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## **Grid links across the Irish Sea**

### **Project moves into new phase with feasibility study**

Efforts to build an offshore electricity transmission network linking Scotland, Northern Ireland and Ireland have taken a step forward. The RPS Group has been awarded a contract to examine the feasibility of an offshore grid in the Irish Sea.

The study, on behalf of the Scottish Government, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment in Northern Ireland and the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources in Ireland will look at potential sites for renewable energy generation in coastal waters.

Part-funded by the European Union's INTERREG IVA Programme, the project will also examine technology, infrastructure, finance, environment and planning issues and develop a business case for the construction of a grid.

Energy Minister Jim Mather said: "Scotland has a clear, competitive advantage in developing green energy and a real desire to work with our neighbours. To realise the huge potential of the wind, wave and tidal resources at our disposal, we must develop grid infrastructure to ensure it is fit for purpose.

"The ISLES study will allow us to explore issues around an offshore transmission network in the Irish Sea and help make the case for commercial investment. It will also be the first building block towards making an offshore grid a reality. It will complement the work of the ENSG and will help inform work to achieve the European vision of offshore Super Grid, the declaration of which, North Seas Countries Offshore Grid Initiative, was signed in December by the UK and Ireland as well as the Benelux countries, Sweden, Denmark, France and Germany.

"This co-operation with Ireland and Northern Ireland is another step in our approach to strategic energy issues. Indeed our close working relationship with the Government of Ireland and the Northern Irish Assembly is being further deepened through the grid work stream of the British Irish Council and we are developing joint working in a number of other areas."

Northern Ireland's Energy Minister, Arlene Foster MLA said: "The appointment of RPS to undertake this innovative feasibility study demonstrates the commitment that Northern Ireland attaches to working at home and with its neighbours to fully develop the potential for renewable energy in and around our shores. This project will inform the partners' decisions as well as those of the wider energy sector on the costs and benefits of future investment in offshore renewables infrastructure. This study will make an important contribution to the European Union's proposal for a European Super Grid for electricity to enhance security of supply."

Ireland's Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources Eamon Ryan said: "I very much welcome the commencement of this study which will help pave the way for the development of our very significant offshore natural resources. Ireland has a sea area that is around 10 times the size of its land area. Our countries location at the edge of the Atlantic Ocean ensures we share some of the best wind and wave resources in Europe. By working

in partnership with each other, we can utilise these resources to generate carbon free renewable electricity to meet our future energy requirements.”

Commenting on the project Pat Colgan, Chief Executive of the Special EU Programmes Body, which manages the INTERREG IVA Programme, said:

“This is a highly innovative study which will explore the very real possibility of the development of a new renewable energy network that will serve communities living in Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Border region of Ireland. It represents a truly collaborative approach spanning three different regional boundaries that will potentially allow us to generate cleaner energy with minimal impact on the environment.”

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### **Notes to Editors:**

The Irish Scottish Links on Energy Study (ISLES) is a joint project between the Scottish Government, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Northern Ireland) and the Department of Energy, Communications and Natural Resources (Ireland).

The project will examine the feasibility of the construction of an offshore electricity transmission network linking potential offshore sites for the generation of renewable energy in the coastal waters of Ireland, Northern Ireland and Western Scotland.

The feasibility study will develop a business case for the construction of such a grid and will examine the following aspects: - technology and infrastructure; environment and planning; regulatory and finance; and construction and deployment. The study will also involve close co-operation with the energy industry and other stakeholders involved in grid transmission systems and renewable energy.

The project is part funded by the European Union through the INTERREG IVA Cross Border Programme for Northern Ireland, the Border Counties of Ireland and Western Scotland. Support is £1,466,667 towards a total project cost of £1,600,000 with partners contributing the additional funds.

The Special EU Programmes Body is a North/South Implementation Body sponsored by the Department of Finance and Personnel in Northern Ireland and the Department of Finance in Ireland. It is responsible for managing two EU structural funds Programmes PEACE III and INTERREG IV designed to enhance cross-border co-operation, promote reconciliation and create a more peaceful and prosperous society. The Programmes operate within a clearly defined area including Northern Ireland, the Border Region of Ireland and Western Scotland.

The INTERREG IVA 2007-2013 Programme is worth €256 million and aims to address the economic and social problems which result from the existence of borders. It has two distinct priority measures to create co-operation for a more prosperous and sustainable cross-border region. For more information on the SEUPB please visit [www.seupb.eu](http://www.seupb.eu)