



Joanne Leng MBE
is Deputy Chief
Executive of NOF
Energy and Deputy
Chair of Energi Coast,
a group managed
by NOF Energy
which represents
the region's offshore
renewables industry.



The time for wind is now:

Interview with Joanne Leng MBE

In the 17 years Joanne has been working for NOF Energy she has been providing business development support and devising business plans and strategy for the UK energy sector. Joanne has worked on over 100 global trade missions, 60 of which she has led. Here she talks to Nigel Wright about her work with Energi Coast Group, as well as her vision for the North East's burgeoning offshore renewables sector.

Getting the industry perspective

Energi Coast is the representative group for the North East's offshore renewables sector, tasked with promoting the extensive offshore renewable expertise in the region as well as the region's unique offering to industry. Energi Coast was officially launched in 2011 following the closure of One North East (ONE). In Joanne's words: 'When ONE closed there was a gap in the support available

regionally for companies wanting to move into the offshore renewables sector. ONE was fantastic at supporting renewables companies and attracting inward investment to the region. In ONE's absence, NOF Energy got together with its members to formulate a way of promoting the region's huge capability in offshore renewables. Energi Coast was born out of that engagement process.'

Since its inception Energi Coast has been instrumental in creating a 'culture of joining forces' for the local offshore renewables sector, really showcasing what the region has to offer as well as referring companies within the local supply chain to each other.

As Joanne points out: 'NOF Energy working on behalf of Energi Coast doesn't leave companies to network themselves, we make the introductions

- the ice breaking and cold calling is done by us.' Once introductions are made, it's up to members to start a dialogue. NOF Energy, however, review the success of introductions made and report back on new business relationships set up as a result. Within two years it has facilitated a number of introductions for members involved in the offshore renewables sector both in the UK and Europe.

Although the oil and gas sector is buoyant Joanne contends that, with renewables and offshore wind in particular, there is a sense of 'when are the opportunities going to actually come?' Energi Coast tries to ensure that its members have confidence in different market sectors and are aware of the opportunities out there, both now and in the future. 'We tell companies to keep their eye on what's happening within the sector and to be patient. They shouldn't have all of their eggs in one basket and be aware of other opportunities, in different energy sectors and overseas markets, which may present.' As well as oil and gas there are also opportunities in subsea, shale gas, renewables and nuclear. Joanne notes that shale gas in particular is one area NOF Energy is researching. 'We are keeping a watching brief on this sector to ensure our members are kept informed.'

NOF Energy complements its own research with that provided by UKTI, to identify priority export markets for the oil and gas, offshore renewables and nuclear sectors. According to Joanne: 'Our best information, however, comes from our annual survey where we ask members where they are exporting to and where they would like to export to next'. NOF Energy uses the survey results to organise future overseas visits to markets of interest to members.

The Energi Coast group prides itself on the ability to really show the 'industry point of view'. Its steering group meets every two months at the NOF Energy offices in Durham and during the meetings the companies discuss how the offshore renewables sector is developing and what more can be done to promote the region's capabilities to a European and global audience.

The innovative North....

Alongside Aberdeen, the North East is a leader in the subsea oil and gas sector but Joanne contends that there is still a lot of work to be done to 'really put the North East on the map'. She says: 'There continues to be a big push in subsea oil and gas developments and Subsea North East, another regional representative group which works with NOF Energy, is currently investigating new technologies for future developments in drilling, subsea production and enhanced oil recovery to name but a few.'

Dogger Bank on the North East/Humber coast is one of the biggest wind farm developments in the UK and with the strong port infrastructure in the region coupled with an innovative and technologically advanced supply chain. It is Energi Coast's belief that this zone could easily be serviced from the region. 'We are ideally placed for the operations and maintenance of offshore wind farms off the east coast in general. Undoubtedly, we are one of the leading regions when it comes to the offshore wind supply chain.'

Currently, many European wind farms are being constructed outside of the UK which is a primary concern for Energi Coast. 'We need to do more to attract major client companies into the UK. In the first instance we need to promote better what we can offer from the region, but we also need to get the clients to visit so they can see first hand what's on offer.' One company that NOF Energy and Energi Coast has been working actively with is AREVA Wind. They are actively looking at UK suppliers and they have run various supplier days in the North East region.

Another key issue which Energi Coast is trying to address is the fact that UK wind farm developments still rely heavily on European suppliers. 'The

coalition government has set an industry objective of achieving 50% UK content in projects, but as Joanne states: 'We are nowhere near that figure yet. European suppliers are winning a lot of the contracts and we need to shift that balance'. There is significant interest from the UK supply chain in offshore renewables opportunities; this was evident from the attendance of over 200 suppliers at the Crown Estate road show held in Newcastle recently.

Raising the profile of the North East of England in offshore renewables is the main priority of Energi Coast. The region has an embedded skills base here and a legacy in the energy industry that stretches back for many years. Recently, however, more and more skilled professionals are being lost to international markets, as foreign firms seek to take advantage of the knowledge and expertise associated with the region. 'It doesn't matter where we go, whether it's Kazakhstan or Perth in Western Australia, you will always find an expat community from the North East of England. To fill this gap, Energi Coast believes people from other industries who are making redundancies should be offered the opportunity to work in the sector and efforts should be made to retrain them. The armed forces are a prime example of a new pool of skilled individuals who would be perfect recruits for the industry. 'We also need to engage more with school kids and make them aware of the career opportunities which exist here and now, in the region's energy industry.'