

European Union invests £5 million in marine bio fuels research

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The European Union has awarded nearly £5 million to leading marine science experts to pioneer research into the production of renewably energy.

The experts from Northern Ireland, Scotland and the Republic of Ireland will be funded to carry out innovative research into the production of renewable energy from seaweeds and marine algae from shared seas. It will harness the expertise and resources of the three countries.

The Scottish Association for Marine Sciences in Oban will lead development work on the cross-border project, in partnership with Queens University Belfast and the University of Ulster in Northern Ireland; and the Institutes of Technology in Dundalk and Sligo in the Republic of Ireland.

Announcing Northern Ireland's support for this major study, Energy Minister Arlene Foster said: "The research is at the cutting edge of marine renewable energy technology and will put the region and our universities at the forefront of world wide marine bio-energy research. The work will significantly increase our knowledge in a key growth area for renewable energy."

"It has great potential for cleaner energy sources from abundant marine plant life to reduce our reliance on fossil fuels and open up economic opportunities for Northern Ireland. I am very pleased that Northern Ireland is working closely with Scotland, the Irish Republic and the European Union to fund and support this important research."

Scotland's First Minister, Alex Salmond, also welcomed the collaboration on the project and said: "The £5million investment is a welcome boost to what is proving to be one of our most resilient and promising sectors in these challenging economic times. By identifying the potential for a new industry, this regional project could bring long term economic and social benefits to the cross border area, including the prospect of hundreds of valuable jobs in remote coastal areas and islands. The development of mari-fuels could have a lasting impact on remote and rural communities by providing locally produced, relatively cheap, low impact fuel as well as serving the local public transport infrastructure."

Commenting on the Irish Government's support for the study, Energy Minister, Eamon Ryan said: "I believe that the premise of the project is both exciting and potentially very significant - that marine algae can be harvested, processed and then utilised as a green energy source. There is huge potential for this, provided it can be proven as viable.

"I commend the wisdom of the collaborating teams in bringing forward this complex project in a manner which will utilise the individual strengths of the teams while providing a synergy that no one partner or jurisdiction could have managed alone."

Work will get underway on the four year research study in early 2009.

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