

One year countdown begins for Ireland's first electricity interconnector to Great Britain

Largest state energy infrastructure project since Ardnacrusha now close to completion

Dublin, 27th October 2011 - The largest energy infrastructure project in Ireland, reached a major milestone today, when work on the EirGrid East West Interconnector got underway involving the laying of underwater cables connecting the power grids of Ireland and Great Britain.

The €600m East West Interconnector project is being developed by EirGrid – the independent electricity transmission system operator in the Republic of Ireland.

It will enable enough power to supply 300,000 homes to be transported between Ireland and Britain, bringing major benefits in terms of competition, secure electricity supplies and potential exports of Irish wind energy.

The work on the interconnector involves the laying of 180 kilometres of undersea and approximately 80 kilometres of underground cables to enable the flow of electricity in both directions between Ireland and Great Britain. This means that when Ireland needs extra electricity it can import it but crucially, it opens a new export market for Ireland's abundant renewable energy.

With most of the underground cables now laid, the cable-laying ship the Nostag 10 anchored itself at North Beach, Rush Co. Dublin to lay the marine cables of the €600 million project partly funded by the European Union. This unusual vessel, off the North Dublin coast, is already attracting curious onlookers. Work on the cable laying will take place over the next year.

Yesterday the ESRI issued a report which confirmed that the creation of a single EU-wide electricity market offers significant benefits for Ireland. The report, entitled the *Internal EU Electricity Market: Implications for Ireland* concluded that 'the single EU electricity market should result in lower electricity prices and increased competition as suppliers from Great Britain and beyond will be able to enter the Irish market. This should spur efficiency and increase consumer choice.'

As the cable laying got underway, Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, Pat Rabbitte TD was present to observe this key milestone for the project with just one year to completion when trading will commence on this interconnector.

Commenting on the project, Minister Rabbitte said, "The interconnector will improve security of supply, as well as increasing competition and assisting in achieving our

ambitious renewable targets. I am delighted that EirGrid are on track to complete the project within budget and on time, by the end of next year.

“Witnessing the laying of the marine cable across the Irish Sea is symbolic of linking Ireland, a geographically isolated Island, to the single European energy market which will ultimately benefit all electricity consumers and generators.”

As the Nostag 10 makes its way across the sea, the cable will be carefully lowered into the water and laid in a narrow trench. The cable laying work is expected to take place over approximately eight months.

Andrew Cooke, EirGrid’s Director of Grid Development, said “This is a very exciting stage in the project and probably one of the most challenging. Before work started, EirGrid carried out a detailed marine survey to identify a route for the undersea cable that would have the least impact on marine life.

“With over 600 people currently working on the project, it is great to see the interconnector cable finally beginning to be laid at sea. Europe’s electricity future will be reliant on interconnector projects of this nature and currently EirGrid is investigating the feasibility of further interconnection to Europe.”

The Interconnector is scheduled to be operational in late 2012 and will be capable of carrying power to supply the equivalent of 300,000 homes.

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Contact EirGrid Press office: Valerie Hedin 087 951 6805

Notes to Editors:

EirGrid plc is the independent electricity Transmission System Operator (TSO) in Ireland and the Market Operator in the wholesale electricity trading system.

EirGrid's role is to deliver quality connection, transmission and market services to generators, suppliers and customers utilising the high voltage electricity system, and to put in place the grid infrastructure required to support the development of Ireland's economy. It is a state-owned company.

In the National Development Plan 2007 – 2013, the Irish Government has identified the need for a strategic energy link, in the form of an electrical High Voltage Direct Current (HVDC) interconnector, to be developed between Ireland and the UK.

ABB, the Swedish engineering firm was awarded the contract to design, manufacture and install the interconnector.

The interconnector is being developed by EirGrid, working closely with the Commission for Energy Regulation, and will be owned by EirGrid following its completion.