

Marine Energy Test Centre to Operate on New Scale

Scotland's world-leading test centre for commercial-scale wave and tidal energy devices is expanding, to attract international businesses with smaller prototypes at earlier development stages.

The Orkney-based European Marine Energy Centre (EMEC) has now identified “nursery sites” in the islands to plug the vital gap between test tanks and full ocean conditions for unproven energy devices.

EMEC's expansion into 'softer' sea areas helps keep Scotland's Highlands and Islands in the global forefront of marine energy development, as the full-scale device testing 'capital' and recent home of the world's first commercial wave and tidal energy sites leasing round.

Development of marine energy technologies is accelerating worldwide, as commercial opportunities and government environmental policies come to bear, said EMEC managing director Neil Kermode.

“These scale test sites will enable developers to take quicker and cost-effective routes to market, through initial access to more benign conditions for mid-scale devices,” he added.

“They will be supported by moorings, data collection and other services complementary to our full scale test areas, along with 'load dump' capabilities, as their power output will not go to the grid. This means the developers can concentrate on their devices and technologies, free of many other technical issues.”

The four new berths – two each for wave and tidal – are planned to be available next year. Two general areas for the berth sites have been earmarked for further exploration – for the wave berths within the north-east corner of Scapa Flow, and for the tidal berths in the Shapinsay Sound. They were selected after consultations with developers to focus on their needs, including wave and tidal strengths, device sizes, shore side facilities and speed and ease of local harbour access.

Ongoing discussions with other stakeholders will determine the best specific sites in each area, to minimise environmental impacts and avoid sea traffic. The berths are being developed with funding from the UK Department for Energy and Climate Change (DECC), subject to issues including consents and seabed lease agreements.

EMEC's larger commercial-scale sites, the first in the world to provide grid-connected testing facilities, have so far attracted a range of device developers who have located there or will arrive this year. These include Pelamis Wave Power, Aquamarine Power, OpenHydro, and Tidal Generation Ltd.

With demand building, EMEC is also expanding both commercial-scale sites, cabling a fifth wave berth at Billia Croo off the south west Orkney mainland and taking the number of tidal berths at the Fall of Warness off the island of Eday from five to seven.

EMEC was established in 2003 in a £15m project coordinated by Highlands and Islands Enterprise and also including funding from the Scottish and UK Governments, Scottish Enterprise, the Carbon Trust, the European Union and Orkney Islands Council.

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For further information, contact:

Eileen Linklater, EMEC

Tel: 01856 852060

Email: info@emec.org.uk

Website: <http://www.emec.org.uk/index.asp>

Note to Newsdesks

EMEC will be exhibiting at the All Energy conference in Aberdeen on 19 and 20 May as part of the Orkney Pavilion on stand M40. The Orkney Pavilion will include exhibitors with expertise in a wide range of support services for marine renewables projects available locally in Orkney.

News, including this story, case studies and data on the fast-growing energy sector in Scotland's Highlands and Islands are available at HI-energy, <http://www.hi-energy.org.uk/explore>, an on-line resource dedicated to the region's natural assets, development activities, research programmes and supply chain of nearly 600 businesses.

The HI-energy programme is run jointly by the North Scotland Industry Group, <http://www.nsig.co.uk>, and development agency Highlands and Islands Enterprise, <http://www.hie.co.uk>.

Issued for HI-energy by Lucid PR, Events and Marketing. Contact:

Bob Kass

07759 057825

bob@lucidmessages.com

Peter Kane

07742 308213

peter@lucidmessages.com