



Renewables at Offshore Europe 2007

Here Iain Todd – Aberdeen's Renewables champion – offers his reflections on one of the busiest weeks in the Aberdeen calendar



L-R: Neil Lindsay, David Rodger, Debbie Ashworth, First Minister, Alex Salmond and Iain Todd

And so the dust settles after another highly successful Offshore Europe conference. We had a great week on the AREG stand, with many, many enquiries from the oil and gas sector on how they could get involved in renewables. Our Members' Handbooks were disappearing by the dozen, and a number of new members signed up there and then.

The week began at the Chamber of Commerce Business Breakfast on Tuesday, with keynote speeches by Alex Salmond and Jonathan Porritt. Both emphasised the need for the oil and gas industry to engage in the carbon reduction debate, whether in their development of carbon capture and storage facilities, or the restriction of their own carbon footprint. There was an interesting discussion on the 'carbon efficiency' of producing a barrel of oil, and how this might vary between locations and between operators.

Jonathan Porritt in particular challenged the oil companies to look to the future, and assess what contribution they could make to bringing climate change under control. He indicated that there is

only 10-15 years left to do this, before events take on a "runaway" nature.

We were delighted to host Alex Salmond (briefly) on the AREG stand. This allowed us to talk to him about our plans for an offshore wind farm off Aberdeen, and also about our planned new Energy Futures Centre on the Aberdeen sea-front.

On the wind farm, we now consider that we are 12 months from making an application to the Scottish Executive for Consent to Build. We are making good progress on all the issues that we need to address before that time, and hopefully we will meet our target.

On the Energy Futures Centre, in the week before Offshore Europe we had published some architectural sketches of what this futuristic building could look like on the Aberdeen sea front.. This has received a lot of interest since then, and seems to have captured the imagination. We are now in the midst of the finance-raising part of then project, and Offshore Europe provided us with a valuable opportunity to promote it. The centre will of course be promoting the capabilities of the oil

and gas industry, as well as the potential in the new renewable sector.

Renewables continued to be a theme at Offshore Europe, with the Topical Lunch on Wednesday being addressed by Bernie Balkin – former chief scientist at BP. He assessed the potential for renewables to contribute to the low carbon economy, and described what BP is doing in this area. His talk perhaps favoured the more high-tech end of the renewables spectrum, for example the scope to develop much more efficient electric vehicles for the future. But nevertheless, a definite sign of the times of a broader "all-energy" approach by an oil major.

On Thursday, the Topical Lunch was on the future of the city of Aberdeen, addressed by the head of Lloyds TSB Scotland Susan Rice and Sir Ian Wood. Both emphasised the great potential for the city, both in terms of oil and gas and in terms of diversification. Susan described the importance of the Energy Futures Centre. Sir Ian spoke of the need to maximise the recovery of remaining assets in the North Sea, while maximising the application of our expertise in other parts of the world. Both felt Aberdeen has great future and a great quality of life to attract new people, and AREG would certainly endorse both of those points.

On to Friday, the feet are bearing up (just) and it's Schools Day. Over 500 senior school children are casting an excited eye over the energy industry as a possible career choice. There is a lot of interest in the AREG projects, and lots of questions about the career prospects in the renewable sector. These are of course considerable, given the rapid expansion of the subject.

And so now as the temporary buildings are being dismantled, as the Bridge of Don is getting back to normal, and as the cruise liner at Peterhead returns to cruising, what is my overall impression of the show? Very, very positive, and I hope all businesses who exhibited there think the same. The city certainly reinforced its position as the Energy Capital of Europe, with the promise of even greater achievement to come. ■