



An
Bord
Pleanála

Inspector's Report ABP-317409- 23

Development	Offshore Wind Farm and Associated Infrastructure
Location	Sceirde Rocks, c.5km-11.5km off the coast of Connemara, Co. Galway
Planning Authority	Galway County Council and Clare County Council
Prospective Applicant	Fuinneamh Sceirde Teoranta (FST)
Type of Application	Pre-Application Consultation under s.287 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, for Other Development in the Maritime Area
Dates of Pre-Application Meetings:	19 th September 2023 18 th December 2023 26 th July 2024
Date of Site Inspection	15 th September 2023
Inspector	Una O'Neill

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1. This report relates to pre-application discussions held with Fuinneamh Sceirde Teoranta 'the Prospective Applicant' in respect of the development of the Sceirde Rocks offshore windfarm, of up to 30 turbines, off the coast of Galway, in a Gaeltacht area. The pre-consultation request was received by the Board on the 20th June 2023. The number of turbines proposed was confirmed to be 30 turbines at subsequent meetings, with defined dimensions of each turbine as follows: tip height of 324.9m, hub height of 178.9m, and rotor diameter of 292m.
- 1.2. This report describes the location and nature of the proposed development, the applicant's submission, the consultations held and the legal provisions which are relevant to the proposed development.
- 1.3. The Board's representatives met with the prospective applicant on three occasions. The presentations provided by the prospective applicant and written records of those meetings are on file. This report should be read in conjunction with the written records on file of the pre-application consultation meetings held with the prospective applicant. It is not proposed to repeat the contents of those records in detail here.

2.0 Site Location and Description

- 2.1. The offshore wind farm site is located between c. 5km-11.5km off the west coast of Co. Galway, off Connemara's Gaeltacht coastline. The closest settlement to the development is Carna village, c. 8km from the site. A grid connection cable is proposed from the proposed windfarm array, which will run southwards in the Atlantic ocean for a distance of c. 70km, where it will reach the landfall site located to the northwest of Doonbeg in Co Clare, at a cliff edge between Kilkee Reefs SAC and the Mid Clare Coast SPA. From its landfall, the cable will run c. 20km underground, predominantly along public roads, to connect to the national grid at Moneypoint, Co. Clare.
- 2.2. There are numerous rocky outcrops and islands along the area of the coast off Galway where the wind farm array is proposed. The Sceirde Rocks are a group of small low lying islands and intertidal rocky reef that lie to the northwest of Mweenish Island. The Aran Islands are c. 21km to the southeast of Sceirde Rocks.

- 2.3. There are several European sites in the area of the proposed windfarm array and grid connection route.

3.0 Proposed Development

3.1. Context

- 3.1.1. Under the transition provisions of the Maritime Area Planning (MAP) Act 2021 (as amended) the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications had the responsibility for assessing applications for Marine Area Consents (MACs) from a first group (phase I) of seven offshore renewable energy projects. As one of the seven phase I projects, Sceirde Rocks has been granted a Maritime Area Consent (MAC) in relation to the *'construction and operation of an Offshore Wind Farm and associated infrastructure (including decommissioning and other works required on foot of any Development Permission for such Offshore wind farm)'* at the subject site (reference no. 2022-MAC-007). The original commencement date of the MAC was 23rd December 2002. An extension of timeframe was granted on 21st May 2024, giving an additional six months to 22nd December 2024 by which date an application for permission must be submitted. An Array Area amendment was subsequently granted on 28th June 2024.

3.2. The Proposed Development

- 3.2.1. The main elements of the development, as proposed at the 1st and 2nd pre-application meetings, were as follows:
- 26 Wind Turbines, with a generating capacity of up to 450 MW, and potential for 2 layout options and range of turbine parameters, with turbines having a blade height of up to 325m.
 - Gravity based fixed bottom foundation design
 - 1-2 Offshore Substation
 - Inter-array cables
 - Export Cable corridor
 - Landfall Infrastructure

- Onshore 220 kV substation and compensation compound

3.2.2. By the conclusion of the pre-application process, the main elements of the development were amended to comprise the following:

- 30 turbines, with a single turbine layout, and fixed turbine dimensions of tip height of 324.9m, rotor diameter of 292m and hub height of 178.9m.
- Gravity Based Fixed Bottom Foundations (WTG &OSS)
- Single 220kV Offshore Substation
- Offshore Grid Connection cable with landfall near Doonbeg, Co. Clare
- Onshore Grid Connection cable from landfall to Moneypoint Substation
- Onshore Compensation Compound located on land adjacent to Moneypoint Substation

3.2.3. No design flexibility was sought for under S287A of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended.

4.0 Policy Context

4.1. The following policy documents are of relevance but, it should be noted, this does not comprise an exhaustive list:

- National Maritime Planning Framework
- Offshore Renewable Energy Development Plan 2014
- Draft Offshore Renewable Energy Development Plan 2023
- Marine Planning Policy Statement 2019
- Project Ireland 2040 - National Planning Framework 2040 & National Development Plan 2018-2027
- Climate Action Plan 2024
- Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Northern and Western Region, 2020-2032
- Galway County Development Plan 2022-2028

- Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029

5.0 Meetings Held

5.1. Three meetings were held with the prospective applicant's representatives on the following dates:

- 19th September 2023
- 18th December 2023
- 26th July 2024

5.2. Presentations were provided at each meeting which are included in the file together with other information provided to the Board in respect of same. The record of each meeting is also contained in the file.

5.3. Issues raised at the meetings are identified and discussed in Section 8 below.

6.0 Legislative Context

6.1. S. 287(1) of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, as amended ('the Act'), states that a person who proposes to make an application for permission under s.291 shall consult with the Board. S.287(2) of the Act states that the Board may provide its opinion regarding the making of the application and in particular, as respects:

- (a) the procedures to be followed by the prospective applicant when making the application and by the Board when considering the application
- (b) the documents required to accompany the application
- (c) the need for the prospective applicant to create an internet website for the purpose of publishing the application and all documentation accompanying the application,
- (d) the publication of notices in accordance with this Act, the furnishing of documentation to persons referred to in subsection (3) of section 291 and the making of submissions and observations in relation to an application under that section,
- (e) such persons as may be prescribed for the purposes of this Chapter,

(f) some or all of the matters that the Board is likely to take into consideration relating to—

- (i) the National Marine Planning Framework,
- (ii) objectives of maritime spatial planning,
- (iii) principles of proper planning and sustainable development, and
- (iv) the environment or any European site,

when making a decision under section 293 in relation to the application,

(g) the fees payable to the Board in relation to the making of the application, and

(h) compliance by the prospective applicant with any direction of the Board under subsection (3) of section 291.

6.2. Of note, under S.287(3) the Board may at any time conclude a consultation under this section where it considers it appropriate to do so.

6.3. An application for an opinion under S.287A is not being sought for this development.

7.0 Relevant Cases

7.1. The following comprise recent marine related pre-application consultations or applications which are considered of note:

- **ABP-315796-23:** Pre-application consultations in respect of a proposed offshore wind farm and associated infrastructure on and around the **Arklow Bank**, approximately 6 – 15 km from the shore at Arklow, Co. Wicklow, lodged December 2022. Development would comprise either 47 or 52 turbines (depending on type). The turbines would have a stated maximum blade height of either 273m or 287m and a stated maximum export power of up to 800MW. There would be 2 x offshore substations and 2 x export cables to a landfall site. Design option pre-application consultations were requested under **ABP-316331-23**. Both cases have been determined by the Board, with the consultations under section 287 concluded (ABP-315796) and an opinion issued under section 287A (ABP-316331).
- **ABP-315800-23:** Pre-application consultations in respect of the proposed **Dublin Array** offshore windfarm project, to have between 39 and 50 turbines (depending on

type) located c.10km off the coast of Dublin and Wicklow. The turbines would have a stated maximum blade height of c.309m and a stated maximum export power of between 700 to 850MW. There would be 1 x offshore substation and 2 x export cables to a landfall site at Shanganagh Cliff, Co. Dublin. Design option pre-application consultations were requested under **ABP-318552-23**. Both cases have been determined by the Board, with the consultations under section 287 concluded (ABP-315800) and an opinion issued under section 287A (ABP-318552).

- **ABP-315801-23:** Pre-application consultations in respect of **North Irish Sea Array Windfarm Ltd.**, offshore wind farm off the coast of Dublin, Meath and Louth with a maximum of 42 turbines, lodged February 2023. Design option pre-application consultations were requested under **ABP-316332-23**. **ABP-310329-23:** S.182 Pre-Application Consultation for proposed onshore electrical and associated infrastructure (NISA). Both cases ABP-315801 and ABP-316332 have been determined by the Board, with the consultations under section 287 concluded (ABP-315801) and an opinion issued under section 287A (ABP-316332).

- **ABP-315803-23:** Pre-application consultations in respect of the **Oriel** offshore windfarm project, to have a maximum of 25 turbines located c.5km off the coast of Louth and Meath. The turbines would have a stated maximum blade height of 270m and a stated maximum export power of 375MW. There would be 1 x offshore substation and 1 x export cable to either of 2 landfall sites. Design option pre-application consultations were requested under **ABP-318274-23**. Both cases have been determined by the Board, with the consultations under section 287 concluded (ABP-315803) and an opinion issued under section 287A (ABP-318274).

- **ABP-315809-23:** Pre-application consultations in respect of the **Codling** offshore windfarm project would have a between 60 and 75 turbines located c.13km to c.22km off the County Wicklow coast. The turbines would have a stated maximum blade height of 314m and a stated maximum export power of up to 1450MW. There would be 3 x offshore substations and 3 x export cables to a landfall site at Poolbeg. Design option pre-application consultations were requested under **ABP-318588-23**. Both cases have been determined by the Board, with the consultations under section 287 concluded (ABP-315809) and an opinion issued under section 287A (ABP-318588).

8.0 Matters Arising

8.1. Proper Planning and Sustainable Development

8.1.1. The matters arising include inter alia:

- National Marine Planning Framework, and in particular the need to clearly indicate project compliance with NMPF policies and objectives.
- Policy context surrounding the proposal ranging from strategic to local, including in relation to the Regional Spatial Economic Strategy for the Northern and Western Region 2020-2032, and the Development Plans for the relevant Coastal Planning Authorities, namely Galway County Development Plan 2022-2028 and Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029.
- Public consultation process and stakeholder engagement undertaken. The prospective applicant indicated that a community liaison officer was appointed in August 2022 and several public consultation exercises have been undertaken with coastal communities, local businesses, local authorities, and scoping with statutory bodies.
- Identification of Coastal Planning Authorities of Galway County Council and Clare County Council and consideration of Transboundary consultees.
- Landscape and visual amenity impact of infrastructural elements, including an assessment of landscape and seascape impacts from along the coastline and beyond, from islands (including Aran islands and associated UNESCO designation), and from inland receptors.
- Potential impact on cultural heritage and tourism.
- Potential impact on biodiversity, including coastal and marine habitats and species, and migratory and /or mobile species (incl. designated European sites, seabirds, bats, marine mammals, fisheries & benthic communities).
- Designated sites and habitats – consideration of Zone of Influence, noting extent of zone of influence can be large given mobility of species.
- Potential impacts on hydrodynamics, wave patterns and coastal processes (incl. patterns of erosion & deposition along the coastline).

- Potential impacts on fisheries, including international fisheries.
- Consideration of engineering design and construction related practices and methodologies; GBS foundations, impacts on seabed; carbon sequestration; destination of any removed material (incl. any EPA Licence requirements); details around cable laying and proposed cable protections.
- Location of the Operational and Maintenance Base (probably Ros a Mhil in Co. Galway) and Operational Port options of Shannon Foynes or Cork Port (not yet determined).
- Impacts at landfall of cable route.
- Survey work - methodologies adopted, modelling assumptions and any data gaps to be clearly set out.

8.2. Environmental Impact Assessment

8.2.1. It is proposed to submit an Environmental Impact Assessment Report with the proposed Application. The following include matters which were outlined during the course of the consultation meetings.

- EIA Scoping document was circulated to prescribed bodies by the prospective applicant.
- Consideration of Alternatives.
- Major Accidents & Disasters.
- Environmental factors including but not limited to:
 - Offshore considerations and associated surveys, including Noise monitoring at onshore locations; Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment Geophysical and Geotechnical surveys; Metocean surveys; Maritime Traffic Surveys; Bird and Marine Mammal surveys; CRM; Fishing Effort Surveys; Bat Surveys; Benthic habitat surveys.
 - Onshore considerations and associated surveys, including Terrestrial walkover and site-specific mammal surveys; Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment; Transport Assessment; Archaeological walkover survey; Topographic survey; Geotechnical surveys carried out at potential landfall

sites; Noise surveys which included attended monitoring at specific locations along the infrastructure route; Bat Surveys to include detector monitoring and transects at specific locations along the infrastructure route; Hydrological survey to include survey of watercourse crossings.

- The importance of robust impact assessments, setting out of methodology, most up to date data, source of survey data, dates of surveys etc, and identify areas of uncertainty.
- Construction Impacts.
- Format of the EIAR.
- Consideration of cumulative impacts.

8.3. Appropriate Assessment

8.3.1. It is proposed to submit a Natura Impact Assessment Report with the proposed application. The following include matters which were discussed during the consultation meetings:

- Likely Zone of Impact of all elements of the proposal.
- Natura 2000 sites within likely zone of impact and proximity to QI's/SCI's.
- Recently addition of Harbour Porpoise as a QI in a number of nearby SACs.

8.4. Procedures

8.4.1. At the final pre-application consultation the prospective applicant requested that the Board clarify the relevant administrative procedures in relation to a range of matters.

8.4.2. The Board representatives provided the prospective applicant with a document containing all of the procedures required for the making of an application.

8.4.3. In relation to prescribed bodies for the purposes of any future application, I recommend that the Board consider that the persons listed hereunder be served with the application and accompanying documents. In forming the list hereunder, regard was had to, inter alia, the requirement under Schedule 1 of the Planning and Development (Maritime Development) Regulations 2023. Regard was also had, in

drawing up the list below, to the provisions of S.291(3)(b) and S.291(3)(d) of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended.

- 8.4.4. The prospective applicant should send a copy of the application, accompanying documents (including EIAR and NIS) and a copy of the public notice to the Prescribed Bodies listed in Appendix A. The Board may wish to review that list and satisfy itself that it is sufficient. In this regard, I note that the prescribed bodies list (Appendix A) has been compiled on the basis of information that is available from the pre-application consultations and that the applicant who has been carrying out detailed studies and surveys in preparing the EIAR and NIS may consider other bodies to be relevant. Accordingly, I recommend that any communication with the prospective applicant advise them that it is open to them to send copies of the application and its associated documentation to any other bodies that they consider relevant on the basis of the studies that they have carried out.

8.5. Transboundary Consultation

- 8.5.1. No transboundary issues arise.

9.0 Conclusion

- 9.1. Following the completion of the final pre-application meeting on 26th July 2024, I am of the opinion that the process should be concluded and the Board should notify the prospective applicant that the process is closed and include the attached list of bodies that the applicant is requested to send copies of the application to, in accordance with S291(3)(b) and S291(3)(d).

I confirm that this report represents my professional planning assessment, judgement and opinion on the matter assigned to me and that no person has influenced or sought to influence, directly or indirectly, the exercise of my professional judgement in an improper or inappropriate way.



Una O'Neill
Senior Planning Inspector

11th September 2024

APPENDIX A

Prescribed Bodies

1. Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage;
2. Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications;
3. Minister for Transport;
4. Minister for Defence;
5. Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine;
6. Environmental Protection Agency;
7. Maritime Area Regulatory Authority;
8. Minister for Rural and Community Development;
9. Marine Institute;
10. Inland Fisheries Ireland;
11. Health and Safety Authority;
12. Commission for Regulation of Utilities;
13. Fáilte Ireland;
14. An Taisce;
15. Northern and Western Region Assembly;
16. National Transport Authority;
17. Irish Aviation Authority;
18. Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland;
19. Eirgrid;
20. Commissioner of Irish Lights;
21. Irish Coastguard;
22. Galway County Council;
23. Clare County Council.