

Interview

Moving with the wind

Maria McCaffery talks of her appointment as Chief Executive of BWEA, and what she plans to bring to the role.

Previously Director General at the Institute of Export and prior to that International Director at the British Chambers of Commerce, Maria joined BWEA on 19 June, and just three weeks later the results of the Government's Energy Review were published – nothing like hitting the ground running.

What strengths do you bring with you, and why do you think this is important for BWEA?

In a nutshell, I have 20 years management experience and 18 years of working with national membership organisations. BWEA has emerged in response to the development of the industry and that has been at such a prolific rate that it hasn't stopped along the way to address its own corporate issues – it's had to be far too responsive to a rapidly changing industry.

What examples of such growing pains have you seen and what do you plan to do to change them?

Right at the heart and core of what I want to bring about is to take a few deep breaths and start the process of planning so that we actually anticipate a programme of activities. We should chose them carefully, and then plan so as to get the greatest benefit from them. Just in my first four weeks we've been up against the wire on time on too many issues and we need to be more selective. We want to be cherry-picking the issues we get behind, the events we participate in, and the principal activities we engage in. We need to have a more cohesive

policy and set of activities that encompasses all the technologies, across renewables as a whole, representing BWEA's membership in all its diversity.

Can I turn this around and say some positives. I've been very positively impressed by the people at BWEA. The team here has a collection of tremendous attributes and strengths, but the issue is they're not always pulling in the same direction – they're all furthering their individual areas because that is how BWEA has evolved. My objective will be to co-ordinate all this capability and competence towards very clearly defined strategic goals. Two keys words are strategic and proactive, where we decide what we're here to do and what we need to do to achieve that overall aim, and then I can address those resource issues.

A third area which is desperately important to me is the image of the organisation, as distinct from its aims and objectives and its raison d'etre. In essence, we are a national trade representative body and the emphasis should be on membership. We should take our cue from our members, whose interests we protect, represent and promote. I fear that we have developed an image which is more consistent with the other NGOs and I'm not persuaded that that's the best one for us.

I want members to know that I see them as central and critical and while the outcome of everything they do is helpful to the environment and the climate change issues and the global

"Everyone I have met in my first four weeks has, within the first two minutes of conversation said, 'you've joined the Association at a very interesting time' and I've scarcely had time to draw breath since."



Maria McCaffery, BWEA CEO

"Thank you to all those who've written to welcome me on board and invite me to your offices and installations: I'd dearly love to accept them all, but it will take some time!"

warming issues and all these altruistic motives, we're not forgetting that they have commercial objectives. We're here to represent their interests and promote and protect their business.

So, back to basics then?

Yes, it is. To achieve that and to deliver effectively we've got to have the appropriate management and administrative processes in place, and this is of necessity a matter of priority. When my predecessor took the helm a little over three years ago, this operation employed seven people; it's now twice that size, and its activities have grown exponentially. Frenetic is a good word because that actually typifies all this energy that I'm not entirely convinced is being channelled towards the achievement of an identified strategic goal and that's what I want to do.

And to go back to image, business-like and professional are the two key thoughts. I want for the Association a very business like and professional image that makes the members proud to be part of us. My not for profit heritage has endowed me with a very frugal disposition; I've become adept at making every pound of income generated do the work of two. I want members to be reassured that I'm not wasteful of our precious resources and intend to use them as effectively as we can.

In the past, some have said that the inclusion of marine renewables technologies dilutes the main message of BWEA. Is this something you would agree with or are marine renewables here to stay within BWEA's remit?

Absolutely. I'm totally committed to the inclusion of the marine technologies taking a progressively greater prominence in our activities as the technologies themselves develop. The mix requires a combination and the 21% deliverable we have declared to Government that we can achieve depends very much on marine doing their bit.

Would you ever see BWEA's remit extending beyond the obvious synergies of marine renewables?

Indeed I would. If it's from a renewable source, and it's helping to achieve the overall objectives of reducing carbon and other greenhouse gas emissions, does no damage and is economically viable, then we are interested. If it can also be as free and abundant as our natural resources of wind, wave, tidal and sunshine, then so much the better. I visualise an Association which is representative of the renewables energy industry in their widest context.

Another great advantage which isn't brought to the fore is that if and when at some point in the future we want to dismantle or decommission any

of these installations, when we walk away, what we leave behind is as if we've never been.

I'm constantly astonished that with all these positives and advantages, our economic and political framework is not standing foursquare behind renewables.

So, what is your gut response to the results of the Energy Review?

It's disappointing because it lacks substance. Government's failure to commit to a 2020 target was extremely disappointing, and while the 20% target is welcome, without a timescale it lacks real teeth.

I do think however that we should heave an enormous sigh of relief because those who have already invested heavily did express their concerns to us that a change in the support mechanism of the RO would have brought negative impacts, so we are relieved that the Green Paper hasn't damaged those who have already invested. But we feel it could, and should, have done much more to provide the long term investor confidence the industry needs so much.

Some may say that the absence of a firm target doesn't really make a difference as we now have an RO to 20%, but I believe that a target is fundamentally important, because it commits the Government and if they have a commitment, if they say we are going to achieve this, then they have a vested interest in making sure it happens. This Green Paper didn't make that commitment. It's all very well saying they believe the industry can do it; well, show us how confident you are by saying you'll work with us because you've accepted this as a target for Government. That's what we'd like to see and that's what our investors would like to see.

A 20% renewables share is often seen as a cut-off point with few

being able to see beyond that - do you ever think we can move beyond 20%?

I do indeed and I think that people are not seeing beyond it because they're not looking beyond it. In Government planning terms where there is a culture of short termism, the period from now to 2020 is long term, but for investors in this industry that period is very short. Possibly people are also hung up on 20% because our own research only looked to 2020, but we have no expectation that we'll fall off the edge come 2020. In fact, quite the contrary, because once wind farm consent is granted it is typically for 25 years, so we'll be in play for quite some time to come.

Equally, there are those who express doubts that wind can grow from its current 1% of supply to the 6% we're projecting in the next four years. This is an extremely steep growth curve, but it can be done, as we have shown in the past three years.

What's your forecast for renewables?

My crystal ball tells me that not only will renewables continue to provide a greater and greater proportion of the UK's energy demand and make a greater contribution to the mixture, but that in so doing we're positioning ourselves as a major global supplier. That's actually a bit too ambitious for our current state of affairs, but we definitely have that potential on technology transfer, and expertise and know-how.

And I'd like to highlight the role of the regions in achieving that. For example, Renewables East have had good success in their region, working with the RDA to advance renewables and highlight the industrial opportunities to all manner of businesses, far better than BWEA could achieve centrally. Essentially the regions are the shape of things to come, where each RDA has a renewable energy body working

specifically within that region, creating a streamlined operating framework for renewables. We recognise and understand that government sets policy centrally, but resource allocation is decided in the regions. It will be our priority to ensure that energy and renewables is very high on that agenda.

What would you most like to see in the coming years?

I would like Government support for attracting to the UK the inward investment for supply chain manufacturers. We are at the mercy of operations that are head-officed overseas – which is not so much of a problem but we have invited them repeatedly to establish themselves in the UK, with jobs creation potential

for longer term export opportunities. This is not a short term opportunity; this is a long term requirement. We can confidently expect at least 14 years, but probably considerably longer than that. We could incentivise inwards investors much better than we are and strengthen the UK's position as a global player in this market place.

Interesting times ahead indeed ... □



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