

## OPR-AILG Planning Training Webinar for Elected Members September 2021 ‘On and Offshore Renewables’ Q&A Responses

### Introduction:

A number of questions that elected members raised during the course of the September 2021 training webinar could not be answered during the ‘live’ Q&A session due to time constraints. However, responses to all questions have been collated and responses are set out hereunder. We would stress that the Minister and his Department are responsible for planning policy and responses should be considered in the context of the explanations of same.

### Development Plan and Local Authorities

Question from Elected Member	Answer
<p>In the absence of a Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plan (SECAP) what targets can the various county development plans include?</p>	<p>There are a variety of mechanisms that can be used to derive local targets from the national renewable electricity targets down to local level. Local authority energy agencies, SEAI and the OPR can point to examples in this regard.</p> <p>Moreover, the <a href="#"><i>Interim Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Statutory Plans, Renewable Energy and Climate Change (July 2017)</i></a> published under Section 28 of the Planning Act include a Specific Planning Policy Requirement (SPPR) that development plans indicate how the implementation of the plan will contribute to realising overall national targets on renewable energy and climate change mitigation and in particular wind energy production and the potential wind energy resource (in megawatts).</p> <p>As outlined in the 3 Counties Energy Agency presentation the draft Kilkenny County Development Plan took this data and then applied scenarios to it, for example the number of homes to be retrofitted, the number of wind turbines, the acres of solar PV farms required etc. Using the Spatial Energy Demand Analysis (SEDA) (or similar) methodology for data analysis all local authorities should be able to complete this type of data analysis.</p>

<p>Is there a timeline for engaging with local authorities on renewable energy options?</p>	<p>See response above. As local authorities undertake research and analysis in connection with their development plan reviews, they should be aiming to be in a position to include the SPPR requirements above in the draft plan. Otherwise this issue may be raised by the OPR as it is in effect a mandatory one to address.</p> <p>If a development plan is published in draft form without specific and evidence based targets on renewable energy delivery in sync with national targets, problems may arise with the finalisation of that plan.</p>
<p>How can local authorities and elected members support this move to renewables? In our area there has been enormous opposition to onshore wind energy projects. Our development plan almost fell because of it and we are likely to have to return to it again. All because of wind opposition.</p>	<p>Community engagement from the earliest stages of plan-making is essential. The public is committed to seeing action on climate and needs as much clear information as possible to consider the options in this regard.</p> <p>The OPR has published a <a href="#">communications toolkit</a> and guidance on good practice in community engagement.</p> <p>It will take a degree of time to build public awareness of the options and choices that have to be made, recognising that every part of Ireland must play its role in overall national and international efforts to switch to carbon-free energy sources and a more energy efficient way to live and work in general.</p> <p>The forthcoming local authority climate action plans will be an important opportunity for the local authority sector to move more centre stage in communicating national climate policy with their local communities and finding ways to identify how to make progress quickly in achieving the targets that have been set.</p>

**EirGrid's Role**

Question from Elected Member	Answer
<p>Is it envisaged that EirGrid will take ownership of future offshore projects? Should there be more emphasis on solar energy options?</p>	<p>Following a Government decision in 2020, it was announced that EirGrid Group, which currently operates and plans the electricity grid, will be appointed as the Transmission System Operator and the Transmission Asset Owner for Offshore Grid Assets in the Republic of Ireland.</p> <p>The electricity system will carry more power than ever before and most of that power will be from renewable energy sources such as solar. Significant growth in grid scale solar is expected.</p> <p>This growth will be coupled with the phasing out of baseload coal and peat plants and the introduction of new technologies such as battery energy storage. Solar energy will be a key component of the energy mix.</p> <p>EirGrid is planning for scenarios where up to 2 GW of energy could be generated from solar by 2030. However, in contrast to the offshore grid, EirGrid is not taking ownership of solar projects.</p>
<p>For EirGrid, how far behind the curve are we regarding renewable energy due to delays in grid upgrade and interconnectors? How much of a worry are rising gas prices and how much more wind energy is coming on stream this year to help alleviate pressures on the use of coal in particular in Moneypoint? Renewable energy is a stable solution price wise. The message needs to be clear that the state will not be going back near peat extraction and the protection and restoration of our bogs is now a priority.</p>	<p>In order to meet targets set out in the Climate Action Plan 2019, investment will be needed in new renewable generation capacity, system service infrastructure and electricity networks.</p> <p>While delays in delivering infrastructure have impacts on these targets, EirGrid is subject to legal and statutory processes in the delivery of any large infrastructure and there can be unanticipated delays to delivery as a result. In all cases EirGrid seeks to maximise the use of the existing network to minimise the need for additional circuits.</p> <p>EirGrid are continually monitoring market prices for energy and seek to provide electricity at the most economic price possible, however, Ireland is subject to the impact of rising gas prices on a global level. It is worth noting that EirGrid is a regulated utility.</p> <p>EirGrid is regulated by the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU). The CRU is</p>

	responsible for ensuring that customers and network users receive value for money.
Also for EirGrid, four different Stakeholder led approaches. A fifth and very important one is Community led. Why are EirGrid and the ESB so against community led and private small generation connecting to the grid? The agricultural sector in particular has the potential to generate and contribute, also community schemes.	<p>Action 30 of the <a href="#">Climate Action Plan 2019</a> provides that a support payment for excess electricity generated on site and exported to the grid will be available to all Irish micro-generators by late 2021, whilst ensuring principles of equity, self-consumption and energy efficiency first are incorporated.</p> <p>A public consultation on the design of a new micro-generation scheme was launched in January 2021, and a summary report of the findings has now been published. Analysis of the public consultation submissions will help to inform the final scheme design, to be announced later in 2021.</p>

## Electric Vehicles

Question from Elected Member	Answer
Would retrofitting cars with electric batteries be better than buying a new electric vehicle? This is being done already but it is niche.	<p>From an embodied carbon point of view, there are benefits in re-use rather than creating new demands.</p> <p>It is likely that as the pace of electrification of our transport systems gathers pace that more retrofit options may become available for people seeking a more energy efficient and less costly source of propulsion for their vehicles.</p> <p>A number of market providers are emerging providing options in this regard and as fossil fuel costs continue to rise, these may become more attractive.</p>

## Infrastructure

Question from Elected Member	Answer
Would situating the infrastructure around areas of high use be the best strategy? Considering the energy generated is fed to the grid, shouldn't the focus be more on situating infrastructure at the point of optimum wind around the country?	<p>By locating generation facilities in proximity to demand centres, this minimises the need for new grid infrastructure.</p> <p>However, technical, planning and environmental considerations generally drive the optimum location for such generators – that is why there are significant levels of on-shore wind generation on the west coast where wind levels are highest.</p>

<p>Is a Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) storage terminal essential to carry capacity until renewables get to where needed?</p>	<p>The source of gas is a matter for Gas Networks Ireland (GNI).</p> <p>However, to cater for a range of credible future scenarios, and to ensure the transition is managed in a coordinated manner, EirGrid believes 1 to 2 GW of new clean, dispatchable capacity will be required between now and 2030 in Ireland.</p> <p>Gas-fired generation is expected to continue to play an important role, replacing retiring conventional plant and providing the multi-day capacity required to ensure security of supply during prolonged periods of low wind. This capacity is especially important when large continental scale weather patterns affect the availability of Renewable Energy Sources (RES) in Ireland and in neighbouring electricity systems.</p>
<p>Greystones is planned to have two merging large offshore windfarms (1.5GW). The planning system needs to ensure a degree of visual separation between the two. Also we need a priority for data centre power if we have this huge generation. There must be a local benefit.</p>	<p>These are matters for the marine planning process to address.</p> <p>Forthcoming updates of national policy with regard to the likely profile of energy demand from the data centre sector will also likely address these issues, including the role of the sector in establishing baseload demand for sustained investment in renewable energy sources at considerable scale.</p>
<p>What role can micro-generation, e.g. solar panels on people's homes, businesses, etc, feeding back into the grid, have in meeting demand and changing the amount of large scale generation, be it gas, wind, etc. necessary?</p>	<p>Action 30 of the Climate Action Plan provides that a support payment for excess electricity generated on site and exported to the grid will be available to all Irish micro-generators by late 2021, whilst ensuring principles of equity, self-consumption and energy efficiency first are incorporated.</p> <p>A public consultation managed by the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications on the design of a new micro-generation scheme was launched in January 2021, and a summary report of the findings has now been published.</p> <p>Analysis of the public consultation submissions will help to inform the final scheme design, to be announced later in 2021.</p>

<p>How much power can anaerobic digestion projects on farms or homes realistically contribute to the grid? There seem to be many more of these projects in other European countries.</p>	<p>The gas produced from the anaerobic digestion of biodegradable material such as grass, animal slurry and domestic waste has similar qualities to natural gas but requires upgrading (carbon dioxide removal) before injection into the gas network.</p> <p>REFIT 3 is a support scheme for renewable energy in Ireland from the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications. It is designed to incentivise the addition of 310 MW of renewable electricity capacity to the Irish grid. Of this, 185 MW will be High Efficiency CHP, using both Anaerobic Digestion and the thermo-chemical conversion of solid biomass, while 125 MW will be reserved for biomass combustion and biomass co-firing.</p> <p>In Ireland, it is estimated that there is currently 120 MW of generation capacity powered by biomass (excluding the co-firing in the peat stations), biogas and landfill gas. There is also 80 MW of waste. A modest growth is assumed in biomass CHP across all scenarios.</p>
<p>Also we need a priority for data centre power if we have this huge generation. There must be a local benefit.</p>	<p>EirGrid recognises the important role that data centres play in shaping Ireland’s economy, and has committed to meeting the challenge of maintaining Ireland’s high standards in security of supply while maximising the opportunities presented by these customers.</p> <p>EirGrid are working with ESB Networks, generators, the CRU and the Government to identify the appropriate network and generation investments, while meeting renewable energy goals.</p>