

MoEPRD: Reducing administrative burden for large wind farms in Latvia will contribute to energy independence

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On 22 March 2022, the Cabinet of Ministers approved the information report "Optimisation of procedures for the implementation of WPP parks above 50MW" prepared by the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development (MoEPRD), which provides proposals on immediate possible solutions to support energy production from renewable energy sources.

Minister Artūrs Toms Plešs (AP!): "Every time we use energy from natural gas, we are financing Russia's war in Ukraine. This is unacceptable! In addition, to significantly reduce our own energy dependence on third countries, we have come up with a solution to accelerate the development of large wind farms in Latvia. Russia's aggression has made it clear that Europe must also become self-sufficient in terms of energy, and to achieve this we need to significantly increase our renewable energy capacity, both for heat and electricity. We need to do this decisively, because time is not our ally!"

Latvia currently has the lowest amount of wind power capacity among the Baltic countries. Wind power accounts for only 3% of the total electricity supply to the internal market. The potential of wind and solar has been minimally exploited so far, so we need to look at how to boost renewable energy production, both by installing new capacity and by expanding existing capacity. This would contribute to Latvia's progress towards energy independence and security, the introduction of climate-friendly (non-emitting) technologies, while improving the energy import-export balance and contributing to a reduction in energy resource costs. This would also reduce the impact of the National Energy and Climate Plan 2021. - 2030 implementation risks for the construction of large capacity wind farms (starting with a capacity above 50 MW) in Latvia by 2030.

The proposal does not exempt the applicant for a wind power plant (WPP) from the obligation to comply with the environmental requirements for the proposed activity onsite. The State Environmental Service is expected to carry out an assessment and develop technical regulations to be taken into account in the further development of the project in order to assess the risks and create conditions for both the implementation of the project and environmental protection, as well as to inform the public and listen to public opinion.

Compensatory measures would also be identified to offset negative impacts, the costs of which would be borne by the operator of the proposed activity. The restrictions already set out in the Specially Protected Nature Territories Regulatory Framework, as well as other requirements set out in regulatory enactments (protection zones around wind power plants), will remain in place for the construction of wind farms.

In general, the proposal of the MoEPRD is to replace the environmental impact assessment (EIA) with technical regulations (30 days) by drafting a special law, and the Cabinet of Ministers would also consider the issue of designating the status of a national interest object (NIO) for WPP structures or sites (30 days). The Cabinet of Ministers would issue regulations, including the obligations of the WPP developer, both in site use and in production. These rules may also include other conditions, for example for certain performances in the interest of the local authority. After the establishment of the NIO status, the State Construction Control Bureau (SCCB) would provide the functions of a construction board, both by examining the application for a construction plan (30 working days for the issuance of a construction permit) and making a decision, as well as by controlling construction works and accepting the object into operation. BVKB could ensure a uniform approach to the assessment of construction plans, concentration of competences in one institution and at the same time reduce the workload of municipal building boards with such objects that are not typical for the daily work of a building board.

Public relations

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