Grant Call for Postgraduate project proposals on Offshore Renewable Energy and the Environment

The Irish Environmental Network (IEN) is the umbrella network for national Environmental Non-Government Organisations (ENGOs) in the Republic of Ireland. It is made up of over 38 national ENGOs that work both individually and jointly to protect and enhance the environment, and to place environmental issues centre stage in Ireland and internationally. The IEN represents and supports national ENGOs, through capacity building and funding support and advocacy work.

The work of IEN members covers a broad range of areas including habitat conservation, wildlife protection, environmental education, sustainability, waste and energy issues, as well as environmental campaigning, awareness raising and advocacy.

The MARÉIRE project, funded by the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (DECC), aims to be a unifying voice for Irish ENGOs in the offshore renewable energy sector. By engaging early in the process, the project will ensure the marine environment is considered in all phases of development. With a focus on advocacy and finding a balance between mitigating the climate crisis and protecting biodiversity, MARÉIRE will provide expert, scientific and evidence-based information while recognising its diverse audience.

Rolling call: a minimum of 4 projects can be funded this year

The IEN's MARÉIRE project is pleased to announce a grant opportunity for postgraduate students projects focused on **environmental topics in the context of offshore renewable energy**. This funding is part of a broader **capacity-building initiative** to support the development of research and expertise related to the interactions between the environment and offshore renewable energy within the environmental non-governmental organisation (ENGO) sector.

We invite **Postgraduate students** from Irish accredited institutions to submit proposals for research projects that align with these themes, specifically focusing on **offshore renewable energy technologies** (e.g., offshore wind, tidal, wave energy) and their **interactions with the environment**.

Funding Details

- A total of **€10,000** is available to support this initiative.
- The **maximum grant allocation per project is €2,000**. This is increased to **€2500** when an Irish ENGO is included in the proposal**.**
- We strongly encourage **collaborations with eNGO groups** from the **Irish Environmental Network** (IEN) membership. Projects that involve a partner IEN member group will be given **priority consideration**.
- If a partner ENGO is involved, **part of the funds should be used to support the partnership** between the student and the IEN member group, as agreed between the two parties. This could be used to facilitate a placement for an agreed period of time (e.g., 1-2 months),

produce content for the member group or other. This will provide valuable experience and create opportunities for the student while strengthening the collaboration between academia and the ENGO sector.

Eligibility Criteria

- The principal applicant must be a Postgraduate student currently enrolled at an Irish university or equivalent institution.
- Projects should be the topic of final year dissertations, in the case of Masters students, or contribute towards one or more thesis chapter, in the case of PhD students.
- The project must focus on **offshore renewable energy** technologies and their **implications** for **the environment**.
- **Proposals involving partner ENGOs** from the Irish Environmental Network (IEN) will be prioritised. If you are interested in collaborating with an eNGO but do not currently have a partner, we can assist with establishing connections where possible.
- Projects can be **desk-based, lab-based or field-based**, but applicants must clearly define the methodology and scope of the research.
- The results of the project will be expected to be presented at a conference in Ireland or abroad, in addition to being presented to the IEN and their members.

Project Focus Areas

We welcome a wide range of topics within the following broad areas or any other area relevant to offshore renewables and the environment, provided the value is suitably justified:

- **Environmental impacts of offshore renewable energy** on marine biodiversity (e.g., habitats, fish, birds, marine mammals, cumulative impacts) at any stage of the development process (inc. planning, construction, operation and decommissioning).
- **Monitoring and assessment** methods for offshore renewable energy developments.
- **Mitigation strategies, Biodiversity-friendly designs and Nature-based solutions** to reduce the negative effects of offshore renewable energy installations on marine ecosystems.
- **Marine spatial planning** and its integration with renewable energy infrastructure.
- **Policy analysis** of renewable energy and biodiversity protection frameworks.
- **Sustainability assessments** of offshore renewable energy projects in an environmental context.
- **Environmental impacts of port and harbour developments** for offshore renewable energy.
- **Baseline data** collection where value and relevance is well-presented and justified.
- **The interconnectedness of ecosystems and socio-economic impacts** in the development of offshore renewable energy

Application Process

Applicants must submit the following:

1. **Project Title**

2. **Project Summary:** A brief overview of the proposal's goals, methods, and expected outcomes
3. **Project Proposal** (max. 2 pages) outlining:
    - Background information
    - Problem statement and hypothesis
    - Aims and objectives
    - Methodology and timeline
    - How the project will contribute to the field of offshore renewable energy and marine biodiversity
    - If applicable, details of the ENGO partnership and planned student placement at the ENGO (location, duration, and intended activities)
4. **CV** of the student applicant (max. 2 pages), including academic background and relevant skills or experience.
5. **Letter of support** from the academic supervisor, confirming the student's enrollment and capacity to undertake the project.
6. **Letter of support** from the partner ENGO (if applicable), confirming the collaboration and/ore commitment to hosting the student for a placement period.
7. **Budget Breakdown** (max. 1 page) detailing how the €2,000/2,500 grant will be allocated, including any costs for the IEN member group partnership.

Please submit your completed application to jenny@ien.ie and ensure all your documents are included.

Assessment Criteria

Proposals will be evaluated by a panel of experts based on the following criteria:

1. **Relevance to Offshore Renewable Energy and Marine Biodiversity** (30%)
    - Does the project focus on a pressing environmental issue related to offshore renewable energy and marine ecosystems?
    - How well does the project contribute to advancing understanding or finding solutions in this field?
2. **Scientific Merit and Methodology** (25%)
    - Are the research objectives clear and achievable within the given timeline?
    - Is the methodology robust, appropriate, and well-designed to address the research question?
3. **Innovation and Impact** (20%)

- Does the project propose innovative solutions or approaches to address environmental challenges associated with offshore renewable energy?
- How significant will the outcomes be for the broader field of marine biodiversity and renewable energy?

4. **Partnership with ENGO** (15%)

    - Does the proposal demonstrate meaningful collaboration with a partner IEN member ENGO (if applicable)?
    - Will the ENGO partnership provide valuable experience and practical skills for the student and contribute to the environmental sector?

5. **Feasibility and Budget Justification** (10%)

    - Is the project feasible within the proposed timeframe and budget?
    - Does the budget breakdown provide clear justification for the allocation of funds, including the ENGO placement costs?

Important Notes

- Project proposals must be designed and written by the applicant without the use of AI. AI generated proposals will NOT be taken under consideration.
- This funding is to finance postgraduate research, the IEN and MAREIRE project do not assume any responsibility in the running, logistics or supervision of the proposed project.
- The project must be completed within **18 months** of receiving funding.
- A final report, including financial reporting, must be submitted at the end of the project.
- **Acknowledgement**: All publications, presentations or reports resulting from this project must acknowledge the funding support provided by the Irish Environmental Network and the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (DECC).

We look forward to receiving your applications and supporting innovative research that contributes to the sustainable development of offshore renewable energy and the protection of marine biodiversity.

For any queries or further information, please contact Dr Jenny Bortoluzzi at jenny@ien.ie.

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An Roinn Comhshaoil, Aeráide agus Cumarsáide
Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications