



# Submission to the Shannon Estuary Economic Task Force

The Western Development Commission (WDC) is a statutory body with a remit to promote and encourage economic and social development in the Western Region (counties Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Mayo, Galway, Roscommon, and Clare). As well as having a remit for these seven counties, the WDC is also the coordinating agency for the Atlantic Economic Corridor Project, a key initiative of Ireland 2040, which seeks to grow the region from Donegal to Kerry significantly in the coming 20 years. The WDC operates under the aegis of the Department of Rural and Community Development. We welcome the establishment of the Shannon Estuary Economic Task Force and the opportunity to submit our views to it.

Firstly, we must acknowledge the significant work already undertaken. The Shannon Integrated Framework Plan (SIFP) provides significant opportunities to grow the Blue Economy through the offshore wave and renewable wind energy in the Shannon Estuary. This progress must be built on and not reversed.

Secondly, we believe that the Shannon Estuary forms just one part of an overall strategy for the sustainable economic development of the Atlantic Economic Corridor. The opportunities presented to the region will require investment in ports and infrastructure along the west coast. All parties must collaborate to make sure that this opportunity is not lost.

[Research](#) conducted by the Western Development Commission has identified several areas where the West of Ireland can develop a global competitive advantage. These areas include MedTech, AI, and Renewable Energy. In the area of renewable energy, we believe this task force can make the biggest impact. For the first time in its history, the West of Ireland has a strategic natural resource that can transform the region with over 30GW of verified offshore energy resources. To put this in context, an analysis<sup>1</sup> of the east coast opportunity has calculated the total employment from the development of 3.5GW of fixed offshore wind as 21,380 full-time equivalent jobs. However, because the supply chain is already well established, most of these are internationally based and in manufacturing (over 16000). Floating offshore wind is a burgeoning industry, and Ireland has the opportunity to get involved from the outset. The opportunity for the west coast in terms of employment is many multiples of the above figures with recognised potential for over 30GW in the Atlantic. This resource can guarantee energy independence for

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Ireland, significantly reduce our carbon footprint, reshape communities through billions of euros from community benefit funds and boost jobs and exports. Indeed, the west coast has many strengths to allow it to seize this opportunity.

Therefore, the WDC believes that the sustainable development of the Shannon Estuary is crucial for the economic prosperity of the West of Ireland and if Ireland is to achieve net-zero carbon emissions by 2050 or before. Within its key location on Ireland's Atlantic coastline, the Western region can offer the most favourable wind conditions in Europe and sheltered deep-sea port facilities along the Shannon Estuary and over 1.5GW of existing grid connection infrastructure at Moneypoint and Tarbert Power stations. Delivery of large energy projects from the region brings the potential to drive significant economic activity and will facilitate the scaling of activity in the sector across the entire coast.

[Other research](#) by the WDC further emphasises the strategic importance of Shannon-Foynes and Moneypoint. Shannon-Foynes is a Tier One port of National Significance. It has facilities already capable of (deep-water mooring facilities and natural deep-water channels) or facilities available for (with a minimal upgrade) servicing the offshore wind industry at all stages of construction, operation/maintenance, and decommissioning. In addition, it has a significant landbank within and adjacent to port lands appropriately zoned for development suitable for a range of complementary industries, which, together with planned infrastructural upgrades to road and rail networks, places the Shannon Estuary in an excellent position to capitalise on the opportunity. It could, with added investment, be an important driver of floating wind development in Ireland off the west coast and in other locations in north-western Europe. Furthermore, the development of a sustainable source of green energy (power to x) can improve the sustainability of key industries in the area, such as Aughinish Alumina, Irish Cement, CRH and Shannon Airport. Shannon-Foynes and the Shannon estuary can be part of a strategic portfolio of investments (including AMETS, SmartBay, MaREI, Killybegs Cluster and the other ports) that will catalyse a new industry that provides benefits from Kerry to Donegal.

With this in mind, the WDC sees the following developments as crucial:

- Establish a group to examine how Ireland can capitalise on the Atlantic resource of at least 30GW of floating offshore wind by 2050
- Undertake a mapping exercise for the ports on the west coast to identify each port's strengths in the context of floating offshore wind and identify what upgrades and investments are needed to capitalise on the Atlantic resource.
- Increase telecommunications interconnection on both an international and national scale (east to west)
- Upgrading of grid capacity on the West Coast to enable the generation of 30GW of renewable electricity from the Atlantic and
- The upgrade of Moneypoint Power station to support the generation of green hydrogen
- Develop a start-up accelerator for floating offshore wind development and renewable energy-related activities, such as the development of green hydrogen.
  - The development of an Atlantic Green Digital Basin
  - The creation of a sustainable aviation ecosystem in Shannon
  - Additional support for the Future Mobility Campus, Ireland

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- The funding and re-opening of the Limerick to Foynes railway line

The WDC also believes that key stakeholders such as the DETE Regional Enterprise Plans, The Southern Regional Assembly, and the WDC should be invited to present each organisation's vision for the Shannon Estuary.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://westerndevelopment.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/WDC-Renewable-Energy-An-Opportunity-for-a-Just-Transition-to-Net-Zero-on-the-Atlantic-Coast.pdf>

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