

An
Bord
Pleanála

Record of Meeting ABP-315803-23 1st meeting

Case Reference / Description	ABP-315803-23 - Proposed development of Oriel offshore wind farm, located off the coast of Co. Louth		
Case Type	Marine pre-application consultation under Section 287		
1st / 2nd / 3rd Meeting	1 st		
Date	15/06/2023	Start Time	11:00am
Location	Conference Room, An Bord Pleanála	End Time	13:00pm

Representing An Bord Pleanála
Ciara Kellett – Director of Planning (Chair)
Stephen Kay – Assistant Director of Planning (online)
Jimmy Green – Senior Planning Inspector
Maeve Flynn – Ecologist
Eugene Nixon – Consultant
Marcella Doyle – Senior Administrative Officer
Niamh Hickey – Executive Officer
Evan McGuigan – Administrative Assistant

Representing the Prospective Applicant
Garrett Connell – Parkwind & Oriel Windfarm Ltd (Country Manager)
Richard Church – Parkwind & Oriel Windfarm Ltd (Consents Manager)
Mairead Hogan – ESB (Onshore Consents Manager)
Valerie Brennan – RPS (Director of Planning)
Cathriona Cahill – RPS (EIAR Project Manager)

The meeting commenced at 11:00am.

The Board referred to the letter received from the prospective applicant requesting pre-application consultations and advised the prospective applicant that the instant meeting essentially constituted an information-gathering exercise for the Board; it also invited the prospective applicant to outline the nature of the proposed development and to highlight any matters it wished to receive advice on from the Board.

The purpose of the meeting is also to give the Board an opportunity to provide its opinion on issues relating to the making of an application and other matters including the NMPF, objectives of maritime spatial planning, the principles of proper planning and sustainable development and the environment and any European site in making a decision on an application.

The Board will not discuss or provide advice on the merits or otherwise of specific aspects of the proposed development. The Board wishes to ensure that the application presented to the Board will be as comprehensive as possible.

The Board mentioned general procedures in relation to the pre-application consultation process as follows:

- The Board will keep a record of this meeting and any other meetings, if held. Such records will form part of the file which will be made available publicly at the conclusion of the process. The record of the meeting will not be amended

by the Board once finalised, but the prospective applicant may submit comments on the record which will form part of the case file.

- A further meeting or meetings may be held in respect of the proposed development.
- The Board envisages that the pre-application consultation process under section 287 of the Act will not involve a significant number of further meetings. Following the conclusion of this meeting, the Board will be in contact regarding a suggested schedule and agenda for future meetings.
- In the event that the prospective applicant has submitted an application for an opinion under section 287A of the Act (Design Options) this discussion will be held at a later date, either in conjunction with discussion under s.287 or as part of a separate meeting. This will be advised to you after this meeting. The prospective applicant should note that a separate Board opinion will issue in respect of section 287A of the Act and that records relating to this application will not be available for public inspection until an application for permission is made to the Board.
- Further information may be requested by the Board and public consultations may also be directed by the Board.
- The Board may hold consultations in respect of the proposed development with other bodies.
- In accordance with section 287(3) of the Act, the decision to close a consultation rests with the Board. At the conclusion of the pre-application process the case file including the record of meetings held and the report of the reporting inspector detailing the issues arising in the consultation, will be forwarded to the Board. The Board will issue a direction / Order clarifying that the consultation has closed and that the prospective applicant may make an application for permission under section 291.
- The holding of consultations does not prejudice the Board in any way and cannot be relied upon in the formal planning process or any legal proceedings.

Presentation by the prospective applicant:

The prospective applicant, Oriel Windfarm Limited (a partnership between Parkwind and ESB), began their presentation by providing an overview of the proposed development. It was designated as a Phase 1 project and granted a Maritime Area Consent (MAC) in December 2022.

The site location was selected by the prospective applicant in the mid-2000s under a foreshore process and was chosen following environmental and constraints analysis, as well as a wide variety of factors such as wind speeds, proximity to suitable ports and the availability of grid connection in the area. The location was also selected to avoid shipping lanes, commercial fishing activities and any overlaps with designated sites.

The prospective applicant confirmed that the wind farm would consist of 25 turbines, with a projected maximum export capacity of 375MW and output of 1,500GWh per annum. It stated that a preferred turbine type has been selected and that an agreement has been reached with a manufacturer for these turbines.

It was also submitted by the prospective applicant that the rotor diameter of the turbines would be maximum 236 meters, with a maximum tip height of 270 meters and minimum tip height above sea level of 27 meters. It confirmed that a monopile design would be used for the foundations of the turbines, as this design would best suit the seabed conditions on site.

The prospective applicant presented a site layout for the proposed wind farm and stated that the layout had been chosen because it would help to reduce visibility of the turbines from land, with the closest turbine to shore being located 6km from Cooley Point, 18km from Blackrock, and 10km from Dunany Point. The offshore element of the proposed development would be completed by 5 inter-array cables, an offshore substation (that would transform the generated electricity from 66kV to 220kV) and a single export cable to landfall.

In terms of the onshore element of the proposed development, the prospective applicant stated that a transition joint bay would be located close to landfall at Dunany Point and a 20km underground export cable would connect from there to the proposed onshore substation located 3km from Ardee. The requirement for 16

temporary passing bays on local roads during the construction phase was mentioned and the prospective applicant confirmed that they have had meetings with Louth County Council regarding this. There will also be a requirement for the provision of 29 no. joint bays along the underground cable route.

The prospective applicant also stated that the underground export cable would include crossings of the M1, rail line infrastructure, 2 rivers, 3 streams and where directional drilling was to be employed as a construction technique that appropriate off-road launch and landing pits would be provided. It further confirmed that this design had been agreed with EirGrid and that agreements had been reached with landowners across all of the cable route.

Regarding the onshore substation, the prospective applicant stated that it would be located on a 3-hectare agricultural site along the N33 and that discussions had been held with the landowner. The substation would facilitate connection into the existing 220kV overhead line at this location (thus negating the need for significant overhead line works) and was designed to comply with the functional specifications of EirGrid. It was also confirmed that the development would involve air insulated substation (AIS) and gas insulated substation (GIS) elements.

The prospective applicant provided an overview of the offshore and onshore site investigations and environmental data collection undertaken within the last four years. These studies – including biodiversity, archaeology, traffic, boat, aerial, seabird, and marine mammal surveys - had enabled the completion of the project design and preparation of the EIAR and NIS. The survey work referenced also included geotechnical investigations, geophysical mapping, wind speed and direction measurements, and marine mammal acoustic monitoring.

The prospective applicant outlined the consultations they had undertaken with relevant stakeholders. This included issuing an EIAR scoping report and ongoing engagement with a wide number of bodies including Louth County Council, Transport Infrastructure Ireland, National Parks & Wildlife Service, and number of coastal-related bodies. The prospective applicant also confirmed ongoing engagement with all commercial fisheries organisations active in the area (specifically in Kilkeel, Dunany and Clogherhead) and identified them as key stakeholders.

The prospective applicant provided information regarding preparation for an application, and stated their belief that the proposed development is compliant with all relevant planning policies at both a national and local level. It confirmed that a final draft of the EIAR is nearly complete and outlined the EIAR structure, including 30 chapters. It also referred to AA screening, NIS and planning drawings.

Regarding public consultations, the prospective applicant submitted that regular engagement had been held with various community groups, sports clubs, and local politicians. It was confirmed that two six-week public consultation periods had taken place online, that in-person events had been held at three locations (Ardee, Dundalk and Killeel) and that they had engaged with several fishing groups. All issues raised during these consultations have been recorded and feedback received so far was described by the prospective applicant as positive following their extensive engagement process.

At this point in the presentation, the prospective applicant stated that they wished to obtain clarification on a potential section 287A request and what constitutes design flexibility. The Board's representatives noted that design flexibility would be discussed at a later meeting and further noted that the Department is due to issue a circular/letter on this item. The Board's representatives also stated that they were willing to hear the prospective applicant's options regarding where it felt design flexibility would be required but could not give their opinions on these at this meeting.

The prospective applicant highlighted several elements of the proposed development where it believed that design flexibility would be required. These were not the subject of discussion with the prospective applicant and, as highlighted in the general procedures referenced above, are intended to form the subject of a subsequent meeting.

The prospective applicant stated that a construction port will be required for the pre-assembly of foundations and turbines, and it is anticipated that the port selected will have the requisite consents in place for the activities proposed. Space in a construction port can only be contracted when the construction programme and timelines are finalised.

The prospective applicant also confirmed that an existing harbour in County Louth or County Down would be used for an operations and maintenance base. It stated that three harbours were currently under consideration, and that any commercial contract could not be entered into until operational timelines are confirmed.

Having regard to the above, the prospective applicant declared their intention to make a formal request under section 287A of the Act.

Discussion:

- The prospective applicant confirmed that surveys had been conducted regarding the composition of the seabed in the selected area, and that it had identified a small sand layer, glacial till and boulders. It stated that it had a detailed understanding of seabed conditions but that the presence of boulders or slopes may lead to difficulties in drilling for some areas, and that this feeds into the future need for design flexibility regarding the finalised location of monopile foundations for the turbines.
- In response to a question from the Board's representatives regarding drilling, the prospective applicant confirmed that surveys on sediment dispersal had been conducted.
- It was submitted by the prospective applicant that the operations and maintenance base for the proposed development would consist of a 20-30 people team, including people stationed at the base for regular work and a team specifically required for offshore work. It stated that one or two crew-transfer vessels would be required at this base to service an offshore wind farm of the nature proposed.
- The prospective applicant confirmed that a list detailing the external consultants and expertise used for this proposed development would be provided.
- In response to a query on the matter, the prospective applicant confirmed that they had completed a detailed alternatives assessment regarding the site selection process carried out for the proposed development. The Board's representatives advised that providing as much information as possible in any

future EIAR regarding the environmental reasons behind the site selection process would be important.

- A discussion was had regarding Parkwind's background and their experience in foreign projects, including four developments in the Belgian Sea and one in the Baltic Sea. This discussion touched on timescales, operational strategies, the turbines and contractors used, and seabed conditions in the Irish Sea compared to the other projects. The Board's representatives advised that providing as much information as possible regarding this subject, previous construction and proven mitigation measures work would be important.
- The Board's representatives advised the prospective applicant of the need to provide a thorough account of all consultations to date.
- The prospective applicant confirmed that it had held two meetings so far with the NPWS and their lead on marine mammals.
- The prospective applicant confirmed that it had been considering other Phase 1 projects and has had meetings with prospective applicants in terms of methodology. The Board's representatives stated that it was important that these engagements continue as much as possible, particularly in terms of the assessment of all potential cumulative effects given that all Phase I projects are progressing within broadly the same timeframes.
- The Board's representatives advised that marine surveys and the associated data be kept up to date, and to ensure that an explanation is provided in instances where older data is used instead. The prospective applicant submitted that data validity exercises are being carried out and can be brought into these assessments.
- During a discussion about the layout of turbines, the prospective applicant stated that the proposed development would not overlap with visibility from the Mourne Mountains or important views, and that it will provide search and rescue corridors. It confirmed that consultations had taken place with the Irish Coastguard and relevant UK bodies. The Board's representatives advised the prospective applicant to include the details of any different iterations of the layout as it developed to show the alternatives that were considered, and how the final design emerged or was informed through the various assessments and engagement that took place in any future potential application.

- During a discussion about the Offshore Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (ORESS) auction held in May 2023, the prospective applicant submitted that it was exploring alternative routes to the market and that the auction outcome does not affect their anticipated timelines.
- During a discussion about scoping responses, the prospective applicant submitted that it had engaged with all necessary bodies but had yet to receive a response from the Department of Defence.
- Following a question from the Board's representatives, the prospective applicant stated that it had consulted with the Northern Ireland planning service regarding transboundary issues associated with the proposed development. The Board's representatives advised that any issues raised should be considered in detail in any future application documentation and that transboundary issues would need to be dealt with in full in the application documentation including any public notices.
- Following a question from the Board's representatives, the prospective applicant submitted that it doesn't believe there are any outstanding issues regarding SPAs and stated that it would keep track of potential plans by the NPWS to extend areas. Similarly, it was noted that the development of any future Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) would be tracked and considered.
- The prospective applicant confirmed that it would be carrying out further investigations regarding seabed ecology but is confident that there are no outstanding issues which could lead to any significant layout changes.
- Following a question from the Board's representatives, the prospective applicant confirmed that several seasonal fisheries (including lobster fishing) operate in the area and stated that these activities would only be impacted during the construction phase of the proposed development as they could continue at this location in the event of the wind farm being operational. It also submitted that there is no trawling activity in the area and that it is continuing to engage with fisheries-related stakeholders.
- The prospective applicant stated that the marine mammal population within the area had been identified and were being taken into consideration, following a query from the Board's representatives.


- The prospective applicant stated that tidal excursions in the area had been modelled and that surveys had been conducted regarding sediment dispersal, following a query from the Board's representatives. It also submitted that it believed any SPAs would be unaffected and that no issues regarding contaminated sediment had been encountered.
- The Board's representatives advised the prospective applicant to be aware of any archaeological, cultural or heritage issues regarding the construction of the transition joint bay at the shoreline. The prospective applicant stated that a cultural assessment would take these issues into consideration. It also submitted that while access along the shoreline would have to be restricted during construction at the landing point for health and safety reasons that there would be no shoreline access restrictions necessary post-construction.
- The Board's representatives advised the prospective applicant to ensure that all plans regarding the onshore cable route and its boundary are as robust as possible, and that the red line boundary of any future application should include all areas where works are anticipated.
- The prospective applicant confirmed that they had engaged with TII (via Louth County Council) and Irish Rail regarding the route of the onshore cable, following a question from the Board's representatives. It was also advised by the Board's representatives to address the issue of junction boxes with TII.
- Following a question from the Board's representatives, the prospective applicant confirmed that EirGrid would have ownership of the onshore substation.
- The prospective applicant confirmed when queried that the decommissioning phase of the proposed development would be addressed in the EIAR. It suggested that the project would have a 40-year lifespan (including commissioning), in line with the MAC duration.
- Regarding a 182A case that the prospective applicant already has lodged with the Board, it was agreed that this would be potentially discussed at a further meeting following the receipt of further information and clarification on the legalities/process involved.

- Following a question from the Board's representatives, the prospective applicant confirmed that they had assessed whether the provisions of the COMAH 2015 Regulations may apply in this case.
- The prospective applicant stated that it believes it would be ready to submit an application for the proposed development soon.

Conclusion:

The record of the instant meeting will issue in due course and the prospective applicant can submit any comments it may have in writing or alternatively bring any comments for discussion at the time of any further meeting. The Board will revert to the prospective in relation to scheduling a further meeting.

The meeting concluded at 13:00pm.

 3/7/23

Ciara Kellett

Director of Planning