

STRANGFORD BASE FOR NEW TURBINE ENERGY PROJECT

Permission has been given for geological investigations in the Strangford Lough area that could lead to the installation next year of a tidal turbine system for the production of 'clean' electricity.

Martin Wright is managing director of Marine Current Turbines (MCT), the company behind the proposal, and he recently told *Ulster Business* that he believed the lough fulfilled the key requirements for development of this new technology:

"The flow regime and depth are very challenging, yet sufficiently sheltered to allow the level of access necessary for a prototype machine," he explained. "It also affords the opportunity to run a comprehensive environmental monitoring programme in a well documented and sensitive location, which is vital to proving that the technology is truly benign and sustainable."

The Department of Trade and Industry is to fund 50 per cent of the project, with the balance coming from private and corporate investors.

A specially equipped vessel visited the lough late last month to gather data and the results of this analysis will provide enough information to finalise the installation design for the system, said MCT.

Several studies have also been undertaken, including an environmental impact assessment for the area:

"MCT is very aware that Strangford Lough is an environmentally sensitive area as well as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty," added Mr. Wright. "We are confident that the system will not have any significant negative effects on the local environment."

The project will be monitored throughout its operational period by an independent team involving the QUB Marine Biology Station at nearby Portaferry.

