

**Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications,
Opening Statement to the Joint Committee
Marine Planning and Development Management Bill
24 November 2020**

Introduction

- Good morning. I'd like to thank the committee for the opportunity to provide some context on the importance of the Marine Planning and Development Management Bill for the offshore renewable energy sector. My name is Martina Hennessy and I am the Principal Officer in the Department's Offshore Energy - Environment and Consenting Unit. I am accompanied today by Anne-Marie Clancy, Assistant Principal who is also a member of the Unit.

Climate Context

- The Government has committed to an average 7% per annum reduction in overall greenhouse gas emissions from 2021 to 2030 (a 51% reduction over the decade). The Climate Action Bill, which was recently published, will commit Ireland in law to move to a climate resilient and climate-neutral economy by 2050.
- The target of delivering 70% of Ireland's electricity by 2030 from renewable sources will play a key role in delivering on our overall energy and climate targets. Onshore wind, which supplied almost one third of all electricity in 2019, has underpinned recent progress in greening our electricity supply, with renewables accounting for 38% of electricity generated in 2019. The Programme for Government has further increased the level of ambition, committing to 5GW capacity in offshore wind by 2030 off Ireland's Eastern and Southern coasts. It also includes a commitment to explore the longer-term potential for at least 30GW of floating wind in the Atlantic.

Importance of the Offshore

- Our sea area is seven times our land area, one of the largest sea-to-land ratios of any EU State. Consequently there is very significant potential for the offshore wind sector to substantially contribute to meeting our energy and climate needs. Targets set out under EU Green Deal and recently published Offshore Energy Strategy affirm this direction, with increased focus on the potential offered by technology developments in the areas of wind, wave, tidal energy and green hydrogen.
- Investment required to meet the 5GW target by 2030 is estimated to be of the order of €10 billion. This has the potential to deliver many high quality jobs, while also contributing towards the sustainable growth of our economy.

Offshore Renewable Energy Projects

- Offshore Renewable Energy or ORE projects typically take 8-10 years from inception through planning and development to become operational. Certainty and stability are crucial for triggering the significant levels of up-front investment required for these large scale projects.

- The delivery of a streamlined, modern and up-to-date regulatory planning framework is one of the essential steps to enable this and is a priority for this Department.
- We have been working closely with colleagues in the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH) on the development of the Marine Planning and Development Management Bill. In tandem, we are building out the State consenting process that will be required for the ORE sector.
- We believe the approach set out offers a robust regime for the effective management of our significant maritime resources, while ensuring appropriate protections for the marine environment, with public consultation a fundamental feature.
- The provisions specific to ORE will enable the transition to a plan-led regime in the long-term, while also enabling projects that have been initiated under the current foreshore regime to progress under the MPDM Bill.
- It is important to note that these “Relevant Projects” will have to separately apply for both Marine Area Consent and Planning Permission under the proposed new regime. These applications will require full assessment against all financial, technical and environmental standards, with public consultation and environmental assessment key components at the planning permission stage.

Marine Spatial Planning

- We view the proposals within this Bill, taken together with the Marine Spatial Planning work being progressed by DHLGH, as offering significant advantages in moving to a planned, holistic approach to the sustainable development of our marine resources.
- In this context, we feel it important to note that Strategic Marine Activity Zones can allow for shared use by different sectors. In the case of ORE, there are many successful examples in Europe of a range of marine activities coexisting alongside wind farm developments, which we can learn from.
- Sharing of information and constructive engagement by all marine users will be critical to achieving this coexistence, and this Department is fully committed to initiatives in this area, including those proposed to engage with fishing communities in the first instance.

Conclusion

- In summary, the ORE sector offers significant potential for greening our energy supply and meeting our climate goals while also enabling the sustainable growth of our economy.
- The timely establishment of a robust, transparent and effective planning regime for our maritime resource is essential to enable the ORE sector to become established, while also improving the management and protection of our valuable offshore resources.
- That concludes my statement and we are happy to respond to any questions the Committee might have.