

Belgian grid delays trigger Princess Elisabeth setback

Auction relaunch puts
700MW project back
by two years, writes
Karolin Schaps

The start-up of Belgium's next offshore wind farm, the 700MW Princess Elisabeth 1 (PE1), is facing a delay of at least two years to 2032 following the postponement of its tender in June.

The tender will be relaunched before the end of the first quarter of 2026, meaning that the project – Belgium's first new offshore wind farm since 2020 – will not be able to meet its initial start-up date of 2030 and add to the country's existing 2.3GW of installed capacity.

The federal Belgian government cancelled the PE1 tender due to ongoing delays in the onshore grid infrastructure and the wider Princess Elisabeth Island to which the farm will connect, and to what it called an unrealistic deadline linked to its EU-approved Contracts for Difference scheme.

"This decision has been carefully considered and is based on some unforeseeable circumstances which have resulted in the preconditions for the implementation of the project not yet being met," said Belgian Energy Minister Mathieu Bihet in his official announcement in July.

At least five consortia had been preparing bids for the concession, according to two market sources, including a tie-up between Ocean Winds, Eneco, Otary and SeaCoop (Haddock Wind), as well as a consortium containing EDF Renewables, Luminus and Jan de Nul.

"While the consortium was well-prepared to participate in the first tender, we trust that additional time allows for the development of a more robust tender framework that will ultimately benefit the entire sector and all stakeholders involved," said a spokeswoman for Ocean Winds.

They confirmed that the EDP Renewables-Engie joint venture was still interested in bidding in the upcoming auction.

"The fact that the CfD is there and that it has not been put into question by the government makes the tender still attractive for developers," said Bérénice Crabs, secretary general of Belgian Offshore Platform, the association of Belgium's offshore wind industry.

The Belgian tender offers a two-way CfD with a price premium guaranteed for 20 years, an attractive prospect for

offshore wind developers to foresee future revenue.

A spokesman for Eneco also confirmed the Dutch utility's continued interest and SeaCoop, representing 125,000 Belgian citizens, was also still on board, its managing director Philippe Awouters said.

He added: "Construction on PE1 could have easily started in 2027 following financial close. Everyone was ready. The fact that the launch has been postponed has cost the sector around €50m."

Delays to grid reinforcement work onshore and changes to infrastructure plans of the Princess Elisabeth Island that were given as reasons for the tender delay remain an issue. The construction of a new 380-kV overhead electricity line at Boucle du Hainaut has been delayed due to local

residents' opposition. Grid operator Elia's Ventilus project, which foresees the construction of an 82km-long high-voltage cable to land electricity from the Princess Elisabeth island, is also embroiled in local opposition.

At the same time, energy minister Bihet decided in June to scrap the high-voltage direct current (HVDC) connection of the Princess Elisabeth Island due to spiralling costs that had been estimated at around €8bn for the whole island project.

While a subsequent offshore wind farm project on the PE2 site – of 1.2GW to 1.4GW in capacity – will be connected using a high-voltage alternating current (HVAC) connection that is already in planning, the scrapping of the HVDC connections jeopardises the development of the third wind farm. ■



CONCRETE STEPS: Installation of the first caissons at the artificial Princess Elisabeth Island began in April

Credit: Elia

New government throws doubt on citizen participation clause

Belgium's requirement for direct citizen involvement in the ownership structure of the country's new offshore wind farms looks uncertain at best following a change in government earlier this year.

The initiative was set to be Europe's first offshore wind tender clause demanding the direct involvement of citizens in bidding consortia, but new energy minister Mathieu Bihet has voiced his concerns.

"The government has not yet taken a final decision on this matter," a spokesman for the Belgian energy ministry told reNEWS, although Bihet said in a recent address to parliament that there were "major legal risks" in the previous tender documents.

Some bidding consortia had already positioned themselves

to meet the citizen participation requirement. For example, in February Ocean Winds, Eneco and Otary joined forces with SeaCoop, an entity representing some 125,000 of the Belgian population.

"We want the requirement to remain in place. We think that is important because we want to demonstrate that renewable energy communities can also handle large projects," said SeaCoop's Awouters.

A SeaCoop petition demanding that the citizen requirement be upheld in the upcoming tender has so far gained more than 20,000 signatures.

"It is not clear yet if there will be citizen participation, or in what form there will be citizen participation," said BOP's Bérénice Crabs. ■



CfD STILL ON TABLE: Secretary general of Belgian Offshore Platform Bérénice Crabs

Credit: BOP