

Ofgem could drop plans for Ireland green energy link

Regulator to consult on three interconnectors that could provide 3.4GW of capacity by 2020, but will also consider ditching plans for Irish link

By Will Nichols

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Ofgem is considering approving proposals for undersea links to the grid in France and Denmark, but may drop a planned connection to Ireland designed to provide the UK with access to Irish wind farms.

The regulator is consulting on proposals to approve three new electricity interconnectors, which could be built by 2020 and provide about 3.4MW of capacity.

The selected projects are the FAB Link to France, which could enable tidal energy produced in the Channel Islands to be exported to the continent, the IFA2 interconnector running 70km between Hampshire and Normandy, and the Viking Link with Denmark.

Ofgem says these three interconnectors could help lower bills and boost the UK's energy supply by connecting to cheaper power, providing about £8bn of benefits to consumers over 25 years. "These three interconnectors would further boost Britain's energy security and reduce pressure on bills," said Martin Crouch, Ofgem's senior partner for electricity transmission. "To date, under our cap and floor regime, we are looking at adding around 5GW to Britain's energy supply." However, Ofgem added that it is consulting on not progressing the application for the Greenlink interconnector between Wales and Ireland that could have brought Irish wind power to the UK because the proposals did not demonstrate enough value for consumers.

All the projects including Greenlink were last year included in a list of five new interconnectors Ofgem considered could be built by the end of the decade. Ofgem said at the time that work on some of the projects could start as early as 2016.

With a fifth of UK generating capacity set to come offline by the mid-2020s, the government is keen to build more interconnectors to build on the 2GW link to France and 1GW connection to the Netherlands already in operation.

Last week, National Grid signed a joint venture agreement with Elia, the Belgian electricity transmission system operator, to move ahead with the first electricity interconnector between the two countries. The Nemo link will provide 1GW of capacity when it comes into operation in 2019.