

Irish wind energy market could be worth over €1 billion by 2010

Over 1 million homes could benefit from clean electricity supply

The wind energy sector in Ireland could supply over one million Irish homes with electricity and has the potential to be a €1 billion annual industry here in the next seven years. That is according to Paul Kellett of Sustainable Energy Ireland's (SEI's) Renewable Energy Information Office who was speaking on the eve of its annual wind energy conference and study tour "Energy from Fresh Air".

The conference, which is being held in the Sligo Park Hotel and which will run until November 14th, will provide an international exchange of experience and information on policy and technical developments in relation to wind energy.

At present, there are 29 operational wind farms, with an installed capacity of 170 MW supplying over 110,000 homes and businesses with clean electricity. However, Ireland has the potential to increase that figure to over 1,600 MW (with a minimum investment in grid upgrade), supplying over one million homes with clean electricity. This in turn could create an industry worth €1 billion each year, sustaining almost 1,000 permanent jobs and saving 4.3 million tonnes of carbon dioxide (CO₂).

Speaking in Sligo Mr. Kellett said that Ireland has one of Europe's best wind regimes, but we have been slow to harness the full potential. "In energy terms, Ireland has become the most import dependent economy in Europe. Our weekly energy bill is a worrying €100 million and rising, as is our growing dependence on oil. Wind energy is a freely available, emission free alternative to polluting, imported fossil fuels for electricity generation and Ireland's vast and largely untapped wind resource is like having an oil well in the sky. Increasing the contribution of wind power to our electricity demand would clean up our energy act, reduce our over reliance on costly fuel imports and stabilise security of supply and our economy".

Global wind power capacity has quadrupled over the past five years, growing from 7,600 MW at the end of 1997 to more than 31,000 MW at the end of 2002 - an increase of over 23,000 MW. Ireland's contribution is just over 85 MW. However, there is a fresh impetus behind wind power expansion here in Ireland. Increasing energy from renewable energy resources and in particular wind is national policy. In the short term the government target is to generate an additional 500 MW of electricity mainly from wind by 2005. In the longer term there are international commitments to further develop all renewable energy resources and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

During the two-day conference in Sligo, Sustainable Energy Ireland will launch a wind atlas for Ireland and publish the results of Ireland's first independent study into the public attitudes to wind energy and wind farms. In addition, leading national and European experts will discuss their experiences on some of the topical issues facing the future development of wind energy in Ireland. These range from policy development to grid connection, from turbine design to the issue of wind farms and landscape integration, and from urban wind farms to the community ownership of wind farms.

The conference will also act as a showcase event for planners, local authorities, project developers, turbine manufacturers, financial institutions and all other professionals with an interest in wind power development in Ireland.

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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For further information please contact:

Diarmuid O'Neill

Edelman

01-6789333 / 087-6699933