases, and carrying out of aerial/marine surveys
- **Emerging and Niche Occupations**, including specialist and experienced professionals, Renewable Energy Technicians, and Marine Operatives.

As well as ongoing industry engagement with Ireland's skills development system, the report recommends the **establishment of training partnerships or responses for projects between Government, industry and education and training providers.**

## 3. Regional Employment

The Offshore Wind industry has significant regional employment potential. The Department has been involved in the development and launch of 9 new **Regional Enterprise Plans to 2024**. In developing these, the Steering Committees in each region considered how to contribute to a carbon

neutral economy. Some of the Regional Enterprise Plans contain specific strategic objectives of relevance to offshore renewable wind and supply chains. For example:

- The **Mid-West Regional Enterprise Plan to 2024** aims to harness the potential for major offshore floating wind projects off the West coast and Shannon Estuary. Its *Atlantic Green Digital Basin* strategy plans to bring the users of renewable energy physically close to the energy source.
- The **West Regional Enterprise Plan to 2024** specifically targets...*the Atlantic West region's potential for enterprise and job creation in the Renewable Energy sector*. Their Plan includes a focus on the potential of green hydrogen in decarbonising industry and they will work with large energy users to demonstrate the demand for this form of energy.
- The **North-West Plan** targets the growth of the wind energy industry by diversifying its existing onshore wind industry into the offshore wind industry.

**Shannon Estuary Economic Taskforce** is being established in response to the Programme for Government commitment to develop local plans to stimulate economic activity in areas that had been expecting economic development arising from new fossil-fuel infrastructure. Given the Shannon Estuary deep-water port and geographical position it is expected to assess the potential for renewable energy projects. Existing infrastructure such as the Shannon Foynes Port and Tarbert and Moneypoint power stations will be key to harnessing that potential.

There are several renewable energy projects either already proposed or in the planning that illustrate the region's potential to complete its transition to a renewables-based economy over the coming years, and these are expected to inform the work of the Taskforce.

## **Conclusion**

Achieving the full potential of Ireland's Offshore wind resource offers major opportunities for the development offshore wind electricity and associated by-products such as Hydrogen, Ammonia, Energy storage and transmission technologies and technology services. Large international investors are currently engaged with indigenous companies in a range of joint ventures to progress some of these business opportunities.

The Department and its agencies are actively engaged in building the capacity in the indigenous sector for these supply chain opportunities.

Thank you for your attention and I and my colleagues are available to answer your questions.