

Countdown to meeting 10% UK renewable electricity target by 2010



17th September 2007

It remains achievable for the UK government to meet its target to generate 10% of UK's electricity from indigenous renewable energy sources by 2010, but urgent action to determine wind energy projects is required at all levels of Government, north and south of the border, if the target is to become a reality.

Unfortunately, the UK's planning decision making powers have not sufficiently responded to the growth in political, industry or public interest in renewable energy which has led to the perceived under-delivery of renewables and an erroneous belief that the sector is unable to deliver the 2010 target.

Where are we now?

Currently, renewables generate just over 4.5% of electricity in the UK. Of this figure, non-wind renewables contribute around 3%, with on- and offshore wind generating around 1.5% of today's UK electricity supply.

Where do we need to be?

In order to bridge the gap between the existing and target contribution, we need to increase renewable energy generation significantly over the next 3 years to source a further 5.5% of our electricity. It is widely accepted that non-wind renewables are unlikely to increase their contribution to more than 4% by 2010 and BWEA can report that offshore wind is unlikely to be able to deploy more than 1.5% of the UK's electricity supply in the same time window. Therefore, within the timescale available, onshore wind is the only technology with an industry ready and able to deliver the large scale increase in generation required to meet the 10% target in time.

The stark reality is that onshore wind energy must contribute 4.5% of our electricity supply by 2010. This equates to around 6,000 MW of installed capacity generated from the installation of approximately 3,600 turbines, around twice as many as are currently operating in the UK.

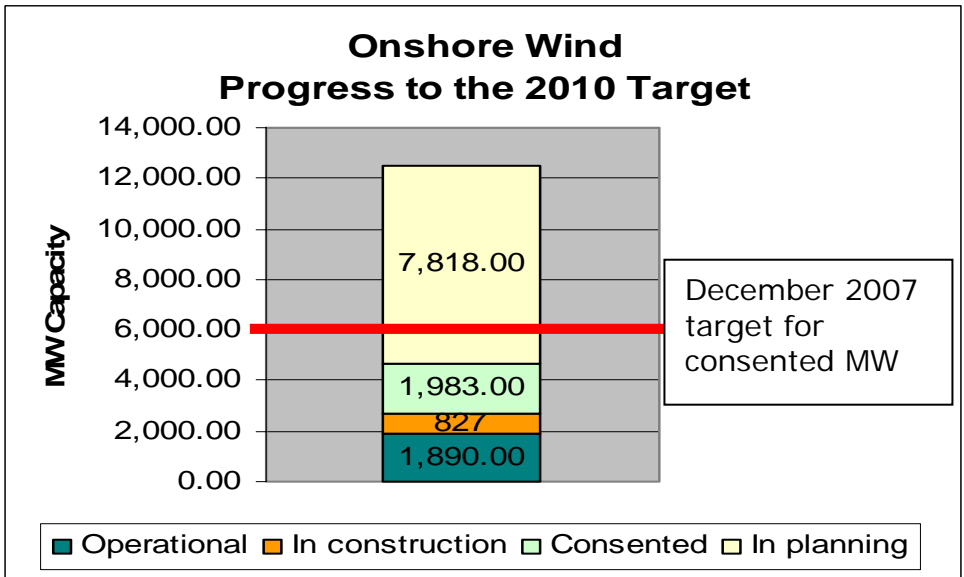
Current Progress to 6,000 MW from onshore wind

- Operational: 1,890 MW
- Under Construction: 827 MW
- Approved & awaiting construction: 1,983 MW

A total of 4,700 MW is able to be constructed and in operation by 2010.

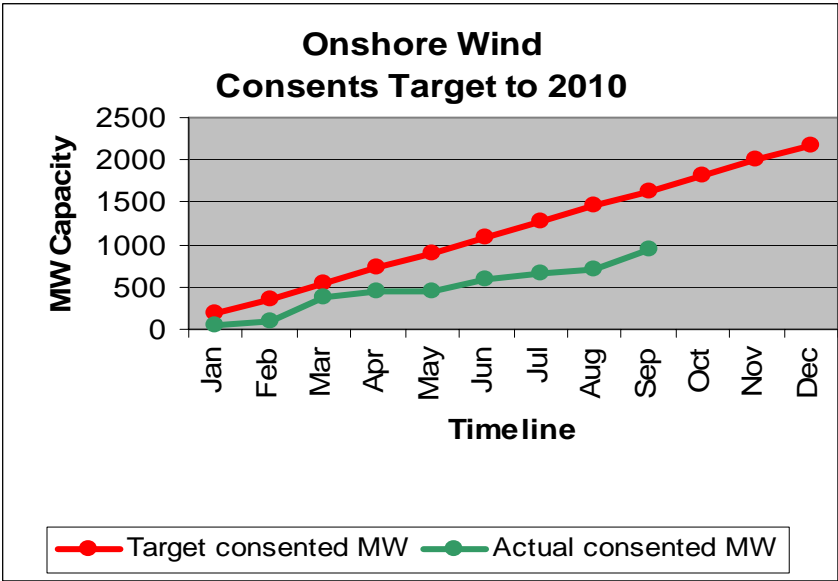
The gap to meeting the target is 1,300 MW

Given that the period required from planning consent to operation of a wind farm is up to 3 years, this must be consented in the next few months in order to be able to be built, operational and contributing to our energy mix by December 2010.



There are currently over 200 onshore wind projects totalling nearly 8,000 MW of capacity in the planning system awaiting determination. Just one sixth of this capacity must be consented by the end of December this year to achieve the UK Government's inaugural renewable energy target. This would be a significant achievement for the renewable energy industry and for all levels of Government.

In January 2007, the position was clear and an outstanding onshore wind consents target of 2,200 MW was set to ensure 2010 delivery. The graph below shows the target for onshore consents which was set in January for delivery in December 2007, and the overall progress in meeting that goal. The red line is the average monthly consents target and the green line is the actual MW capacity consented to date. The graph shows where we are now, with 941 MW consented to date in 2007 leaving a shortfall of 1,259 MW required to be consented promptly, to ensure target delivery.



How can the onshore wind consents target be met?

The planning system is solely able to deliver the consents in time, but the planning system is now a complex devolved system with a range of decision making authorities in all four different UK countries which has led to slow decision times.

Prompt decision making is encouraged by all determining bodies across the UK, although there are three key decision making powers which hold the bulk of the capacity and ultimately control whether the target can be met. BWEA is calling on each of these decision making authorities to take urgent action to determine the carbon free generating capacity that is within their control.

The key role of UK Government

Currently five projects, constituting 321 MW of capacity, are awaiting determination from the Department for Business Enterprise and Regulatory Reform, under Section 36 of the Electricity Act. These projects have been with the Secretary of State for an average of more than 2 years, with one project still awaiting a decision after 3 years.

There is similarly an additional 260 MW from 9 projects currently awaiting determination from the Planning Inspectorate in England. The time taken for appeal decisions is also a matter of concern with the average time taken for appeal decisions being over a year for the 10 decisions made in the last 18 months.

BWEA calls on the UK Government to make prompt decisions for the five Section 36 projects to ensure timely delivery of a potential 321 MW of carbon free electricity generation and allow the projects to contribute to the 2010 target.

BWEA encourages UK Government to support the Planning Inspectorate with increased resources to allow for more efficient and timely decisions.

The key role of Scottish Government

With 33 Section 36 projects contributing a total of 4,000 MW awaiting determination from the Scottish Government, prompt decision making in Scotland offers the greatest opportunity to deliver 10% of UK electricity from renewable energy sources by 2010.

BWEA warmly welcome the new Scottish Government starting to unblock the backlog, having made three decisions this week alone, resulting in the approval of an additional 213 MW.

However, a significant backlog remains, resulting in a lack of predictability for the industry. This is demonstrated by the fact that almost half the Section 36 projects have been with the Scottish Government for over three years, with an average decision time of 51 months for the 4 decisions taken this year. If Scotland is to lead the world in renewable energy production, timely decision making for onshore wind projects is imperative in order to instill investor confidence in the renewables industry as a whole and secure the wider economic benefits that it brings.

BWEA would encourage the new Scottish Government to maintain their recent rate of decision making for the remainder of 2007, in order to effectively address the 4,000 MW backlog and secure investor confidence in a renewables future in Scotland.

The key role of local decision makers

Onshore wind is the leading renewable energy technology and the only technology able to deliver on a large scale right now, but with only 5% of wind farm applications determined within the statutory 16 week period, compared to an average of 70% for all other major developments, delays in local decision making are failing national government planning objectives north and south of the border.

National governments must also be more diligent in monitoring and enforcing the delivery of their own policy on the ground, as local decision making bodies across the UK continue to make decisions inconsistent with national policy. Analysis of the data on decisions since January 2005 proves that not only are decision times damaging investor confidence, but so too is the inconsistency in decision making. Local Councils with a particularly poor track record include the following:

Perth and Kinross

- Perth & Kinross has refused all of the 10 applications it has received
- Perth & Kinross Council alone is responsible for refusing approximately a third of the total onshore wind capacity refused in Scotland since 2005

South Cambridge

- South Cambridgeshire Council has refused 2 applications since 2005 and approved none, out of a total capacity of 33MW decided

West Devon District Council

- West Devon refused 2 applications and approved none during the study period

In total, 3,000 MW are awaiting decisions at the local level. Given the role of local councils in meeting the 2010 target, there is a clear need for national governments to remind local authorities of their statutory responsibilities in decision making.

BWEA calls on the UK and Scottish Governments to write to local planning authorities, reminding them that decisions need to be made within statutory timelines and in accordance with the existing robust national planning policy for renewables as set out in PPS22 in England and SPP6 in Scotland. They should also highlight independent and authoritative information on wind energy published in the Sustainable Development Commission's report, 'Wind Power in the UK'.

BWEA calls on all political parties to play their part in tackling climate change and encourage their elected members to support local wind farm projects.

BWEA calls on the Secretary of State to bring the 'Renewables Statement of Need' to the attention of planning authorities in England when assessing planning applications for renewable energy projects.

BWEA also call on the Northern Ireland Planning Service to make prompt decisions on the 1,000 MW which are within its own powers to determine.