

Accelerating Europe's energy transition? The North Sea offers the solution!

- **Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany and Denmark together want to generate 150 gigawatts of offshore wind energy in the North Sea by 2050**
- **According to the European Commission, 300 gigawatts are needed to make Europe climate neutral**
- **To realize this ambition, cooperation is needed between all eight North Sea countries (United Kingdom, Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, France, Denmark, Sweden and Norway)**

If we want to accelerate Europe's energy transition, the North Sea must become the continent's largest climate-neutral energy system by 2050 at the latest. And to achieve this, we need to work together. Thanks to cooperation between Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark and Germany, the North Sea can provide us with 150 gigawatts of offshore wind power. But we need twice that by 2050 if we want to make Europe completely climate-neutral. And so all eight North Sea countries must work together to generate more green power.

By Peter Koninckx, Head of Siemens Energy Belgium

What science has been warning about for years is becoming a frightening reality. We are heading for the greatest climate and energy crisis humanity has ever known. Ironically, it takes a European war with Russia to come to that realization. Because suddenly we are lying awake over the gas we need to meet our energy needs. However, energy and climate go hand in hand.

Whether we look at it from a climate or energy point of view, the conclusion remains that we urgently need to invest in renewable, green energy. The good news? Our renewable energy source is right in front of our noses. The North Sea meets all the requirements to play a leading role in the energy transition for the whole of Europe. And the wind is favourable: the technology to generate energy from our sea exists. Companies are waiting to get started. More than ever, sustainability is at the top of the political agenda. And governments are calling on us to contribute to ambitious climate targets.

To all the countries around the North Sea, unite!

If we want to get the most out of our North Sea, it is time for the eight North Sea countries to work together. With innovative companies and their supply chains. Our coast is the place to generate, store, convert and transport huge amounts of renewable energy. But then Belgium, Denmark, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom urgently need to join forces.

Time for action

For decades, the North Sea has played a key role in Europe's energy supply and growing prosperity, thanks to its oil and gas fields. Now that same North Sea can help us deliver net zero energy, by modernizing existing oil and gas platforms; by becoming the global testbed for innovative technologies; and by expanding the energy connections between European countries into a single grid, for an optimal energy balance.

Because we have to change course. And preferably as soon as possible. The latest IPCC report by the United Nations once again underlines the climate crisis. There are many plans, but the implementation must now really get underway. This acceleration requires will and decisiveness, coupled with sufficient resources, knowledge, instruments and cooperation. Science has been warning and doing this for a long time. But in the climate crisis, leaders of countries, companies, and many individual citizens lack the awareness that the situation is not only dire, but also extremely urgent.

Example agreement

On 18 May 2022, Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark and Germany have taken an important step by signing the Esbjerg Declaration: an agreement on the North Sea as the green powerhouse of Europe. In this way, the Belgian government, together with its foreign colleagues, is demonstrating its ambition to significantly increase the production of wind energy in the North Sea to 150 gigawatts in 2050, which will become possible through closer cooperation. The wind turbines on our North Sea should already produce 65 gigawatts by 2030, four times more than today.

This North Sea summit should serve as an example of the necessary cooperation between all eight North Sea countries. By 2050, our coast must be the largest climate-neutral energy system in Europe. However, according to the European Commission, more is needed. It states that 300 gigawatts of wind energy are needed to make Europe climate neutral by 2050. So we still have a long way to go.

Belgium shows ambition

Although the Belgian coast is only 76 kilometers long, our government is showing ambition. Today, Belgian offshore wind turbines generate 2.2 gigawatts. This will be increased to 6 gigawatts by 2030 and to 8 gigawatts by 2040. That is enough to provide every Belgian family with power from the North Sea. Our country is therefore strongly committed to cooperation with other countries. For example, work is being done on an undersea energy connection with Denmark. In time, Belgium will also look further into importing green electricity from abroad - from Norway, for example.

Need for leadership

With the North Sea, we have gold in our hands for energy transition. But mining that gold calls for servile leadership, for people who can build bridges, bring parties and interests together, and make progress. That is why I sincerely hope that Belgium continues to show leadership at the international level. That we become pioneers of the European climate objectives, and that we succeed in convincing foreign governments to put all political, commercial and personal interests second and to implement the best solution for the energy transition. That best solution is not an ideal drawing-board solution, but a workable solution that will allow us to

start working immediately with what we have now, on what we want: a carbon-neutral society.

The crowning glory of a career

Of course, it must also prove to be politically and commercially sustainable, but I am convinced that the energy transition will, in all respects, yield far more than the short-term benefits of a few political successes, a few won tenders, or a few personal triumphs.

The definition of sustainability is that our human actions should not hinder the freedom of action of future generations. Project North Sea offers the opportunity to flourish politically, scientifically and commercially and to let Mother Earth and our (grand) children profit from it. That seems to me the crown on everyone's career.