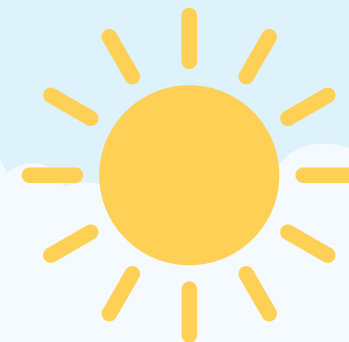




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An Roinn  
**Geilleagair**

# OFFSHORE RENEWABLE ENERGY ACTION PLAN FOR NORTHERN IRELAND



**February 2025**

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## 1. 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 draft Marine Plan and the Energy Strategy support the growth of the low carbon economy in NI. 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 renewable energy 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 renewable energy 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.

## 2. 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 draft Marine Plan for NI, and once adopted, the Marine Plan for NI. 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 developers to establish offshore renewable energy developments in NI's marine area 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 NI'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 renewable energy projects 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 NI maximises the economic benefits of offshore renewable energy projects in NI 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 NI's offshore renewable energy and low carbon technology ambitions.

## Key Objectives

Twelve key objectives within the five strategic priority themes have also been identified. Towards the development of the OREAP, expert stakeholder working groups provided research and data insights, and engaged in robust collaborative discussions on what objectives are key to delivering the Energy Strategy Action Plan's initial target of at least 1GW of offshore wind from 2030 and enable the development of other marine renewables within NI's marine area.

## 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 to 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 offshore renewable energy in NI.

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

## Theme A: Sustainability and Co-existence

Offshore renewable energy development in the marine environment will work within the framework of DAERA's draft 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 for Completion
<b>Update the 2012 Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) of Offshore Renewable Energy in the Northern Ireland Marine Area.</b>	A1. Procure external consultants to conduct SEA/ HRA update of offshore renewable energy in the NI marine area.		DfE		Complete
<b>Align offshore renewable energy policy with marine-related environmental policy.</b>	A2. 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 draft NI Marine Plan, Biodiversity Strategy and Blue Carbon Action Plan.		DfE	DAERA/TCE	Ongoing
<b>Deliver a wider stakeholder engagement forum.</b>	A3. 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

## Theme B: Enabling Frameworks

A coherent and coordinated process for developers to establish offshore renewable energy developments in NI's marine area 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 for Completion
<b>Establish a decommissioning regime for Northern Ireland.</b>	B1. Consult on policy options for a decommissioning regime for offshore renewable energy installations in NI.		DfE		Complete
<b>Prioritise and streamline the process for licensing and consenting.</b>	B2. Establish a Memorandum of Understanding between DfI/DAERA/DfE to ensure that offshore renewable energy projects are prioritised and where possible, departments co-ordinate and communicate to progress applications expeditiously.		DfI/DAERA/DfE		2025
	B3. Publish guidance on consenting regimes and marine boundaries for offshore renewable energy projects in NI.	Action A1	DfE/DfI/DAERA	UR	2025
<b>Deliver an offshore wind leasing round for Northern Ireland.</b>	B4. Undertake spatial characterisation work in parallel with DfE work to update SEA/HRA.	Action A1	TCE	DfE/DAERA	Complete
	B5. Commence the design of future leasing for offshore wind.	Action A1 Action B1	TCE	DfE/DAERA	Ongoing

## Theme C: 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 NI's long-term ambitions for 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 for Completion
<b>Facilitate current and planned work and consider strategic network requirements to deliver the NI's initial offshore wind ambition.</b>	C1. 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	Complete
	C2. Determine the quantity of offshore capacity that will be targeted in the short, medium, and long term.	Action C1	DfE	UR/SONI/NIEN/TCE	2025
<b>Implement a cost effective and efficient offshore transmission connection and operation framework.</b>	C3. SEA/HRA commissioning to incorporate strategic environmental considerations of offshore infrastructure.	Action A1	DfE		Complete



## Theme D: Economic growth

Certainty and assurance on the route to market for offshore renewable energy projects 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 NI maximises on the economic benefits of offshore renewable energy projects in NI will be prioritised by government departments and agencies, and industry partners.

Key Objective	Actions	Dependencies	Lead/Lead Partner	Partner	Timing for Completion
<b>Provide a visible route to market.</b>	D1. Consult on a renewable electricity support scheme for Northern Ireland.		DfE		Complete
	D2. Publish a Statement of Intent with The Crown Estate.		DfE/TCE		Complete
<b>Support development of a skilled workforce for offshore renewable energy and related areas.</b>	D3. Develop policy around schemes and awareness campaigns to bring forward the skills and workforce for offshore renewable energy.		DfE	InvestNI/ RenewableNI	2025
	D4. Establish linkages between colleges, universities, and industry to train a workforce and address skills shortages.		DfE	InvestNI/ RenewableNI	2025

## Theme D: Economic growth

Certainty and assurance on the route to market for offshore renewable energy projects 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 NI maximises on the economic benefits of offshore renewable energy projects in NI will be prioritised by government departments and agencies, and industry partners.

Key Objective	Actions	Dependencies	Lead/Lead Partner	Partner	Timing for Completion
<b>Enable Northern Ireland's businesses and economy to maximise the benefits of offshore renewable energy.</b>	D5. Determine policy approach to maximise local content in the offshore renewable energy supply chain.		DfE/TCE		2025
	D6. Facilitate greater collaboration within the NI supply chain that benefits everyone.		InvestNI	DIT/BEIS/DfE	Ongoing
	D7. Develop policy to bring forward public and private sector collaboration with the purpose of achieving NI and UK offshore renewable energy targets and maximising the benefits for NI.		DfE/ InvestNI/ RenewableNI	BEIS/DIT	2025
	D8. Establish a working group to identify policy necessary to maximise potential use of offshore renewable energy with low carbon technologies, including green hydrogen.		DfE	UR/RenewableNI/ HydrogenNI/SONI/ NIEN/DAERA/ Wholesale Market Stakeholders	Complete

## Theme E: 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 NI's offshore renewable energy and low carbon technology ambitions.

Key Objective	Actions	Dependencies	Lead/Lead Partner	Partner	Timing for Completion
<b>Bring forward necessary legislative and subsequent appropriate regulatory changes to enable the sustainable deployment of offshore renewable energy projects in Northern Ireland.</b>	E1. Establish any regulatory change necessary for offshore transmission arrangements.	Action C1	DfE/UR		2025
	E2. Consider any regulatory changes necessary to enable the use of offshore renewable energy with low carbon technologies, including green hydrogen.	Action D8	DfE/UR	RenewableNI/ HydrogenNI/ SONI/NIE/ DAERA	2025
	E3. Regularly review the legislative and regulatory framework to establish any gaps in provision.		DfE/UR		Ongoing

### 3. 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 NI.

#### 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 OREF on progress against the actions set out in section 2 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 OREAP will be subject to review following completion of the SEA and HRA in 2025. 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.

# **GOVERNMENT RESPONSE: DRAFT OFFSHORE RENEWABLE ENERGY ACTION PLAN FOR NORTHERN IRELAND**

## Introduction

The Department for the Economy (DfE) held a consultation on the draft Offshore Renewable Energy Action Plan (draft OREAP)<sup>1</sup> for Northern Ireland (NI) between 21 December 2022 and 16 March 2023.

The purpose of the consultation was to enable stakeholders to provide input into offshore renewable energy policy development. This document provides a high level overview of the feedback received.

## Overview of responses

The consultation asked twelve questions which can be seen presented in **Annex A**.

A total of 50 responses were received during the consultation. Respondents have been broken down by categories as illustrated below:

- 6 environmental representatives
- 3 Business consumers
- 7 Domestic consumers
- 21 Energy sector representatives
- 13 Public/third sector representatives

Presented below is an overview of responses followed by a government response for each theme.

## Principles

The majority of respondents (95%) agree with the three principles of the draft OREAP:

- Sustainable development in the marine environment
- Collaboration and partnership
- Adaptive approach

One environmental respondent noted the need for consideration of the historic marine environment i.e. historic shipwrecks, within the sustainable development in the marine environment principle. Respondents from all sectors welcomed the proposed principles. There was widespread agreement with the draft OREAP adopting an adaptive approach as this will enable the most appropriate policy and statutory frameworks to be developed for NI which will be evidence-led.

### Government response

As outlined in the OREAP, offshore renewable energy policy will be aligned with marine related environmental policy. This includes the Department for Agriculture, Environmental and Rural Affairs' (DAERA) draft Marine Plan which contains a requirement for public authorities to consider the historic marine environment.

<sup>1</sup> [Draft Offshore Renewable Energy Action Plan | Department for the Economy](#)

## Theme 1: Sustainability and Co-existence

The majority of respondents (95%) agreed with the key objectives and actions of Theme 1 Sustainability and Co-existence.

Respondents from all sectors highlighted the importance of effective engagement which is regionally balanced and considers local councils/communities.

Environmental respondents raised concerns on the impact of offshore wind development on the marine environment, noting the need to assess cumulative impacts and advocated for the use of mitigation hierarchies and eco-system based approaches to achieve sustainability. Environmental representatives also acknowledged evidence gaps in the marine environment which should be addressed. It was suggested that consideration be given to impact and vulnerability assessments for species and habitats in relation to the long-term effects of offshore wind development.

A respondent from the energy sector noted that industry must align with the targets as set out in the Global Biodiversity Framework and Government policy must be supportive of this.

Respondents from all sectors welcomed the update to the 2012 Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA). Energy sector representatives called for transparency on the SEA/HRA process requesting that a date for completion be added to the OREAP. Environmental and public sector representatives highlighted the need for alignment with DAERA's draft Marine Plan.

Energy sector representatives widely agreed that offshore wind that will deliver significant benefits to local communities and that this should be acknowledged in the OREAP. Representatives of both the energy and public sector noted that the scope of the action plan should be widened to include other marine renewables such as tidal, wave and floating solar. Several energy sector representatives recommended that consideration be given to a 'one-stop-shop' approach towards licensing and consenting as adopted by Marine Scotland.

### Government response

The OREAP has been established through close collaboration with key stakeholders and marine users through the Offshore Renewable Energy Action Plan Steering Group and Offshore Renewable Energy Forum (OREF).

As outlined in the draft Marine Plan<sup>2</sup> public authorities must consider the cumulative impact of proposals on other marine activities, uses, users and/or the marine area. The draft Marine Plan will provide the framework for decision making and therefore the mitigation hierarchy and ecosystem-based approach will be followed.

The UK Government used the Energy Act 2023 to introduce provisions needed to implement the Offshore Wind Environmental Improvement Package (OWEIP) that was committed to in the British Energy Security Strategy. DAERA will be undertaking stakeholder engagement to consider whether it is necessary to utilise these powers to enable offshore wind development in the Northern Ireland marine area.

DAERA collaborates with the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) and other nature conservation bodies to consider impact, vulnerability assessments, and cumulative impacts. This will be incorporated into the conservation advice that DAERA will provide for offshore wind projects. DAERA is also updating the draft Marine Plan and developing a Biodiversity Strategy (Nature Recovery Strategy) in response to the Global Biodiversity Framework<sup>3</sup> therefore policy will be supportive of this.

DfE have appointed RPS Ireland to undertake an update to the SEA/HRA of Offshore Renewable Energy in the NI Marine Area. These assessments will enable DfE and our delivery partners to ensure that the OREAP can maximise the potential of the NI seabed whilst focusing on development in areas that will cause the least disruption ecologically, as well as on other users of the marine area. The SEA/HRA will collate evidence available within the marine environment which will be fed into policy making and DAERA's draft Marine Plan.

Alongside the evidence gathered through the SEA/HRA the Department continues to work closely with stakeholders to identify and address evidence gaps in the marine environment. The Department also participates in The Crown Estate's Offshore Wind Evidence and Change Programme<sup>4</sup> which aims to develop the evidence base for the offshore wind sector in a way which protects and enhances the environment.

Community benefit will be a consideration in policy development going forward. The OREAP has been developed as an action plan to deliver offshore wind and marine renewables deployment in NI. The NI Executive has committed to delivering at least 1GW of offshore wind from 2030 in the Energy Strategy action plan 2022<sup>5</sup>, however the implementation of the OREAP will also see policy development to support the deployment of other marine renewable energy technologies such as tidal stream and wave power.

A 'one-stop-shop' for offshore renewable energy licensing and consenting would likely require legislative changes to bring all relevant functions into a single Department or ALB. However, in the absence of this, government departments will collaborate to ensure there is effective co-ordination of their respective functions. The proposed cross-departmental MOU between DfE, Department for Infrastructure (DfI) and DAERA will enable this co-ordination and consideration could be given to this being an 'arrangement to promote co-ordination of functions' as provided for in section 3 of the Marine Act (Northern Ireland) 2013.

<sup>3</sup> [Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework | UNEP - UN Environment Programme](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Our business | The Crown Estate](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Energy Strategy - Path to Net Zero Energy - Action Plan | Department for the Economy](#)



## Theme 2: Enabling Frameworks

The majority of respondents (97%) agree with the key objectives and actions of Theme 2.

Respondents of all sectors welcomed the proposal to establish guidance which will provide a clear route through the licensing and consenting process. Several environmental representatives noted that the streamlining of licensing and consenting processes should be supported by sufficient environmental data. One public sector respondent noted that the OREAP should consider the Circular Economy Strategy for Northern Ireland<sup>6</sup> and actions arising which may have close connections with marine development.

Respondents from all sectors welcomed the long term strategic approach to offshore wind development in NI. Energy sector representatives proposed that a date for the completion of the objective “establish a decommissioning regime for Northern Ireland” be included in OREAP.

Energy and public sector respondents expressed concern on the indicative timeline for leasing and requested transparency on future leasing activity in NI from The Crown Estate. Energy sector representatives noted that a policy update following the Statement of Intent on the details of the spatial plan and tender structure for offshore wind leasing in NI would be helpful in guiding developers.

Onshore planning was identified as a significant concern for offshore wind development in NI and it was suggested that consideration should be given to lower strategic level planning policy as well as alignment across local councils to alleviate bottlenecks in the planning system.

Respondents from all sectors welcomed the proposed cross-departmental Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) as they believe it sets a positive precedent. It was expressed that this should be replicated for onshore renewable energy development. One energy sector representative suggested consideration should be given to inclusion of a framework for the identification of regionally significant projects within the MOU.

### Government response

The cross-departmental MOU on offshore renewable energy towards coordination and streamlining processes for licensing and consenting will improve collaboration between government departments. Through the MOU, government departments will consider relevant available evidence on an ongoing basis. DfE will consider the relevant NI Executive strategies and policies adopted in NI and how they interact with the OREAP. As policy development progresses, we will regularly review the strategies and approaches adopted in other jurisdictions, assessing whether there is any potential for adaption to the NI context.

As outlined in the Draft OREAP, DfE launched a public consultation on policy options for a decommissioning regime for Offshore Renewable Energy Installations (OREI) in NI in December 2023. The action plan will be updated at the annual review process and will outline the next steps or delivery.

Concerns regarding the timeline for seabed leasing have been noted and DfE continue to work in coordination with our partners to progress delivery plans for offshore renewable energy.

6 [Circular Economy Strategy for Northern Ireland](#) | Department for the Economy

In January 2023, DfE and The Crown Estate published a joint Statement of Intent outlining the ways in which the two organisations will work together to enable leasing for offshore wind in the Northern Ireland (NI) marine area, in parallel with work to address relevant regulatory and planning challenges in conjunction with other government departments. Seabed leasing is a critical step in delivering NI's offshore renewable energy ambition and the options are being considered. As information becomes available this will be shared with stakeholders.

In regard to lower-level strategic planning policy, this would be for local councils to develop through their Local Development Plans. In regard to 'regionally significant projects' planning legislation already identifies thresholds for considering what may be 'regionally significant' developments onshore.

### Theme 3: Electricity Network

The majority of respondents (82%) agree with the key objectives and actions of Theme 3.

Respondents from all sectors acknowledged the scale of the transmission infrastructure upgrades needed to facilitate the connection of renewable energy projects. Respondents also highlighted the need to consider connection processes which exist in Great Britain (GB) and Ireland (ROI), in the NI context for suitability. Energy and public sector respondents noted a need to engage with the SEM (Single Electricity Market) Committee and work with RoI to maximise offshore wind potential on the island of Ireland.

A public sector respondent noted there are opportunities to strategically place grid enhancements and offshore renewable energy developments in areas which currently have network constraints. This could bring direct benefits to local communities and businesses.

Energy and public sector respondents noted the need for the actions within Theme 3, to be more detailed and include dates for completion. Respondents also highlighted the need for clarification on offshore transmission asset ownership as well as long term offshore renewable energy capacity targets to enable key stakeholders to develop the electricity network with a long-term vision in mind. Environmental representatives called for assessments of future offshore wind capacity to be balanced with considerations for the environment.

Respondents from all sectors noted the need to address the potential of increased levels of curtailment alongside increased variable generation. It was suggested that the Department should consider energy storage projects and government led alternative off-take options. Public and energy sector respondents noted the need for OREAP to consider co-location and hybrid offshore projects to achieve greater system efficiency.

#### Government response

DfE has adopted a collaborative approach to delivering on the actions within OREAP, this includes maintaining close connections with the RoI and GB on offshore renewable energy development. The timings detailed alongside the actions in the draft OREAP are target completion dates.

DfE is working on developing a more resilient electricity network system through several workstreams such as interconnection policy, electricity storage and the Smart Systems Flexibility Plan (SSFP). The Department, with key stakeholders, will also consider challenges such as the impacts of potential increased constraint and curtailment as we deliver on the actions outlined in Theme 3.

Offshore renewable energy capacity targets in the short, medium, and long term must be evidence-led. DfE is considering further targets in parallel to the development of a robust evidence base, which includes the SEA/HRA and electricity networks studies and assessments. In addition, decisions on offshore transmission connection arrangements have not yet been made and are currently being considered as policy development progresses in close coordination with key stakeholders such as SONI, NIE Networks and the Utility Regulator.

The action plan details the first steps towards supporting an electricity network which enables delivery of NI's Energy Strategy ambitions for offshore renewable energy. As we progress with the delivery of these actions, new actions may emerge and be fed into future iterations of the OREAP. All comments received on the Electricity Networks theme in this consultation will be considered throughout policy development.

## Theme 4: Economic Growth

The majority of respondents (90%) agree with the key objectives and actions of Theme 4.

Respondents from all sectors welcomed the publication of a “Consultation on Design Considerations for a Renewable Electricity Support Scheme for Northern Ireland”<sup>7</sup> however, the majority of respondents identified a need for a timeline for the design and delivery of a scheme.

Respondents from all sectors acknowledged the scale and urgency of addressing skill shortages to enable NI to maximise on the opportunities of an offshore wind supply chain.

Energy sector representatives welcomed collaboration with education sector and industry to bring forward programmes, internships, and projects to train a workforce and address skills shortages. The UK Government Offshore Wind: Sector Deal<sup>8</sup> was identified as a key enabler to alignment of government and industry and that a similar approach in NI should be considered.

Several energy sector representatives noted that overreliance on establishing local industry can lead to delays and increased costs. Instead, consideration should be given to the balance between the use of local supply chain and established global skill sets to deliver offshore wind at pace. While some energy sector representatives raised concerns over NI’s ability to sustain a local supply chain in a globally competitive market. One environmental representative noted that there is a need to ensure that investment priorities and metrics for measuring success align with delivering biodiversity and environmental strategies.

Energy and public sector respondents acknowledged the potential of NI ports to support a local offshore wind supply chain and provide significant economic benefits for the economy.

### Government response

Establishing a support scheme will be essential to meeting the 80% target of electricity consumption from renewable sources by 2030 set by the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022.

The High-Level Design for the scheme was published in April 2024 and Action 17 within the Department’s business plan has a target date of March 2025 to publish the final design of a renewable electricity support scheme for the north.

The modelling and financial impact assessment phase has recently concluded with the current phase of the support scheme development involving the establishment of a legislative pathway, state aid approval and institutional roles and responsibilities that are necessary for delivery.

The Department commissioned the report “Investigating the skills required for a transition to an advanced zero emission, indigenous diverse energy secure and circular economy in Northern Ireland” which was published in June 2023<sup>9</sup>.

Concerns regarding overreliance on the establishment of local industry and supply chain and the potential for delays and increased costs have been noted.

<sup>7</sup> [Design considerations for a Renewable Electricity Support Scheme for Northern Ireland | Department for the Economy](#)

<sup>8</sup> [Offshore wind: Sector Deal - GOV.UK](#)

<sup>9</sup> [Transitioning to a greener economy – a skills perspective | Department for the Economy](#)

DfE is considering all options including any NI specific implementation of the UK Offshore Wind Sector Deal and the suitability of the creation of an offshore wind collaborative hub in NI. DfE continues to engage with ports in NI to explore opportunities for economic diversification through schemes such as the Floating Offshore Wind Manufacturing Investment Scheme (FLOWMIS) to ensure NI benefits from the same economic opportunities as the rest of the UK. DfE is working to establish the best fit policy approaches towards economically, socially and environmentally sustainable development for NI. The OREAP seeks to capture as much economic benefit as feasibly and practicably possible for NI in terms of investment, jobs and supply chain development. The OREAP will build upon the offshore wind supply chain sector that has already become established in NI to further strengthen the long-term sustainability of the offshore renewable energy sector. This will be taken forward in a way that supports the sustainable use of the marine environment and in alignment with the Draft Marine Plan for NI and other environmental policy.

## Theme 5: Legislation and Regulation

The majority of respondents (92%) agree with the key objectives and actions of Theme 5.

Respondents from all sectors welcomed the ongoing review of legislation and regulatory frameworks. Noting this as essential to bring forward the delivery of offshore renewable energy in NI. Energy sector representatives proposed that an indicative legislative timetable would be a welcome addition to the action plan. Environmental sector respondents expressed strong views that any legislative and/or regulatory change must acknowledge environmental data and assessments associated with the development of offshore renewable energy projects.

Several energy sector respondents noted the timelines associated with actions may need to be reconsidered and any required regulatory change should be advanced as far as possible at pace to enable deployment of offshore wind projects.

Energy sector representatives noted the importance of establishing regulation, policy, and delivery plans to enable co-location of offshore wind and other low carbon technologies such as green hydrogen. It was noted that the DfI should be considered as a named partner in the delivery of the actions outlined in Theme 5.

### Government response

The Department is not yet in a position to outline an indicative legislative timetable to deliver offshore renewable energy in NI. When this information is available it will be added to the OREAP during an agreed review period.

DfE and our partners are working together to identify legislative changes needed to deliver on the Energy Strategy ambition for offshore wind and other marine renewables. The Department will continue to progress legislative/regulatory changes as required.

The OREAP recognises the need to consider the regulatory changes needed to enable the use of other low carbon technologies such as green hydrogen. While delivery plans / strategies fall outside the scope of the OREAP they will be taken forward by DfE.

While not named as a partner in Theme 5, in their role as a Steering Group member, DfI will regularly review legislation and regulatory context to identify any gaps in onshore planning arrangements.

### Additional comments on the draft OREAP

Energy and public sector respondents noted the need for the OREAP to consider the relationship between EirGrid and SONI and implications of integration of offshore wind energy into the Single Electricity Market. Strong views were expressed that there is a need for a coordinated approach to offshore wind development particularly in relation to route to market.

Respondents from all sectors acknowledged that the timeline in the OREAP will be amended through review periods. However, respondents from the energy and public sectors suggested that clarification on timelines is required urgently to assess whether offshore wind will contribute towards NI's 2030 target. One energy sector respondent encouraged the target being 1GW of offshore wind by 2030.

Environmental representatives encouraged DfE to adopt a nature positive approach to the OREAP and demonstrate how offshore renewable energy projects can work in harmony with nature.

Respondents from all sectors welcomed ongoing monitoring of the OREAP however, they asserted that DfE should ensure that strategic monitoring/review is sustained over the long term.

### Government response

DfE will continue collaboration with ROI stakeholders to understand the implications of the integration of offshore wind energy projects into the SEM.

The target as set out in the Energy Strategy for offshore wind is at least 1GW of offshore wind from 2030. The Department is working with partners and industry to accelerate the delivery of offshore renewable energy as far as feasibly possible. Any decision on targets must be evidence-led. The SEA/HRA is essential step in providing a strategic level overview of potential capacity of offshore renewable energy in the NI Marine Area and is due for completion in 2025.

### Monitoring and review

DfE will undertake strategic level monitoring of the OREAP on an ongoing basis and provide regular reporting to the OREAP Steering Group and OREF. Updates will be provided on progress throughout the year through the Energy Strategy Bulletin and the DfE website. If you would like to be kept informed through this e-bulletin, please contact: [energystategy@economy-ni.gov.uk](mailto:energystategy@economy-ni.gov.uk). Following the annual review of the OREAP, DfE will publish an annual progress report outlining the progress made on delivering the OREAP.

### Amendments to the OREAP

The OREAP Steering Group have considered the consultation responses and have made the following amendments to the OREAP:

1. As the OREAP is a live action plan which will develop over time, the numbering of the actions has been amended to make the distinction between themes clearer. The themes are now referred to as Themes A-E.
2. Where appropriate, updates on actions have been provided. Any follow-on actions will be determined by the OREAP Steering Group and added to each iteration of the OREAP.
3. Minor wording amendments throughout the OREAP document. Such as:
  - pluralisation of wind farm,
  - addition of the word draft before Marine Plan
  - updating document to reflect current version and removal of draft/consultation,
  - amendments to delivery dates

The Department would like to thank all respondents for taking the time to provide feedback on the draft OREAP. The comments provided have been extremely valuable and will be considered as policy development progresses. The current OREAP has been published alongside this government response.

## Annex A: Consultation questions

**1. Do you agree with the principles of the Offshore Renewable Energy Action Plan?**

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

**2. Do you agree with the key objectives and actions in relation to Theme 1?**

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

**3. Are there any other areas that require further attention?**

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

**4. Do you agree with the key objectives and actions in relation to Theme 2?**

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

**5. Are there any other areas that require further attention?**

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

**6. Do you agree with the key objectives and actions in relation to Theme 3?**

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

**7. Are there any other areas that require further attention?**

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

**8. Do you agree with the key objectives and actions in relation to Theme 4?**

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

**9. Are there any other areas that require further attention?**

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

**10. Do you agree with the key objectives and actions in relation to Theme 5?**

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

**11. Are there any other areas that require further attention?**

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

**12. Do you have any further comments on the Draft OREAP?**

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