



Submission by the *Marine Renewables Industry Association*

**Public Consultation on the development of a National Industrial Strategy for
Offshore Wind**

November 7th, 2023

1. Context

The Irish Offshore Renewable Energy (ORE) 2030 target of 7MW of Offshore Wind Energy (OWE) represents the largest industrial project in the history of the State. But it is modest by international standards. The European Commission has recently noted a new quantum of OWE commitments (111GW) by Member States:

'In 2022, the cumulative EU-27 offshore installed capacity amounted to 16.3 GW. To bridge the gap between the 111 GW committed by Member States and the installations in 2022, we (EU) must install almost 12 GW/year on average. This is 10 times more than the 1.2GW that was installed in 2022'¹.

One implication is that Irish OWE projects must compete for a share of an already strained global supply chain and develop a competitive local capacity if we are to meet our deployment goals.

Moreover, while mature, Bottom Fixed Wind (BFW), technology is vital to the early Phases of Irish offshore deployments, achieving the national aspiration of 37GW of Offshore Renewable Energy by 2050 will require major deployments of Floating Offshore Wind (FLOW) and Wave energy platforms. A major research exercise is being led SEAI to examine the implications of this wider ambition.

The State has faced sectoral supply chain development challenges before e.g., the early electronics industry, biotechnology, and software sectors where local industry involvement and winning FDI could not emerge from market forces alone. [The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and its agencies conceived and undertook radical and successful initiatives with remarkable results](#). These initiatives included the National Linkage Programme (ELECTRONICS - multi agency, led by an industrialist), Biotechnology Research Ireland (PHARMA SECTOR - several hundred researchers in Irish universities at the dawn of Biotechnology, all under central direction) and the National Software Directorate (SOFTWARE - led by experienced software industrialists). All very different sectors with different, successful policy responses linking them up with local firms and filling gaps in the supply chain.

[The development of an internationally competitive supply chain for ORE requires similar radical, mould breaking initiatives and a high level of ambition.](#)

2. Closing the Supply Chain Gaps

The small scale on global terms, proximate deadline (2030) and already mature – even if stretched – international OWE supply chain makes it likely that the heavy engineering end of Irish OWE (blades, nacelles, towers, foundations, substations etc) in Phases 1 and 2 will be

¹ Communication from the Commission: *Delivering on the EU offshore renewable energy ambitions*, 24/10/2023.

met from overseas sources only. There will, of course, be a need for support infrastructure development (n.b., ports) and for a wide range of local services, particularly in support of O&M.

The immediate challenge, therefore, is to ensure that local firms are made aware of the standards required by ORE, are helped to achieve them and, also, are directly linked into opportunities. Second, planning for the ORE developments (*including routes to market*) beyond the initial 7GW must be advanced rapidly.

The Strategy should include:

- a. [A mapping exercise to identify gaps in the local supply chain](#) to address both local needs and export opportunities e.g., by updating the SEAI Supply Chain report, 2014.
- b. **FDI:** There will be a need for heavy engineering facilities to enable at least a further 30GW after Phases 1 and 2. Unlike fixed projects where foundations and jackets will be deployed directly from a transport ship to site, floating platforms and foundations can be built and deployed from Irish ports. [Enabling measures](#) for this type of heavy industry, in proximity to suitable ports, on the south and west coasts, should be to the forefront of the strategy and could bring unprecedented opportunities to these regions. A 2020 report by Carbon Trust² estimated that FLOW projects could attract €40bn to the Irish economy with the appropriate policy support.
- c. In addition, steps should be taken to [attract large FDIs](#) such as a blade plant, a nacelles/turbine plant, and a heavy steel engineering facility to manufacture hulls, towers, jackets etc. However, to attract large players to Ireland, a *visible* pipeline (of more than 5GW) will be required.

A further initiative to attract international players in these fields would be to form a [cluster of State agencies \(led by IDA\) and potential project developers](#) to identify a minimum demand (over a set period and subject to price etc requirements) for e.g., blades and make joint approaches to select FDI players to establish Irish plants.

- d. **SMEs:** Form a [National Offshore Linkage Team](#) (NOLT) to
 - Provide ongoing information on opportunities for local SMEs.
 - Increase awareness of ORE standards among SMEs.
 - Coordinate provision of training for SMEs e.g., ISO, Health and Safety etc.
 - Arrange regular group meetings between SMEs and developers.
 - Feed into policy makers about SME concerns and needs

² <https://windenergyireland.com/images/files/final-harnessing-our-potential-report-may-2020.pdf>

The NOLT would have the following features:

- Fixed term e.g., three years
- Led by a seconded senior industry figure with extensive ORE experience.
- Other staff seconded by agencies e.g., IDA, Enterprise Ireland, NSAI, MSO etc and supported out of Enterprise Ireland
- *The overall purpose of the NOLT would be to inject a multi-faceted and credible urgency and expertise to SMEs about ORE. It would be temporary in nature and draw off the expertise of the agencies.*

In addition, a concerted effort must be made to ensure relevant *contracts by State bodies* are structured to enable local SMEs to participate.

- e. [A research and development programme](#) for ORE– see 4. below.

Direct local content targets are not suited to Ireland’s circumstances, but we support non-price criteria such as supply chain agreements. They need to be pragmatic to enable both the Offshore wind industry and the supply chain

3. Building Co-operation

MRIA endorses the laudable aims for ‘clustering’ as set out in the *White Paper on Enterprise 2022-2030* but knows from experience that establishing clusters which can add real value is exceptionally difficult. An effective cluster requires a strong executive team, real power at cluster level devolved from or at least supported by relevant State institutions and financial resources. The experience of IMERC in Cork is an excellent clustering case study which merits review by DETE.

[Clustering for ORE should focus in the initial years on separate REGIONAL clusters in Cork and on the Shannon alongside the clustering initiative outlined at 2.c above.](#) Both locations are proximate to major ORE resources, ports, relevant educational institutions, industrial locations etc and are being targeted offshore at scale by ORE developers.

The Association extends to Northern Ireland and is mindful of the outstanding ORE expertise in Queens University and the major engineering tradition and knowledge in the North where over 140,000 people work in engineering activities³. Notwithstanding the obvious political challenge arising from the absence of an Executive, an [Irish initiative to inform and draw in Northern Ireland firms to the ORE opportunity in Ireland would benefit industry, including ORE, and society on both sides of the Border.](#)

4. Research, Development & Innovation (RD&I)

Ireland already has substantial ORE infrastructure and research capacity including the SFI MaREI centre (incorporating the LiR National Ocean Test Facility), the Galway Bay Marine & Renewable Energy Test Site and the planned test site in Belmullet, Co Mayo (‘AMETS’ – which should be built out, inter alia a signal to show Ireland’s commitment to new

³ <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/labour-market-report-may-2023>;
<https://www.engc.org.uk/media/3466/mapping-the-uks-engineering-workforce.pdf>

technologies). Irish Ocean Energy - wave and tidal - researchers have featured throughout this technologically challenging sector's global development⁴. [The skills and infrastructure needed to spark off a RD&I policy for OWE largely exist already but are languishing without policy support and funding.](#)

The Association does not favour the development of new locations for a 'Centre of Excellence' to support RD&I in OWE. Policy should build on the institutions and facilities in existence today. It should focus on the technology issues associated with the early commercial technology of Floating Wind (and Wave and Tidal which share many cross-cutting RD&I needs – exclusion of these areas from consideration by this Consultation is remarkable and the terms of reference of the planned Strategy should be amended accordingly). There may well be RD&I topics directly associated with Bottom Fixed Wind technology but, given that mature technology's development, it makes sense to concentrate on the emerging technologies on which Ireland will in the longer term have significant dependence, where there is greater export potential and in which there are no dominant industrial 'players' at present.

The UK taken various steps to address the challenges of developing the local supply chain which may provide a useful reference point for Ireland – a key initiative is the Offshore Wind Growth Partnership⁵ under the Offshore Wind Sector Deal⁶ Moreover, the UK Government has also established a fund to support innovative technology development in Floating Wind⁷ and provides support to early Wave and Tidal too.

⁴ MRIA has recently published *Ocean Energy R&D Policy - MRIA's proposals to regain Ireland's leading global position* www.mria.ie

⁵ <https://owgp.org.uk/>

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/offshore-wind-sector-deal/offshore-wind-sector-deal>

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/60-million-boost-for-floating-offshore-wind>