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CREATING CLARITY

2030 Energy Sector Targets – to Meet, or Not to Meet?

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2030 Energy Sector Targets – to Meet, or Not to Meet?

The conflict in the Middle East has brought the strategic value of homegrown renewable energy into sharper focus, adding urgency to the question of whether Ireland and Northern Ireland can hit their 2030 targets. Here's where things stand.

What Are the Targets?

Ireland has target of 80% of electricity generated from renewable sources in 2030, along with a 51% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions (GHG), compared to 2018 levels.

In order to achieve power sector targets, the Climate Action Plan (CAP25) sets capacity targets of 9GW of onshore wind, 5GW of offshore wind and 8GW of solar by 2030.

NI also has a target for at least 80% electricity consumption to come from renewable sources by 2030, as well as reducing GHG by at least 48%, compared to 1990.

Where Are We with Renewable Generation?

Onshore Wind and Solar

Figures from Wind Energy Ireland show that Ireland now has more than 5GW of onshore wind installed, with 150MW added last year, a further 450MW under construction and 2,500MW of projects with planning permission.

The Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) exists to incentivise buildout of onshore renewable generation, but the latest auction (RESS 5) underdelivered. With the longstop date for RESS 5 projects set at December 2030, this auction and potentially some from RESS 6 could be among the last to meaningfully contribute to the target.

Solar in Ireland has seen strong growth across the board (from small-scale residential solar to larger, utility-scale solar farms), with installed capacity now exceeding 2.5GW – an increase of over 280% since 2023.

In Northern Ireland, 47% of electricity consumption in 2025 came from renewables, with the majority from wind (72%). However, compared to Ireland, development in NI has stagnated – partly due to the lack of a renewable support mechanism but also other barriers, such as grid connection issues and planning delays. Solar growth in NI, has been modest While it has seen growth, increasing from 1.2MW in 2010 to 325.5MW in 2023, a report commissioned by RenewableNI found that the industry saw a significant slowdown from 2018 to 2024, with no new installation of utility-scale solar.

In response, the Department for the Economy is introducing the Renewable Electricity Price Guarantee (REPG) but the first auction, planned for 2027, looks increasingly unlikely and there are concerns about adding further strain to an already constrained network.

Offshore Wind

Offshore wind has gained momentum in Ireland recently, with Helvick Head Offshore Wind DAC – a joint venture partnership between ESB and Ørsted – announced as the winner of the second Offshore Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (ORESS) Tonn Nua auction. This will contribute 900MW towards the Government's target of 5GW installed offshore wind capacity and was welcome news following the cancellation of the 450MW Sceirde Rocks offshore project and the broader uncertainty that followed the first ORESS auction.

NI currently has no offshore wind capacity so it will not contribute to the 2030 renewables target.

What Are We Expecting in Terms of Demand?

The latest All-Island Resource Adequacy Assessment (AIRAA) 2026-2035,from EirGrid and SONI, says the connection of data centres and other New Technology Loads is expected to be a key driver of electricity demand in Ireland over the next few years.

While there are currently no data centres or large energy users connected to the NI transmission system, growth is anticipated in this area.

For Ireland, the Total Electricity Requirements (TER) increases from 39.0TWh in 2026 in the median scenario to 49.2TWh in 2035. By 2035, electricity demand is expected to increase by 40% compared to 2024 levels, driven largely by data centres and New Technology Loads, as well as increased uptake of electric vehicles and heat pumps.

The TER forecasts for NI also increase from 8.30TWh in the 2026 median scenario to 10.67TWh in 2035.

Storage Development

Storage is increasingly central to integrating renewables, addressing grid congestion and managing surplus electricity.

Energy Storage Ireland's 2025 pipeline survey found that there is nearly 10GW of storage in development across Ireland and NI, with 1,275.5MW of storage already operational (965.5MW of battery storage and 292MW of pumped hydro). This highlighted that a ramp up in storage is required but that deployment beyond 2026 is uncertain, with some of the main barriers identified being the lack of a Long Duration Energy Storage procurement scheme, revenue uncertainty, network charges and hybrid policy.

Interconnection

Interconnectors are expected to play a key role in the Island's energy transition. Commitments to expand Ireland's interconnectivity have been building -- from the Irish Government's 2023 National Policy Statement on Interconnection to a joint UK-Irish government pledge to deepen cooperation on offshore energy and interconnection, and most recently a commitment to explore a potential link between Ireland and Spain.

The 500MW Greenlink Interconnector between Ireland and Wales came online at the start of last year, becoming the third electricity link between the island of Ireland and GB, alongside the East-West Interconnector and the Moyle Interconnector between NI and Scotland. Two further

interconnectors are planned -- the 750MW MaresConnect and 700MW LirIC -- due online in 2030 and 2032, respectively, although these timelines are unlikely to be achieved.

The 700MW Celtic Interconnector between Ireland and France is currently under construction and will be Ireland's first direct link to continental Europe. Now due online in 2028 after a two-year delay, EirGrid's latest AIRAA notes that this has contributed to increased system stress expected between 2026 and 2028 -- making any further delays a significant concern.

Perhaps most pressing is the North-South Interconnector -- a new 400kV overhead line connecting the Irish and Northern Irish grids -- now estimated for completion in October 2031. Without it, there is the risk that more renewable output could be dispatched down.

Looking to The Future

From the outset, the targets set for 2030 were acknowledged as challenging and all the above indicates that there has been progress, albeit slow.

The SEM is now at a critical inflection point on its journey to net zero. Given the SEMs reliance on imported fossil fuels, uncertainty is growing around future energy prices and the long-term implications for households and businesses across the island of Ireland.

The path forward almost certainly requires a sharper focus on renewable integration and, critically, on flexibility. Without it, the gap between ambition and delivery will widen.