

New study reveals that over 80% of people are favourable to the construction of more wind farms in Ireland

- **Sustainable Energy Ireland publishes first independent study of public attitudes to wind energy in Ireland**
- **New Wind Atlas of Ireland also launched to earmark potential wind farm sites**

Over 80% of people are favourably disposed to the construction of more wind farms in Ireland, while over two-thirds are favourable to having a wind-farm built in their locality. That is according to Sustainable Energy Ireland (SEI) which today announced details of a range of new initiatives relating to wind energy. In addition to publishing the first ever independent research study into public attitudes towards the development of wind energy in Ireland, SEI also unveiled details of a major new Wind Atlas of Ireland.

The two new initiatives were officially launched today in Sligo by the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources, Mr. Dermot Ahern T.D. who was the keynote speaker at SEI's annual wind energy conference, *'Energy from Fresh Air 2003.'*

The new research study, from SEI's Renewable Energy Information Office, shows that the overall attitude to wind farms in Ireland is almost entirely positive, and that wind farms are seen in a positive light compared to other utility-type structures that could possibly be built on the landscape.

Highlights of the study include:

- Half of Irish adults are aware of the term "renewable energy", with wind energy easily the best-known type of renewable energy. However, although renewable energy sources, including wind energy are well known, awareness of their contribution to the total fuel supply in Ireland remains low
- Support for renewable energy is higher in areas where wind farms are planned or operational
- Significantly, those with direct experience of wind farms in their locality do not, in general, consider that they have had any adverse impact on the scenic beauty and

- wildlife of the area, or on tourism – over 60 percent of those living in close proximity to existing wind farms would favour either an additional wind farm in the area or an addition to the existing one.
- Very few residents (less than 3%) formally objected to existing wind farms at the time that planning was being sought.
 - While some developers do consult with the local community, there is room for improvement in genuine consultation with those most affected.

At present, there are 29 operational wind farms in Ireland, with an installed capacity of 170 MW supplying over 110,000 homes and businesses with clean electricity.

Speaking at the launch of the wind atlas and new public attitudes survey, Mr. Dermot Ahern T.D., Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources said, "Ireland's high reliance on imported fossil fuel and the current preference for gas-fired plant for most of our new electrical generation capacity leaves our electricity system more exposed to cost and security of supply risks than many of our competitors.

The exploitation of wind energy can reduce our dependence on imported fossil fuels and in doing so contribute to security of supply and greenhouse gas emission reduction. While these are powerful arguments for the increased penetration of wind power within the electricity system, it will be important to balance the development of wind power with the preservation of amenity, respect for heritage and recognition of the economics of electricity transmission and distribution. I am particularly pleased to see these two new SEI products, The Attitudes towards the Development of Wind Farms in Ireland survey and the Wind Atlas of Ireland in the public domain. They should be invaluable tools for planners, developers and policy makers alike in developing wind energy in Ireland "

The study also indicates that Irish people are clearly realistic about the probable effects of ongoing climate change, with most expressing some concern about climate change and the impacts it may have on Ireland. The research reveals, however, that few of those questioned believe they can personally contribute to reducing climate change.

The Wind Atlas highlights the wind energy potential in terms of wind speed and power for each county in the Republic of Ireland, both for onshore and offshore areas. The Atlas will provide a basis for informed decision making in relation to the efficient development of wind farms in Ireland. Sustainable Energy Ireland will update the atlas on an ongoing basis to take advantage of refinements in resource assessment tools and the increasing amount

of wind measurement data that is being collected. SEI also intends to provide similar tools for other primary renewable energy sources.

Commenting, David Taylor, Chief Executive, Sustainable Energy Ireland, "Given that Ireland has one of the best wind resources in Europe, wind energy should have a promising future here. Indeed, the technical potential for onshore wind power is well in excess of the predicted electricity demands for Ireland. However at present the Irish wind industry is in its infancy. One of the key objectives of SEI is to promote and assist the development of renewable energy. In working towards this objective we have produced the Wind Atlas and Attitudes to Wind Farms study. These tools should greatly assist local authority planners and developers in identifying effective wind sites and developing them in harmony with the local community. I am encouraged by the findings of the study which indicates that the Irish public are open to new methods of energy production, particularly wind energy. It is our vision that sustainable energy practices will become mainstream in our everyday lives."

Sustainable Energy Ireland, formerly the Irish Energy Centre, was established on May 1st 2002 as a statutory authority charged with promoting and assisting the development of sustainable energy. It is funded by Government under the National Development Plan 2000-2006 with programmes part financed by the European Union.

The Renewable Energy Information Office (REIO) is a national service of Sustainable Energy Ireland, established to promote the use of renewable energy resources and provides expert independent advice and information on financial, social and technical issues relating to renewable energy development.

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