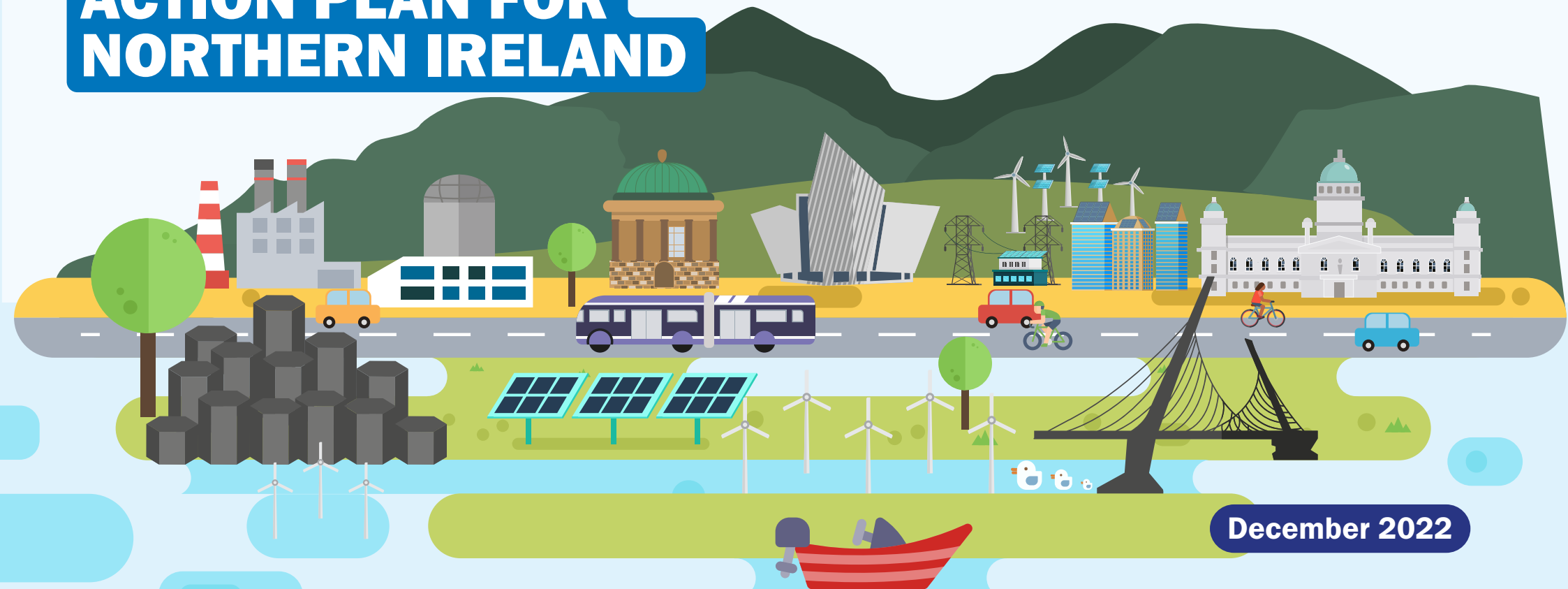
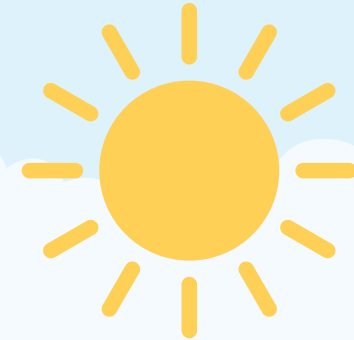




Department for the
Economy
www.economy-ni.gov.uk

CONSULTATION ON THE DRAFT OFFSHORE RENEWABLE ENERGY ACTION PLAN FOR NORTHERN IRELAND



December 2022

Contents

1. Purpose of this consultation	3
2. Introduction	4
3. Offshore Renewable Energy Action Plan	5
4. Indicative timeline for offshore wind development in Northern Ireland	6
5. Principles of the OREAP	7
6. Themes, key objectives, and actions	8
7. Monitoring and reporting	16

1. Purpose of this consultation

The Draft Offshore Renewable Energy Action Plan (OREAP) represents a crucial step for The Department for the Economy (DfE) to deliver on the Energy Strategy for Northern Ireland and the ambition of 1GW of offshore wind from 2030. The purpose of this consultation on the Draft OREAP is to enable stakeholders to contribute and provide input into offshore renewable energy policy development.

The Draft OREAP sets out the direction for planning, licensing, consenting and the development of offshore renewable energy in Northern Ireland. We encourage everyone who has an interest in offshore renewable energy development and the wider energy sector to provide comments on the Draft OREAP by answering the public consultation questions included throughout this document. This will provide DfE with valuable insight, which will be analysed and considered throughout the further development and implementation of the OREAP.

How to respond

This consultation will be hosted online at the following website: <https://consultations.nidirect.gov.uk/dfe/consultation-on-the-draft-oreap/>

The Citizen Space website has been specially designed to be as user-friendly and welcoming as possible for those who wish to complete the consultation. It also allows DfE to rapidly collate results. For this reason, we would encourage anyone who is interested in responding to this consultation to utilise Citizen Space as the method of their response.

If this is not possible, you can however respond to this consultation via email to: RenewableElectricity@economy-ni.gov.uk or you can respond in writing to the DfE Renewable Electricity Team address:

OREAP Consultation
DfE Renewable Electricity Team
6th Floor, Adelaide House
Adelaide Street
Belfast
BT2 8FD

When responding via email or in writing, please state whether you are responding as an individual, or representing the views of an organisation (please state the name of the organisation). Also, quote the following Reference: "OREAP Consultation".

Responses must be received by 23:59 on 16 March 2023.

2. Introduction

The Department for the Economy (DfE) published the Energy Strategy for Northern Ireland in December 2021, which established the vision of net zero carbon and affordable energy in line with the UK Government's 2050 commitment^[1]. The Energy Strategy identifies the need to diversify the electricity generation mix with an initial focus on offshore wind and marine renewables. The Energy Strategy Action Plan 2022 (published 16 January 2022) includes Action 14^[2] to “**Develop an action plan to deliver 1GW of offshore wind from 2030**”.

The Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022^[3] which came into effect on 6 June 2022, raised the commitment for renewable electricity consumption from 70%, as established in the Energy Strategy, to 80% by 2030. The research underpinning the Energy Strategy, supported by the analysis of responses to the Energy Strategy policy options consultation, established that one of the criteria for raising the renewable electricity consumption target was the deployment of offshore wind in NI waters by 2030. It is therefore now necessary to consider to what extent the offshore wind ambitions of the Energy Strategy can feasibly be accelerated.

The OREAP's target of delivering 1GW of offshore wind energy is Northern Ireland's most ambitious energy infrastructure plan, supplying enough energy to power one million homes with clean and affordable electricity.

The NI marine area offers an opportunity for both decarbonisation and economic benefit to NI communities and businesses. The OREAP is designed to accelerate the Energy Strategy ambition, setting the pathway to achieving the deployment of offshore wind in advance of 2030, if feasibly possible.

Delivering this will require the input of a wide range of stakeholders from across society. Therefore, the OREAP takes a collaborative approach working across Government with those who manage, live close to, or work in the marine environment, and with the energy industry, to ensure that activities are being taken forward in a coordinated, informed, and transparent manner.

The OREAP will not only deliver clean electricity for Northern Ireland but will also attract investment into local communities and businesses and see the creation of new skilled jobs for Northern Ireland's workforce. All of this will support growth and innovation in the green economy and low carbon technology sector, contributing to DfE's 10X Economic Vision^[4] - to deliver a ten times better economy with benefits for all our people.

1 [Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/net-zero-strategy-build-back-greener)

2 <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/economy/energy-strategy-path-to-net-zero-action-plan.pdf>

3 <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2022/31/contents/enacted>

4 [10X Economy - an economic vision for a decade of innovation | Department for the Economy \(economy-ni.gov.uk\)](https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/government/consultations/10x-economic-vision)

3. Offshore Renewable Energy Action Plan

The OREAP aligns with the UK Government's ambition of 100% clean electricity by 2035⁵; the target established through the Climate Change (Northern Ireland) Act 2022 of at least 80% of electricity consumption from renewable sources by 2030; the Energy Strategy's target of net zero carbon and affordable energy by 2050. The OREAP will support a whole system approach to the facilitation of a smart and flexible electricity system. This means ensuring that offshore wind farms are sited in the most sustainable and cost-effective locations, and that they are connected in the most efficient ways that are feasible to deliver self-sufficiency in affordable renewable energy for Northern Ireland.

OREAP Steering Group

To oversee the delivery of the OREAP, DfE established an OREAP Steering Group to identify the actions that will need to be undertaken to ensure that the ambition for offshore wind is successfully delivered, and if feasibly possible, accelerated. The Steering Group brings together our key delivery partners: The Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA), The Department for Infrastructure (DfI), the Utility Regulator for Northern Ireland (UR), The Crown Estate (TCE), the System Operator for Northern Ireland (SONI), Northern Ireland Electricity Networks (NIEN), and RenewableNI, to identify the barriers to accelerating offshore wind deployment in Northern Ireland and seek solutions to overcoming them, through a joined-up and coordinated approach. The OREAP Steering Group also has the function of monitoring and ensuring that actions within the OREAP are delivered in an environmentally, socially, and economically sustainable way. In that sense, the OREAP can be considered a 'living' document that will evolve as the position regarding the challenges we face becomes clearer, and as we complete each stage of its development.

OREAP Working Groups

Four expert stakeholder working groups were established, which have identified key actions required to deliver offshore wind deployment in Northern Ireland waters. The working groups are:

- Planning, Licensing, and Consenting;
- Network Development;
- Legislative Powers; and
- Sectoral Growth.

The Draft OREAP has been developed based on the work of these groups and the research and evidence they have provided, setting the direction to achieve the 1GW of offshore wind from 2030 target.

Offshore Renewable Energy Forum

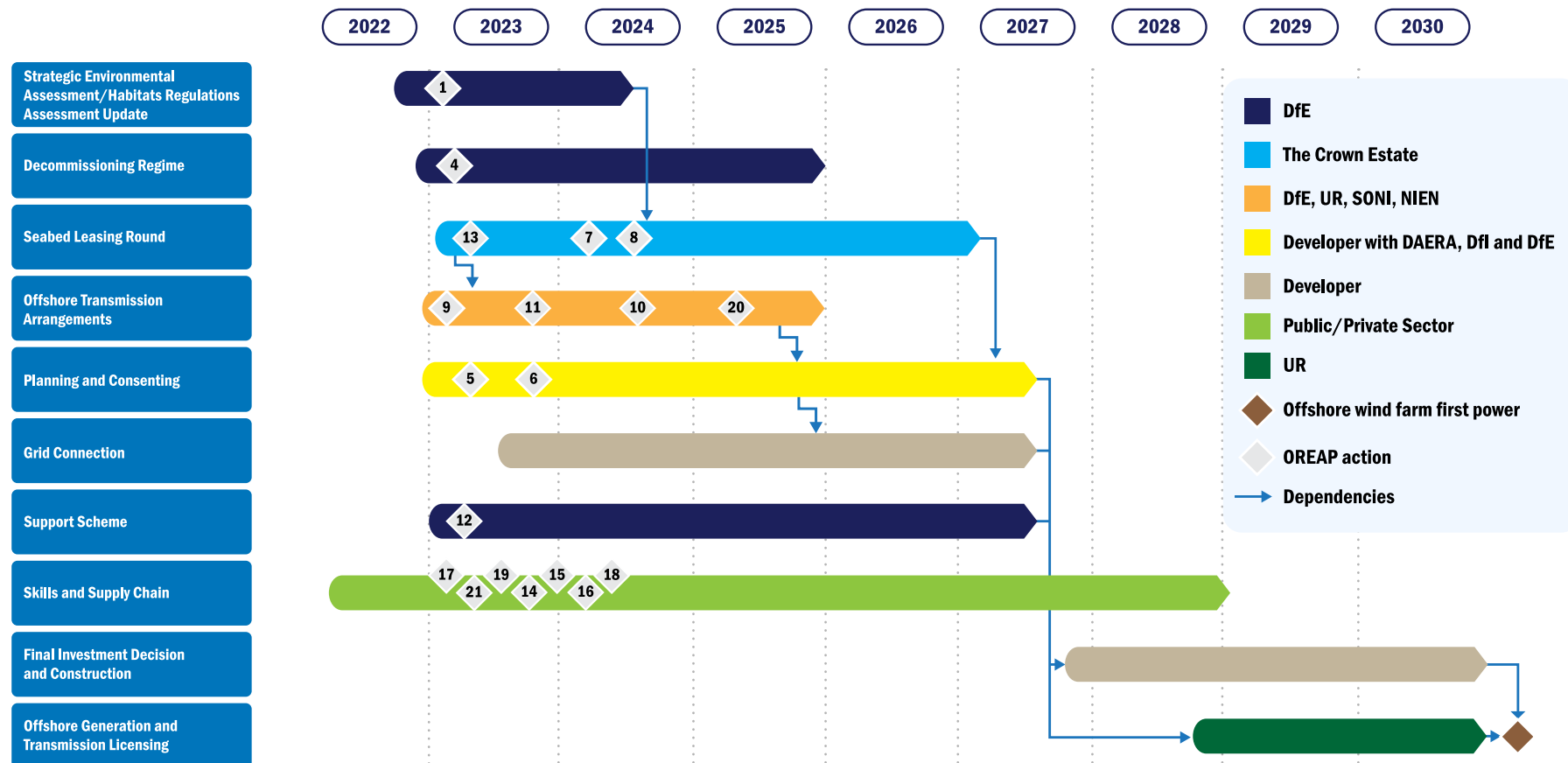
The Offshore Renewable Energy Forum (OREF) has also been established, which includes bodies that are representative of those that live close to, work in, or use the marine environment including: the fishing industry, local Government, maritime safety, environmental protection, maritime and marine economic development, ports and harbours, and marine heritage. The OREF functions to ensure that the views of marine users in the widest sense are considered in offshore renewable energy development in NI.

5 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/plans-unveiled-to-decarbonise-uk-power-system-by-2035>

4. Indicative timeline for offshore wind development in Northern Ireland

The indicative timeline below shows the key processes which will deliver offshore wind in Northern Ireland waters, and the organisations responsible for delivering them. These timescales do not represent commitments, rather they are intended to aid stakeholders in understanding the various phases involved in delivering a new offshore wind framework in NI, and the approximate timescales and interdependencies of each stage. The numbered markers mapped to the timeline indicate some of the key OREAP actions, which are detailed in Section 6 of this document. The numbered markers provide a visualisation of how the OREAP implementation is sequenced within the wider timeline. The lines and arrows connecting phases in the timeline signify the dependencies between them.

This indicative timeline shows an initial illustration of the processes and actions that will be taken forward in the coming months and years. This timeline will be further updated and enhanced as the OREAP implementation process is delivered.



5. Principles of the OREAP

The OREAP has been developed with three principles to guide the implementation of the action plan. These are:

1. Sustainable development in the marine environment

The Marine Plan and the Energy Strategy support the growth of the low carbon economy in Northern Ireland. Ensuring that this occurs in the most appropriate locations, with co-existence of compatible marine users where possible, and balancing all competing factors in a sustainable, environmentally positive way. Sustainable development also means maximising the long-term economic benefits that the offshore wind sector can offer communities and businesses in NI.

2. Adaptive approach

Delivery will be managed through an adaptive approach which will allow the OREAP to be adjusted, if necessary, based on what is learned and as new data and insights become available. As such, the OREAP is an evolving, flexible document, which will address uncertainties and improve understanding of the processes of developing offshore wind in NI.

3. Collaboration and partnership

Offshore renewable energy development involves several government departments, and multiple stakeholders. Therefore, pivotal to success will be the ability to work collaboratively and to regularly engage with key delivery partners including other government departments, regulators and other relevant bodies, the energy industry, and wider stakeholders who live close to, work in, or otherwise use the marine environment. The OREAP process will be delivered through a multidisciplinary and cross-sectoral approach.

Question 1: Do you agree with the principles of the Offshore Renewable Energy Action Plan? Yes/No

Please provide any further comments and, if possible, evidence to support your answer, additional comments or suggestions.

6. Themes, key objectives, and actions

Themes

The OREAP has been developed around five themes. These themes, outlined below, encapsulate the overarching strategic priorities that must be coordinated to enable offshore renewable energy deployment in NI waters:

Sustainability and Co-existence	Enabling Frameworks	Electricity Network	Economic Growth	Legislation and Regulation
Offshore renewable energy development in the marine environment will work within the framework of DAERA's Marine Plan for Northern Ireland. The highest standards of environmental, social, and economic sustainability, and where possible, innovative approaches to co-location and co-existence in the marine environment, will be practiced.	A coherent and coordinated process for offshore wind developers to establish an offshore wind farm in Northern Ireland will be established. This process will involve a combination of marine licensing, development consent, planning permission, and generation and transmission licences. Government departments, regulators and relevant bodies will work in a coordinated and aligned way to deliver this.	Government departments, regulators, electricity networks and relevant bodies will work in coordination and collaboration to establish a joint approach to deliver the Energy Strategy for Northern Ireland's long-term ambitions for offshore renewable energy. Coordinated research and analysis activities will be aligned with and drive policy, and inform decision making.	Certainty and assurance on the route to market for offshore wind will be established. Public, private and education sector collaboration will bring forward the necessary skills and workforce to meet the requirements of the energy sector in the future. Ensuring Northern Ireland maximises the economic benefits of offshore wind in Northern Ireland will be prioritised by government departments and agencies, and industry partners.	Legislation and regulation will be reviewed as necessary to be fit for purpose to deliver on the Energy Strategy for Northern Ireland's offshore wind and low carbon technology ambitions.

Key Objectives

Twelve key objectives within the five strategic priority themes have also been identified. The expert stakeholder OREAP Working Groups provided research and data insights, and engaged in robust collaborative discussions on what objectives must be met to deliver on the Energy Strategy Action Plan ambition of 1GW of offshore wind from 2030.

Actions

Within these key objectives, twenty-two actions have been set out – these are the initial delivery steps towards ensuring policy direction is established, any necessary legislation is brought forward, and then regulatory requirements necessary for offshore renewable energy deployment in NI waters are implemented.

Additionally, actions have been identified that coordinate the work of key delivery partners, developing insight and better data through research, and bringing the right people together to steer the sustainable development of the offshore wind industry in NI.

Progress on the key objectives and actions included in the Draft OREAP will be monitored and reported on, and as necessary, updated actions will be brought forward in the future. Therefore, the Draft OREAP represents the first phase in an evidence-based and data led process that will evolve and adapt as further information and research becomes available.

Each Theme, including Objectives and Actions, is outlined in the tables below. We ask that you consider each theme and respond to the questions at the end.

Theme 1: Sustainability and Co-existence

Offshore renewable energy development in the marine environment will work within the framework of DAERA's Marine Plan for Northern Ireland. The highest standards of environmental, social, and economic sustainability, and where possible, innovative approaches to co-location and co-existence in the marine environment, will be practiced.

Key Objective	Actions	Dependencies	Lead/Lead Partner	Partner	Timing
Update the 2012 Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) of Offshore Renewable Energy in the Northern Ireland Marine Area.	1. Procure external consultants to conduct SEA/HRA update of offshore renewable energy in the NI marine area.		DfE		2022
Align offshore renewable energy policy with marine-related environmental policy.	2. On an ongoing basis, DfE will liaise with DAERA and TCE to ensure that offshore renewable energy policy remains aligned with marine-related environmental policy including, but not exclusively, the developing NI Marine Plan, Biodiversity Strategy and Blue Carbon Action Plan.		DfE	DAERA/ TCE	Ongoing
Deliver a wider stakeholder engagement forum.	3. Establish and regularly engage with a group of wider stakeholders representing those that live close to, work in or otherwise use the marine environment.		DfE	DAERA/ TCE	Ongoing

Question 2: Do you agree with the key objectives and actions in relation to Theme 1? Yes/No

Please provide any further comments and, if possible, evidence to support your answer, additional comments or suggestions.

Question 3: Are there any other areas that require further attention? Yes/No

If yes, please provide evidence to support additional comments or suggestions.

Theme 2: Enabling Frameworks

A coherent and coordinated process for offshore wind developers to establish an offshore wind farm in Northern Ireland will be established. This process will involve a combination of marine licensing, development consent, planning permission, and generation and transmission licences. Government departments, regulators and relevant bodies will work in a coordinated and aligned way to deliver this.

Key Objective	Actions	Dependencies	Lead/Lead Partner	Partner	Timing
Establish a decommissioning regime for Northern Ireland.	4. Consult on policy options for a decommissioning regime for offshore renewable energy installations in NI.		DfE		2023
Prioritise and streamline the process for licensing and consenting.	5. Establish a Memorandum of Understanding between DfI/DAERA/ DfE to ensure that offshore renewable energy projects are prioritised and where possible, departments coordinate and communicate to progress applications expeditiously.		DfI/ DAERA/DfE		2023
	6. Publish guidance on consenting regimes and marine boundaries for offshore wind projects in NI.	Action 1	DfE/DfI/ DAERA	UR	2023
Deliver an offshore wind leasing round for Northern Ireland.	7. Undertake spatial characterisation work in parallel with DfE work to update SEA/HRA.	Action 1	TCE	DfE/DAERA	2023
	8. Commence design of future leasing for offshore wind.	Action 1 Action 4	TCE	DfE/DAERA	2023

Question 4: Do you agree with the key objectives and actions in relation to Theme 2? Yes/No

Please provide any further comments and, if possible, evidence to support your response, additional comments or suggestions.

Question 5: Are there any other areas that require further attention? Yes/No

If yes, please provide evidence to support any additional comments or suggestions.

Theme 3: Electricity Network

Government departments, regulators, electricity networks and relevant bodies will work in coordination and collaboration to establish a joint approach to deliver the Energy Strategy for Northern Ireland's long-term ambitions, which includes offshore renewable energy. Coordinated research and analysis activities will be aligned with and drive policy, and decision making.

Key Objective	Actions	Dependencies	Lead/Lead Partner	Partner	Timing
Facilitate current and planned work and consider strategic network requirements to deliver the NI offshore wind ambition.	9. Establish a working group to consider offshore transmission arrangements and related grid development, including options for offshore connections under existing processes and the options out to 2050 to inform policy direction.		DfE	UR/SONI/ NIEN/TCE	2022
	10. Determine the quantity of offshore capacity that will be targeted in the short, medium and long term.	Action 9	DfE	UR/SONI/ NIEN/TCE	2024
Implement a cost effective and efficient offshore transmission connection and operation framework.	11. SEA/HRA commissioning to incorporate strategic environmental considerations of offshore infrastructure.	Action 1	DfE		2022

Question 6: Do you agree with the key objectives and actions in relation to Theme 3? Yes/No

Please provide any further comments and, if possible, evidence to support your response, additional comments or suggestions.

Question 7: Are there any other areas that require further attention? Yes/No

If yes, please provide evidence to support any additional comments or suggestions.

Theme 4: Economic Growth

Certainty and assurance on the route to market for offshore wind will be established. Public, private and education sector collaboration will bring forward the necessary skills and workforce to meet the requirements of the energy sector in the future. Ensuring Northern Ireland maximises on the economic benefits of offshore wind in Northern Ireland will be prioritised by government departments and agencies, and industry partners.

Key Objective	Actions	Dependencies	Lead/ Lead Partner	Partner	Timing
Provide a visible route to market.	12. Consult on a renewable electricity support scheme for Northern Ireland.		DfE		2023
	13. Publish a Statement of Intent with The Crown Estate.		DfE/TCE		2023
Support development of a skilled workforce for offshore wind and related areas.	14. Develop policy around schemes and awareness campaigns to bring forward the skills and workforce for offshore wind.		DfE	InvestNI/ RenewableNI	2024
	15. Establish linkages between colleges, universities, and industry to train a workforce and address skills shortages.		DfE	InvestNI/ RenewableNI	2024

Theme 4: Economic Growth

Certainty and assurance on the route to market for offshore wind will be established. Public, private and education sector collaboration will bring forward the necessary skills and workforce to meet the requirements of the energy sector in the future. Ensuring Northern Ireland maximises on the economic benefits of offshore wind in Northern Ireland will be prioritised by government departments and agencies, and industry partners.

Key Objective	Actions	Dependencies	Lead/Lead Partner	Partner	Timing
Enable Northern Ireland's businesses and economy to maximise the benefits of offshore wind.	16. Determine policy approach to maximise local content in the offshore wind supply chain.		DfE/TCE		2024
	17. Facilitate greater collaboration within the NI supply chain that benefits everyone.		InvestNI	DIT/BEIS/DfE	Ongoing
	18. Develop policy to bring forward public and private sector collaboration with the purpose of achieving NI and UK offshore wind targets and maximising the benefits for NI.		DfE/InvestNI/ RenewableNI	BEIS/DIT	2024
	19. Establish a working group to identify policy necessary to maximise potential use of offshore wind energy with low carbon technologies, including green hydrogen.		DfE	UR/RenewableNI/ HydrogenNI/SONI/ NIEN/DAERA/ Wholesale Market Stakeholders	2023

Question 8: Do you agree with the key objectives and actions in relation to Theme 4? Yes/No

Please provide any further comments and, if possible, evidence to support your response, additional comments or suggestions.

Question 9: Are there any other areas that require further attention? Yes/No

If yes, please provide evidence to support any additional comments or suggestions.

Theme 5: Legislation and Regulation

Legislation and regulation will be reviewed as necessary to ensure it is fit for purpose to deliver on the Energy Strategy for Northern Ireland's offshore wind and low carbon technology ambitions.

Key Objective	Actions	Dependencies	Lead/Lead Partner	Partner	Timing
Bring forward necessary legislative and subsequent appropriate regulatory changes to enable the sustainable deployment of offshore renewable energy projects in Northern Ireland.	20. Establish any regulatory change necessary for offshore transmission arrangements.	Action 9	DfE/UR		2025
	21. Consider any regulatory changes necessary to enable the use of offshore wind energy with low carbon technologies, including green hydrogen.	Action 19	DfE/UR	RenewableNI/ HydrogenNI/ SONI/NIE/ DAERA	2024
	22. Regularly review the legislative and regulatory framework to establish any gaps in provision.		DfE/UR		Ongoing

Question 10: Do you agree with the key objectives and actions in relation to Theme 5? Yes/No
Please provide any further comments and, if possible, evidence to support your response, additional comments or suggestions.

Question 11: Are there any other areas that require further attention? Yes/No
If yes, please provide evidence to support any additional comments or suggestions.

7. Monitoring and reporting

It is important to be able to identify to what extent the OREAP's objectives and actions are being achieved and what impact this plan has had on the sustainable development of offshore renewable energy in Northern Ireland.

Strategic Level Monitoring

DfE will undertake strategic level monitoring of the implementation of the OREAP on an ongoing basis and provide regular reporting to the OREAP Steering Group and Offshore Renewable Energy Forum (OREF) on progress against the actions set out in section 6 of this document. DfE will publish an annual report on progress against these planned actions and identify any new actions coming forward for the following year. This report will be considered by the OREAP Steering Group and the OREF and will be published on the DfE website.

Review of the OREAP

The Draft OREAP will be subject to review following completion of the SEA and HRA in 2024. This review will assess progress against all actions identified in the OREAP. This review will also assess the need for any corrective action or change of direction in light of any of the strategic level findings and recommendations from the SEA or HRA and considering any emerging strategic developments. This review will also consider monitoring for potential significant environmental effects.

Question 12: Do you have any further comments on the Draft OREAP? Yes/No
If yes, please provide evidence to support any additional comments or suggestions.

Thank you for taking the time to respond to this consultation, we welcome your feedback.

The responses provided give DfE valuable insight, which will be considered throughout the refinement and then implementation of the OREAP.