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Information note

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SeaGen - the world's first commercial scale tidal energy turbine is delivered successfully

At approximately 4.00 am this morning the 1.2MW Seagen tidal turbine was offloaded from the massive crane-barge, Rambiz, so that it is now standing on the seabed of the fast flowing waters in Strangford Narrows, Northern Ireland.

It is now correctly positioned and ready for the installation process to be completed so that it can be connected to the grid. The Seagen tidal turbine has been developed by the pioneering renewable energy company Marine Current Turbines Ltd and is the first commercial system in the world capable of collecting clean energy from tidal or other marine currents.

Seagen is sited roughly 1km south of the ferry route between Strangford and Portaferry, approximately 400m from the shoreline. When fully operational later in the summer, its 16m diameter, twin rotors will operate for up to 18-20 hours per day to produce enough clean, green electricity, equivalent to that used by a 1000 homes.

It is four times greater than any other tidal stream project so far built, including Marine Current Turbines' own earlier 300kW Seaflow system installed off Lynmouth, Devon in 2003 which was hitherto the joint largest tidal turbine.

Commentating after the successful phase of work, Martin Wright, Managing Director of Marine Current Turbines said:

"SeaGen is a hugely exciting project, as well as an historic achievement for both Marine Current Turbines and for renewables in the UK and Ireland. No other system can harness the power of the tidal currents in the way this one can. Tidal energy has the great advantage of being predictable. We take great pride and see enormous potential in the technology and hope it will eventually make a significant contribution to the future energy needs of the British Isles, Ireland and beyond."

Secretary of State for Energy, John Hutton added:

"It is great news that Marine Current Turbines and British innovation are leading the world in the development of marine energy technologies. It's this sort of project which will help the UK meet our ambitious targets to significantly increase the amount of energy from renewable sources.

"I am proud that my department has played a part in the development of SeaGen, granting £5.2 million of funds to help take it from the drawing board.

"Marine power has the potential to make a significant contribution to our energy generation needs, and I hope the success of this project will inspire others to follow its lead."

Seagen had its final assembly at the Harland & Wolff dockyard in Belfast. Here it was winched onto the crane barge, "Rambiz", owned and operated by the Belgium company Scaldis, and then transported to Strangford Narrows on Sunday (30th March).

The installation went according to plan but several days' delay were caused by extreme weather which held up Rambiz's arrival at Belfast and which led to another 24 hours delay for lowering the turbine into the Narrows

The deployment by the Rambiz and the subsequent installation work is being overseen by MCT's in-house engineering team and being managed by marine engineering specialists SeaRoc Ltd.

The quadropod base of SeaGen's structure, which sits on the seabed is currently being pin piled. Each of the four pins that secure the structure will be drilled to a depth of about 9 metres. This work is being carried out by Fugro Seacore Ltd.

Following the pin-piling operation there will be an approximately 12-week commissioning phase to connect the tidal system up to the local electricity network for commercial use. ESB Independent Energy, the retail subsidiary of Ireland's ESB, generating utility has offered a Power Purchase Agreement to supply to its customers in the island of Ireland with electricity from Seagen.

As a renewable energy company, Marine Current Turbines takes its responsibilities to the environment seriously. It has established a £2million programme to closely monitor the environmental impact of SeaGen, involving scientists from the Queen's University Belfast (QUB) and from the Sea Mammal Research Unit at St Andrew's University (SMRU). The programme includes the presence of a Marine Mammal Observer on SeaGen at all times during the commissioning phase, when SeaGen will only operate during daylight hours, to observe how the Lough's marine life interacts with the structure. There is also a sonar system monitoring seal movements, operated by SMRU, which has been partly paid for by the Npower juice fund.

An official "switch-on" ceremony for SeaGen will take place in the summer after commissioning is completed.

Notes to Editors

1. Marine Current Turbines Ltd (www.marineturbines.com) is based in Bristol, England. The company was established in 2000 and its principal corporate shareholders include BankInvest, ESB International, EDF Energy, Guernsey Electricity and Triodos Bank. With SeaFlow, the world's first offshore tidal stream device and SeaGen, the world's largest grid-connected tidal stream system,

MCT is the “first mover” in the development of tidal turbines and has a significant global technical lead in this field.

2. In February MCT announced a joint initiative with npower renewables to take forward a 10.5MW project using several SeaGen devices off the coast of Anglesey, north Wales. It is hoped the tidal farm will be commissioned around 2011/2012.
3. The juice fund is financed by npower on behalf of juice customers to further the research and development of marine renewable energy generation

For further information:

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