



**EUROPEAN
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Fact or fantasy – can offshore wind really deliver by 2020?

Are European offshore sector players fantasising when they bandy about phrases like 50 per cent wind power by 2050? Given that offshore wind energy currently supplies under per cent of Europe's power, and that substantial grid and technology development needs to happen before it expands much further, isn't the industry being unrealistic?

Hard-hitting questions such as these were discussed by business leaders at a session of the European Offshore Wind 2009 Conference in Stockholm this morning.

A European offshore power grid was referred to frequently as one of the make or break issues.

"Transmission system operators would find it difficult to integrate huge amounts of offshore wind into the grid straight away, as the system is not ready", said Konstantin Staschus, Secretary-General of the recently-formed European Network Transmission System Operators for Electricity (ENTSO-E). He pointed out that ENTSO-E agrees with the idea, strongly supported by the wind industry, of a European offshore grid, but that it will not come cheap.

Money spent building a European offshore grid will be money well spent, said Eddie O'Connor, CEO of Mainstream Renewable Power in Ireland. "If you built a series of offshore wind farms, 25 per cent of the overall cost would go on the nodes and interconnections, but it would be an investment for 80 or 100 years.

"I built a little 250 kW wind farm in Ireland in 1992 that is still bashing away producing free power for the people", he pointed out as an example.

Planning of the grid developments is crucial.

"After seven years we have still not obtained permission for one transmission line", said Ian Marchant, CEO of Scottish and Southern Energy in the UK. "Much better coordinated planning is needed. There is still no grid plan for the UK's Round 3, for example".

"As from June 2010 we will have an overview of renewable development up to 2020, thanks to EU governments' National Renewable Energy Action Plans", pointed out Christian Kjaer, CEO of the European Wind Energy Association. "This will be of major help in grid planning."

The overall message coming from the session was that many changes need to be made, particularly regarding the electricity network, but that provided they are, offshore wind's boom will continue and increase.

"Look at what has been done in China", said Andreas Nauen, CEO of Siemens Wind Power. "They went from zero to 10,000 MW in just a few years. And we have seen that onshore growth rates were phenomenal – if offshore wind follows the same patterns, there will be 40 GW of capacity by 2020."

40 GW of offshore wind capacity would provide 14-18% of Europe's power, and is the 2020 target given by the European Wind Energy Association in its new report, 'Oceans of Opportunity', that was launched at the conference on Monday.

"The old ways of producing energy are no longer suitable", declared Marchant. "Offshore wind is the only technology that can provide tens of Gigawatts of in our generation".

Some of the participants had even more ambitious visions than others.

"After 2030 no more fossil fuel plants will be built", said O'Connor. "By 2050, 50 per cent of Europe's energy will come from wind, and 90 per cent from renewables".

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