

Community Energy

Our Vision

Our Vision is an Ireland where communities, local groups, and citizens participate in renewable energy generation, distribution and energy efficiency, or 'Community Energy' as it is more commonly known.

Irish people agree with renewable energy but increasingly feel alienated

A recent Eurobarometer survey showed 89% of us in Ireland agree with renewable targets. However, recently amidst fears of disruption and adverse local impacts, communities are actively resisting developments they feel they have no control over and see little benefit from. We believe that Community Energy is the key to ensuring strong public support for renewable energy in Ireland, and will put us on track to reaching our full renewable energy potential.

Developments by the community for the community

To play an active role in renewable energy, it is important that it is possible for a community to come together and develop its own renewable energy project. A development owned by the community, for the community.

An equity stake... developer led with citizen participation

In addition, for individuals and community groups who are not in a position to develop their own renewable energy project, it is essential that communities have the opportunity, indeed the right, to participate in developments brought forward in their area by developers. This must include more than just a consultation exercise, and more than compensatory 'benefit' or 'gain' payments, and should ensure that communities can enter into partnerships with developers and have an equity stake in any development.

Removing the barriers.... And enabling

For these aspirations to be realised, there must be a shift in the current approach to delivering renewable energy projects, particularly wind energy projects. Quite simply there are too many barriers which prevent communities from developing their own projects, and there is no mechanism to involve citizens in developer led projects.

Empowered energy citizens

There can be no doubt that for a transformation to a renewable future of the scale required, it needs to be an endeavour that all our citizens play an active role in.



Recommendations: Establishing Policy Support for Community Energy

Recommendation	Examples from Europe
A National Strategy for Community Energy	United Kingdom: ' Community Energy Strategy ' Department of Energy and Climate Change ¹
Targets for Community ownership and Co-ownership of renewable developments	Scotland: "500 MW of community and locally owned renewable energy capacity in place by 2020" ² Denmark: Co-ownership requirement ³ requires developers to offer 20% of overall ownership shares of wind projects larger than 25m in height to citizens/groups, this includes a preferential right to buy for those living within 4.5 km of the project.
Intermediary body to provide advice and guidance to potential groups	Recommended in Ireland: The National Economic and Social Council, in their Report to Government ⁴ , July 2014, recommend " <i>intermediary actors should be certified and resourced to enable and facilitate the energy transition at a local level</i> ", " <i>a key central agency (such as SEAI [Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland]) should be tasked to provide a learning network</i> " Scotland: Local Energy Scotland " <i>free, impartial advice service to help develop community and locally owned renewable energy projects</i> " Denmark: Energy Service Denmark (Energitjenesten), many offices across the country (e.g. Aero Island) run by citizen based organisations, provides information and practical advice for groups who want to establish community power projects. Germany: Municipal initiative, Freiburg 'Free Sun', an internet tool providing information on the development of solar projects, including which roof spaces are most suitable.

¹ UK Government, Department of Energy and Climate Change, Community Energy Strategy, January 2014 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/community-energy-strategy>)

² The Scottish Government (2011), 2020 Routemap for Renewable Energy in Scotland, section 3.9 on Community Renewables (<https://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/08/04110353/0>)

³ Danish Government (2008) Promotion of Renewable Energy Act, Act no 1392 of 27 December 2008, Part 1, Section 13 (<http://www.ens.dk/sites/ens.dk/files/supply/renewable-energy/wind-power/onshore-wind-power/Promotion%20of%20Renewable%20Energy%20Act%20-%20extract.pdf>)

⁴ National Economic and Social Council (July 2014) 'Wind Energy in Ireland: Building Community Engagement and Social Support' (<http://www.nesc.ie/en/publications/publications/nesc-reports/wind-energy-in-ireland-building-community-engagement-and-social-support/>)

Recommendations: Removing Practical Barriers to Community Energy

Removing Barriers	What is best practice elsewhere?
Facilitate connection to the National Electricity Grid	<p>Denmark: General right for all installations to connect to the grid, without discrimination⁵. Lead times are on average 2 months. The application procedure is widely recognised as simple and transparent. To ensure connection costs are appropriate, costs are socialised and shared between the plant owner and grid operator.</p> <p>Germany: The grid operator has a statutory duty to connect renewable energy plants 'without undue delay' to the closest technically suitable point⁶. Within 2 months the applicant must be given clarity on connection time, costs and any technical restrictions.</p>
Ensure all renewable electricity can be sold (community energy, micro generators)	<p>Across Europe, Feed in Tariffs support all renewable technologies, most notably solar which is excluded in Ireland. A payment for all forms of electricity exported to the grid ensures individuals and micro generators are incentivised to generate renewable electricity.</p> <p>In UK, community energy projects are recognised as different to traditional developments and receive more favourable Feed in Tariff rates than traditional developer led models⁷.</p>
Communities cannot generate and use electricity locally	Private electricity lines and sharing of electricity across property boundaries are permitted in the majority of European countries.
Communities have no role in Developer-Led Renewable developments	<p>Denmark: Co-ownership requirement⁸ requires developers to offer 20% of overall ownership shares of wind projects larger than 25m in height to citizens/groups, this includes a preferential right to buy for those living within 4.5 km of the project.</p>

⁵ Danish Government; Act No 516 of 1 January 2010 on Electricity Supply

⁶ German Government, Electricity and Gas industries, amended from 7th July 2005 (Energiewirtschaftsgesetz) Section 5(1).

⁷ UK Government, Department of Energy and Climate Change, (Consultation ongoing) Support for Community Energy Projects under the Feed in Tariffs Scheme (<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/support-for-community-energy-projects-under-the-feed-in-tariffs-scheme>)

⁸ Danish Government (2008) Promotion of Renewable Energy Act, Act no 1392 of 27 December 2008, Part 1, Section 13

(<http://www.ens.dk/sites/ens.dk/files/supply/renewable-energy/wind-power/onshore-wind-power/Promotion%20of%20Renewable%20Energy%20Act%20-%20extract.pdf>)

