

Comharchumann Fuinnimh Oileáin Árann in partnership with Energy Co-operatives Ireland

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**Aran Islands to declare the objective of making themselves totally energy independent by 2022**

Following the formal establishment of Comharchumann Fuinnimh Oileáin Árann (Aran Islands Energy Cooperative) the Aran Islands in partnership with Energy Co-operatives Ireland is set to announce that it will be Ireland's first living energy technology development centre.

It will actively engage with technology developers to trial new innovations in renewable energy on the island. This will make the islands a centre for research and development, boosting revenues and employment on the islands and helping the community to achieve energy independence.

The Islands are also keen to focus their renewable energy strategy on maximizing the secondary benefits available from new technologies. Comharchumann Fuinnimh will seek to attract new businesses and industry to the islands which will compliment the existing businesses in order to maximise the local benefits of sustainable energy production.

Comharchumann Fuinnimh recognises that the Islands have an almost unique place in the cultural and environmental sphere in Ireland and indeed the world. It will protect that legacy by engaging with renewable energy technology developers in such a way as to maximise the social and environmental benefits of their innovations.

**Context:**

Comharchumann Fuinnimh Oileáin Árann was formed on foot of co-operation between the local community and the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) over the past years, particularly through the three year "Wind to Wheels" electric car trial programme. This is a collaboration between the Aran Islands, SEAI, Green Machines, Merrion Fleet Management and smart meter manufacturer Klockner Moeller. Eight electric Mega e-City were delivered to the Aran Islands in early 2011 and are in everyday use. The charging patterns and costs of operation are constantly monitored and when the trial ends in 2013 an accurate assessment of all aspects of running an electric car can be made from the real life experience of operating these cars on the Islands. The first interim report is expected to be released by SEAI in the coming months.

Amongst the co-op's aims are to secure the future energy needs of the three Aran Islands by removing the Islands' communities dependency on fossil fuels by replacing them with alternative and more sustainable sources of energy. They expect the Islands will be an example of best practice in sustainability to the rest of Ireland and to the world, and will actively seek to use the three Aran Islands as a platform from which to promote sustainability and environmental protection worldwide.

To achieve this goal the Aran Islands will become a practical living energy research environment, targeted at energy conservation, renewable energy production and the testing and operation of new technologies. This will include, energy generation (wind, ocean etc), smart grids, transport and research in collaboration and partnership with leading Irish and international innovative industries, Universities and researchers.

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Comharchumann Fuinnimh Oileáin Árann will work closely with Energy Co-operatives Ireland to identify suitable technology partnerships which will focus on promoting local employment, maximizing the social benefits of these projects.

The Aran Islands are almost uniquely dependent on energy imports; access to certain forms of fuel (traditional forms of biomass for example) is very restricted and problematic. Businesses and families have to cope with significant additional fuel import prices through added transport costs. The islanders intend to overcome these issues through their openness to research and innovation.

Comharchumann Fuinnimh is keenly aware of the unique characteristics of their cultural and geographical environment. This presents the community with unique opportunities in demonstrating how to innovate while at the same time preserving the islands' unique language, heritage and culture by providing sustainable employment and a sustainable environment for people to live in. This will include building on the communities experience in providing education and training to both residents and non-residents in sustainable living.

The unique technical characteristics of the island also offer great opportunities for researchers. A modern, well maintained, medium scale local grid which has a quantifiable single point of access to the national grid will enable researchers to trial technologies in a real world technical situation, which is also highly controllable and measurable. It is expected that this will offer greater opportunities for technology trials and innovators looking for test sites and proof of concept facilities to validate their renewable energy production technologies.

Energy efficiency and energy conservation are vitally important subjects in an era of high energy costs, Fuinnimh Oileáin Árann and Energy Co-operatives Ireland are pleased to announce that Kingspan, Senator Windows, Firebird Boilers and RedT energy storage have already identified areas of common interest and are in discussions at present to finalise partnerships and programmes of work.

Fuinnimh has selected Energy Co-operatives Ireland (ECI) as its partner in achieving its ambitious goals. ECI is a Sprit of Ireland Foundation initiative specifically established to promote, educate and encourage the acceptance and development of renewable energy at local and community level, by providing practical help, advice, expertise and knowledge.

Energy Co-operatives Ireland assists communities and business to realise their local community projects at every stage from inception, planning, construction and completion, so that they directly benefit from secure energy supply and generate sustainable local employment by developing and becoming successful energy producers, energy conservators and technology development partners.

Energy Co-operatives Ireland has been specifically established to provide the essential practical bridge between local and community groups and business, public bodies/agencies, corporations, financial institutions, Local Authorities, National Government and EU Institutions in order to achieve local and national energy policy objectives while ensuring that the control and economic benefits of locally generated renewable sustainable energy stay local and benefit the local community.

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ECI sees its partnership with Comarchumann Fuinnimh as an internationally significant project which will promote the Aran Islands and Ireland as an internationally preferred location for innovation and research.

Achieving the Aran Islands objective of energy independence by 2022 will demonstrate the significant social, economic and environmental gains to be made from a focused, accepted and quantifiable multi year plan, providing the first real life community to make the transition from increasingly expensive fossil fuel dependency to independent, secure and sustainable renewable energy sources which are also price stable over decadal timeframes.

Contact details for further comment.

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