

Community Engagement – Partnership & Progress

2030 Vision: IWEA and the Wind Energy Industry in Ireland are major contributors to Ireland's Low

Carbon Transition and active partners in a positive future for Ireland

In line with the Irish Wind Energy Association's (IWEA) plans for Ireland's energy future, comes the industry's commitments to a 'step change' in how members will engage with communities neighbouring wind farm projects. The largest national wind energy association, IWEA, announced a series of new measures and undertakings at its annual conference (Wednesday 21st March, Dublin) as part of the association's work to ensure best practice guidelines in community engagement are the norm across the country.

"We haven't always got it right in the past, but this new community engagement approach heralds a step change in how we intend to work with neighbouring communities. With these commitments we want to show our members willingness for a marked change in engagement with local communities. This is part of the process to develop best practice in this area. It follows a period where poor engagement practices with communities in the development of some wind energy projects in the past is now negatively impacting levels of support for further development.

Responsible development and genuine community engagement are pre-conditions if the wind industry is going to continue to flourish and Ireland is to achieve its low carbon economy transition." described Peter Harte, Chairman of IWEA.

"We know that support for wind energy is high, 84% of those polled in an independent survey in October 2017 said they were positively in favour of wind energy, with only 3% strongly against. Despite this there is often negative sentiments locally when a new wind farm is mooted so we need to set out clearly how we will engage with communities to make sure people have real information on the proposed development and that they understand the many benefits," he added.

"We have enormous potential in this country when it comes to our home-grown wind energy. A wealth of resources that can be developed to the benefit of all. We want to be good neighbours with positive, responsible developments. We can do this together, and we are determined to do that. We have opened the conversation here today, we are listening and we want to grow together."

Why now?

- Ireland's 2030 energy targets will be defined under the upcoming 'National Energy and Climate Plans' under the EU's Clean Energy Package
- A new Renewable Energy Support Scheme (RESS) is anticipated that will facilitate the further build-out of renewable technologies in Ireland
- Awareness is growing regarding climate change and the requirement to transition to a low carbon economy

What's in the plans?

We are listening, so these commitments will be subject to ongoing review in the light of feedback from stakeholders and new policy developments as the industry seeks to continually learn from experience.

The commitments are split into various stages of a wind farm's life and a summary of the main points are listed below.

Pre-planning

The long timelines associated with the development of a wind farm getting to operation (5-10 years on average) mean that there is considerable uncertainty in the earlier stages as environmental and design information is gathered. When all necessary land rights are secured IWEA members commit to:

- Create a project website at an early stage of the project development. This webpage will include project milestones and timelines, as they become known.
- Appoint a Community Liaison Officer (CLO) for the project and provide contact details to the community. The CLO will be the point of contact for the community and all requests / concerns will be acknowledged within 48 hours and resolved, where possible within one week.
- Call to the door of all residents within one kilometre of the nearest proposed turbine to provide information – in the form of a project leaflet – which explains the proposed project and provides contact details for the CLO

Pre-construction / Construction

It typically takes about 12 months to construct a wind farm and during the construction phase, there will inevitably be periods of disturbance locally during this phase. The role of the CLO will become more proactive, during this phase, to make sure the local community are kept up to date with developments and any issues are dealt with. During this phase, IWEA members commit to:

- Provide information on the construction schedule to all stakeholders identified in the pre-planning process and on the project website.
- Facilitate public meetings, as necessary, to inform the public about the project and its status.
- The CLO acknowledging all requests / concerns made to him / her within 48 hours and working with the project promoter / construction contractor to resolve any issues that arise. Issues raised generally to be 'closed out' within one week.
- Produce an annual report detailing events / issues that arose and how they were dealt with. This report to be submitted to the local authority.

Post Construction / Operation

Following the completion of the construction and commissioning phase, activity on the site will dramatically reduce. Generally, the only regular visitors to the site thereafter will be the project maintenance personnel transported in cars and vans.

During this phase, IWEA members commit to:

- Maintain the project website with updated information about the project
- CLO continuing to acknowledge all requests/ concerns made to him / her within 48 hours and work with the project promoter / owner to resolve any issues that arise
- Produce an annual report detailing events / issues that arose and how they were dealt with. This report to be submitted to the local authority.
- Compile a report measuring the economic impacts of the project

Existing Projects

There are over 200 wind farms in operation in Ireland today of varying sizes and at varying stages of their operational life. IWEA's members represent approximately 70% of the installed wind capacity at present, and for these operational wind farms, IWEA Members commit to:

- Nominate a Community Liaison Officer (CLO) to each wind farm
- Host a project website with CLO details, or where no dedicated website for the project is in existence, IWEA members commit to providing CLO details to a wind farm database hosted on the IWEA website
- Acknowledge all requests / concerns within 48 hours of being made.
- Ensure all instances of any planned disruption, traffic restrictions etc. are highlighted and clearly communicated to the community in advance.
- Prepare an annual report documenting engagement with the local community. This report to be submitted to the local authority.

Where repowering of older projects is being considered, then IWEA members will apply the full provisions of this document to the redevelopment process.

Community Benefit & Community Ownership

Benefit - As well as developing projects responsibly and seeking to be a good neighbour, IWEA Members will also seek to provide support to local communities. IWEA and its members know from experience that every community and locality is unique, with its own heritage, politics, assets and challenges. Therefore, every partnership with a local community needs to be unique too. IWEA members are committed to providing resources for Community Benefit Funds, tailored to each particular project and the needs of each particular community, with each community defining for themselves how the funding should be allocated.

Recently, a consultation from the Irish Government in relation to the new Renewable Energy Support Scheme (RESS) indicated that best practice for all forms of renewable electricity in relation to community benefit is €2/MWh, which was welcomed in IWEA's subsequent response. To ensure that IWEA's members are aligned with the best practice proposed in RESS, IWEA members are committing to provide €2/MWh to Community Benefit Funds for all future wind farm projects (RESS supported or not). The duration of these payments will depend on what is set out in the final design of RESS.

This is a very substantial increase in local funding over what had been committed to in previous IWEA policy documents. For example, a typical 3 MW wind turbine under current IWEA guidelines would provide approximately €45,000 to a local community over a 15-year period (@€1,000/MW¹), but in the future a 3 MW wind turbine (@€2/MWh) will provide approximately €250,000 to a neighbouring community over this 15-year period, assuming this is how long the projects is in RESS.

Ownership - In some cases, local communities aspire to forms of community ownership or community investment in wind farms.

IWEA supports this, but also recognises that there are important aspects of how this might best work in practice, that require further working through between the different stakeholders. Developing wind farms is, by its nature, a business with risks. IWEA recognises that work is required to develop models of ownership that minimise risks to communities (and / or, at least, recognise that any risks are made

¹ <http://www.iwea.com/iweabestpracticeprinciplesinco>



as transparent as possible). IWEA members commit to working with community interests seeking to explore community options in as open and transparent a manner as possible.

The €2/MWh and the Community Ownership commitments will apply to all projects developed post the current REFIT support.

Next Steps

IWEA is committed to working nationally with government on the design and implementation of best-practice in relation to community engagement, particularly in relation to the Wind Energy Development Guidelines and Renewable Electricity Support Scheme.

IWEA call on the Government to facilitate a workshop on the Community Investment element of the Renewable Electricity Support Scheme with industry and other stakeholders now to ensure this key area will be fit for purpose when rolled out.

IWEA call on the Government to set up an independent energy commissioner to facilitate the independent adjudication of issues associated with wind farm developments (and all other energy projects).

IWEA will also work with other stakeholders to develop initiatives and conversations that support community engagement. For example, IWEA will host a workshop on the above commitments during the Spring / Summer with international guests to ensure we benefit from best practice in other jurisdictions. IWEA will use our education and training program, Wind Skillnet, to provide training opportunities to IWEA members that will enable our membership to learn from experiences and continuously improve how the industry delivers on the above commitments.

IWEA will continue to grow partnerships and work with others committed to a low carbon transition and a positive future for Ireland's rural communities through 2018 with a view to producing a strategy document on this key area before the end of the year.