

Pause onshore wind & solar projects >10MW until the full potential of off-shore wind is included

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 11 Rhaglan 2023
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Reference: SR237337-5

Petition Number: P-06-1383

Petition title: Pause onshore wind & solar projects >10MW until the full potential of off-shore wind is included

Text of petition:

To prevent widescale and needless damage to the Welsh countryside, we call upon the Welsh Government to place a temporary moratorium on all onshore wind and ground based solar developments over 10MW, until Future Wales 2040 and the Welsh Government's renewable energy targets are updated and incorporated with Wales Marine Energy to ensure that the full potential of offshore wind, rooftop solar, and other emerging energy sources is recognised as a critical priority to combat climate change.

Wales presently produces 30 Terra Watt hours (TWh) of energy (55% of that from renewables) whilst using only 14TWh, however, demand is estimated to increase to 45TWh by 2050.

Wales has massive potential for far offshore wind (both fixed and floating) with projects proposed for offshore wind projects, in the Irish and Celtic Sea combined forecast to generate at least 100 TWh of energy.

Estimates also calculate that up to 50% of Wales energy consumption could be met through rooftop solar on houses, businesses, and covered car parks.

Yet neither the full potential of offshore wind nor rooftop solar is being calculated into Welsh Government policy. The Minister for Climate Change admitted to CPRW it wasn't, stating that their policy document, Future Wales,



had not been updated in three years. We call for policy to be updated to include the full potential of offshore wind, rooftop solar and other emerging technologies to ensure we sacrifice the least amount of countryside and farmland.

1. Background

1.1. Current picture of renewable energy generation

The Welsh Government published its strategy to decarbonise the energy sector and accelerate renewable energy development, the [Net Zero Wales Carbon Budget 2 \(2021-25\)](#) (“the Net Zero Plan”), on 28 October 2021. The Net Zero Plan outlines actions the Welsh Government (and others) need to take, over the next five years, to reduce reliance on fossil fuels and drastically reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the energy sector. It also takes a longer term view, looking towards the net zero by 2050 target.

In 2022, there were 95,047 renewable energy projects in Wales, and [approximately 59% of Wales’ electricity demand](#) was met from Welsh renewable energy sources. There was 897MW of locally owned renewable energy capacity in Wales, almost 90% of the 1GW target. The [Welsh Government’s Energy Generation in Wales 2022 report](#) gives further information. Annual [Energy Generation in Wales reports](#) are available from 2016.

1.2. Offshore wind

Offshore wind is an [established and proven renewable energy technology](#). There are three operational offshore wind farms off the North Wales coast: Gwynt y Mor, Rhyl Flats and North Hoyle.

[Floating offshore wind](#) (FLOW) technologies combine the platform technology used in the oil and gas industry, and wind turbines. This means wind turbines can move into deeper waters with higher wind speeds, and have less visual impact. The UK Government wants to develop 5GW of FLOW by 2030 as part of the [British Energy Security Strategy](#).

The Celtic Sea, the area between south Wales, Ireland and Cornwall, is incredibly windy, but too deep for traditional fixed-bottom turbines. Marine Energy Wales is facilitating the development of FLOW in the Celtic Sea, saying it can deliver 24GW of energy and thousands of jobs. It highlights that FLOW development should be “rapid” to meet net zero ambitions, as such the Crown Estate is offering leasing opportunities in the Celtic Sea for FLOW projects.

1.3. Rooftop solar

The UK Climate Change Committee’s June 2023 progress report on reducing emissions in Wales found that Welsh renewables capacity has increased over time, but the rate of solar power installation has slowed since 2016.

Permitted development rights allow for the installation of micro-generation equipment, including rooftop solar panels on domestic and non-domestic properties in Wales, without having to make a planning application. Where certain criteria are not met a planning application would be required.

Senedd Research has published a small-scale renewable energy schemes planning quick guide which provides further information.

1.4. The planning framework

Future Wales, published in 2021, is Wales’ National Development Framework and has development plan status. It sets out the Welsh Government’s strategic planning policies on a range of topics including renewable energy.

Planning Policy Wales (PPW) remains the Welsh Government’s primary statement of planning policy and continues to apply to all aspects of the planning process. Future Wales applies the key principles of PPW and establishes where in Wales development should take place and how.

Future Wales can be revised at any time, however there’s a statutory requirement for a review at least every five years. It’s produced under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended by the Planning (Wales) Act 2015) which extends to the land only in Wales, down to the low water mark. **Future Wales is therefore unable to refer to offshore wind.** The Welsh National Marine Plan sets policy for the sustainable use of the sea.

1.5. Consenting energy infrastructure

The [Net Zero Plan](#) states the Welsh Government will “improve and unify” the consenting of energy generation projects in Wales to provide a quicker and more proportionate energy infrastructure consenting regime.

The [Infrastructure \(Wales\) Bill](#) was introduced into the Senedd on 12 June 2023. The Bill reforms how infrastructure is consented in Wales by establishing a unified process, known as an Infrastructure Consent (IC), for specific types of major infrastructure called Significant Infrastructure Projects (SIPs). These include energy projects on land and in the sea around Wales (known as the ‘[Welsh marine area](#)’).

Key Senedd Research publications to support scrutiny of the Bill can be [found on this page](#), which will be updated as the Bill makes its way through the [Senedd’s legislative process](#).

2. Welsh Government action

2.1. Renewable energy targets

In September 2017, the Welsh Government [set renewable energy targets](#):

- Wales to generate 70% of its electricity consumption from renewable energy by 2030;
- 1 GW of renewable electricity capacity in Wales to be locally owned by 2030; and
- New renewable energy projects to have at least an element of local ownership.

Additionally, the [Programme for Government 2021-26](#) includes a commitment to “expand renewable energy generation by public bodies and community groups in Wales by over 100 MW by 2026”.

Earlier in 2023, the Welsh Government consulted on a [review of its renewable energy targets](#). In response to this petition, the Minister for Climate Change, Julie James MS, referenced the evidence base supporting the consultation, which made clear “that we cannot rely on one type of renewable energy source to support our long-term energy needs”, saying:

Wind energy, along with solar are the most mature technolog[ies] and these are likely to make the most significant contribution to our energy

needs in the short to medium term. We anticipate much of this will be offshore, but we will need further onshore generation

Following the consultation, the Minister for Climate Change announced the Welsh Government's intention to adopt a target for Wales to meet the equivalent of 100% of annual electricity consumption from renewable sources by 2035. The Wales Net Zero 2035 challenge group has since been set up to examine potential pathways to net zero by 2035.

In October 2022, the Welsh Government announced its intention to set up a publicly owned renewable energy developer, to develop wind energy projects on the Welsh Government woodland estate.

2.2. Renewable energy deep dive

In October 2021, the Welsh Government announced it would be undertaking a Deep Dive into renewable energy to identify barriers to significantly scaling up renewable energy in Wales and steps to overcome them. The outcome of the Deep Dive, including a series of recommendations, was published in December 2021. The Welsh Government has subsequently published two biannual updates on recommendations from the deep dive.

2.3. Responding to the petition

In response to this petition, the Minister for Climate Change, says restricting the freedom for anyone to “submit a planning application for whatever proposed development... is not the best way forward”. As such the Minister does “not support the call for a moratorium on onshore wind or solar farms as they still have an important role in the future energy mix”.

The Minister also highlights that:

...a number of key levers that the offshore wind industry need lie in the hands of the UK Government. Without a supportive framework from the UK Government, I have concerns that the offshore wind sector will not provide the electricity generation and economic opportunities we know it can.

3. Welsh Parliament action

In late 2021 the Senedd Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure (CCEI) Committee's undertook a [short inquiry into renewable energy](#). This [Senedd Research article](#) provides an overview of the Committee's findings, and an [update on the Deep Dive recommendations](#).

Also in late 2021, the CCEI Committee considered marine energy development as part of its [inquiry into marine environment management](#). The CCEI Committee is currently undertaking scrutiny of the [Infrastructure \(Wales\) Bill](#).

You recently considered petition '[P-06-1339 Require all new Welsh homes to be fitted with solar panels as a condition of planning permission](#)'.

In June 2023, the Minister [referred to the issue](#) of requiring solar panels in response to questions from Senedd Members on the UK Climate Change Committee progress report referenced earlier in this briefing.

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