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Wind

Onshore wind delivers almost a quarter of Northern Ireland's power



James Murray

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As the government signs its controversial deal with the DUP, new stats show how Northern Ireland is emerging as a clean power hub

Onshore wind capacity in Northern Ireland has passed the 1GW mark and is providing nearly a quarter of the country's power, according to the latest generation figures from NI Electricity

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The data also shows that over the 12 months to April 2016 onshore wind met 22.4 per cent of electricity demand in the country, while renewables as a whole met 27.1 per cent of demand.

The country has seen £127.5m of local investment mobilised in onshore wind capacity so far this year, while there has also been additional investment in storage and smart grid technologies.

In addition, the country boasts 197MW of solar capacity, 65MW of anaerobic digestion and biogas capacity, and 4MW of hydro and tidal capacity.

"Crossing this 1GW threshold shows just how much of a success story onshore wind is in Northern Ireland," said Rachel Anderson, chair of the Northern Ireland Renewables Industry Group, in a statement. "Onshore wind remains one of the vital growth areas to our modern low-carbon economy, so we need to ensure that politicians here join us in securing a

bright future for this technology."

Her comments were echoed by RenewableUK's executive director, Emma Pinchbeck, who said renewable electricity was "making a massive contribution to Northern Ireland, creating jobs, bringing inward investment and enabling local regeneration".

"Northern Ireland is making the most of its great onshore wind resources, embracing a mature technology which is now the cheapest way to generate electricity bar none, helping to keep consumer's bills down," she added.

Energy policy is devolved to the Northern Ireland administration. However, the administration has emulated the UK government in closing the equivalent of the Renewables Obligation scheme and Feed-in Tariff incentives to new projects a year ago. A grace period means a number of projects are still in development, but developers are concerned future projects could be denied a route to market.

However, the DUP's recent election manifesto fuelled hopes new projects could come online again, after it called for a new Energy Strategy that addresses the "future of renewables".



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The update comes just a day after the UK's minority Conservative government signed its controversial £1bn confidence and supply deal with the Northern Ireland's DUP.

The agreement could have significant implications for the green economy and environmental policy with the deal promising a £1bn, two year investment package, including £150m for new ultra-fast broadband infrastructure.

In addition, the deal promised a review of Air Passenger Duty, which is likely to be opposed by green groups, and ensures DUP involvement in future discussions about agricultural policy and support post-Brexit.

The deal has been roundly condemned by environmental groups, which have criticised leading DUP politicians' past rejection of climate science and mishandling of renewable heat subsidies.



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