

A welcome shift in wind energy north of the border

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The UK has more offshore wind turbines than any other country in the world. But while Scotland has 25% of the whole European wind resource, only around 5% of the UK's offshore wind fleet is currently north of the border.

Finally, however, that is starting to change.

Record-low prices in September's Contracts for Difference saw EDPR's Moray East project succeed where it had previously lost out. This scheme will now join SSE's Beatrice in the stormy seas off our North East coast.

It isn't just the wind farms themselves which are happening in Scotland, either.

Two events in coming months – a Floating Offshore Wind Conference on November 14 and Scottish Renewables' Offshore Wind Conference on January 29-30 – will allow a burgeoning supply chain to share ideas with developers and decision-makers.

Both come at a key time for the sector, with policy optimism still buoying up offshore wind following the largely-positive Clean Growth Strategy and secondly, the CfD auction results.

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The cost reductions in offshore wind have been dramatic and are testament to the determination of developers to drive down costs and show the importance of ensuring a viable, competitive route to market is available for all clean power technologies.

That positivity, for offshore wind at least,

was also reflected in the Government's Clean Growth Strategy, which last month (October) set out some important commitments from the UK Government, which will further our transition to a low-carbon economy.

In particular the renewed support for offshore wind deployment and innovation, and the commitment to work with the industry on a Sector Deal, is to be welcomed – as is the commitment of £557 million to be made available for future power contract auctions, with the next scheduled for Spring 2019.

Beatrice is currently the only one of Scotland's consented commercial offshore wind projects under construction, but the figures which underpin it are staggering.

The project, at £2.6 billion, is one of Scotland's largest-ever private infrastructure investments and is almost twice the cost of the new Queensferry Crossing.

Research for developer SSE and its partners show Beatrice is expected to add £1.13bn to UK GDP and support more than 18,100 years of full-time employment in the UK. Scotland alone is expected to see a spend of £530m from its construction.

A lengthy planning phase culminated for Beatrice's larger neighbour last month when the EDPR scheme was awarded a

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CfD at £57.50. It's scheduled to start generating power in 2022/23.

Research in August showed the project will create nearly 2,000 jobs over the course of its 30-year life.

And it's not just fixed foundation offshore wind which is finally starting to move in Scotland.

The presence of the Hywind project in Scottish waters is a reminder that, with some of the deepest waters and most promising offshore wind sites, Scotland is perfectly placed to capitalise on floating turbine technology.

Hywind, which was opened last month (Oct 18) by First Minister Nicola Sturgeon, shows if nothing else the ambition of an oil and gas sector determined to diversify.

Norwegian multinational oil and gas

company, Statoil, has long been committed to floating wind and has operated a single Hywind turbine off the coast north of Stavanger since 2009.

The latest deployment – of five 6MW turbines in the Buchan Deep off Peterhead – is another milestone for a young technology, which has much to do to reduce costs, but which could open parts of our oceans for energy generation and create a significant global market by doing so.

Also in the pipeline is the 48MW Kincardine offshore floating wind farm, which could see a further eight turbines deployed off Aberdeenshire. That project must be commissioned by October 2018 to qualify for Scotland's Renewables Obligation deadline for floating wind.

Off Aberdeen, Swedish utility Vattenfall is pressing ahead with a £300 million,

11-turbine wind farm which will use technology at the very cutting edge offshore wind design.

And other projects are still waiting in the wings.

The commercial-scale offshore projects in the Firths of Forth and Tay are still unable to progress without the resolution of an ongoing legal process, but 2-B Energy already has permission to erect two of its innovative twin-bladed turbines in the Firth of Forth. It has also submitted a scoping report to Marine Scotland to erect a further seven turbines at the site in future.

All these projects are helping develop a thriving supply chain, with companies like Ecosse Subsea Systems continuing to diversify from oil and gas into renewables to capitalise on the opportunities afforded by the shift to green energy.

Offshore wind is at the heart of our efforts to tackle climate change, and as the projects above so clearly show it's also an unparalleled opportunity to deliver jobs and investment in Scotland for many years to come.

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