

## National Grid Problems

The Commissioner for Electricity Regulation Mr Tom Reeves, recently announced that due to concerns about the “security and stability of the power system” no new wind farms will be allowed to connect into the Grid until at least the end of 2003.

The Grid related problems that are strangling the wind industry are as follows:

1. Grid security and stability.
2. Grid infrastructure.
3. Connection delays and red tape.
4. Cost of grid connection.

**1** Bellacorrick in Co. Mayo was the first wind farm to be commissioned in Ireland back in 1992. Since then wind energy developers, including the ESB, have been constantly working on wind energy developments. It has been all too obvious for the last 10 years that wind energy development has huge potential in this country. How is it then, that we come to 2004 and the ESB subsidiary the National Grid suddenly finds that it has not taken the necessary steps to accommodate the amount of wind energy that is due to come on stream. Once again the wind industry is to be penalised for the incompetence of others who control the industry.

The ESB, CER and Dublin University contracted Garrad Hassan to inspect the Grid and assess the capability of it to accept more wind power. Garrad Hassan’s report stated that the Grid in its present state could take up to 2000 MW of wind power and if a little work was done to the Grid it would take a further 1000 MW. With only 166MW currently connected and only a further 700 MW planned for connection there would appear to be ample capacity left unless the Garrad Hassan report is being ignored. Only 2% of Irelands electricity requirements are met by wind power as compared to 20% in Denmark. Surely these Grid concerns have been blown out of all proportion.

2. The grid infrastructure in Ireland has never taken into account the necessity to connect wind power. By their nature wind energy developments are usually located in sparsely populated areas of the country and therefore the grid infrastructure is not good enough to take the power. Again there has been a distinct lack of foresight in this area.

**3** The connection delays due to the glut of applications following the awarding of AER contracts have already been outlined. However, there are regulations pertaining to the process of applying for a grid connection that need to be addressed also. In particular, the necessity to nominate the specific make and size of turbine to be used has the effect of forcing the developer to choose the turbine too far in advance. In order to avoid delays, the developer will usually apply for a connection as soon as planning permission has been achieved. It may be several years before the developer can even apply for an AER contract not to mention actually succeed in getting one. By this time there may have been further improvements in turbine technology but the developer is already committed to the original choice of turbine. Also turbine prices may have come down from when the decision was made.

- 4 The cost of grid connection is exorbitant by comparison to most other European countries. This means that projects that could be quite promising cannot be considered because they are too far away from the grid connection point and the size of the development cannot be increased to carry the cost due to other limitations.

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**Chairman**

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