



Sustainability Strategy

2024-2025

www.windenergyireland.com

Note from the CEO

A little over ten years ago Ørsted, a Danish wind farm developer, was building the Anholt wind farm around 15 kilometres off the Danish coast.

They were moving large sea boulders to make way for wind turbines and the cables needed to connect the wind farm back to the mainland. Then they did something different.

Rather than just getting rid of the boulders they used them to build 25 artificial reefs scattered throughout the wind farm.

Today, a decade later, these reefs teem with life, a perfect breeding ground for fish, sea anemones and a variety of fauna that has transformed a rocky seabed into a celebration of marine biodiversity.

This is the renewable energy future we believe in, one where wind farms are not just cutting our carbon emissions, but protect, support and enhance the natural habitats in which they are built.

Over the next decade we will build dozens of new onshore and offshore wind farms in Ireland. Each of these will help cut our carbon emissions and end our dependency on imported fossil fuels.

“This is the renewable energy future we believe in”



Note from the CEO

Global revolution

They are part of a global revolution which is changing how we produce and use the energy we need to light our homes, power our businesses and drive our economies.

But a true transformation means not just a move from fossil fuels to renewable energy, but a complete change of mindset, away from an approach to producing energy based on extraction and exploitation, where nature is sacrificed and communities ignored, and to one based firmly on the principles of the Sustainable Development Goals.

We want to play our part. In recent years we have developed All-Ireland Pollinator Plan guidelines for onshore wind farms, reduced waste at our conferences and supported enhanced benefits for local communities near wind energy infrastructure. But we wanted to do more.

That is why our team has worked with Change By Degrees to produce Wind Energy Ireland's first Sustainability Strategy.

We are committed to working together as a staff team to reduce waste, run our events more sustainably, cut our own travel emissions and to build an inclusive and diverse organisation culture.

“Build an
inclusive
and diverse
organisation
culture”



Note from the CEO

Not enough

But that is not enough. While we are a small organisation we represent a large, and growing, industry employing almost 6,000 people. Together, we provide more than a third of Ireland's annual electricity needs and the infrastructure we use to do this has its own impact on the environment.

We need to build wind farms, we need to lay cables and install foundations. Ireland needs renewable energy infrastructure. But we have to find ways to do this sustainably, to do it in partnership with local communities and in concert with nature.

In this strategy we set out how we will encourage and support our members to make sustainability a hallmark of Irish wind energy. We will develop new policies, showcase best practice and celebrate those leaders in our industry who never stop challenging us to do things more sustainably.

“
We have to find
ways to do this
sustainably”

Note from the CEO

Our members are leaders in Ireland's response to the climate emergency. But we must also respond to the twin, and related, challenge of a global biodiversity crisis. We have a responsibility to get involved in protecting our natural and marine habitats, ensuring that we find ways to have a net positive impact on nature and we have no time to lose.

Writing about how we respond to the global climate and ecological crisis Greta Thunberg wrote:

"Together, we can still avoid the worst consequences. We can still avoid catastrophe and start to heal the wounds that we have inflicted. Together, we can do the seemingly impossible. But make no mistake – no one else is going to do it for us. This is up to us, here and now. You and me."

This sustainability strategy sets out how we will help to accomplish the 'seemingly impossible'; it will be a core part of how we run our organisation and lead our industry. It is the benchmark against which our actions and our words must be judged. We will not be found wanting.

Noel Cunniffe
CEO
Wind Energy Ireland

“We have a responsibility to get involved”



is home to a wide variety of birds. The terrain offers a rich source of food and shelter for breeding species, throughout the year to make the area a hive of activity.

Introduction

Wind Energy Ireland represents Ireland's wind energy industry, working to promote wind energy as an essential, economical and environmentally friendly part of the country's low-carbon energy future.

“**Our vision is to lead Ireland to a zero-carbon electricity system by 2035**”

Our nearly 200 members have come together to plan, build, operate and support the development of the country's chief renewable energy resource. As leaders in Ireland's fight against climate change we recognise that achieving climate targets requires a comprehensive approach to sustainability that benefits not just the economy but also people and the environment. We are an all-Ireland body working to create jobs, invest in communities, reduce CO2 emissions and end Ireland's reliance on foreign fossil fuels.



Our Mission Statements

- 1 ● We will sustainably deliver the Government's 2030 onshore and offshore wind targets at the best possible value for Irish consumers.

- 2 ● We will put wind energy and supporting technologies at the centre of decarbonising Ireland and promote the delivery of a cleaner environment which supports sustainable jobs and rural communities.



Our Values



INTEGRITY

We will always act with integrity when engaging our people, our stakeholders and communities. We will be honest, trustful, respectful, transparent and collaborative.



LEADERSHIP

We will demonstrate leadership in the energy sector by producing and promoting ambitious, trusted, evidence-based research to support the delivery of a zero-carbon energy future for our society. We will be an authoritative, pioneering voice in championing policy initiatives which deliver a sustainable future at the best value for the consumer.

SUSTAINABILITY

We will deliver a sustainable future for the people of Ireland. We will develop our projects sustainably and with sensitivity for the local environment and actively work to reduce our emissions footprint.



SAFETY

We will always prioritise the health, safety, and wellbeing of the people we work and interact with. Safety is never compromised in our actions.



WEI & the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

We have aligned our strategic objectives in the sustainability strategy to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The 17 SDGs provide an international framework, applicable across all countries and sectors, which demonstrates how our commitments are part of a global effort to address climate change, halt biodiversity loss and make our planet a safer and more equitable place for everyone to live. We are committed to partnering with others and increasing the level of sustainability knowledge and our overall impact.

While there are 17 SDGs, we have chosen five priority SDGs to align with the four strategic impact areas in this strategy. This ensures we remain focused on the areas where we can make the most impact while acknowledging that our impact extends indirectly to additional SDGs.

We have also identified the SDGs we will contribute indirectly to as a secondary area of focus.



SDGs we contribute to:

PRIORITY WE CONTRIBUTE DIRECTLY



SECONDARY WE CONTRIBUTE INDIRECTLY



Our Action and Our Influence

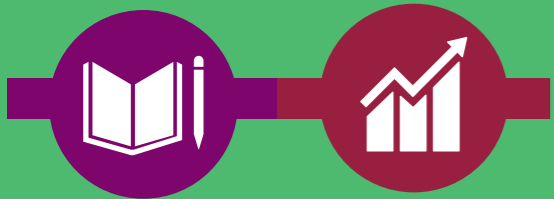
We are committed to showing leadership on sustainability in the wind energy sector. We do this through our actions as an organisation, conscious that our direct impact is modest. We have an office in a shared building, a relatively small staff of just over 30 people and many of us work remotely for much of our working week. We do however convene events and travel internationally to deliver our mission – so reducing our direct impact is important.

Our more significant impact and influence comes from our role as a membership organisation, representing a growing wind energy sector in Ireland. Leading by example we can inspire and motivate our members to adopt their own sustainability strategies, building skills in the sector to deliver sustainable wind energy and using our voice to advocate for policies that create benefits for people, the planet and our members.

This Strategy has actions for us to take as an organisation, to reduce our own footprint, as well as actions to drive a greater focus on sustainability across the sector. A sustainable wind energy sector delivers benefits beyond renewable energy and reduced carbon emissions; it delivers social, environmental and economic benefits to communities, to our members and to society.

“We will develop our projects sustainably and with sensitivity”





QUALITY
EDUCATION

DECENT WORK &
ECONOMIC
GROWTH

Taking Action: Building skills for sustainable wind

The transition to a sustainable energy future requires new skills and offers new job opportunities.

Green Tech Skillnet is a partnership between Wind Energy Ireland and Skillnet Ireland. In 2020, Green Tech Skillnet developed three training and work placement programmes for both technical and professional careers in renewable energy, to address the skills shortage. They were i) Wind Turbine Technicians; ii) Work in Wind and iii) Near Zero Energy Buildings and Building Energy Ratings. This suite of programmes won the IITD Award for Best Talent Development Initiative in 2022. To date, the programmes have trained 218 jobseekers and will upskill an addition 40 jobseekers in 2023 through the Work in Wind and Wind Turbine Technician programmes.

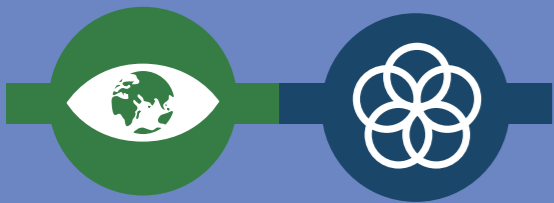
A recent survey with 102 responses showed that 81% of trainees found employment after finishing their training, with the majority working in the wind or energy sector. The Green Tech Skillnet delivers on the skills solutions required under the Climate Action Plan.



This course is an incredible opportunity to anyone who wishes to break into the Renewable sector, it's thoroughly enjoyable and gives a great insight to the different regions in the sense of wind turbine technician/ Blade Repair/ Construction etc."

Tanya O'Reilly, Wind Turbine Technician
Skills Connect Programme





CLIMATE
ACTION

PARTNERSHIPS
FOR THE GOALS

Taking Action: Making events more sustainable

Running and marketing events adds to the environmental footprint of WEI. Participant travel, food and drink, the venue and marketing materials all create waste and carbon. WEI takes steps to make events, which are critical learning, networking and influencing opportunities for members, sustainable.

Venues – we choose venues with a public and robust commitment to sustainability and proximity to public transport.

Food – we ask venues to source local and sustainable food
Marketing materials – we use QR codes to minimize printing and we purchased reusable pull up banners stands made from wood and the banners are printed on recycled material. Our lanyards are made from recycled materials and we collect them at the end of events for reuse.

Exhibitors - We ask our exhibitors to assist us with our sustainability approach by reducing waste, use less plastics, be mindful of printing materials and to lower their carbon footprint where possible.

Our next step is to produce a guide to sustainable events for WEI and our members.





PARTNERSHIPS
FOR THE GOALS

Taking Action: Sharing benefits with communities


For communities to welcome wind energy projects in their locality they have to share in the benefits created from the energy transition. Community benefit funds flow from wind energy companies into local communities to fund projects and initiatives chosen by the community. The 2022 annual Building Communities report from Wind Energy Ireland shows that wind farms delivered more than €4.3 million in funding to local projects in 2021 via community benefit funds, an increase of over €300,000 from the year before.

Funding supported local projects in 19 counties, ranging from education initiatives and sports clubs to installing solar panels and energy efficiency upgrades for community buildings. Some of the innovative local projects include:

The Cork-based Irish Community Air Ambulance, Ireland's first and only charity-funded Helicopter Emergency Medical Service. The funding from SSE Renewables' Coomacheo and Curragh Community Fund group enables the Irish Community Air Ambulance to provide equal access to healthcare for patients from rural communities

In Donegal, funding from the Energia Meenadreen wind farm community benefit fund allowed St Francis' National School in Barnesmore to install a sensory garden.

The number of projects benefitting from the fund will increase every year as new wind farms are connected in line with the Climate Action Plan.



“Did you know that Wind Energy Ireland made the proposal that a portion of the money from onshore RESS be set aside to support sustainable development and the SDGs in communities?”

Stakeholder Engagement

As a member organisation it was important to hear from our members and other stakeholders when embarking on this strategy.

We conducted focus groups & stakeholder interviews and a member survey.

Member Expectations

- Support Members on journey to net zero
- More facilitated activities to support members and more face-to-face meetings for working groups
- Make it holistic

Employee Expectations

- Make budget available for upskilling

Community Expectations

- Opportunity for Engagement: RESS Scheme & Biodiversity development
- Work more collaboratively with communities

“Promote circular economy principles in wind energy design”

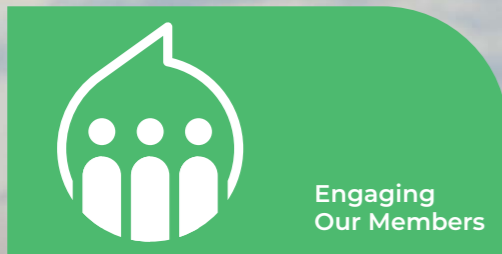
“Support local businesses and communities”

Overview of our Sustainability Strategy Framework

PURPOSE

To make Ireland's wind energy industry a leader in sustainability

STRATEGIC IMPACT AREAS 2023-2025



Impact Area 1: Environment and Carbon Strategic Objectives

- 1.1** Create a compelling narrative for wind energy to help Ireland meet its climate goals and the SDGs
- 1.2** Promote and support the sustainable development of wind energy on land and at sea, through the application of measures which will support the enrichment of biodiversity and enhance environmental resilience.
- 1.3** Promote circular economy principles in wind energy design, development, operation & decommissioning
- 1.4** Reduce emissions and waste through our operations, procurement, and events

SDGs



Impact Area 2: Community engagement Strategic Objectives

- 2.1** Support local businesses and communities by fostering a thriving, inclusive, sustainable and local wind energy economy
- 2.2** Enable members to engage with communities to build mutual respect, buy-in and shared benefits from sustainable wind energy
- 2.3** Raise awareness of wind energy's contribution to sustainable development

SDGs



Impact Area 3: Engaging our members Strategic Objectives

- 3.1** Upskill members so that wind energy contributes to sustainable development and the SDGs
- 3.2** Enable members to effectively advocate for sustainability in national renewable energy policies
- 3.3** Organise sustainable events that model and promote best practices among members

SDGs



Impact Area 4: Governance and integrity Strategic Objectives

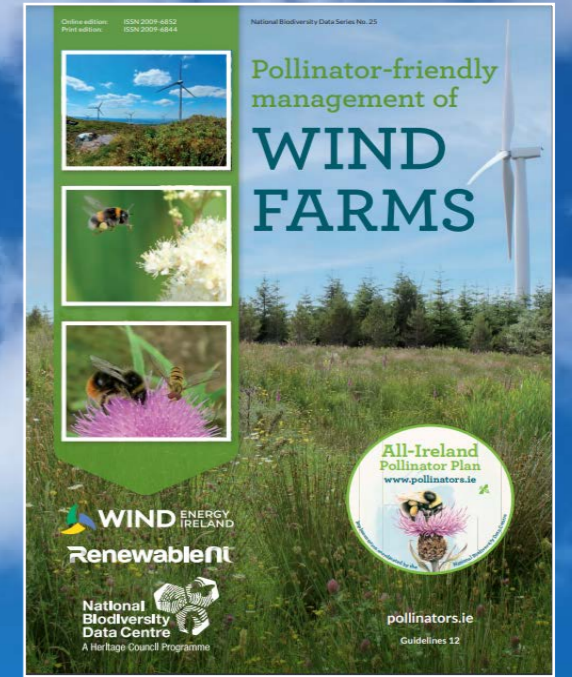
- 4.1** Cultivate a culture of sustainability in WEI to inspire and engage employees in supporting Wind Energy Ireland's mission
- 4.2** Ensure robust governance of WEI that promotes sustainability and exemplifies ESG best practices

SDGs



Impact Area 1: Environment and carbon

Strategic Objectives	Actions
<p>1.1 Create a compelling narrative for wind energy to help Ireland meet its climate goals and the SDGs</p>	<p>Create and advocate for policies promoting renewable energy and a just, sustainable transition to a zero carbon energy system</p>
<p>1.2 Promote and support the sustainable development of wind energy on land and at sea, through the application of measures which will support the enrichment of biodiversity and enhance environmental resilience.</p>	<p>Build an evidence base to increase the uptake of greater environmentally conscious and sustainable wind energy development.</p>
<p>1.3 Promote circular economy principles in wind energy design, development, operation & decommissioning</p>	<p>Provide thought leadership and collaborate with stakeholders to implement circular economy principles in wind energy projects.</p>
<p>1.4 Reduce emissions and waste through our operations, procurement, and events</p>	<p>Be a net zero organisation by 2025</p> <p>Reduce waste to as close to zero as possible from operations and from WEI organised events by 2030</p> <p>Develop and implement a sustainable procurement policy for WEI prioritising Irish suppliers committed to sustainability.</p>



Turning commitments into actions: Pollinator friendly windfarms

In 2021 members of Wind Energy Ireland and its Northern Ireland counterpart RenewableNI collaborated with the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan team. Together they produced the “Pollinator-Friendly Management of Wind Farms” guidelines which outlined actions which wind farm operators in Ireland could implement to help pollinators on the land they manage.

Impact Area 2: Community engagement

Strategic Objectives	Actions
<p>2.1 Support local businesses and communities by fostering a thriving, inclusive, sustainable and local wind energy economy</p>	<p>Support quality green job creation in the renewable energy sector.</p> <p>Promote local supply chains for wind energy to contribute to circularity and local development.</p>
<p>2.2 Enable members to engage with communities to build mutual respect, buy-in and shared benefits from sustainable wind energy</p>	<p>Provide training and awareness building for members so that they can reach wider audiences and maximise the positive impact of Community Benefit Funds.</p>
<p>2.3 Raise awareness of wind energy's contribution to sustainable development</p>	<p>Support community outreach and education initiatives for wind energy awareness & showcase the contribution of wind energy to the SDGs.</p>

School children visits to wind farms

Schools can now visit wind farms to get inspired about the jobs and the energy of the future.

Mountlucas Wind Farm is an ideal place to learn about renewable energy. Your guide will explain how the turbines were built, how they work, and will answer any questions you may have about wind energy. The wind farm will provide a perfect example of renewable energy to students. The Learning Hub at Mountlucas Wind Farm contains a series of interactive hands-on activities based around wind energy and technology. All school tours are free of charge and Bord na Móna is also offering schools a contribution towards transport costs.



Impact Area 3: Engaging our members

Strategic Objectives	Actions
<p>3.1 Upskill members on wind energy's contribution to sustainable development</p>	<p>Provide educational resources and training opportunities for members to increase the sector's contribution to SDGs and ESG.</p>
<p>3.2 Enable members to effectively advocate for sustainability in national renewable energy policies</p>	<p>Create sustainability working group(s) to identify and disseminate best practices.</p>
	<p>Use WEI events and publications to promote sustainable wind energy in Ireland, driving engagement and innovation.</p>
<p>3.3 Organise sustainable events that model and promote best practices among members</p>	<p>Create guidelines for sustainable events for WEI (and for sharing with members) and model the guidelines in practice through WEI convened events.</p>
	<p>Promote sustainability awards in the annual Irish Wind Industry Awards ceremony (e.g. wind energy in the community award)</p>

Green Tech Skillnet:

Building sustainability knowledge and skills

This webinar held in 2023 introduced Green Tech Skillnet participants to Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) Reporting and the EU Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD)

The 1.5-hour workshop was designed to demystify the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) which came into effect in January 2023. It also demonstrated how Economic Social Governance (ESG) strategies are developed and reported. Participants gained insights into why ESG is at the top of the global agenda and its relevance to them, as well as gaining knowledge of the CSRD legislation, ESG reporting and stakeholder engagement.



Impact Area 4: Governance and Integrity

Strategic Objectives	Actions
<p>4.1 Cultivate a culture of sustainability in WEI to inspire and engage employees in supporting Wind Energy Ireland's mission</p>	<p>Provide educational resources and training opportunities for members to increase the sector's contribution to SDGs and ESG.</p> <p>Build skills and knowledge in WEI to drive sustainability across the organisation and membership.</p>
<p>4.2 Ensure robust governance of WEI that promotes sustainability and exemplifies ESG best practices</p>	<p>Monitor and report on WEI's sustainability performance to stakeholders.</p> <p>Communicate our commitment to sustainability and our progress year on year</p> <p>Build the capacity of the board to provide oversight of the Sustainability Strategy and use co-options / advisory positions to fill skills gaps</p> <p>Align the WEI risk register with sustainability-related risks and opportunities (e.g., climate risk, supply chain risk, human rights).</p>

Governance

Wind Energy Ireland is committed upholding the highest levels of corporate governance, transparency and integrity. We are accountable to our membership and we will always act with integrity when engaging our people, our stakeholders, and communities. We will be honest, trustful and transparent in sharing our sustainability commitments and results and collaborative and respectful in our approach to sharing what we learn on our journey to greater sustainability.

Oversight and responsibility for the implementation of this strategy and reporting on it rests with our board, our senior leadership team and all our employees as set out below.

Board

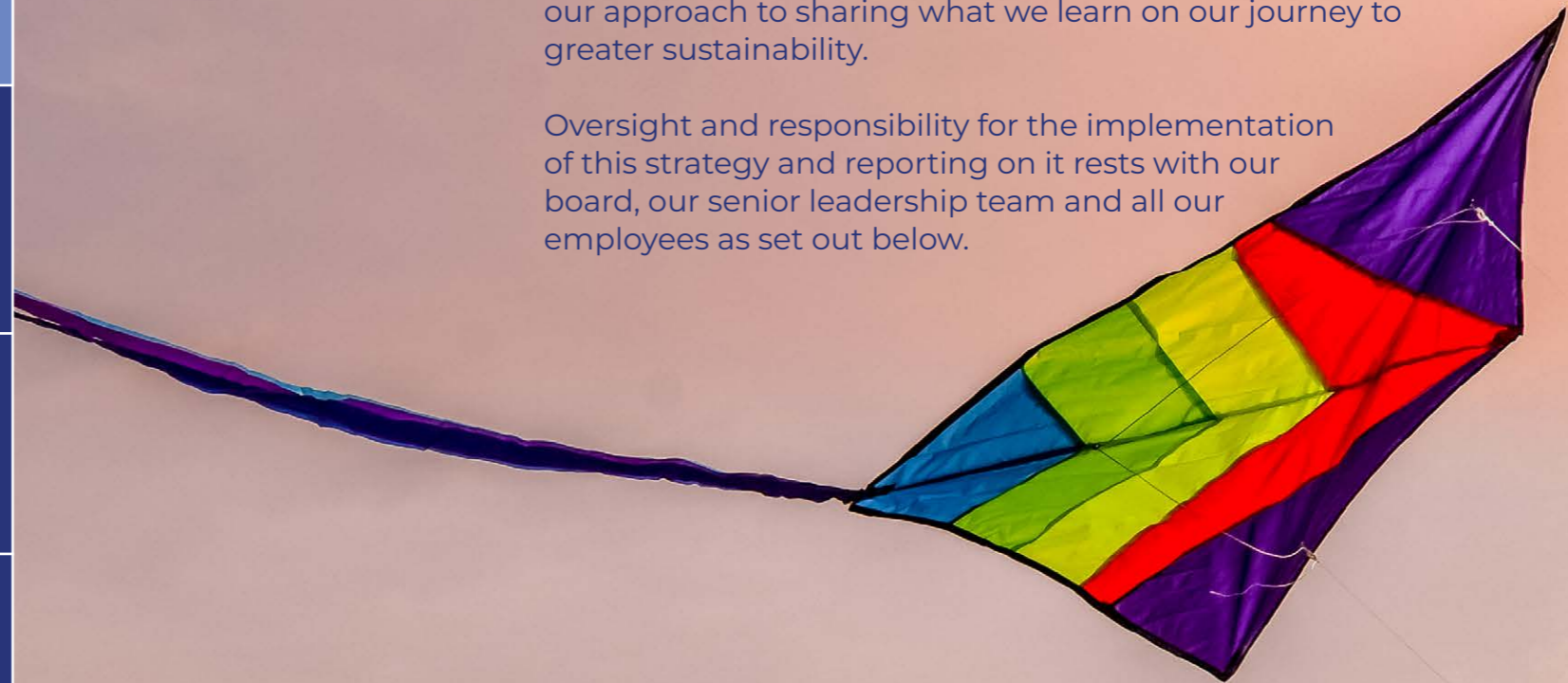
Strategy committee responsible for oversight and annual reporting

Senior Leadership Team

Responsible for implementation and monitoring of progress
Reports to Strategy Committee of Board

All Employees

Twice yearly meetings to provide input and review feedback and updates



Thank You