A statement from the offshore wind ports: ‘What does it take to be an offshore wind port?’

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Abstract

The offshore wind industry is maturing, and costs have been drastically going down in the past 12 months. As of the end of June 2017, 14 GW of cumulative installed capacity have been commissioned in Europe. This number is expected to reach 25 GW by 2020 and 70 GW by 2030. Ports are the natural centre of industrial activity and development, playing a unique role in the growing offshore wind sector by providing adequate infrastructure and superior services which create value across the entire value chain of the sector. Their involvement spans over the entire life-cycle of assets, from installation to operation and maintenance (O&M) and decommissioning, and they continuously adapt their infrastructure to cater for ever-larger components, bigger vessels and an increased number of activities.

Ports are strategic partners in delivering increased value to customers, governments and society in general. But what does it really take to be an offshore wind port? What are the challenges and opportunities that existing and upcoming offshore wind ports are facing and will face over the coming years?

Main synergies and challenges

Policy for offshore winds and ports

The value that ports bring to the industry is largely measured by their ability to follow industry development and provide the right infrastructures and services. This requires long-term planning in order to invest in infrastructure that caters for technology which may not yet be commercial. To make these investments, offshore wind ports need clear guidance from the industry and commitments from governments on a steady pipeline of projects for the post-2020 period. Without binding 2030 targets, ports face the same uncertainty as other capital-intensive sectors over future investments. They face the risk of making investments without any guarantee of business and potential underutilization of new investments if the two-way communication between ports and industry is not improved.

Ambitious policies could exploit ports potential to further contribute to the economic revitalisation of coastal regions by expanding their facilities and operations, creating jobs, skills and attracting further capital.

Ports users and the supply chain

Ports are the transfer location of choice for the offshore wind sector, acting as a gathering point for equipment and personnel. Tailored facilities are required to accommodate the need of every actor in the sector. This goes from testing facilities, training centres and hosting warehouses to offices and operation centres. With the increase in scale and optimisation in logistics, ports must also meet greater requirements in data management if they are to support customers with extensive information exchange. Both new and existing businesses in offshore wind are constantly adapting to changing practices and technology in offshore wind, creating new logistical challenges, such as space optimisation.

As the natural centre of industrial activity and development, offshore wind ports have the potential to bring together knowledge, labour and capital.

Ports and project development

Ports play a unique role in cost reduction and efficiency in offshore wind projects. Their early involvement in the planning phase of projects is required to guarantee that the industry will profit from the best value that ports can bring, making ports strategic partners in delivering increased value over time. Ports continuously have to adapt their infrastructure to cater for ever-larger components, bigger vessels and an increased number of activities, and to offer tailored facilities to accommodate the needs of developers. Long-term industry involvement in ports is required to get the most cost-efficient solution for carrying out projects.

Ports: a ground for innovation

Ports are the gateway to physically and digitally connecting customers and authorities across the offshore wind energy industry. As a crossroads of virtual and physical flows, ports are a natural breeding ground for innovation. Whether enforced or inspired by optimisation, innovation is at the heart of port activities. Ports contribute to blue growth not only in terms of physical infrastructure, but also in terms of new economic activities in the digital era. Big Data, automation and digitalisation are permeating all sectors, and ports are no exception.

A platform for offshore wind ports

In order to address those challenges and opportunities, WindEurope has launched a Port Platform that aims at allowing ports with active operations and interest in offshore wind to come together to share best practice and engage with industry and policy makers with one voice. By sharing knowledge and align communication priorities through regular meetings and networking events, offshore wind ports ensure that their voice is being heard by the industry and that the sector develops in the most optimal way.

Interested in joining the conversation? Contact tom.remy@windEurope.org or visit windEurope.org/ports

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