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Wave power project eyes Mayo sites

By Keith Bourke

THE Mullet peninsula and Achill Island are among four sites short-listed for the State's first full-scale ocean energy project. ESB International (ESBI) hopes to begin construction of the development early next year.

The sites, along with ones in Co Galway and north Clare, are under consideration for the five megawatt WestWave project. A final selection is expected soon.

Harnessing the ocean resource could reduce energy costs by up to 4 per cent, and could be part of a €9 billion industry by 2030, ESBI ocean energy project manager James Todd told the Association of Irish Regions conference in the Marine Institute in Galway.

WestWave has been approved by the Government as one of two Irish bids for the €4.5 bn in funding set aside by the European Union under the New Entrants Reserve (NER) 300 programme for low carbon technologies. The company is seeking €18m in NER funding, but the project is expected to cost at least €40m. It has also applied to the European Investment Bank for funding for the project.

Mayo's effort to establish itself as the country's renewable energy capital continues with Cork company Organic Power Limited's ambitious plans for a seawater-pumped hydroelectric energy scheme at Glinsk, near Belderrig.

The 480 megawatt scheme would use excess grid power during off-peak night-time hours to pump water to a reservoir system and use the reservoir to generate power when demand rises. The company also plans to provide an underground High Voltage Direct Current Cable transmission connection from North Mayo to the Irish terminus of the East West Interconnector, which links the UK and Irish electricity grids.

Plans remain for Bord na Mona's 300 megawatt Oweninny windfarm at the site of the former power station in Bella-corick. While an environmental impact assessment has been completed and applications for foreshore licencing and planning permission are to be lodged soon for the Atlantic Marine Energy Ireland Test site. If the project gets the green light two test sites off the Mullet peninsula will be established.