Aquamarine Power ‘beds in’ in the Western Isles

Edinburgh wave energy company Aquamarine Power has secured seabed leases to capture up to 40MW of wave energy off the west coast of Lewis.

Following a series of meetings and consultation with the local community, stakeholders and officials, the firm has obtained leases from seabed owner the Crown Estate. This will enable them to start environmental and feasibility studies and continue working with the local community and other key groups on the potential to install the company’s Oyster wave energy technology. The Western Isles could capitalise on Scotland’s green energy boom following the news today.

Aquamarine Power will require planning consents from Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and government regulator Marine Scotland before any development of the sites can take place.

Representatives of the company have already met with local landowners to discuss their outline plans, and will issue a ‘scoping report’ tomorrow seeking views of statutory and local consultees on the draft proposal. The company will undertake extensive environmental monitoring and consultation before formally submitting an application to Marine Scotland later this year.

Aquamarine Power has secured two leases. One is a 10MW demonstration lease for a site between Siadar and Fivepenny, known as the Galson site; the other is a 30MW lease granted under the Crown Estate’s recent ‘Saltire Prize’ leasing round – which offers an area of search between Bàgh Dhail Beag and Tràigh Shanndaigh.

The company will take guidance from and work closely with local communities and stakeholders to identify the most

appropriate 30MW site within the search area. When this has been identified and Aquamarine Power has secured all permissions and consents required, they will then seek a formal lease with the Crown Estate. The lease area will be known as the North West Lewis site. Following this, the rest of the search area will become available to other potential developers seeking a seabed lease.

The development has the potential to allow up to 40 Oyster nearshore devices to be installed across both locations on an approximate 2km stretch of coast. The proposed sites would have a total installed capacity of 40MW and could provide enough energy to power 38,000 homes.

Aquamarine Power installed its first Oyster at the European Marine Energy Centre (EMEC) in Orkney in 2009 and is about to install its second full scale device – known as Oyster 2 – in Orkney this summer.

The company has officially registered its intent to use the Lewis site to compete for the Scottish Government's Saltire Prize, a £10 million global prize for the wave or tidal technology which generates the greatest volume of electrical output over 100GWh over a continuous two year period, using only the power of the sea.

"Wave energy offers great potential to the Western Isles," said company CEO, Martin McAdam. "As the lead industry partner alongside Lews Castle College in the Hebridean Marine Energy Futures project, we can clearly see the economic and social benefits that could be generated in the Western Isles through a thriving marine energy industry.

"In Orkney, for example, we have worked with more than 30 local firms, employed local people and have spent directly over £2 million in the Orkney economy. We hope that, in time, we will build just as positive a story in the Western Isles."

The company has already used BiFab's Arnish yard to fabricate

the metal tubes or ‘cans’ for the Oyster 2 device, which is being assembled at BiFab’s main site in Methil in Fife, and the Arnish yard is now working on the foundations for a further two Oysters.

The Hebridean Marine Energy Futures project is also drawing inward investment and jobs potential to the islands.

McAdam stressed the importance of the local community. “It is vital to recognise that we are new arrivals on these islands,” he said. “We are a young industry and we need to develop our plans in partnership with the people who live here.”

Commenting on the news, Angus Campbell, Leader of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, said:

“The Comhairle has long maintained that the marine energy resource West of Hebrides is among the best in the world. Aquamarine Power’s commitment to this area validates that assessment and puts the area firmly on the renewables map. The Comhairle is pleased to have worked closely with Aquamarine Power in developing these proposals and looks forward to the benefits that the company’s commitment will bring to the Outer Hebrides in terms of fabrication jobs, research activity and supply chain opportunities. This news proves that West of Hebrides is now the location of choice for industry leaders”.

Lisa Maclean, Commercial Development Manager at community landowner, Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn (Galson Estate Trust), said:

“We congratulate Aquamarine Power’s success in securing seabed leases from the Crown Estate with a view to the development of wave energy projects of the west coast of Lewis. The wave and tidal energy potential in this area is significant and harnessing this energy will help to deliver the Scottish Government’s 2020 targets to reduce carbon emissions from renewables. Also, there is the potential to create much needed

employment in our islands both directly and through the supply chain.

“The Trust looks forward in anticipation to meaningful dialogue with Aquamarine Power as this proposed development moves forward. Importantly the local communities affected will need to be consulted on how the proposals impact them.”

Alasdair Allan Western Isles MSP said:

“This is positive news – the Western Isles has the potential to lead the way on wave power for the rest of Scotland and indeed Europe, and today’s development is a step in that direction. Both wave and tidal power have the potential to create jobs in construction and to contribute towards the ambitious targets which Scotland has set itself both to reduce carbon emissions and to meet Scotland’s power demands from renewable sources. It’s obviously early days as far as this project goes, but it has to be a positive sign for the future.”

Dr. Neil Finlayson, Senior Researcher at Lews Castle College, University of the Highlands and Islands said:

“The opening up of the coastlines of the Outer Hebrides to wave energy developments gives the opportunity to create economic growth on a considerable scale in the area. As the project leader of the Hebridean Marine Energy Futures Project we are very supportive of sustainable wave energy developments, and are working together with technology providers across industry and top class Scottish academic groups to characterise the marine environment and investigate how energy outputs can be maximised.”