Closing the *North Seas Delivery Gap*

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP TO DELIVER AFFORDABILITY AND SECURITY FROM OFFSHORE WIND

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Changing geopolitics and volatile fossil fuel costs present major challenges for Europe. Offshore wind in the North Seas is a strategic opportunity to address these issues. It can provide the clean homegrown electricity to support electrification, promote integration of the European market, and transform the region into a clean industrial powerhouse. Despite ambitious political targets, delivery is off track. Closing this delivery gap will require sustained leadership from heads of governments to drive this critical strategic agenda.

The EU and UK have recognised the strategic importance of replacing their dependence on fossil fuel imports with homegrown renewables and an electrified economy. The strategic imperative for exploiting the vast renewable resources available in the North Seas and developing a new regional clean industrial powerhouse is compelling and has underpinned the ambitious political targets for offshore wind deployment: 300 GW by 2050. The Hamburg Summit in January 2026 reaffirmed this strategic case and established an action plan to drive forward delivery.

However, key gaps have emerged in the delivery framework. Work has been delegated to technical bodies that lack the mandate or agency to drive forward a project of strategic importance. Leaders must take control of the process to ensure their political ambition remains achievable. This requires a series of actions to be taken now such that real progress can be demonstrated by the next North Sea Summit in early 2028.

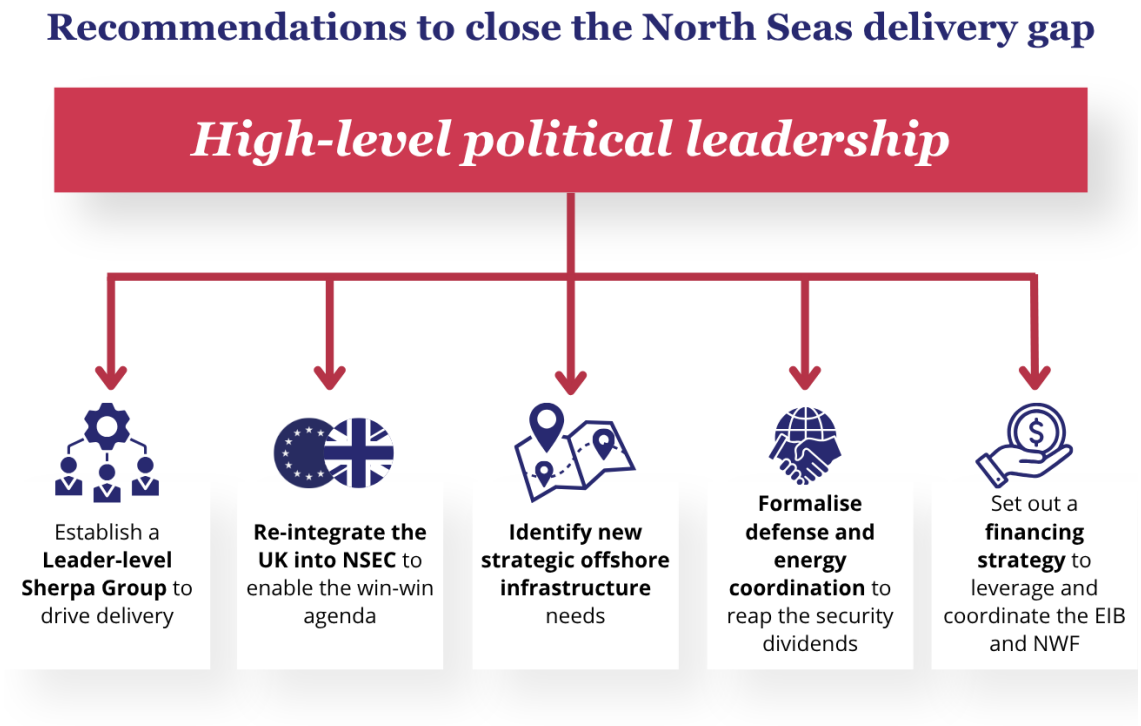


Figure 1: Recommendations for European leaders to drive forward progress on delivering the North Seas offshore wind ambition, across planning, security and financing.

Recommendations for leaders to re-inject high-level leadership

- **Establish a leader-level sherpa group** to ensure strategic objectives are achieved and delivery remains on track in the run-up to the next North Sea Summit.
- **Re-integrate the UK into the North Seas Energy Cooperation (NSEC) as a full member** to enable the closer collaboration required to deliver the North Seas agenda.
- **Instruct the Offshore TSO Collaboration (OTC) to identify the new, strategic offshore infrastructure** necessary to ensure that delivery of the strategic objective of 300 GW by 2050 remains viable and cost effective.
- **Formalise cooperation between national security and energy stakeholders across the region**, to leverage the security dividends of closer cooperation and ensure the timely deployment of resilient infrastructure.
- **Develop a financing strategy for the North Seas** that leverages existing public finance institutions like the European Investment Bank (EIB) and National Wealth Fund (NWF) to provide de-risking capital for shared, cross-border infrastructure projects while ensuring coordination across institutions.

The strategic imperative of the North Seas region

Europe is experiencing its second energy crisis in five years. The transition away from fossil fuel dependence and towards a clean energy future is increasingly recognised as a critical lever for delivering energy security as well as resilience against climate impacts. Since the closure of the Strait of Hormuz last March, the EU has spent well over €100 billion in additional costs to continue importing fossil fuels,[1] while the UK has spent over £183 billion in additional costs since 2021.[2]

The North Seas region is one of the few places where Europe can produce vast quantities of clean and homegrown electricity – the energy needed to power an electrified, competitive and more secure European economy. Reducing fossil gas demand in power generation is the key lever for reducing electricity prices and tackling affordability. Each 100 GW of North Seas wind could reduce European gas demand by approximately 60 bcm,[3] the equivalent to around 15% of the combined UK and EU gas demand in 2025.

Moreover, this is a major industrial opportunity for Europe. North Seas offshore wind can provide clean electricity for industries across the continent – from the chemical clusters adjacent to the North Sea basin, to the industries and manufacturing sectors in Central and Eastern Europe – with positive effects for electricity prices and supply chains across the continent. This is also an opportunity for Europe to build global leadership in pioneer offshore technologies and secure domestic manufacturing capability in strategic supply chain components. Political commitment to this flagship European industrial project is an opportunity to safeguard European leadership in crucial sectors, as well as leverage the supply chain dividends of better cooperation in the region.[4]

Finally, as security risks in the region sharpen, better coordination of surveillance and protection capabilities can strengthen Europe's defences while making the most of the sea basin's spatial and physical resources.[5]

In a political context characterised by geopolitical instability, repeated energy crises and increasingly severe climate impacts, Europe must reclaim agency. Delivering on the North Seas clean energy opportunity is a chance for European leaders to signal their resolve to improve competitiveness, affordability and security outcomes for industry and households alike.

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[1] European Commission, 2026, **Opening remarks by Commissioner Jørgensen at the press conference concluding the Informal Energy Council**

[2] E3G, 2025, **Cost of the fossil fuel crisis in the UK**

[3] E3G own calculation, assuming a 40% wind capacity factor and 55% gas-plant efficiency.

[4] E3G, 2026, **Empowering Europe: Delivering the security and economic benefits of North Seas wind**

[5] Ibid.

Forward progress, but more is needed

The Hamburg Summit in January 2026 saw European leaders re-commit to the ambition of a strategic, large-scale offshore wind deployment in the North Seas. The political target remains to deliver up to 300 GW of offshore wind by 2050, of which 100 GW should be cross-border joint projects. However, recent forecasts suggest that under 'status quo' conditions, delivery will fall far short of this ambition.[6] The Hamburg Summit conclusions therefore recognised that attention must now turn to delivery and included an action plan to implement the political declaration. This instructed the Offshore TSO Collaboration (OTC) to identify the first set of projects by the end of 2027.[7]

Over the last year, the OTC has set up workstreams to progress actions covering planning and cost allocation, as well as work to develop a financing toolbox in collaboration with the EIB. An updated sea basin plan will be published by the OTC in early 2027, with plans to include this in the EU's 2028 Ten-Year Network Development Plan (TYNDP) process.

This work is necessary to ensure existing projects are deployed. However, it is not sufficient to progress a strategic industrial project of the scale and importance outlined above. Key gaps remain relating to planning, security and financing, and addressing these will require a step change in governance.

Planning: ensuring the strategic goal can be achieved

The sea basin plan being produced by OTC will focus on existing developer-led projects. While it is important that tangible progress is made on those projects already in the pipeline, this exercise does not consider or plan to achieve the longer-term strategic objective. It is vital that the goal expressed by leaders remains viable and that options exist to enable delivery of the 300 GW of offshore wind as economically as possible.

Doing so requires a strategic plan that coordinates spatial needs and proposes cross-border cooperation projects that make the best use of investments, networks and resources. The plan must move beyond existing projects and consider new offshore infrastructure that creates the option to connect future windfarms and supports the development of further shared infrastructure projects. Such infrastructure developments might be difficult to justify as stand-alone projects but will have huge strategic benefit – by reducing costs and accelerating development of subsequent projects.

Heads of government should therefore instruct the OTC to identify the new offshore infrastructure that ensures the strategic objective remains viable and can be delivered cost-effectively, along with an appropriate commercial framework to underpin delivery.

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[6] Baringa, 2024, **Beyond Borders: Unlocking the power of UK-EU offshore wind coordination**

[7] TenneT, **Offshore TSO Collaboration**

Security: regional coordination to speed delivery

The security context has changed significantly. Conflicts in the Ukraine and the Middle East have strengthened support for faster decarbonisation to reduce the geopolitical and economic vulnerabilities of dependence on fossil fuel imports. Also, more severe and frequent climate events, as well as a range of hybrid threats, including sabotage, cyber-attacks, and the use of unmanned aerial and maritime devices have created direct risks to energy systems.

The development of North Seas wind infrastructure must consider these risks from the design stage, preparing infrastructure that is robust to new and emerging risks. This 'security-by-design' approach should not only strengthen resilience against external threats, but improve situational awareness, repair capabilities, and system restoration capacity. Where appropriate, offshore wind infrastructure could also be equipped with surveillance equipment that enhances maritime monitoring, making North Seas wind an additional asset for Europe's security.

Coordination is critical to delivering an integrated North Seas infrastructure that provides security, resilience and economic benefits. Facilitating the exchange of information between defence and energy stakeholders across North Seas countries with appropriate levels of confidentiality is necessary to ensure infrastructure planning meets defence priorities and security requirements alongside timely and cost-effective delivery. Coordination can also reinforce the long-term signal for industry to develop the supply chains capable of meeting these requirements and support European leadership in strategic sectors.

However, there is currently no formal coordination structure for regional alignment on security requirements. Initiatives are emerging, including informal cooperation among national TSOs, structured national coordination mechanisms (such as the Netherlands' Platform for the Protection of Undersea Infrastructure[8]), or bilateral arrangements (such as the Poland–Norway energy security cooperation[9]). However, a significant gap remains at the regional level which must be addressed to ensure North Seas wind infrastructure is resilient to emerging and new security risks.

Heads of government can address this security coordination gap through existing institutional structures. It could be integrated into the UK–EU security partnership as a dedicated pillar, established as a cross-cutting workstream within the North Seas Energy Cooperation, or developed through a mechanism within NATO. Whichever approach is adopted, leaders must commit to a way forward as soon as possible.

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[8] E3G, 2026, **Empowering Europe: Delivering the security and economic benefits of North Seas wind**

[9] Notes from Poland, 2026, **Poland and Norway sign declaration on deepening security ties.** Full declaration here: **Declaration of Polish-Norwegian Partnership on Energy Security, Green Transition and Security of Critical Energy Infrastructure**

Finance: attracting low-cost funding

Significant private finance has already been raised to build and connect windfarms within a single country's territorial waters. However, large-scale private financing has not yet been deployed for complex shared infrastructure projects. This was recognised at the Hamburg Summit, and the OTC was tasked with developing a cost allocation and regulatory framework that would enable investment in such projects. The OTC is therefore developing a series of options that could be adopted by countries seeking to progress specific shared infrastructure projects. These options will need to demonstrate an appropriate allocation of risk to make these projects attractive to institutional investors.

However, two significant gaps in the financing framework remain. Firstly, part of the industrial dividend of developing North Seas wind infrastructure will depend on scaling investment across the different types of private investment, and ensuring these projects are bankable to enable them to scale. This relies on creating an investible environment and restoring investor confidence in the North Seas opportunity. In addition to addressing regional and regulatory coordination issues as set out above, this will require strong political support, a credible and coordinated pipeline for future projects and clear policies on security requirements, including for rules of origin.

The second gap relates to the role of public finance. Some risks for supply chain or shared infrastructure projects may be difficult for private investors to manage alone. Other infrastructure may have a strategic or security value which is difficult to allocate under conventional cost sharing approaches. In these cases, there is likely to be a crucial role for public finance to provide de-risking capital and indicate political backing.

Building on the existing work by the EIB and OTC, Heads of government should therefore develop a financing strategy which leverages public finance institutions like the National Wealth Fund and EIB to drive investment. This should involve identifying and aligning how these institutions will work together on shared cross-border infrastructure projects.

The keystone of success: delivery governance

Sustained political commitment is the foundation upon which successful delivery of North Seas offshore wind objectives will be built. Heads of government must not only continue to restate the strategic importance of those objectives but also demonstrate their continued commitment through mechanisms designed to ensure delivery. This requires a new delivery governance.

Progress will require a close working partnership between all North Seas countries, including the UK. Re-integrating the UK as a full member of NSEC is a crucial step forward and this should be progressed at the upcoming EU–UK summit and subsequent NSEC ministerial. Moreover, leaders should appoint a set of high-level influential champions (sherpas) to liaise between the leader-level and the technical processes. The sherpas would

be tasked with securing political backing for key decisions, strengthening the case for cooperation, and ensuring that technical delivery is on time and in line with the strategic vision.

Leaders can re-inject commitment to the North Seas offshore wind ambition and close the delivery gap by:

- **Establishing a leader-level sherpa group** to ensure strategic objectives are achieved and delivery remains on track in the run up to the next North Sea Summit.
- **Re-integrating the UK into the North Seas Energy Cooperation (NSEC) as a full member** to enable the close collaboration required to deliver the North Seas agenda.
- **Instructing the Offshore TSO Collaboration (OTC) to identify the new, strategic offshore infrastructure** necessary to ensure that delivery of the strategic objective of 300 GW by 2050 remains viable and cost effective.
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