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SEARCH



Wind energy specialists interested in developing wind farm in Maltese territorial waters

by **FRANCESCA VELLA**

Blue H Technologies BV, a Holland-based company specialising in the development of offshore wind farms, has said it would be interested in building a wind farm in Maltese territorial waters.

A spokesman from Blue H told this newspaper that the company has been following the wind energy debate in Malta and believes that the technology it uses could be ideal for local conditions.

Blue H was one of the nine companies that submitted an expression of interest for offshore wind farm development in Malta two years ago.

Blue H was incorporated in the UK in 2004 and is now based in Holland. It brings together expertise in wind energy, marine construction and tension legged platforms to develop offshore wind farms with large turbines (five Megawatts or more), which are difficult to site on shore.

The company focuses exclusively on developing economic wind energy sites far offshore. The company has adapted proven deepwater technology from the oil and gas industry to develop stable platforms in the sea on which to place offshore wind turbines in the sea.

Blue H typically aims to develop offshore wind farms about 10 to 15 nautical miles off the coast and at sites where the average winds are good (at least eight metres per second). Not only are the economics of wind farms better in such locations, the wind turbines are practically invisible to the naked eye from land.

The 2006 call for expression of interest focused specifically on far offshore wind farm development.

However, the project was never commissioned and a spokesman from the Ministry for Resources and Rural Affairs recently told this newspaper that the main purpose for issuing the call in 2006 was to acquire knowledge on deep-water technology and it was discovered that such technology was still in the development stage.

And indeed it was. Only recently did Blue H install its first commercially operating deepwater wind energy converter in the world, off Tricase in the southeast of Italy.

But the Maltese government now seems to have changed its mind and is no longer considering the development of an offshore deepwater wind farm.

As reported in The Malta Independent on Sunday two weeks ago, Sikka I-Bajda, a reef located about two kilometres off Rdum tal-Madonna at Ahrax Point in Mellieha, has been identified as a possible site for the development of a near-shore wind farm.

Industry sources said that Sikka I-Bajda has certain attractions, like a considerable area of seabed within the 25-metre depth line, but it is far from the best shallow-water site as far as wind exposure is concerned.

So Blue H's latest developments, and particularly the fact that it uses a technology similar to that used for oil rigs, could open up Malta's options further, giving the government the possibility to consider sites that are not necessarily shallow water sites such as Sikka I-

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Bajda.

Prime Minister Lawrence Gonzi has been giving a lot of importance to renewable and alternative sources of energy in his speeches over the past few weeks.

Last Sunday he said the government will be announcing its renewable energy policy shortly. Better late than never, one would say.

But Dr Gonzi's statement shows that the government may be finally seriously considering to develop a wind farm, since, he said, the renewable energy policy is expected to place significant importance on wind energy.

Malta's limited space and the depths of its surrounding sea will lead to the government having to take difficult decisions, concluded Dr Gonzi.

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Registered in Malta
Registered office: Standard House, Birkirkara Hill St. Julian's STJ09

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