

**COASTAL CONCERN ALLIANCE**  
**Presentation to Labour Parliamentary Party**  
**Dail Eireann**

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**Offshore Renewable Energy Development Plan 2014 - a Threat to Landscape and Wildlife**

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The Irish Government has recently (February 2014) adopted an *Offshore Renewable Energy Development Plan (ORED)* which poses a serious threat to protected landscapes and wildlife along Ireland's East coast. .

Described as a "*framework for the Sustainable Development of Ireland's Offshore Renewable Energy Resource*", this Plan and its accompanying Environmental Report, form the framework for the development of massive offshore wind farms, of up to 4,500MW , with over 800 giant turbines, constructed in full view of the East coast off Louth, Dublin and Wicklow..

According to the ORED the wind energy generated will be **exported directly to the UK**. Mr Pat Rabbitte, Minister for Energy, has stated that Ireland will meet its binding targets for renewables from wind farms on land without recourse to offshore wind which he described in the Dail as "more than twice as expensive".

**Landscape Impact**

Ireland's beautiful coastal landscapes are crucial to our tourist industry and quality of life. This Plan will have adverse visual impact on the unspoiled coastal landscapes and seascapes of Ireland's east coast. . The 800 turbines envisaged will be up to 180 metres high (three times the height of Liberty Hall) and situated 5 to 12 km offshore (The average distance from shore of offshore wind farms under construction in Europe in 2013 was 29.7km). The wind farms will change the character and quality of unspoiled coastal views listed for protection in Louth, Dublin and Wicklow county development plans. The developers' Environmental Impact Statements predict adverse visual impact on coastlines from Dundalk to N. Wexford with "*major adverse visual impacts*" predicted for iconic viewing points such as Howth Head, Killiney Bay, Killiney Head and Bray Head. The adverse landscape impacts are therefore not in dispute. Just a few months ago following an independent review, Failte Ireland made a submission opposing the development of one of these offshore wind farms - the Dublin Array (10 km offshore) - on grounds of "*negative impact on recreational and visual amenity*" which would "*adversely affect the tourism resource of the area*".

**Wildlife and Habitat Impact**

Impacts on marine **wildlife** are unknown. The offshore wind farms will be constructed largely on shallow sandbanks, an Annex 1 Habitat protected under EU Habitats Directive. Effects of such massive construction on the marine wildlife (birds, cetaceans, fish, etc) which rely on near shore sandbanks for breeding and feeding cannot be predicted and are acknowledged internationally to be site specific. Almost all the shallow sandbanks off the East coast have been claimed by offshore wind developers over the past ten years on "a first come first served" basis. In 2008, National Parks and Wildlife Service identified construction and maintenance of offshore wind farms as a threat to the integrity of these sandbanks, with conservation status of this important habitat deemed to be "*unfavourable - inadequate*". (Conservation Status Assessment Report – Sandbanks Slightly Covered by Seawater at all Times 2008).

## **OREDP – Retrospective Planning**

How could such a Plan have been produced without widespread debate and why do so few people appear to know about it? The answer is to be found in the speculation and inadequate regulation of the Celtic Tiger era. It centres on the failure of successive governments to update the Foreshore Act 1933 which governs construction in Irish water and to introduce a proper democratic system of marine planning before awarding foreshore leases to private developers for construction of the biggest offshore wind farms in the world off South Dublin & Wicklow.

The *Offshore Renewable Energy Development Plan (2014)* is a classic example of retrospective planning. It has been around for some time having been published as a draft plan by Minister Eamon Ryan in 2010. The OREDP is not a Plan in the accepted sense of a plan democratically drawn up to provide the framework for future development. In this case, massive development had been permitted or progressed (under the Foreshore Act 1933) before the OREDP was introduced. With regard to offshore wind off the East coast, the OREDP is demonstrably developer-led. It is not designed to safeguard Ireland's coastal environment in the public interest. Rather it serves to rubber-stamp the massive offshore wind development permitted and progressed in an ad hoc manner with no Plan and no Environmental Report/ Strategic Environmental Assessment during the Celtic Tiger era. .

## **Offshore Wind Projects**

Over the past ten years, some of the biggest offshore wind farms in the world were permitted and progressed close to Ireland's East coast without any national strategic plan. These are:

- **520MW Ark low Bank Wind Park** (200 turbines) 10km off Arklow, Co Wicklow. Permitted by Minister for the Marine Frank Fahey in 2002
- **1100MW Codling Wind Park** (220 turbines) 12km off Bray Head/Killiney Bay. Permitted by Minister Noel Dempsey in 2005.
- **320MW Oriel Wind Park** (55 turbines) 6km off Cooley Peninsula. Consultation on Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) closed 2007
- **Dublin Array** (145 turbines) 10 km off Dublin coast. Consultation on EIS closed 2013
- **1000MW Codling Wind Park 2** (200 turbines) 12km off Bray Head /Killiney Bay. EIS not yet published.

On the basis of an Environmental Report and Appropriate Assessment commissioned in 2009 by Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, the *Offshore Renewable Energy Development Plan 2014* asserts that all the above offshore wind development (with approx 820 turbines up to 180 metres high) can be built off the East coast “*without significant adverse impact on the environment*”. Such a conclusion can only be drawn if significant adverse visual impact on designated coastal landscapes (predicted in developers' environmental impact statements) and unknown impact on protected marine wildlife and habitat is not considered to be an environmental constraint.

## **Inadequate regulation**

Offshore wind farms were permitted under the undemocratic Foreshore **Act 1933**, an outdated piece of legislation which had long been earmarked for reform. This Act gave the Minister for the Marine power to award foreshore leases for construction in Irish waters on his sole authority. There was no statutory involvement of local authorities, and no right of appeal against the Minister's decision.

Under this legislation drawn up before large-scale construction at sea was envisaged, the Minister awarded foreshore leases for the construction of two of largest offshore wind farms in the world (520MW Arklow, permitted 2002 and 1100MW Codling, permitted 2005 ) in full view of the South Dublin/Wicklow coast. By end 2005, a total of 1630 MW of offshore wind had been permitted in the two developments, 10 to 12km off Wicklow. **This was more than double the amount of offshore wind (700MW) then installed worldwide**, raising serious questions about the rigour of the permitting process.

Wicklow County Council had no involvement in assessing the visual impact or indeed any other aspect of these developments. In fact no independent professional assessment of the cumulative landscape impact of these two large-scale near shore developments was carried out or commissioned by the Department of the Marine - a shocking failure of proper governance.

Unlike in other EU countries, there was no tender for use of State-owned waters, no restriction on size or scale of development or proximity to shore. Sites were picked out by developers on a "first come first served basis". Public consultation was totally inadequate for unprecedented development of this scale with widespread economic, social and environmental consequences. Indeed with regard to the giant 1100MW Codling Wind Park (220 turbines) 12km off Bray Head/Killiney Bay, public consultation on the developer's Environmental Impact Statement was so low key that **not a single submission was received from the public**.

### **Speculation**

Offshore wind farm leases were and are a very valuable commodity with sale price reflecting the size of development permitted. To avoid speculation, it was accepted practice in the EU that leases for offshore wind farms could not be sold on before construction. However in Ireland during the Celtic Tiger era, no such rules appear to have applied. The lease for the Arklow Bank Wind Park was sold on before construction to an international power company. Shares in Codling Wind Park, co- owned by Treasury Holdings also appear to have changed hands. One can suppose that with regard to these transactions, significant profits were made by the original Irish promoters who acquired foreshore leases for use of massive tracts of State-owned waters without any public tender. (Leases were awarded for 99 years, the maximum possible under the foreshore legislation. In the UK at this time (2002 to 2005) leases for offshore wind development were awarded for a maximum of 30 years).

### **Export**

The developers' Environmental Impact Statements for Arklow and Codling projects stated that the objective of these massive offshore wind farms was to service the Irish market, help us meet our Kyoto targets and avoid heavy fines. Clearly this was the basis on which they were permitted.

The OREDP 2014 now identifies these extensive developments, permitted in an ad hoc manner without any strategic planning, as an export opportunity. Developers are moving ahead with plans for connection to the UK. With regard to the huge 1100MW Codling Wind Park, the co-owners Fred Olsen Renewables and Hazel Shore Ltd (a company comprising key ex-directors of Treasury Holdings) signed a grid connection agreement with the UK national grid in December 2012 for direct export of power from Codling Wind Park to the UK. Developers are being allowed to progress their export plans in advance of any cost benefit analysis or Inter-Governmental Agreement.

### **Projects of Common Interest**

Under, the European Commission's Energy Infrastructure package, an application has recently (Nov 2013) been lodged with the EU Commission seeking "Project of Common Interest Status" for the following : *Project 1.9.3 PCI Ireland – United Kingdom interconnection between the Northern Hub Dublin and the Codling Bank and Trawsfynydd and Pembroke UK.*

“Projects of common interest” which further the construction of Trans European Energy Infrastructure, benefit from accelerated planning process, cross border cost allocation and the opportunity to apply for EU financial assistance. This application is apparently progressing with the support of the Irish government in the absence of any democratically agreed export policy for Irish offshore wind and indeed without the knowledge of communities on Ireland’s east coast who will be directly affected.

### **Opposition to Offshore Wind**

Opposition to offshore windfarms in the near shore zone is widespread throughout Europe. There is international agreement that the future of offshore wind lies in large scale installations, carefully sited, far from shore. Countries such as Germany, Netherlands and Belgium have adopted buffer zones of 22km to protect the wildlife and scenic amenity of coastal areas. According to the European Wind Energy Association, the average distance from shore of offshore wind farms under construction in 2013 was 29.7km. In the UK, there is growing opposition to wind farms close to shore with huge controversy about wildlife and landscape impact of proposed developments such as *The Atlantic Array*, 16km off Devon.

### **The Future - What is best for Ireland?**

We are now at a cross roads with regard to the best long term strategy for our coastal zone. The Foreshore Act 1933 is finally being reformed, a National Landscape Strategy is being introduced and Ireland has begun the process of marine and coastal planning as required by EU. There is no need for the large scale offshore wind development, permitted and advanced 10/12km offshore, contrary to international good practice. We have a beautiful coastline... a major asset and amenity for tourists and visitors alike. Why should we ruin it? Are we to sacrifice Dublin and Wicklow to save Devon & Cornwall?

In January 2013, Minister Rabbitte entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the UK to export offshore wind subject to its being “mutually beneficial” for both countries. We urge the Minister to:

- Review Ireland’s energy policy as advocated by economist Colm McCarthy and others.
- Review the Planning Consents for large scale near shore development awarded under the outdated Foreshore Act 1933. (Consented offshore wind projects were deemed by Minister Eamon Ryan in 2010 to be outside the scope of the OREDP/ SEA).
- Review the OREDP 2014 and adopt a strategic, plan-led approach to the development of offshore wind rather than the project-led approach the Plan embodies.
- Carry out a cost benefit analysis of plans to export wind energy from large-scale near shore wind farms off the East coast which can only be constructed with:
  - Adverse impact on designated coastal landscapes, protected views and tourism
  - Unknown impact on protected habitats and species
- Ensure that a National Landscape Strategy (with protection for seascapes as required by European Landscape Convention) is adopted as promised in the Programme for Government.
- Ensure that coastal landscapes and seascapes are protected in Marine Spatial Plans

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*Concern Alliance is a voluntary citizens group set up in 2006 to campaign for reform of the Foreshore Act 1933 and the introduction of coastal and marine planning to balance competing interests in Irish seas. We have no political or industry affiliations. For further information see [www.coastalconcern.ie](http://www.coastalconcern.ie)*