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Offshore wind requires government action to realise its tremendous potential

STOCKHOLM — If anyone was looking for an effective example of grass roots lobbying, they needn't look any further than the European Offshore Wind Declaration that close to 150 business leaders from 35 nations signed here at the Offshore Wind 2009 conference.

Divided into three sections, the declaration brings together the ingredients that are necessary to create a mature, offshore wind sector that can help transform Europe's future energy system.

It begins with the recognition that more than 100 GW of offshore wind projects are currently planned for Europe and that a total capacity of 150 GW of offshore wind power predicted for 2030 could meet up to 17% of EU electricity demand while avoiding 290 million tonnes of CO₂ annually.

The declaration continues with a series of pledges by companies and individuals promising that a sufficient number of reliable and cost-effective offshore turbines, components, foundations, installation vessels and cranes, and cable-laying vessels will be available to help the industry while it ramps up to take advantage of its amazingly powerful potential. In addition, the companies pledged to ensure new technologies are pursued and that related research and development efforts in skills and training are expanded.

It then calls on Member States and the European Union to continue promoting offshore wind, provide political and legislative support, remove administrative and permitting barriers to its effective implementation, and make necessary improvements to the grid.

In effect, the declaration indicates just how sophisticated the offshore industry has already become and proves how seriously companies want to be part of the sector as it rapidly expands.

Arthouros Zervos, President of the European Wind Energy Association, agreed.

Zervos predicted today the declaration will raise the profile of the growing offshore sector and help politicians understand that Europe's largest indigenous energy source is waiting to be exploited.

In an interview on the last day of the three-day conference here in Stockholm, Zervos said the fact that over 4,500 people attended the event when only 2,500 were expected demonstrates just how much interest there is in developing offshore wind.

"The future for offshore wind is great," Zervos said. "I fully expect that as long as governments continue to support the sector and make sure there is an efficient transnational grid system in place to funnel a huge amount of wind power into Europe, offshore wind will one day be as successful as onshore wind."

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