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Moderator questions in Bold, Respondents in Regular text.

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Richard Rogers: Thanks everyone. I hope I have a few interesting things to say. It's a absolute pleasure to be here. It's different, I suppose. Many of the speakers will reflect on the fact that it's not sitting behind a desk at home in front of a Zoom call. It's actually real live people and we'll all be for the better of it by the time we get to the end of the morning, I'm sure. I am working in energy in government and, yes, I'm with the department for the economy and, yes, we've published the energy strategy, but actually the theme of today is that it's a collaboration of the willing across government and outside of government and I'm delighted that Will Apps is here from the Crown Estate. He'll speak later this morning which, you know, one of the important aspects of being able to deliver offshore wind in an accelerated way, coming from behind to be the leaders in the same way that we're leaders in onshore renewable electricity production.

So one of the things, maybe even one of the last things, that the executive did was to approve the energy strategy just before Christmas and the, the important thing is that that's all set within the net zero legislation for 2050 and it laid out a roadmap to 2030. Cause it's easy to say we're gonna do things over the next 30 years, now 28 years, but it's actually what we're doing now that's really important. And that forecast, or that set a target of a 56% reduction in carbon dioxide by 2030, emissions on-, based on a 1990 start. But really it's far, far more about that and actually the vision is really important. the vision is that we will deliver self-sufficiency in affordable renewable energy. As soon as possible we will stop importing fossil fuels. We see the damage that importing fossil fuels is doing, not in the-, on the climate basis but actually every single kilowatt hour, every single litre of petrol or diesel or heating oil or natural gas that we important costs us out of our pocket a lot more now than it did a few months ago.

But it's sending money overseas. Far, far better if we were self-sufficient in the renewable energy that we have that is indigenous, and that's really what the message is all about. It's about this region becoming self-sufficient, providing a stable energy cost. A stable energy cost going forward for the next century, not a volatile energy cost. A stable energy cost around which government can build the support to ensure that people don't have to experience fuel poverty. The shocking figure today is that probably 50% of our households will now be experiencing fuel poverty in Northern Ireland and that, if, if prices remain where they are over the next six months, that will be a massive problem for us next winter. So it's not acceptable in a modern society for that to be happening. So that's what this energy strategy is all about.

That's what today is all about. This is a fundamental part of enabling that self-sufficiency and this current

energy crisis reinforces the vision that was agreed by the executive in December, and actually encourages us to accelerate our ambition for delivery. So the other important aspect of this is not just about stable energy prices but the ambition to at least double the size of our zero carbon, low carbon economy by 2030 to at least £2 billion annually. Actually, it's great to be in the heart of the Titanic quarter here today because the delivery of the 10X innovative economy that is, again-, was agreed and published last year by the department leverages our DNA, our DNA that stretches back in this region for over 100 years. The advanced manufacturing DNA, engineering, materials handling and leveraging the smart. Who would've believed we could have such a software industry here in, in this part of the world? Artificial intelligence and that's what-, that's what smart is all about.

The fact that we've had, you know, one, one, one point in January, we had 90% of our electricity was being supplied by renewable energy. We're leaders in that area. We've got to a range of 40-49% over the past twelve months in terms of the renewable electricity mix. We are leaders. We are regional leaders and that is down to the engineering expertise of some people who are actually in this room. The, the expertise of NIE Networks, the expertise of Sony and the expertise of the companies in the supply chain that actually are bringing that innovation. Companies like Camlin, who are a home-, a successful home-grown electrical engineering business that produces solutions not just for what we're achieving here but does most of its business in exports. That's what it's all about. That's what the economic development is all about.

So one thing you'll have noticed that has changed since the energy strategy landed in December is that the 70% target for renewable electricity by 2030 to build on the, the peak we've achieved so far of 49%, is now in statute, or will be in statute, before the summer in the current climate bill. It'll be in 80% by 2030. That means we need even more renewable electricity capacity, which makes today even more important in terms of getting to that 80%. So I suppose the question for today is how can we accelerate the deployment of offshore wind to help achieve this new legislative target? Government is notorious for thinking about things. So what we did in January was, after the energy strategy, was, agreed and published in December was we published an action plan for 2022. It just so happens there were 22 actions in that action plan, so obviously there'll be 23 in next year's action plan. And number fourteen states develop an action plan to deliver one gigawatt of offshore wind from 2030.

In a few minutes time, in the last slide, you'll see a timeline. The ambition needs to be to accelerate that and, again, that's what today is all about. We will be measured by what we achieve this year in government and it's not just in the department for the economy but it's across government and that's why the 22 actions have been published. We will report on those actions at the beginning of next year and, like I mentioned a moment ago, we will have a new action plan for 2023. We will have a formal review, we'll all inform a formal review of the strategy by 2025 and we will bring a private sector discipline to the ongoing review development and delivery of the energy strategy, done through the action plan that feeds into several years of work, so that we know where we're going. And at the heart of it for today is that offshore action plan for 2030 or earlier if we can.

So whatever the target we need to work across government, you know. In Northern Ireland, the executive departments, the UK government departments, the Crown Estate and you, the private sector, to ensure that, you know-, cause at the end of the day, most of the investment will come from the private sector and we, as touch-bearers and consumers, will pay for that through the bills and we need a long-term stable price. We need to work out how to do that. So the action plan mentioned in this slide will broadly have five key issues. It'll be consents and planning upfront. It'll be grid development, it'll be decommissioning in the sea afterwards. It'll be the regulatory change that's needed and it'll be understanding what financial support is needed or might be needed. We're not starting from scratch. There was a substantial strategic and environmental assessment that was done actually back in 2009 that didn't lead to anything in fruition but it's there and now we're on thirteen years later with completing a new strategic environmental assessment.

We also had a 2012-2020 offshore renewable energy strategic action plan and there was a lot of work done on potential projects off the County Down coast where I live, where I grew up and I still live, but it didn't happen. But it's gonna be different this time. It is gonna be different this time and it's this plan that provides the foundations for our approach over the coming month and years. And I think it's important to mention something else at this point and that is there, there is an opportunity. Offshore wind in particular brings the opportunity for Northern Ireland to be the exemplar in the development of a green hydrogen economy here. That is our focus, because the consequence of getting to 80% renewable electricity by 2030 and at least one gigawatt of offshore wind means that without hydrogen the cost to consumers will be exorbitant. Without hydrogen we won't be able to keep the lights on when the-, when the wind doesn't blow.

It's dunkelflaute. Dunkelflaute is what the Germans call it and we had plenty of dunkelflaute in January, whenever it's dark and the wind isn't blowing. We need strategic gas storage. That gas needs to be decarbonised. That gas can be decarbonised by the renewable electricity capacity that we're gonna put in place. 80%, the statute will say, by 2030. So it's the opportunity that comes with that rather than just the cost to consumers, and the opportunity is to be the leaders in the development of the green hydrogen. And there are people in this room who have already been involved in the trial, the electrolysis trial that's producing oxygen that's needed for a waste water treatment plant, NI Water, and the hydrogen that is starting to stimulate the development of our green hydrogen economy already. And on top of that we've also got, through the city deals, potential funding to facilitate the creation of a hydrogen centre of excellence at (mw 11.34) to support world class research and innovation.

And that plays to the world class research academic setups we have at Queens and at Ulster University and other further education colleges just down the road, with Belfast Met leading the way through the GenComm project, again, in the area of green hydrogen. So in fact today across town, at lunchtime, it's a really big day for decarbonisation of energy in this region. We have a workshop which is putting together

the creation of the hydrogen roadmap for 2030 and the development of the-, of a hydrogen technology accelerator concept, and that's happening down the road. It's, there is a lot happening and it's really exciting to see the momentum. So quick couple of slides, just getting close to finishing for addressing the barriers to deployment and the actions we're taking forward this year, and it's the people in this room today that will make this happen.

The combination of the best minds and brains in the private and the public sector. The department is engaging with BES in London to consider urgently a financial support mechanism to incentivise renewable investment in Northern Ireland. Discussions are at an advanced stage and the, the leading candidate being a contracts for difference scheme for Northern Ireland we will consult on this year and we will land it next year. That's our commitment. Secondly, we have, as I mentioned, Will in the room from Crown Estate and the concept of a seabed leasing line for Northern Ireland waters being worked urgently with the Crown Estate, not just with the department for the economy, economy but across government. We also are working with our colleagues in DAERA and the department for infrastructure on the appropriate marine licensing and consenting arrangements and onshore planning considerations. We need to be thinking about that now even though people are saying, 'Well, it's years down the road until we actually want to commission some offshore wind.'

No, it's happening today, is the important message. And we're also working with colleagues in NIE Networks and the system operator, Sony, to ensure that the electricity grid will be ready to accommodate the deployment of at least one gigawatt of offshore wind capacity from 2030. And good communications are vital. Days like today are fundamental, but the fear of the unknown, pardon the pun, fuels nimbyism, we need to bring society with it. The vision is, as I mentioned already, we will have an affordable renewable energy system that ends fuel poverty in this region and grows a vibrant economy, which fuels a more prosperous and fairer society. We mustn't let the nimby stop that because that's a vision that's worth something to everyone here. The department is also working with the Crown Estate on a statement of intent which will formalise our working relationships and commitments that each party makes towards achieving this timetable that we've set out, so it's a fundamental commitment that we will work together to do that.

And then, finally, we have a robust programme of environmental and habitats strategic and impact assessments and we'll complete these by Q3 in 2023 next year. And we are also undertaking a fast-moving research project with the Bryden Centre at Queen's to identify how to maximise the potential of offshore wind, the data and the evidence that will underpin our accelerated approach. And so to the final slide. This high-level timeline is, in my opinion, not yet as ambitious as it needs to be, and there are enough stakeholders in the room who will no doubt say today that this timeline needs to be accelerated. Indeed we'll hear from some of them from time to time today. Personally, I want to see a momentum developing rapidly from sessions like this and indeed the other one today in Belfast in the development of our regional green hydrogen economy. This year we will, in government, publish an ambitious plan for offshore wind and the vision is that we will all work as partners to help deliver it, public and private

sector, and the potential benefits for our society are great. So we should leave no stone-, no stone unturned. Thank you.

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